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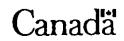
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Canada

The Sage of Kingston:

John Watson and the Ambiguity of Hegelianism

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Abstract

John Watson's thought has not been well understood. A question suggested by previous scholarship, namely, how successful was he at his task of re-founding the Christian religion on a philosophical base? is answered first in terms of consistency with the theological tradition. His revision of Christian theology is found to be inadequate by traditional standards; it is then examined as a philosophy of religion which, to his mind, overcame the difficulties of classical theism. It is argued that, despite some advantages, his philosophy of religion is deficient in two respects. First, its method is vitiated by a strained and sometimes mistaken interpretation of the philosophical tradition, indicative of arbitrariness. Second, "Speculative Idealism" as the result of that method reveals conceptual ambiguities corresponding to the ambiguities of classical theism. As the method is not self-evident and is used implicitly by Watson, and the results are philosophically ambiguous, the appropriation of his thought was theologically or philosophically shallow. Though Watson's thought, as far as it was understood, provided an underpinning for the "social gospel" movement in Canada, it is argued that this shallow appropriation explains, at least in part, the brevity of its appeal as philosophy of religion.

Resumé

La pensée de John Watson a été mal comprise. Cette thèse s'efforce tout d'abord de répondre à une question qui ressort de recherches antérieures sous l'angle de sa conformité avec la tradition théologique: John Watson a-t-il réussi à rasseoir la religion chrétienne sur une base philosophique? La révision qu'il fait est insuffisante selon les normes classiques. Elle est ensuite analysée comme philosophie de la religion qui, pour lui, permet de surmonter les difficultés du théisme classique. L'auteur de la présente thèse soutient que sa philosophie de la religion présente deux lacunes importantes. Premièrement, sa démarche est viciée par une interprétation tendancieuse et arbitraire de la tradition philosophique. Deuxièmement, "l'idéalisme spéculatif" traduit des ambiguïtés conceptuelles qui cadrent avec les ambiguïtés du théisme classique. Étant donné que la méthode ne va pas de soi et que ses résultats sont ambigus sur le plan philosophique, l'adaptation de sa pensée reste superficielle. Même si la pensée de Watson a servi à étayer le mouvement "social gospel" au Canada, cette adaptation superficielle explique, du moins en partie, la brièveté de son attrait comme philosophie de la religion.

Contents

Preface

No full-length study of John Watson has been published to date. Thus the novel contribution of this dissertation to scholarship is the elucidation of Watson's sources and method, the theological and philosophical criticism of his work, and the tentative explanation for the broad but vague character of his influence.

I have long been interested in the relationship between philosophical idealism and the Christian doctrine of creation. My appetite for the intellectual pleasures of philosophy of religion was whetted in the preparation of my master's thesis, written on elements of Plotinian pantheism in Augustine's thought. I owe a great deal to many. Dr. William Klempa suggested the subject of the present study, and he helped to orient me to the intellectual and church backgrounds in Scotland and Canada. Over the years Dr. Joseph C. McLelland has encouraged an intellectual stance both open and critical. I have benefited generally from his example, and particularly from his careful questions on one or another point in philosophy of religion. Other instructors and students at the Faculty of Religious Studies have stimulated my thinking on the relationship between theology and philosophy of religion, in ways that I can no longer trace. I thank them all.

I am grateful, also, to the Administrative Council of Quebec's *Fonds FCAR* which furnished me with a scholarship during my doctoral studies. Victor Brassard kindly let me use his computer and printer. I thank my family, who managed to work and play around me as I became lost in thought on Watson and company. My wife and colleague, Edith, diverted distractions and provided the occasional second opinion--"a friend as staunch as steel and full of sense and humour," as John McNaughton said of John Watson's wife Margaret.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are given here for books by John Watson which are cited frequently in the text and notes. A complete bibliography of Watson's books, articles, and unpublished notes and manuscript is provided in the first section of the *Bibliography*. Alphabetical order is followed here, while the *Bibliography* is ordered chronologically.

CI   1897. *Christianity and idealism: The Christian ideal of life in its relations to the Greek and Jewish ideals and to modern philosophy.* 2d ed. New York: Macmillan.

IRE:C   1912. *The interpretation of religious experience* Vol. 2, *Constructive.* Glasgow: J. Maclehose and Sons.

IRE:H   1912. *The interpretation of religious experience.* Vol. 1, *Historical.* Glasgow: J. Maclehose and Sons.

OP   1901. *An outline of philosophy, with notes historical and critical.* 3d ed. Glasgow: J. Maclehose and Sons; New York: Macmillan and Co. (The first edition was published in 1895 under the title *Comte, Mill and Spencer: An outline of philosophy.* The editions of 1898 and 1908 were published under the first title.)

PBR   1907. *The philosophical basis of religion: A series of lectures.* Glasgow: J. Maclehose and Sons.

PKE   1908. *The philosophy of Kant explained.* Glasgow: J. Maclehose and Sons.

STI   1882. *Schelling's transcendental idealism: A critical exposition.* Chicago: S.C. Griggs and Co.; London: Trübner.

I. *Introduction: The Approach to John Watson's Thought*

When one turns to the magnificent edifice of the physical sciences, and sees how it was reared; what thousands of disinterested moral lives of men lie buried in its mere foundations; what patience and postponement, what choking down of preference, what submission to the icy laws of outer fact are wrought into its very stones and mortar; how absolutely impersonal it stands in its vast augustness,--then how besotted and contemptible seems every little sentimentalist who comes blowing his voluntary smoke-wreaths, and pretending to decide things from out of his private dream! Can we wonder if those bred in the rugged and manly school of science should feel like spewing such subjectivism out of their mouths? (William James)[1]

Constructive Idealism maintains that not the most infinitesimal atom of matter or the faintest trace of feeling, not to speak of the fair creations of imaginative genius or the solid constructions of reflective thought, could possibly exist, were they not involved in the Infinite and supported by its continual presence and spiritual energy (John Watson, *PBR* 437).

John Watson (1847-1939), Canada's first internationally known philosopher, gave himself to the task of demonstrating that the "magnificent edifice" of the physical sciences in reality must be only the first floor of a hierarchy of knowledge which ascends by dialectical development through the humane sciences to culminate in knowledge of God or the Absolute. To use a more hospitable organic metaphor,

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[1] William James, *The Will to Believe* 7-8, quoted in Watson, *The Philosophical Basis of Religion* (1907) (hereafter cited *PBR*), 142-43.

the "sage of Kingston" saw the physical sciences as rooted necessarily in the unity of mind, so that rather than "levelling down" the higher orders of thought and reflection to the physical, true philosophy "levelled up," acknowledging both the truth and the inadequacy of "the icy laws of outer fact." Thus science grows through self-contradiction and higher synthesis from *more* inadequate conceptions of knowledge to *less*, finally attaining to explicit knowledge of its ground, the self-consciousness of self-differentiating Reason. In Watson's view, neither true science nor true sentiment need be sacrificed; far from being opposed to religion, scientific reasoning required it. In the religious uncertainty of his day, this was a message with a ready audience.

Today John Watson is a neglected philosopher of religion, who is best known in English-speaking philosophical and theological circles for his exposition of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. He is considered by historians to be a seminal influence upon the Social Gospel movement in the Canadian Church during the early decades of this century. Though his positive philosophy appears to have enjoyed great popularity (like that of his teacher, Edward Caird, and Josiah Royce) around the turn of the century, it lost its hold in the period following the First World War. While Caird and Royce are known still in philosophical circles, Watson's name is not found in the indices of philosophical reference works.[2] Aside from a rather vague recognition of his Hegelianism, historians of Canadian intellectual history today are more cognizant of his influence than of the substance of his teaching.

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[2] The exception which proves the rule is John Passmore's *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (1957), in which there is one reference to John Watson in a list of distinguished pupils of Edward Caird. Passmore notes that, like Edward Caird's brother John, Watson was interested in the philosophy of religion (54, n. 1).

Historical Interest and Indefinite Influence

A dissertation on a Canadian philosopher of religion who in his day was an international leader in his field, but today is virtually unknown, demands an approach which takes both history and philosophy of religion seriously. The historian seeks to explain the pervasive influence of idealism, primarily that of John Watson, in Canadian religious thought of the period, while the philosophical theologian is interested in Watson's attempt to re-found the Christian faith on philosophy, in place of historical revelation. Watson's stature in the eyes of Canadian historians is undeniable. In his review of philosophy in central Canada, John Irving describes Watson's appointment to Queen's University in 1872 as "the most important event in Canadian philosophy in the nineteenth century." In 1950 Irving wrote, "One of the four great teachers of philosophy (in the opinion of many the greatest) in Canada during the last hundred years, Watson was the first philosopher in this country to achieve an international reputation through his writings." "Even a brief sketch of his writings must indicate that if any Canadian philosopher of the nineteenth century is remembered in future ages, it will surely be John Watson" (Irving 1950, 268, 276).[3] At least until 1965 Watson was the only Canadian to have delivered the Gifford Lectures (in 1910-12), published in two volumes as *The Interpretation of Religious Experience* (1912) (Irving 1976, 455). More recently A. B. McKillop has noted that Watson led the "Kantian Revival" in the 1880's in the English-speaking world (McKillop 1979, 195), and Watson's *Philosophy of Kant as Contained in Extracts of his own Writings* was revised and

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[3] W.L. Morton wrote of the 1920's that "[i]n professional philosophy the speculative idealism of the great John Watson of Queen's University still remained the chief philosophic influence in Canada, and particularly in theology and the life of the Church" (Morton 1968, 224). Morton notes that idealism was beginning to wane in the 1920's.

reprinted eleven times between 1882 and 1934. On the subject of Watson's Kant

scholarship, Irving again remarked that "[i]t is no exaggeration to say that Watson

has done more to promote the study of Kant on this continent than any other North

American philosopher" (Irving 1950, 274). In 1976 the Garland Publishing

Company with Lewis White Beck as editor published a series of the eleven most

important studies of Kant since that philosopher's death: two of Watson's books

were among them (McKillop 1987, 97).

Yet the approach to John Watson's thought today immediately faces

difficulties from both the historical and philosophical angles. In terms of history,

Watson and his thought are somewhat removed from the Canadian scene: his

partners in philosophical dialogue are almost entirely British and Continental

thinkers.[4] His influence upon Canadian philosophers was limited in extent. So

Hilda Neatby writes that Watson was the first Queen's professor "to make for

himself a name in the scholarly world," and that this and his "compelling personality

made him from the beginning a power on the campus, a power for truth and for

goodness," yet she admits that only those few who greatly admired him could truly

appreciate him (Neatby 1978, 138, 229). Among these admirers would be L. P.

Chambers, who taught at Washington University;[5] J. M. MacEachran, who was

head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Alberta for many years;

Dr. A. Dawson Matheson, who became Dean of Emmanuel College in Toronto; and

R. A. Wilson, whose theories in the book *The Miraculous Birth of Language* (1948)

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[4] As Irving notes of this period, "Philosophically, Central Canada was a colony
of Scotland" (1950, 285).

[5] Chambers delivered a paper entitled "The Realism of Bosanquet and Watson,"
(Box 1, Watson Papers, Queen's Archives, n.d.) at "a philosophy meeting at St.
Louis University." This meeting would be that of the "St. Louis Hegelians," founded
by H. C. Brockmeyer and W. T. Harris.

were inspired by Watson's interpretations of Kant and Darwin (Irving 1950, 272).
(The precise character of Watson's influence on Wilson is described below, in
Chapter VII.) Watson influenced another writer, John Evan Turner, who defends
Hegelian realism in *A Theory of Direct Realism, and the Relation of Realism to
Idealism* (1925), but there is slight evidence of Watson's influence in Turner's book.
Watson's influence was felt, but it is hard to gauge, as Neatby suggests when she
comments that "the quality of thinking in the community *must have been to some
degree affected* by [Watson's] auspicious reconciliation of the apparently divergent
teachings of science, philosophy, and religion" (Neatby 1978, 138, emphasis added).

In the absence of demonstrable specific philosophical influence, one must
speculate on the kind and degree of influence which Watson may have exercised.
Hundreds of Protestant clergy, educators, civil servants, and others passed through
the doors of Queen's University, both in the regular undergraduate and theological
programs and in the ten-day annual Theological Alumni Conferences (begun in
1893). From all accounts, the effect of Watson's teaching and writing was largely to
imbue students with a vaguely philosophical moralism, "idealistic" in a popular, non-
technical sense. Neatby observes that "in the fifty-two years of his active work at
Queen's, Watson sent out hundreds of young men and women with a profound
concern for truth and an absolute conviction of their own personal responsibility to
exemplify it in their conduct by making 'true,' that is unselfish, choices" (Neatby
1978, 138). Margaret Van Die claims (*contra* A. B. McKillop) that idealism did not
influence Presbyterians and Methodists equally. She concludes from a study of the
student newspaper at Victoria College, University of Toronto, *Acta Victoriana*, that
"what may appear [to McKillop] to be idealism can just as easily be an expression of
late-nineteenth century postmillenialism and a modified form of Christian
perfectionism" (Van Die 1989, 211-12, n. 93). One may go further and say that if the

Presbyterians at Queen's imbibed idealism, they did not drink deeply: an examination of the *Queen's Journal* during the relevant period suggests that the adoption of idealism at Queen's was a matter of assuming several general principles of knowledge, without grasping their necessity for knowledge in the idealistic system, nor their systematic coherence. (See for example the description of the article by J. A. Sinclair in Chapter VII below.) A. B. McKillop himself appears to qualify his view of Watson's influence, suggesting that it may have been philosophically indefinite yet widespread. In his discussion of idealism in *A Disciplined Intelligence*, he says that those who were not philosophically astute would likely have adopted a vague Hegelianism from Watson as a way beyond the conflict of religion and science, faith and reason (McKillop 1979, 212).

McKillop's own thesis is that Watson and later idealists like George John Blewett "helped clear the path towards the application of an essentially secular rationalism to the Christian revelation" (McKillop 1979, 211).[6] McKillop argues that it was at least partly on the intellectual foundation of this idealism that the Social Gospel movement in Canada began and was sustained between 1890 and 1914. Watson was instrumental in "the transition of the overtly Christian mental and moral philosophy of the nineteenth century in Canada into a broadly secular moral outlook that has dominated much of English-Canadian thought in the twentieth" (McKillop 1987, 97).[7] The "deeply ironic legacy" of the idealists for Protestantism in Canada was the transformation of the faith into a secular message

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[6] McKillop asks, "How many of the divinity students trained under Watson in the fifty years from 1872 to 1922 came to accept Watson's simple definition of the Church" as "'an organization for making men better'?" (1979, 216).

[7] McKillop traces the spread of idealism through the cultural centres of universities and churches in the ensuing years in *A Disciplined Intelligence* (1979, 208-11, 218-28).

of social service with indefinite "spiritual" significance, promulgated by men like

Watson's student, the Methodist "social gospeller" Salem Bland, and the man who

led the Methodists into the new United Church of Canada, S. D. Chown. McKillop

even suggests that the absence of theological argument in the discussions leading to

the union in 1925 of Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists can be

attributed partly to the work of idealists. He speculates that "there may not have

been many theological questions the advocates of union would have deemed

important enough to debate" (McKillop 1979, 219-22, 225-26, 228). Ramsay Cook's

interpretation is very similar.[8]

The Absence of Philosophical Originality

A pursuit of philosophical themes in Watson's thought reveals another

challenge. Watson's thought is not original enough for a place in the traditional

"history of ideas": his critique of the empiricist tradition is a standard denial of the

unity of the subject and the unity of the object in empiricist epistemology, made from

the Kantian perspective, while his Hegelian idealism does not depart significantly

from that of Edward Caird. A. B. McKillop argues correctly that Watson was not

an original thinker, but passed on the tradition of his teacher, Edward Caird: "One

cannot, then, overemphasize the extent to which Watson was influenced, both

personally and intellectually, by Edward Caird. He accepted Caird's philosophical

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[8] According to Cook, Watson brought to Queen's "a Scottish interpretation of
Hegelian idealism that would become a major influence in the development of
theological liberalism in Canada." By the 1890's "theological liberalism" had made
its most obvious impact in the Presbyterian Church, "and most markedly in that
branch represented and influenced by Queen's University," under the influence of
George Munro Grant, Adam Shortt, and John Watson (Cook 1985, 9). As is noted
in Chapter VII of this dissertation, Cook is probably mistaken to consider Grant and
Watson together (Gauvreau 1991, 155ff.).

views from the first, and his own philosophical system, articulated over the span of the next half century, was virtually identical with that of his master. It would in fact do injustice to neither philosopher to say that Watson's many writings elaborated much of Caird's thought but never transcended it" (McKillop 1979, 184). This assessment was anticipated by the anonymous reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*, who commented of Watson's *The State in Peace and War* (1919) that "[t]he book is not so much an original contribution to political philosophy as a gathering together of well-recognized material."[9] Originality might be too much to expect in a Canadian writer of this colonial period.[10]

It should be observed, however, that similar things concerning originality could be said of Edward Caird with regard to Hegelian idealism, and Caird himself acknowledged his dependence on the last great idealist while holding that no foreign philosophy could be imported *en bloc* (Reardon 1980, 308). The issue of originality was obviously a troubling one to the school of Caird. Jones and Muirhead in their *Life and Philosophy of Edward Caird* admit that Caird was "one of the greatest and most effective borrowers of his time," but insist that little in philosophy is truly original, and that "whatever is built for ever, is for ever building" (Jones and Muirhead 1921, 250-53, 312-13). Another student of Caird, Henry Jones, made an impressive criticism of Browning's scepticism, leading Caird to say that it had "'real original force'"; Jones' biographer, on the other hand, commented that "it is familiar ground" (Hetherington 1924, 49). Thus when Caird said of Watson that he is "no

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[9] May 1, 1919, no page, Watson Papers, Queen's Archives.

[10] As Morton observes, "[t]hat a colonial society should be derivative in its style, mind and taste was only to be accepted. Indeed, the need of a new country was not to be original but to prove the old possible in the new, to re-affirm accepted modes in new conditions. The task was not creative, but re-creative" (Morton, *The Shield of Achilles* 1968, 328).

mere disciple of a school, but has real speculative power and originality," we have good reason to suspect that Caird simply failed to see the strong similarity in thought between Watson and himself (Caird 1968, 2-3).

There is a philosophical reason for this lack of originality: the Hegelian system espoused by Caird and Watson will not admit anything truly original. This will become clearer in the discussion of Watson's philosophy of religion, but at this point it may be said that in this school, every "new" philosophical position arises from, and is anticipated by, an earlier one, and it is understood within the system as one side of a dialectical opposition that advances the system itself.

The Thesis: Answering the Question, How Far Did John Watson Succeed?

This dissertation takes the philosophy of John Watson seriously, and thus advances the cause of Canadian intellectual history. A. B. McKillop has argued for this distinct sphere of study, which (unlike the history of ideas) considers intellectual developments in their social and political environment (McKillop 1987, 3-33). Thus, he says, "intellectual history shades methodologically into the study of cultural history" (15). However, in order to understand the thought of John Watson and its impact, it is necessary to deepen the grasp of the ideas involved, to go some way towards breaking down the boundary between intellectual history and philosophy.

There are several reasons for this. The first is a straightforward one; any discussion of John Watson must meet him on his own terms, and consider his philosophical work in light of his purposes, his method, and his conclusions. Simple references to his Hegelian method, or to his "rejection of dualisms," are not adequate for understanding that work. Secondly, Watson's constructive thought is curiously obscure, and, despite an acknowledgement of his Hegelianism, commentators have failed to see the Hegelian pattern behind his historical descriptions and philosophical

arguments. The reconstructions of even the best commentators often sound odd in terms of Watson's own statements. Thirdly, it is likely that the indefinite character of Watson's broad influence is related to the ambiguity of his philosophy which, it will be argued, is the result of his method.

For these reasons I will engage a broad question, arising from John Watson's purpose and leading to the explanation of his historical influence: How successful as either theology or philosophy of religion was Watson's project of restoring the Christian religion on a philosophical basis? Before this question is pursued, I will present a brief biographical sketch which locates Watson and his teacher, Edward Caird, both intellectually and personally (Chapter I). In order to demonstrate the need for a deeper examination of Watson's thought I will review the work of significant commentators, and note significant observations made by them (Chapter II). Another task necessary to "set the stage" is a presentation of Watson's thought in outline, noting its sources in German idealism (Chapter III). The question of theological success would seem to have been answered by A. B. McKillop, whose thesis of the irony of secularization advanced unintentionally by those who would save religion, has been widely accepted. However, a theological critique is a necessary first and definitive "moment," before a dialectical movement to the second, the philosophical examination. In this chapter I will show why it is that McKillop is right, both by traditional standards of Protestant orthodoxy (Scripture and tradition) and by standards of Protestant liberalism (represented for convenience by Hegel's contemporary, Friedrich Schleiermacher). From a theological point of view, Watson's project of revising the Christian religion was its undoing (Chapter IV). Here the criteria of success are fidelity to the common interpretation of biblical texts, or to creedal statements, or to common doctrines or assumptions of the Church.

After this I will allow Watson to respond, to explain why the traditional doctrines understood according to the wooden categories of the Kantian "Understanding" must be replaced by the unfettered and dynamic logic of Hegelian "Reason." I will change the question, asking to what degree Watson's project is a success as a *philosophy of religion*, that is, whether, on its own terms, it offers better solutions to the problems of classical theism. Watson is a follower of Hegel: as Hegel re-formulates the Spinozan problem of the relation between the finite and the infinite, so it will be shown that Watson treats Augustine and classical theology as a form of Spinozism requiring the Hegelian sublation. This re-interpretation of Augustine is demonstrably misinterpretation, and this brings suspicion on Watson's Hegelian method (Chapter V). Aside from empirical contradiction, Watson's method itself appears to succeed by its systemic ambivalence, the introduction of abstraction and contradiction into the matter being considered. As a result, the philosophical conclusion is an ambiguous Absolute and an ambiguous Self (Chapter VI). One is led to conclude that the ambiguity of analogy in classical theology has not been overcome by Watson's method, but has been made its central feature, re-appearing in Watson's conception of the Absolute and the Self.

Excursus: "A Man of the 'Driest Light' that I Know"

John Watson was born in Glasgow on February 25, 1847, the eldest of four children of John and Elizabeth Watson.[11] His father was a calico block printer.

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[11] Harriet Watson Sweezey, entitled, "John Watson of Queen's--As Teacher and Philosopher," R.O. Sweezey Papers, Box One, Queen's U. Archives, n.d. In the account of Watson's life I rely largely upon this unpublished biography by Watson's daughter. It is cited as "Sweezey", without page numbers because the manuscript is eccentrically paginated, with many appendices to particular pages.

John went to the Free Church School in Kilmarnock, and as a young boy "was given to the making of verses" (Sweezey). At thirteen he left school, eventually getting a job as a clerk in Glasgow and staying with his grandfather for a time. It was common for the eldest sons of Scottish homes to become ministers of the church (the influence of the Old Testament custom of devoting the first-born child on a Reformed people with a high regard for the Law of God). John Watson's family was poor, so when he set out to university in 1866 to become a minister his sister went to work to help support him. His family belonged to the religiously conservative United Presbyterian Church, and "[t]he children were brought up on oatmeal porridge and the shorter catechism . . ." (Sweezey). It was common practice to send U.P.C. young men to the University of Edinburgh for their Arts programme. but John found the Calvinist "orthodox atmosphere" of its theological school uncongenial. So against his father's wishes, he withdrew after a month or so to return to Glasgow and study at the University which was more closely identified with the established Church of Scotland.

Glasgow University would have introduced Watson first-hand to the intellectual cross-currents of the mid-nineteenth century. His teacher of Greek was Edmund Lushington, Tennyson's father-in-law; Watson was taught physics by Lord Kelvin, the prominent scientific model-maker, the first to formulate explicitly the principle of entropy (in 1852), and the one after whom the Kelvin temperature scale is named.[12] The real attraction of Glasgow, though, was the presence of the Caird brothers. Edward had recently come to teach philosophy, while elder brother, the

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[12] In his metaphysics Lord Kelvin was obviously influenced by Caird and the classically Fichtean rejection of Kant's limitation of reason. Kelvin remarked once, "I say *finitude* is incomprehensible, the infinite in the universe *is* comprehensible," in an 1884 lecture on "The Wave Theory of Light" (quoted in Jaki 1978, 433, n. 13). See Chapter IV, on the relation of finite and infinite in post-Kantian idealism.

Reverend John Caird, described by his brother's biographers as "probably the greatest preacher in his day, at least in Scotland," taught at the theological school (Jones and Muirhead 1921, 7).[13] Before Watson studied with Edward Caird (three years after commencing at Glasgow) he began to distinguish himself in a brilliant undergraduate career,[14] and read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, James Frederick Ferrier's *Lectures on Greek Philosophy* (1866) and his *Institutes of Metaphysics* (1854), and T. H. Green's notes on Hume.

However, it was Caird who made philosophy live for Watson, and to some extent Caird's intellectual formation was Watson's as well (McKillop 1979, 182ff.). Caird's biographers comment that the revival of philosophy in the late-nineteenth century deserved the name of the Second Oxford Movement, and they trace its movement from Germany to the classroom at St. Andrews University of James Ferrier, and to the Edinburgh classroom of the amateur philosopher J. Hutchison

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[13] John Caird would become Principal of Glasgow University after Watson graduated. Jones and Muirhead comment that John Caird "liberalized and humanized" his students' "theology, and helped to secure their faith against scepticism by revealing to them its intrinsic reasonableness" (1921, 7).

[14] Watson won the prize in Logic, produced an essay on "Scientific Induction" which won a prize in 1869, and won the Coulter prize about the same time for the best essay on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, a prize won by Edward Caird in his day (Jones and Muirhead 1921, 15). He won the first prize of the whole class awarded by the students for "General Eminence in the Exercises and Examinations" and the first prize for "Excellence in Written Examinations" (Sweezey). In his final year (1872) he won class prizes in the Junior Divinity class and in English Literature; he also won the Rector's Prize for the best essay on Hume, and the Buchanan gold medal in English Literature. I am indebted to Brian Fraser for the information that the Rector's Prize was shared with T. B. Kilpatrick, who also would have an influence on Canadian church life.

Stirling, author of the ground-breaking *The Secret of Hegel* (1865).[15] Edward

Caird wrote that Stirling's "powerful statement" of Hegel's principles was the first

introduction of the German philosopher to English readers (Muirhead 1931, 171).

At Oxford the movement "gathered volume" and from there spread to Glasgow, and

to the other universities "in the Colonies" and the United States (Jones and

Muirhead 1921, 126). Caird had begun his studies at Glasgow,[16] but moved to St.

Andrews for health reasons from the winter of 1856 to the spring of 1857, during

which time Ferrier held the chair of Moral Philosophy. Ferrier lectured on

"Knowing and Being" and "The History of Philosophy" (the latter was a study of

Greek thought, followed by a study of English thought from Locke on), and it is

probable, considering similarities of thought, that Caird studied with Ferrier (Jones

and Muirhead 1921, 17-19). Caird had been exposed to empiricist psychology at

Glasgow, and found the then-dominant thought of William Hamilton inadequate to

explain the fact of thought. Here Caird found Carlyle helpful. Carlyle pointed a

way beyond intuitionism or empiricism by appealing to Caird's "higher instincts," as

Watson put it, with the authority of the virtually unknown Germans and with a

broad Puritanism naturally attractive to a Scot "nourished on the Shorter Catechism

and the Bible."[17] Carlyle was an early influence on John Watson, too: as a youth,

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[15] Someone drolly observed that if the author knew the secret of Hegel, he succeeded in keeping it to himself. Despite its obscurity, J. H. Muirhead described Stirling along with Ferrier as Hegelian "pioneers," and Carlyle, Jowett and Green praised its author for making the thought of Hegel clearer to the English than anyone before him (Muirhead 1931, 162, 170-71).

[16] One of Caird's peers was George Munro Grant, who would play a leading role in the history of Queen's University after Watson's arrival.

[17] 1909d, 151. Watson remarks, "In [Carlyle's] imaginative creed Caird seemed to find the conception of life that must be true in the main, and indeed, later he found

Watson used to walk the streets of Glasgow, repeating to himself some of the "unforgettable passages" of *Sartor Resartus* (1833-1834) (Sweezey).

Influenced by Carlyle, Caird began to read German literature and philosophy, specifically that of Goethe and Schiller. Plato scholar Benjamin Jowett was his tutor when he went to Balliol College, Oxford, suggesting the reading of Hegel to him and to his friend Thomas Hill Green. In Caird's thinking, Hegel corrected the poetic generalization about the spiritual unity at the base of all things, found in Goethe. Similarly, Carlyle's exaltation of the hero and reduction of religion to a system of symbols which lose or recover spiritual power were rejected by Caird, in favour of a developmental and organic view similar to Hegel's. "Religion became for him the process by which man comprehends, and comprehends ever more clearly and fully, the spiritual unity which combines all existence and manifests its power in that process, while the salvation of society and the influence of great men he ascribed to the free play of reason in converting all that seems foreign to it into a means of its own realization" (Watson 1909d, 157).

In 1866 Caird took the chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow, the chair of Frances Hutcheson, Adam Smith, Thomas Reid, and William Hamilton. He was chosen from a field of candidates that included Hutchison Stirling. Watson attended Caird's inaugural lecture in 1866 and wrote more than forty years later of "a distinct

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that it was identical with Idealism, in so far as it maintained that the sensible world is 'itself in its deepest essence spiritual'" (ibid., 152). Caird himself said that Carlyle was his "'greatest literary influence of his own student days'" and that Carlyle's philosophy was "'Puritanism idealised, made cosmopolitan'" (Jones and Muirhead 1921, 22; Muirhead 1931, 125). Biographers Jones and Muirhead present a familiar picture: Carlyle's thought "pointed . . . the way out of the narrow and cramping orthodoxies into the broad, generous, natural-supernatural world outside" (Jones and Muirhead 1921, 23). Carlyle seems to have played a similar role in the thought of the American "national prophet" Ralph Waldo Emerson (Ahlstrom 1977, 153).

recollection of being forcibly struck by what then seemed to me the curious way in which he spoke in the same breath of Socrates and Christianity, Aristotle and St. Paul" (Watson 1909c, 304). He continued,

> I had been accustomed to regard Christianity as a thing apart, and I imagine that to others also this was the first glimpse into the kinship of Greek Philosophy and the Christian Religion, and in general the first vague apprehension of the principle of organic development. It was, however, three years before I entered the Moral Philosophy class [1869], and day by day, week by week, saw unrolled before me the ideas by which Caird exhibited before his pupils the process by which Greek Philosophy gave rise to the categories by means of which Christian experience was gradually developed into a theology that enabled it to conquer the world, though not without loss, and by which in modern times the spirit thus generated has been transforming the whole mass of humanity into its own image. All this was nothing less than the disclosure of a new world to a Scottish youth, who from his early years had been accustomed to roll like a sweet morsel under his tongue such abstract themes as the relations of faith and works, predestination and foreknowledge. The close shell of traditional Calvinism was burst, and we gradually learned to seek for truth in the interpretation of experience, conceived in the widest possible way as the experience of the race . . . .
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> . . . And philosophy itself, as Caird explained it, was in no sense to be divorced from the concrete life of man. It had a law of its own, no doubt; but this was the law by which human reason gradually unfolded itself, when aroused by the conflicts and oppositions which on a less self-conscious plane never ceased to emerge. For reason as it is in man--so we were taught--was not something peculiar to him, something which was infected by finitude [and therefore not merely subjective]; on the contrary, it was that in him which connects him with the Divine. Hence, it was true, in a literal sense, that man is "made in the image of God," and therefore is able to comprehend the nature of God. . . . If we have no glimpse of what really is--if we cannot penetrate to the heart of things and see God there--we must obviously live for ever in a vain show, from which no efforts of ours shall ever deliver us; nay, if it were so, how should we even know that we were living in a vain show? As Caird often put it: How can we

know that we are limited unless we are in some sense beyond the limit?
A being living in a world of mere appearance would never know it"
(Watson 1909c, 304-305).

In 1871-72 Watson studied divinity with John Caird at the Theological
School of Glasgow. Like Carlyle and Edward Caird, Watson began his academic
career to prepare for ministry and by this point he, like them, had given up that
goal.[18] Edward Caird lost interest in becoming a clergyman while recuperating
from an illness at his brother's home, before he returned to Glasgow from St.
Andrews. Carlyle had virtually given up the Christian faith as well, but Watson was
not driven that far, for Caird had introduced him to the great nineteenth-century
synthesis of Christian faith and idealistic philosophy. Watson was profoundly
impressed by this "best of all philosophic teachers" (Watson 1909c, 305) and either
never saw, or would not describe, any weaknesses in Caird's thought. In 1910
Watson joined former students and friends of Caird, including A. S. Pringle-
Pattison, J. S. Mackenzie, and J. H. Muirhead, at a ceremony in the old classroom at
Glasgow, as Caird's successor Henry Jones unveiled a portrait tablet inscribed with
Plato's praise of Socrates: ανηρ των τοτε ων επειραθημεν αριστος και αλλωσ
φρονιμωτατος και διαιοτατος: "a man who, of those living at that time, was
proven to be best, and above all most wise and most just" (*Phaedo* 118).

Caird too thought highly of his student: in ten years he had not had his equal,
and we have noted his claim that Watson is "no mere disciple of a school, but has
real speculative power and originality" (Caird 1968, 2-3). Later Caird would write,
"Professor Watson, one of my earliest pupils in Glasgow, is perhaps a man of the

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[18] In "A Sketch of Professor Watson" it is noted that Watson referred to himself
in 1911 as a "stickit minister," meaning an ordinand who has not received a call, and
who is active in another role such as teaching (1968, 4).

'driest light' that I know. I do not know anyone who sees his way more clearly through any philosophical entanglement. I always feel braced by his conversation" (Wallace 1941, 24). In May of 1872 Watson received the M.A. "with highest honours in Mental Philosophy" (Sweezey).

The young man from the conservative Presbyterian background who read Carlyle and left the conservative university against his father's wishes for a less confining intellectual environment at Glasgow did not break all the old ties. While at University he was superintendent of the Sunday School in the Rev. George Jeffrey's London Road United Presbyterian Church in Glasgow. The Church's "Young People's Society" gave him a small bursary for his studies. It was at this Society that he met Margaret Patterson Mitchell, whom he would return to Scotland to marry in 1874.

He applied for the position of Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy at McGill, but that went to John Clark Murray of Queen's. This made possible, however, Watson's appointment to the chair of Logic, Metaphysics and Ethics left vacant at Queen's, and in September of 1872 at twenty-five years of age the new graduate arrived in Kingston. When Watson first saw the two buildings which housed the University, he was taken aback, and remarked later of what is now the Old Medical Building that it concentrated severely on Aristotle's definition of the purpose of a house--to afford shelter from the weather. "With my mind's eye filled with this vision of a stately university it was hardly surprising that as I looked at the plain and ugly structure in which I was to begin my labours I felt a curious sinking of the heart." He whispered to himself, "One-horse college, evidently!" (Watson 1902b, 188). Queen's had a Principal (Snodgrass) and six teachers (besides Watson), thirty students in Arts, three of whom were graduating that year, and another twenty students in Theology. Despite an institutional confidence, typically Victorian

anxieties were evidenced by the fact that when Watson arrived, he found that Queen's had barred its students from reading Darwin's *Origin of Species*, published thirteen years earlier (Sweezey). Thus began a career that would mark him as the first Canadian philosopher of international standing, a world authority on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, and a leader with Caird and the American Josiah Royce of what would be for some years a dominant school of philosophy in the English-speaking world, Anglo-American idealism.

Watson gave his inaugural lecture in Convocation Hall of Queen's University on October 16, 1872 ("On the Relation of Philosophy to Science"). It was an impressive performance for someone so young, and it was well received: a newspaper editorial opined, "It is of good augury for Mr. Watson's success in teaching philosophy that he is able to give so much clearness and illustration to his thought with so little sacrifice of precision" (Sweezey). Over the next fifty-two years at Queen's Watson taught continuously, except for a year's leave of absence in 1902, and another in 1921-22 due to nervous exhaustion. From 1901 to 1924 Watson served as Vice-Principal of Queen's. Hilda Neatby's assessment of Watson has been noted: Watson "sent out hundreds of young men and women with a profound concern for truth and an absolute conviction of their own personal responsibility to exemplify it in their conduct . . ." (Neatby 1978, 138). This was the result of Watson's conscious imitation of Caird's strengths as a teacher of philosophy; he noted years later that when he was leaving to take his position at Queen's, Caird "sent me a note full of wisdom and kindness, recommending among other things the 'idealisation' of my students, and I may say that whatever manner of success has attended my efforts has been largely due to my imitation of his own practice in this regard" (Jones and Muirhead 1921, 85-86). In the 1870's and '80's his classes were small (his first year he had one class of four, another of five, and a third of fourteen)

but the academic work was "solid and substantial" and the atmosphere "seemed to radiate with hope and enthusiasm . . ." (Watson 1902b, 189). In 1885 Watson offered a series of weekly lectures open to the public, on the subject "Is Pleasure the End of Life?" Those who attended were expected to write the class essays (Neatby 1978, 228).

In 1880 John Watson was given the degree LL.D. from Glasgow University. The LL.D. was also awarded later by the University of Toronto; the D. Litt. was given by the University of Michigan, and the D.D. by Knox College, Toronto. Within four years of arriving in Canada Watson began a long association with the "St. Louis Hegelians." From its beginning in 1875 he was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and in the same year he became a member of the Board of Education of Canada.

The legendary Principal of Queen's, George Munro Grant, called on Watson as well for the task of fund-raising, but it was not his forte. On one occasion he visited a prospective donor several times asking for a contribution to found a tutorship in Political Economy. The man finally put his name down for five hundred dollars. The smallness of the sum disappointed Watson, but he was pleased with this success nonetheless. His pride was dashed when he found that the amount was never paid. Principal Grant never again asked him to solicit funds for Queen's (Watson 1926, 355).

In the summer of 1874 Watson returned to Scotland and married Margaret Mitchell, the daughter of David Mitchell. (He would continue to return to his home in Scotland every year or so). A year later the first of five children, a son they named Edward Caird, was born to them. They would have four more children. A daughter Alice was born in 1876 and a second daughter Eileen in 1879. A son born in 1881 died in infancy, and their third daughter Harriet was born in 1887. Mrs. Watson ran

the household, leaving Watson free for his work. Something of the character of their relationship is indicated by Mrs. Watson's comment on the marriage of Thomas Carlyle and his wife Jane Welsh. Carlyle had been an irritable and inconsiderate companion to his brilliant wife, and the marital troubles were revealed in print by J.A. Froude. Margaret Watson was critical of Froude's "laments" for Mrs. Carlyle, saying, "'She ought to have been proud to be the wife of a great man and not bother him with her little ailments. She should not have expected the little attentions which are given by ordinary men to their wives'." Of Mrs. Watson herself, John McNaughton said to her daughter: "She was a most attractive and lovable lady. You could tell her anything and be sure of a kind and most intelligent hearing. I saw at a glance how fortunate your father was in having such a wife. She was a friend as staunch as steel and full of sense and humour as well as woman's charm and lovely looks. She had a first rate brain and in the true feminine fashion of infallible instinct and perception" (Sweezey).

Watson, like Carlyle, was no ordinary man in the estimation of his wife and family. His daughter Harriet notes that though her father could be kindly and sympathetic, "he was very impatient in the ordinary affairs of daily life" and had a "surface irritability of temper . . ."; at the same time he had "a most extraordinary intellectual patience," tolerating the dullest students if they gave evidence of effort (Sweezey). Watson's teaching practice, later adopted by Harvard and from there by other universities, was to assign readings in the primary sources (later using his own translation of Kant, for example) and then question the students on their reading (Irving 1950, 274). At least one student described the questioning as "gruelling," especially as Watson let it be known that he expected the best of which each student was capable (Sweezey). W.E. McNeill, a student of Watson's and later Vice-Principal of Queen's, thought that Watson, though a great philosopher, was a

greater teacher: "No one went lightly to his classes, for each person knew that any day he might be subjected to an hour's questioning which would reveal the depths of his ignorance. The cross examiner was patient and kindly in his explanation, but he was also deadly in his detection of sham or intellectual indolence. But no serious student missed these classes; the whole University knew that minds were transformed there" (McNeill 1939, 160-61). Inadequate preparation, careless thought or flippancy could meet a steely scorn. The students themselves referred to Watson's intimidating gaze in a topical song:

> Does yer know the man
> Who makes you think
> And sweat and agonise?
> Does yer always feel a numskull
> When he bores you with his eyes?

> --We does! (Sweezey).[19]

Occasionally Watson would invite several students to his study in the evenings where the interchange was less formal. The undergraduate humour did not disguise the fact that Watson's influence on his students was great. It does suggest, however, that the difficulty of his subject matter was well-recognized.

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[19] Watson was "amused occasionally by [the student's] somewhat unconventional behaviour in the class-room" (Watson 1902b, 189). Perhaps Watson acknowledged here one particular incident in which his philosophical loyalties were satirized. He always began the first class of each day with a brief but inaudible prayer. It was actually the collect, "Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help." However, conjecture about what he said led one student to appear in class before Watson's arrival clutching a piece of paper and exclaiming that he had found "Wattie's prayer": "God bless me and Immanuel Kant; damn Comte, Mill, and Spencer and all the Hedonists" (Irving 1950, 272); an alternative version of the first line is given by Mrs. Sweezey: "God bless Kant, Hegel and me."

Watson's academic life was generally even and stable, as was his friendship with his teacher Edward Caird. There were, however, two troubling incidents. Encouraged by Caird, he applied to take Caird's position in Moral Philosophy at Glasgow when the latter was appointed to Balliol College, Oxford, in 1894. Caird thought Watson the most able candidate, and gave him the impression that the chair was virtually his. But later Watson was disturbed to learn that Caird had recommended several other men for the position as well. Under some strain from overwork, his handling of the application was affected. When he learned that he was competing with other applicants, and that applying for the position required that he meet with each of the governors of the University individually, he was reluctant to do so. When he did meet with one of the committee members he got into an argument and lost his temper. With that he lost the position as well. Watson was bitterly disappointed, but his friendship with Caird recovered (Sweezey). The chair went to Henry Jones, Caird's long-time assistant, in June of 1894.

In the second instance, Watson was at the centre of controversy concerning a successor to Principal Grant, who died in May of 1902. Hilda Neatby describes the developments (Neatby 1978, 245-47), in which Watson declared in a private circular to those concerned that he would not stand for the position of Principal of Queen's, and recommended a Rev. Dr. Barclay. He also presided over a meeting of the Senate, which recommended as well to the board of trustees they appoint Dr. Barclay. Watson's high-handedness offended members of the board, while he in turn was contemptuous of the chairman's procedure and at least one of the candidates. The board meeting held that September to settle the question was stormy, and Watson at one point angrily threatened to resign. The outcome was embarrassing for Watson, as his man refused the position. Watson took a three month leave for

his health, which leave was extended to a year, and he returned to his work at Queen's in 1903.

Besides being committed to teaching philosophy, Watson was devoted to scholarship, spending long hours reading, note-taking and writing, scrupulously researching every subject that interested him or any disputed point, and publishing frequently. He worked seated in an armchair by the fireplace, his feet on a footstool and his book or manuscript on his knees. Classical, German and contemporary philosophy were the subjects of numerous notebooks and looseleaf notes written in a small, even hand.[20] His absorption in his work was that of the stereotypical academic: as the dinner bell did not rouse him, someone had to be sent to summon him; once, when daughter Harriet rushed into the sanctum sanctorum to tell him breathlessly that his neighbour's house was on fire, Watson asked absently, "Oh, is it?" and went on with his reading. For recreation this concentration was re-directed to golf, painting, billiards and lawn bowling.[21]

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[20] The products of these many hours, stored in cardboard boxes, now take up 30 feet of shelving in the Queen's University Archives. Among Watson's notebooks and looseleaf notes is an unpublished typescript for a book, *A Study of Contemporary Philosophy*, written during WW I, poetry (some published under the pseudonym "Ian Robertson") and a couple of plays ("Mary Queen of Scots" was performed privately in Montreal) as well as many philosophical and other "dialogues" published in the *Queen's Journal*. The *dramatis personae* of one of these dialogues, set in 1910, includes Watson himself, Socrates, Professor Alexander of Manchester, Professor's Muirhead and Jones, as well as Bernard Bosanquet and Watson's peer and friend, T.R. Glover. Another brief work in the *Queen's Journal* (Watson 1926) is an imagined dialogue between Woodrow Wilson and Wilfred Laurier.

[21] Watson kept a notebook of billiards shots and their method of execution which is in the Queen's Archives (Queen's University 1968, 7).

Watson wrote prolifically, producing fifteen major works and more than sixty articles and book reviews. "Human thought develops by antagonism," he wrote and it is not surprising for a young man, or a Hegelian, to set about the work of philosophy by showing how other positions fall short of the truth while approximating to it (Watson 1892a, 9). Thus a preponderance of Watson's early works are refutations of the positions of others--materialists, utilitarians, Darwinians, empiricists, "psychologists." This criticism takes as its point of departure epistemology, and is carried out largely on Kantian grounds. Throughout his academic life Watson also produced more technical studies, primarily of Kant, but also of Protagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Hume, Leibnitz, Schelling, Hegel, Bosanquet and Whitehead. Fellow Kant specialist Hans Vaihinger invited Watson to contribute to the specialized journal *Kantstudien*. Other studies began as aids in teaching, such as the popular and influential *Philosophy of Kant as Contained in Extracts from his Own Writings* which was revised and reprinted eleven times from the year of publication in 1882 until 1934, his *Comte, Mill and Spencer: an Outline of Philosophy* (1895),[22] and *The Philosophy of Kant Explained* (1908). His chief constructive work in philosophy is in the area of philosophy of religion: *Christianity and Idealism* (1897), *The Philosophical Basis of Religion* (1907) and the two-volume *Interpretation of Religious Experience* (1912), the last being the Gifford Lectures of 1910-12. One work is different from the rest: Watson's last major contribution, *The State in Peace and War* (1919), is his only major contribution to political philosophy.

In 1921, the golden anniversary of Watson's professorship, his associates in several countries produced *Philosophical Essays Presented To John Watson*. Three years later Watson retired. Margaret Watson died on February 2, 1929. Along with

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[22] The second, third and fourth editions of this were published in 1898, 1901 and 1908 under the title *An Outline of Philosophy, with Notes Historical and Critical.*

reminiscences of university life and poetry he continued to publish scholarly papers occasionally, the last being a paper delivered by his daughter Harriet to the Eighth International Congress of Philosophy in Prague in 1934, entitled "A Discussion of Dr. Whitehead's Philosophy of Nature with Special Reference to his work *Concept of Nature*" (Watson 1934, 903-909). On January 26, 1939 within a month of his ninety-second year and after a brief illness, John Watson died.

Over his long career he had seen tremendous changes in life and thought. He loved to tell a story which conveys the fascination and unease with which most in his generation confronted modernity. Alexander Melville Bell, father of the inventor of the telephone, returned to Queen's in 1876. Bell had lectured at Queen's on elocution, but his purpose this time was to demonstrate the telephone. A wire was strung from the gate on Arch Street to one of the college rooms. From among the interested crowd at the gate one incredulous fellow shouted into the novel instrument: "The telephone is a hoax!" To the amazement of all present, over the wire and through the device came the voice of Bell senior: "The telephone is *not* a hoax!" (Sweezey). Watson's self-appointed task had been, in words he often borrowed from Arnold, "to see life steadily, and to see it whole": by "steadily," meaning with philosophical consistency and thoroughness, and not romantic or popular imprecision, and by "whole," intending that vision of reality which would reach beyond the partial, especially the partiality of modern science, to the Infinite. Watson's influence upon students was as pervasive in Canada in the early twentieth century as Caird's had been two decades before. Though Anglo-American idealism fell from fashion, Watson and his work were memorialized when Queen's named a new humanities building John Watson Hall at a special ceremony on May 31, 1968.

Previous Treatments

Despite his pervasive influence, it seems that previous commentators on John Watson have not been able to grasp his method in any detail.[23] A. B. McKillop's

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[23] For example, John Irving describes Watson's accomplishments and gives brief and general descriptions of his positions in an article (1950) and a chapter of Carl Klinck's *Literary History of Canada* (Irving 1976). In the latter, he writes: "In the popular consciousness Watson is usually associated with the provision of more adequate philosophical foundations for Christian theology. The popular view is, on the whole correct, but it should be emphasized that he preferred to regard Christianity as an ideal of conduct rather than a historical theology" (Irving 1976, 457). This is too simple, in that, while Watson would not play off metaphysics against ethics, he did not collapse them either. On *Christianity and Idealism*, Irving says: "Here Watson argued that Christianity and idealism, when each is understood, lend each other mutual support. Each proved the other true; each is seen to be but a different expression of the same indivisibly three-fold fact--God, freedom, and immortality. Idealism is the principle of morality and the principle of advancing history. Christianity is the germ of which idealism is the full issue" (457). With his reference to the "fact" of God, freedom and immortality, Irving makes Watson a Kantian of the second *Critique*, but Watson was really a Hegelian.

In *Idealism Transformed: The Making of a Progressive Educator* (1985), B. Anne Wood describes Watson's philosophy very generally. She claims that Watson's educational goals (given in the article, "The University and the Schools," 1901e) reveal an "implicit utilitarianism which underlay his major thrust towards organic development" (37; cf. 194). This would in fact reverse the relation between utilitarianism and Watson's own thought. Wood does not see that Watson's dialectic could absorb whatever was true in utilitarianism, and so appear to be utilitarian without giving the last word to such a "one-sided" philosophy. Again, she writes that the "spiritual principle" "drew out and synthesized the dialectical conflict between man's concrete life, with its potential for higher levels of self-consciousness, and the demands of the Divine" (32). In fact, the dialectical conflicts in Watson's presentation (for example, in his account of the history of religious experience) are not vertical oppositions between human, concrete life and a separate God, but horizontal contradictions between elements on the same level, so to speak. The "demands of the divine" for Watson are the demands of the ideal humanity which is implicit in self-consciousness. The influence of Watson on the subject of her book, the Canadian educator Harold John Putman, is discussed in the last chapter of this

work on Watson in *A Disciplined Intelligence* (1979) and in *Contours of Canadian Thought* (1987) sketches broadly the thrust of Watson's philosophy as an evolutionary idealism mediating, like Hegel's, between organic unity and pluralistic development. McKillop's grasp of the philosophical aspect of Watson's thought is the best of all who have studied it, but it remains fairly general in comparison with the detailed examination of texts in Leslie Armour's and Elizabeth Trott's *The Faces of Reason* (1983). And McKillop's examination does not attempt to lay out the logic of Watson's arguments.[24]

Leslie Armour's treatment of Watson in *Religion and Science in Early Canada* (1988) also reveals several weaknesses. His discussion of Watson's sources is peculiar, in that he ascribes an influence to John Henry Newman and an independence of Caird which it would be difficult to demonstrate from their respective works. Thus he writes that Newman "greatly interested" Watson and exercised "a considerable influence upon him," and that Watson used Newman's theory of church development "more nearly as Newman himself intended" (Armour 1988, 5, 6).[25] Unlike the British idealists, Armour says, Watson frequently mentioned Newman favourably. In contrast, Armour claims that Edward and John

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dissertation.

[24] Occasional statements mislead: his claim that "Kant had contended that the existence of the universal principle of reason within man lifts him above the seeming limitations of the senses" (McKillop 1979, 184) overlooks Kant's treatment of pure reason, which has only a "regulative" but not a "constitutive" role (which reason Kant distinguishes from understanding). This remark, however, does describe the post-Kantians.

[25] Armour claims that this use by Watson of Newman was only possible in Canada, for the Scottish Presbyterian academic environment was too dominated by consciousness of division rather than by the catholic tradition.

Caird "converted" the thesis of Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, first published in 1878, "into a rather simple evolutionary theory," an "'evolutionism'" which "was sometimes rather mechanical" (Armour 1988, 6, 9).[26] Caird's doctrine of development is simple progress, Armour asserts, in which primitive religious practices and notions were left behind and genuine novelty and improvement took their place. Watson followed Newman, says Armour, in that he saw progress in terms of the preservation of good elements of past religious experience (1988, 9-10).

This is all rather puzzling. In fact, Watson mentions Newman hardly at all and in his one major discussion of Newman's developmentalism is critical of it. So there is no reference to Newman in his *Outline of Philosophy*, nor in his major work, *The Interpretation of Religious Experience*, nor in his *Christianity and Idealism*. In his *Philosophical Basis of Religion* Watson praises Newman's developmentalism in general terms: "Like all the higher minds of the nineteenth century, he [Newman] instinctively seeks for a principle of reconciliation which shall lift us above such abstract opposites as faith and doctrine, revelation and reason, eternal truth and human fallibility; and the lever which he employs is that distinctive idea of the nineteenth century, the idea of development" (*PBR* 11). However, Watson's desire as a philosopher of religion is to establish grounds for knowledge of God (against agnosticism), and Newman is no help to him here. Watson must oppose Newman's doctrine of analogy to argue his own case.[27]

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[26] At the same time, Armour says that Edward Caird's extension of the notion of development from Christianity to all religions was a "much more radical thesis" than that of Newman (Armour 1988, 7).

[27] The Church cannot be a *tertium quid* between the individual mind and truth, Watson says, nor can any "symbol" such as a dogma of the Church (*PBR* 16-17). "The truth of Christianity cannot be established by an appeal to any authority other

A similar criticism of Armour's treatment of Caird and Caird's influence on Watson might be made. Armour gives a generally positive assessment of Watson's philosophy, while criticizing Caird for a somewhat mechanical evolutionism, (Armour 1988, 9), or a simple doctrine of progress. Yet the thought of Watson and Caird was very similar, and both were convinced students of Hegel. Caird's doctrine

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than the response of man's spirit, and if it is not in its essence a revelation of the very nature of the infinite, all attempts to perpetuate it must end in failure" (*PBR* 36).

Though this is to anticipate the argument of the thesis, to see the weakness of Armour's presentation it is necessary to observe that the problem here is that of analogy. That is, Watson held that "if we are unable to reach out beyond the symbol, we can never know that it is a symbol of anything, much less the symbol of an Infinite which by hypothesis is hidden from us by the very constitution of our minds" (*PBR* 18). Watson reasons that if all of our statements about God are analogical, we cannot avoid agnosticism. Newman's distinction between "symbols" and the "reality" they are meant to represent is to Watson's mind a (Kantian) distinction which, when pressed, leads to agnosticism: one does not have the "thing-in-itself," that is, God, even partially in mere "symbols" (*PBR* 17-18); "We cannot . . . admit that the divine lies beyond the reach of our consciousness" (*PBR* 18).

As will be seen, Watson is accusing Newman of having Kantian "faith" when what is required is Hegelian "knowledge": "And here, perhaps, we come clearly in sight of the fundamental assumption which underlies the whole of Newman's reasoning, and indeed of the reasoning of all who ultimately fall back upon authority. If the faith of the individual is veritably life in the Eternal, there is no reason to seek for any *tertium quid* to unite man and God; for they are, on that supposition, already united" (*PBR* 16). The methodological agnosticism of Newman (and Mansel) led directly to the agnosticism of Herbert Spencer, "who drew the inference that the term 'God' is but a name for that ultimate Reality, the nature of which is by us unknowable and undefinable" (*PBR* 21). Watson shows no knowledge of Newman's "illative sense," nor his distinctions between formal and informal reasoning, and between notional and real assent.

Finally, according to Watson the French ex-priest Alfred Loisy 'corrects' Newman's understanding of the development of doctrine by treating it as an evolution (*PBR* 42). Thus there is little to be said for Armour's claim that Newman was Watson's inspiration.

of development, like Watson's, ~~sents~~ progress arising from the clash of opposed

elements in thought and experience.[28]

Armour correctly notes that, for Watson, God is not to be located by us at

gaps in scientific explanation, but in self-consciousness. Armour writes,

"Consciousness can embrace everything that is possible within its own store of

knowledge. . . . If consciousness is really unlimited *in itself* then it, after all, has the

properties usually assigned to God: It is infinite and unflawed. It is only in contact

with the flawed world that it becomes limited" (Armour 1988, 11). In his last

sentence, however, Armour shows that he has mistaken Watson's meaning[29] and

replaced it with what Watson would call the world-denying philosophy of the

Greeks. In response, Watson might say that the "world", inasmuch as it is "world" (a

system comprehended by mind), cannot be flawed.[30] From Watson's viewpoint one

cannot separate consciousness from the world, and any limitation in the world is

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[28] That Caird was no prophet of a simple or mechanical progress is indicated when he writes that Christianity's "universality has been shown in the past, and must be shown still more in the future, by its being able to produce, as grafts on the new stem, all the forms of human development that were fostered by the civilization of the ancient world, and to bring them to a higher perfection than they reached in their independent state" (Caird 1907, 2:262).

[29] Armour refers in a note to Chapter 12 of *The Interpretation of Religious Experience* (without specifying which volume), and he may have mistaken Watson's dialectical development of the problem of evil for Watson's own position. Watson presents the view of others when he writes, "God, it may be said, is the source of all the positive good in the world, while evil is due to the inherent limitations of the finite" (*IRE:C* 282).

[30] Watson thinks that he finds support for this Hegelian notion in the world-affirming thought of Augustine; Watson interprets Augustine to be saying that ". . . when we view all things in relation to the whole for which they have been made, we see that the universe in its totality is perfectly good, and reveals the wisdom of the supreme Good" (*PBR* 325).

only the *self*-limitation of Spirit. This is the kind of thought that lies behind Watson's description of things, and can easily be mistaken by Armour and others for something more conventional.

Armour is persuaded that in Watson's philosophy "Christianity has . . . been relieved of the burdens which had tended to make it unacceptable. But none of its most central traditional tenets has been denied. The Divinity of Jesus, the doctrine of the Trinity, the centrality of the New Testament all remain and yet belief has been revolutionized" (Armour 1988, 11). Armour's assessment here is insufficiently critical.[31]

Armour's discussion of Watson's thought focuses on the inaugural lecture at Queen's. He finds four main points in his analysis. Of these, the most significant is Watson's insistence upon the unity of knowledge. To see the inadequacy of Armour's treatment, it is necessary to understand Watson's argument. For Watson, Spencer and Huxley are ambiguous dualists: either the phenomenon of consciousness is an irreducible enigma alongside the comprehensible material world, or it is reduced to the interplay of material forces. Watson agrees that one is subordinate to the other, but holds in contrast to them that the material world must be subsumed beneath the category of consciousness, and not the reverse. Armour paraphrases Watson's criticism: "We can see from the above that knowledge requires the activity of distinguishing between what seems to be and what is. If so, then the

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[31] It will be argued that the "revolution" is so complete that the traditional tenets are unrecognizable: the Divinity of Jesus is really the divinity of all humankind, and the Trinity is an Hegelian ontological modalism. The "centrality" of the New Testament cannot be demonstrated in Watson's works, for Watson's view that religion has a philosophical basis (cf. *The* Philosophical *Basis of Religion*) means that no historically-conditioned work can exercise the kind of authority suggested by the term "central."

project of sitting still (as the more extreme empiricists suggested) and letting nature write its own message on the mind--the project of attending to the *effects* of sense data on the human awareness--is self-defeating. It can only produce accounts of what seems to be" (Armour 1988, 13). This is too simple, however. The problem of empiricism is not that it only produces accounts of what appears to be--that, Watson would say, might apply as easily to Kantian thought, which never admits that one has knowledge of "the thing in itself." Watson is careful to say that empirical science *within its sphere* is knowledge of the world--"They discover truth, but it is only relative truth" (Watson 1988, 21).

For Watson the problem of empiricism lies in any illegitimate extension of empirical-scientific categories beyond the physical or the organic to consciousness, the life of the mind. (For example, against the materialist reductionism of Spencer, Watson argues that the language or category of force or causation is inadequate for anything beyond physics, and therefore that neither material force nor the category of causation can be ultimate.) Thus Watson's critique of empiricism is that the "hard opposition" between science and philosophy or religion is a mistake made by shallow thinking about the powers of empirical science and about the epistemological foundations of all science. Armour's interpretation of Watson's treatment of Locke and Hume is speculative at the least, as no evidence is given that he was partial to the Scotsman and imputed fault only to the Englishman.[32] Finally, Armour misrepresents the line of Watson's argument when he describes Watson's "Moralists" as wanting "to separate moral judgment from motives involving one's personal

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[32] "The gravest sin--the belief that knowledge depended on passivity, a view that undercuts the heart of the Scots work ethic--is ascribed to Locke"! (Armour 1988, 16). Armour's reading of Watson along the lines of an assumed nationalist prejudice is odd, as Watson appears to be impartial to ethnic differences in his philosophical judgments.

situation" (Armour 1988, 16). The Kantians wanted to separate *motives* from *duties*; Watson wanted to unite them.

The treatment of Watson in two chapters of the earlier work by Armour and Elizabeth Trott, *The Faces of Reason: An Essay on Philosophy and Culture in English Canada, 1850-1950* (1981), is superior in its detailed grappling with texts. However, it reveals a general unfamiliarity with Watson's sources, influences, methods and categories, and like the others stands in need of correction and clarification. So a long description of T. H. Green's philosophy is given on the assumption that Watson's teacher, Caird, as a "close friend" of Green, merely developed, without substantial change, Green's views (Armour and Trott 1981, 217, 222, 249). However, it is clear that although Caird and Green were both influenced by Hegel, they each developed their philosophies in different ways and with different interests (Stout 1967, 5). It is true that Green's early interest was epistemology (exemplified in a critical introduction to Hume's works, produced with T. H. Grose), and Caird published his first work on Kant only after Watson left Glasgow. (Watson came to Canada in 1872. Caird's *A Critical Account of the Philosophy of Kant* was published in 1877.) Yet Caird shared Green's interest in epistemology from the beginning, and Caird's major interest was philosophy of religion, while Green's was ethics. The direct influence of Green upon Watson in the critique of the empirical tradition, if any, would have come as Watson read Green's notes on Hume (along with the works by Kant and Frederick Ferrier), before Caird taught Watson philosophy. It was while studying with Caird in 1872 that Watson wrote an essay on Hume that won the Rector's prize. Watson refers to Green briefly in several contexts. He notes Green's claim that Hegel's work had to be done all over again (1901b, 252). He also refers approvingly to Green's remark that philosophy is a "levelling up" of nature to mind, rather than a "levelling down" of mind to nature

(*OP* 131).[33] In *The Philosophical Basis of Religion* Watson discusses Green's

thought at greater length, both to criticize its Kantian limitation of Reason and to

ponder Green's question, whether to *know* God, we must *be* God.[34] There is little

question that Edward Caird's thought was distinctive, and that it was this influence

which was primary in the constructive work of Watson at least. Green's particular

influence on Watson, if any, remains to be shown.[35]

While Armour and Trott claim that Watson worked out his own metaphysic

in a way different from Bradley, Bosanquet, Green, and the other British idealists

(Armour and Trott 1981, 222, 224), the influence of Caird (and Hegel) can be

demonstrated in a quotation of Watson's *Outline of Philosophy* which the authors

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[33] The notion derives from Carlyle's assertion that the natural and the
supernatural do not differ, but the former must be elevated to the latter, rather than
the reverse (see Shine 1938, 69). Green's use of the notion was socio-politically
informed, for he was "oppressed" by what he called the "'monotonous level of
commercial intelligence' of men . . . ." He was "impatient of social distinctions
based, not upon real worth, but upon wealth, which afforded the privileges of a
'Public School' education and introduced certain weak spots into the type of
education that it represented. The ideal involved in the so-called 'education of a
gentleman,' he believed, tended to consolidate undesirable social distinctions instead
of 'levelling up without levelling down' in the ideal of a 'gentleman'" which "always
meant 'a man habitually honourable in feeling, conduct and speech'" (Wallace 1941,
34-35).

[34] On Watson's criticism of Green, see the section "British Idealism and the
Relativity of Knowledge," in Chapter V below.

[35] The authors also claim that "there is little doubt about the origin of Watson's
own theory" in philosophy of religion, i.e., Kant (Armour and Trott 1981, 304). Yet
they also recognize in principle the influence of Hegel, saying that "[h]owever far
Watson would or would not go with Hegel, he makes it clear that he will go far
enough to admit Hegel's view of reason, for he thinks that Kant's restrictions turn
out to be, to a large extent, arbitrary" (ibid., 309). As will be shown, the guiding
influence is Hegel.

provide (Armour and Trott 1981, 223). An analysis of this quotation anticipates the argument of the dissertation. However, at this point it can be said that Watson follows Caird and Hegel in three ways: he demonstrates the presence of an incomprehensible identity (Spencer's "inscrutable and unintelligible Power"); he shows the emergence of contradiction in Spencer's thought (irreducible individuality alongside, and unrelated to, this Power); and he presents the sublation of this contradiction in a way that ostensibly preserves and transcends the opposition of individuality and the loss of individuality. It is *this* Hegelian dialectic and its preservative character, traceable in Edward Caird as well, which explains why the alternatives appear as "evenly balanced"--not Watson's singular attention to the particulars of situations (Armour and Trott 1981, 224).[36]

There follows an exposition by Armour and Trott of Watson's treatment of evolutionary theory which faithfully follows his thought without seeing through it to its roots in Hegelianism. So the conclusion that "for Watson, reason is much more intimately bound up with every aspect of the world, and, in the end, Watson's God becomes not another thing outside the order but a structural feature of that order itself" (Armour and Trott 1981, 229), is true and yet only partially so. Again, to anticipate later argument: Reason is "bound up" with the world because, in Hegelian terms, "the rational is the real and the real is the rational." God in Watson's thought is the Hegelian Absolute, both within the dialectic of the world-process, and beyond it. (Without naming it as Hegelian, Armour and Trott do see the equation of reality with Reason: "It would not be going too far to say that for Watson reason *is* reality" [Armour and Trott 1981, 230].) The authors observe Watson's rejection of Bergson's

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[36] This dialectic is vaguely referenced when the authors write that "Watson's solution is to perform a close analysis of those orders [of reality] and to try to show how the solution arises within them" (Armour and Trott 1981, 229).

Vitalism, and note that this philosophy made no headway among Canadian philosophers, either because of the impact of idealism or as a result of the Canadian environment upon reflection about nature. However, the reason for Watson's rejection is the "externality" of Bergson's principle of life, a superadditum which does not arise from within the dialectical development of nature. Behind this rejection is Watson's agreement with Hegel on the *self*-differentiating totality (Armour and Trott 1981, 231).[37]

Following a long discussion of Watson's political theory as presented in *The State in Peace and War*, the authors refer again to T. H. Green, concluding that Watson amplifies the priority of community over individuality in Green's thought. The source is Hegel or Caird, not Green, but the assessment is largely correct. "Persons are not discrete substances--whether material or spiritual--but rather individuations of a common system" (Armour and Trott 1981, 249). Caution is necessary here, however: in Watson's dialectical movement of thought there is no blank identity or ahistorical "individuation," but rather a development that takes in every kind of phenomenon, including the personal, apparently without effacing that which makes it personal. Towards the end of a discussion of Watson's ethical thought the authors correctly observe this double-sidedness, so that the sphere of

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[37] So Watson observes at one point, "But the question is, whether M. Bergson is justified in his reduction of immanent teleology to the formal and external arrangement of pre-existent elements that remain unchanged in the product" (*IRE:C* 174), i.e., the question is whether immanent teleology should not rather be conceived in a Hegelian fashion as the sublation of conflicting elements which are transformed and yet preserved in their product. He faults Bergson for implicitly applying a mechanical notion of ends, when Bergson's own work has shown the inadequacy of mechanical explanations (see *IRE:C* 175-177). The authors do describe Watson's criticism of vitalism accurately on 271: "Watson wants nothing to do with the notion that there are unusual 'psychic' forces which animate living things. Living things, indeed, are, for him, an integral part of a reality which forms a single system."

moral enquiry is "at once universalized and individualized" (Armour and Trott 1981, 262). They identify the elements of a Hegelian conception of things, but the description misses the necessary dynamic movement through the moments of knowledge: "The ultimate reality is not, on the one hand, a collection of sensations and it is not, on the other hand, an abstract structure of rational principle. The ultimate reality is the intelligible. It is the retreat to abstraction, whether that abstraction is a misguided kind of sensationalism or a misguided kind of rationalism--which imposes insoluble problems on the situation" (Armour and Trott 1981, 266). Exactly so, and the authors might have gone on to note that Watson's approach is to follow the dialectical progress of reason as it faces these "insoluble problems," producing the history of religion and philosophy.

In the second chapter on Watson, Armour and Trott delve more deeply into his metaphysics, noting that he is not a subjective idealist, nor does he hold to a notion of "spiritual substance."[38] By mind Watson means "a rational order or, rather, a series of rational orders which interlock and intersect with one another." The authors see that Watson is not a simple monist or dualist. Though he does not grant the same degree of reality to matter as to mind, matter as a form of mind has its own relative independence. Their description of Watson's view of matter as less Hegelian than his view of mind is mistaken, however. Watson's argument in the quoted section from *Outline of Philosophy* (177-79) is that the materialist thinks that matter can *cause* life and consciousness, but he or she is confusing material causation, which involves parts and movement, with relations involving "existence as a whole" (*OP* 178). He refutes the materialist view by discovering an internal

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[38] This rather unclear reference may be Watson's point, derived from Kant's criticism of Descartes, and crucial in Hegel, that the subject does not know himself directly, but only through the world.

contradiction requiring the Hegelian sublation: in the materialist view life and consciousness are *different from matter* on the one hand, and, as the effects of matter's movement, merely *modes of matter* on the other. The authors follow Watson's argument to the extent of seeing that Watson will not allow the reduction of consciousness to an epiphenomenon (Armour and Trott 1981, 271-73).

The authors consider Watson's argument to begin with the assumptions of modern science, the most basic science being physics, and in this they are correct, for idealistic philosophy from Kant to Watson assumed that Newtonian science was paradigmatic. There is some confusion about Watson's notions of causation, however: matter, they write, "is intelligible not primarily through primitive notions of a kind of collision between billiard ball-like bits of matter but rather as a structure which becomes intelligible through its expression in law-like forms" (Armour and Trott 1981, 275). In fact, these two should not be opposed: Watson's view of physics (classical, not quantum-mechanical) would allow a billiard-ball model of molecular interaction, merely insisting that every collision would follow the "laws of nature" without variance.[39] Watson is really setting in opposition what might be called classical causation, in which causation is seen to be a linear series (perhaps an infinite series), and Spinozan causation, in which the totality of causes and effects, as totality, is self-caused (a totality which thus is similar to the uncaused God of classical theism). Behind Watson's argument one can see the ancient view, adopted by Spinoza, that the whole (the cosmos) is greater than the sum of the parts: life and

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[39] Watson quotes Hegel, to the effect that if one atom were to be destroyed (or, the same thing, were to act "irrationally"), the whole universe would be destroyed (*PBR* 90).

consciousness emerge from the parts but are not related to them as effect to cause. Life and consciousness are that which is "greater" than the sum of the parts.[40]

Watson is thus able to say that the true nature of existence is organic, and that it is better to say that the organic produces the inorganic than the reverse. The authors find this "a little confusing" and Watson's argument to be a "verbal tangle" (Armour and Trott 1981, 277), but the problem is really that the category of causation itself, which Watson cannot abandon, is stretched beyond comprehensibility when it is made a reciprocal relation. Watson's own discomfort with his description of things, noted by the authors, is really the Hegelian observation that thought or argument cannot consider any one element (organic or inorganic) out of dialectical relation to the other: Watson notes that "[i]f this one all-inclusive unity is now seen to involve within itself organic as well as inorganic existence, its nature cannot be comprehended by looking at either apart from the other. It is neither inorganic nor organic, but both. . . . [A]s no mode of existence originates any other, what we must say is, that in organic existence we have a fuller and truer expression of the nature of existence as a whole than we have in inorganic existence" (*OP* 181-82). The authors conclude from a quotation of the *Outline of Philosophy* that Watson is imprudent, not really intending to say that the appearance of conscious beings is a higher manifestation of "the one existence that always was and is and shall be" (*OP* 182-83 in Armour and Trott 1981, 278). But Watson must intend nothing less than this. This "one existence" is Hegel's Notion,

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[40] The authors quote Watson: "But this life, although it has for the first time presented itself is not something that has come into being by a power belonging to inorganic things. And no one would be so absurd to say that it originated itself. Its origination can be explained only on the supposition that it was implicit in the nature of existence *as a whole*" (*OP* 181, quoted in Armour and Trott 1981, 276-277). See below, "Self and self," in Chapter VI.

which goes over into its opposite and returns to itself, the self-same out of which difference arises. The authors do not see that Watson's "system" is not static, but a dialectical development.

This failure to grasp Watson's Hegelian method marks their treatment of a problem in Watson's thought, that of temporal and logical order (Armour and Trott 1981, 278ff.). They note that, unlike Bradley and McTaggart, Watson cannot treat his ordering principle as trans-temporal, for it must be immanent in nature. (As will be shown, Watson is here following Hegel's rejection of abstract universals.) Yet if the immaterial (consciousness) is actually prior to the material (nature), they say, then Watson must "hold that time is not a fundamental feature of the world." But again, as the ordering principle is *in* the world, time is necessary for it to come to light. There is a contradiction here, they say. They conclude that in Watson's thought there is a "transformation of time," such that, "in every thought, we escape from the immediacy of given, successive experience into the notion of a forged and created unity" (Armour and Trott 1981, 279, 281).[41] This is a rather indirect and obscure presentation of an argument for Kant's "transcendental unity of apperception," and involves alien categories such as "untransformed time" (Armour and Trott 1981, 282-83)[42] but it neither states the problem properly nor suggests any way to resolve it. It will be argued in this dissertation that there *is* incoherence

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[41] The authors mistakenly observe that because any "amount of knowledge" can be synthesized, infinity can be reached by a generalization of this process of synthesis. What is required in fact is the Fichtean correction of Kant's limitations of reason, as described in the dissertation below.

[42] Watson's metaphysic is presented in a peculiar manner: to say that "we discover the truth in the process of transforming time, and thus, we discover the reality which always was and will be," (Armour and Trott 1981, 282) is to point to the atemporal character of Kant's logical or transcendental unity of apperception, or to the Hegelian (divine) Reason.

in Watson's thought, but Armour and Trott have not grasped the way in which it arises from Watson's Hegelian dialectic. So they write, "If Watson holds that there is only one, ultimate, rational system, then development cannot really have any place in the system." To this, of course, Watson (following Hegel) would say that the Absolute must be grasped as the *result* of a development, that of the knowing process or of history. They continue, "But if development has no place in the system, the rational order loses its unique connection with the particular structure of experience--for that structure, then, is only a surface appearance, something to be overcome in the transformation of time" (Armour and Trott 1981, 283). In Watson's epistemology, however, the distinction between appearance and reality has been relativized, and the rational order is something in the process of realization.

Armour and Trott approach the analysis of Watson's thought from the perspective of Bertrand Russell, who treats idealism as a form of the coherence theory of truth (Armour and Trott 1981, 271, 275, 283, 289). Russell's criticism of idealism, they note, is that there may be "many equally coherent rational orders" (Armour and Trott 1981, 285).[43] The authors comment, "On Watson's view this is simply not true because the rational order and the order of experience are not separable. An order must be an order of something. It must have a content. We know which order we belong to because we do have some experience and the experience does contain within it the general principles from which the rest of the order may be inferred" (Armour and Trott 1981, 285). This imagined response would not meet Russell's objection to idealism, however. Instead, Watson would

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[43] This is the source of the authors' earlier suggestion that "Watson's system might break down into a radical scepticism simply because of the plethora of potentially rational systems by and through which we might grasp reality" (Armour and Trott 1981, 283).

respond to Russell quite simply that the ability to compare "equally coherent rational orders" implies a unity, that is, the mind that in comparing them is able to transcend them all. He would also dispute the notion of their equality, arguing that in the act of comparison they could be ranked according to their *comprehensiveness*. (Thus chemistry is "above" physics, while both are far "below" the philosophy of religion, for example.) Russell has other objections to idealism like Watson's, which are discussed below.[44]

The authors ask the question: "Is he clearly aware of what he is doing or are these various passages from which we have been quoting *ad hoc* solutions to problems which he develops simply as he meets them?" (Armour and Trott 1981, 287). In this question they indicate both the obscurity of Watson's method and their failure to grasp it. John Watson knew what he was doing, but he did not show how he was doing it. Therefore it is true that Watson's form of idealism "is complex and does not yield at once to immediate surface analyses" (291); the only way in is through his philosophical sources and influences. More might be written on Armour's and Trott's explication of Watson, but it would serve little purpose: a fresh approach is necessary.

There is one further, minor point: Armour and Trott connect Watson to the "Free Church of Scotland," which they describe as having a "liberal outlook on religion" (Armour and Trott 1981, 225). Watson's roots, however, were in the United Presbyterian Church. (The U.P.C. and the Free Church in this period drew

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[44] See "The Overthrow of the Idealistic School," in Chapter VI below. Armour and Trott present a notion of development, but it is not Hegelian, and does not grasp the dialectic with its contradictions and sublations (289). So, for example, it is impossible on Hegelian terms that human beings might "impede the orderly development of the universe"; such an impediment would itself find a place in the Hegelian system as that which precipitates conflict and the resulting higher harmony.

close in general theological orientation, though not in ecclesiology [Fleming 1927, 134-35, 174 ff.].) Yet Watson left his United Presbyterian theological and philosophical roots behind when, against his father's wishes, he withdrew from the uncongenial "orthodox atmosphere" of the theological school of the University of Edinburgh. He studied instead with the Cairds, who were members of the more liberal established Church of Scotland, at Glasgow University.[45]

The Logic of Identity

Armour and Trott come closest to finding an entry point to Watson's thought when they touch upon "the logic of identity." The context is Watson's article on William James, in which they quote James as saying that he has given up the logic of identity "fairly, squarely and irrevocably." The authors comment that "[i]t is hard to be sure what the 'logic of identity' is--though Watson claims that it is 'the only logic that Mr. James recognizes' . . ." (Armour and Trott 1981, 297). The authors assume that James means the formal logic in which are found propositions such as "A is A," and thus that he is renouncing the notion that entities have unique and unequivocal characterizations. Watson's objection, they note, is that James must be falling back into "relativism," and thus "taking the 'plunge into the abyss of phenomenalism, where we meet with nothing but the elusive fictions of an unintelligible universe.'"[46] The result is that the Jamesian universe is completely incomprehensible, and reason must be abandoned for a mystical faith.

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[45] John Webster Grant makes a similar error when he associates Edward Caird and Henry Drummond as "Free Church" thinkers (Grant 1990, 123). Drummond in fact was Free Church, but not Caird.

[46] "Some Remarks on Radical Empiricism" (Watson 1910b, 118), in Armour and Trott 1981, 297.

By "logic of identity" James and Watson do indeed mean classical Aristotelian logic, and Watson's remark that James knows no other logic is a reminder that there *is* another, that is, the Hegelian dialectical logic. It is this logic, Watson would say, which is the only one to do the job that James wants done, that is, to know life and reality. The simple logic of identity cannot make sense of becoming; the Hegelian logic describes the movement of thought or life as the Notion reveals its difference and self-sameness in the dialectic.[47] (To Watson's mind, James's fall into "phenomenalism" is a declension to a form of subjective idealism like Berkeley's, in which things-in-themselves are hidden from the mind and there is no one rational order of all things, but many possible worlds.)

Armour and Trott observe that what is at stake between James and Watson is the possibility of a "univocal reality," or a "univocal description of things." This is quite correct, but the authors do not proceed beyond this point (Armour and Trott 1981, 299, 298). The claims that Watson (along with James) did not seem "very determined to explore the theoretical basis of this question about logic," and that Watson "seems to have had no tendency to go back and reconstruct documents like Hegel's *Science of Logic*" (299) are contradicted by the fact that, while Watson thought that Hegel's deduction of the categories in the *Science of Logic* was out of harmony with the modern temper, he taught the *Wissenschaft der Logik* and

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[47] Hegel distinguishes the two forms of logic in the *Science of Logic* in such a way that the classical form, judgment, is reduced to a "moment" of "speculative" thought: "Judgment is an *identical* relation between subject and predicate; in it we abstract from the fact that the subject has a number of determinatenesses other than that of the predicate, and also that the predicate is more extensive than the subject. Now if the content is speculative, the *non-identical* aspect of subject and predicate is also an essential moment, but in the judgement this is not expressed" (Hegel 1969, 91).

provided students with a translat'on and commentary at least of some chapters.[48]
That Watson's interest in Hegel was not merely antiquarian is indicated by his notes
on the opening section of the *Science of Logic*, and by his use of Hegel's method, as
is described below in the dissertation. For Watson, it is appreciation for Hegel's
treatment of the problem of identity which leads him to the dialectical method.

Intimations of Ambiguity

Despite some conceptual misunderstandings, Armour and Trott happen upon
a problem in Watson's work, that of fundamental metaphysical ambiguity. The
problem might be stated as a question: for example, whether Watson's Absolute is
truly absolute. It was observed above that, according to the authors, Watson's God
"becomes not another thing outside the order but a structural feature of that order
itself" (Armour and Trott 1981, 229). It was indicated also that this is too simple, for
Watson's God is both within the dialectic of the world-process, and beyond it.
Moreover, if Watson holds that there is only one, ultimate, rational system, in which
development can have no place, then the rational (objective) order loses its
connection with the particular structure of (subjective) experience, which is reduced
to only a "surface appearance, something to be overcome in the transformation of
time" (Armour and Trott 1981, 283). In other words, if the Absolute is an objective
rational system beyond development, or the goal of that development, then it cannot
be truly absolute as it is realized in particular historical consciousnesses.

The authors return to this problem when they observe that in parts of *The
Interpretation of Religious Experience* Watson suggests that God is "part of this
development" towards the final truth, while other passages "suggest some

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[48] In "The Degree of Ph.D. in Philosophy" (1900a), Watson indicates that he
intended to complete the teaching of the entire *Wissenschaft* by the Session 1902-03.

uncertainty on this point" (289). Again, in a discussion of Watson's treatment of philosophy of religion, the authors observe that "Hegel's doctrine seems to entail that the point at which subject and object finally merge is the point at which the individual consciousness finds the genuine infinite consciousness as its object of knowledge . . ." (313). What they seem to be saying here is that the end of the knowing process raises the question of the absoluteness of absolute knowledge, and raises the question too of whether the subject-object relation is transcended in a higher unity. The question comes up again: "If God is not 'a Being which grows in experience,' [as Watson claimed,] are we back with the God who is a mystical transcendent unity quite apart from nature which *is* a process?" (Armour and Trott 1981, 314, quoting *IRE:C* 125). This is the problem of the ambiguity of the Absolute, which is approached in the dissertation below in terms of Watson's own Hegelian method.[49]

The Point of Departure: "The Polite Form of Naturalism"?

As noted above, in A. B. McKillop's view John Watson's philosophy was an attempt to rescue the Christian faith, which seemed threatened by the new science of the nineteenth century.[50] Yet Watson's idealism, McKillop thinks, overshot the mark, rendering a Protestant Christianity that bears little resemblance to the belief of

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[49] The notion of metaphysical ambiguity may suggest a deconstructive analysis to the minds of some readers. See the section "Ambiguity and Deconstruction," in Chapter VI.

[50] "Watson's stages in the progressive evolution of thought offered an alternative to the materialistic social evolutionism of Herbert Spencer and his disciples. Moreover, and most important of all, the philosophy Watson espoused did not seem to undermine the Christian experience. Did it not see Christianity as the ultimate expression of human thought?" (McKillop 1979, 191).

nineteenth-century believers and resulting ironically in the further secularization of Canadian culture. In McKillop's judgment, Watson's attempt to mediate between the gospel and culture failed to preserve the essentials of the faith: "Judged by any general understanding of the fundamentals of Christianity, Watson was willing, in effect, to scrap much in order to 'preserve the essence of the Christian consciousness--the unity of man & God'" (McKillop 1979, 215).[51]

McKillop asks whether the views of Watson and other idealists were finally distinguishable from the evolutionary naturalism which idealism opposed: "Both accepted the principle of evolutionary change; both asserted the fundamental unity of nature" (McKillop 1979, 215). McKillop quotes John Passmore on the close affinity of Hegelian metaphysics and evolutionary naturalism, which affinity Passmore thinks is the result of Darwinism. As pantheism has been described as the polite form of atheism, Passmore comments that, similarly, "'Absolute Idealism is the polite form of naturalism'" (Passmore 1959-60, 52-53).[52] Passmore himself goes on to say that "there is more in common between Darwinism and Absolute Idealism than there is between Idealism and the orthodox Christianity which, it was at first expected, the Idealists would save from the onslaughts of Darwin" (Passmore 1959-60, 53). This observation suggests a fruitful point of departure for considering the success of Watson's project: was Watson's philosophy a fulfillment or an undermining of the Christian faith?

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[51] In his *Contours of Canadian Thought* (1987), McKillop says again that it is an open question whether Watson's "desire to preserve the essentials of the Christian religion had resulted in preservation or destruction" (96).

[52] McKillop follows Passmore, who notes that there are two points of agreement between Darwinian naturalism and idealism: the emphasis on development and the denial of the existence of two worlds (material and spiritual, natural and supernatural).

II. *John Watson's Thought in Outline*

John Watson's thought can be described in terms of three subjects or themes. First there is his treatment of the history of epistemology, which is largely a decline from empiricism towards scepticism until the period of Kant. Then there is Kant's philosophy itself, a major subject of Watson's analysis and the point of view from which he attacks the empiricism of his own day. Lastly, there is his advancement of the Hegelian project, primarily in his works on philosophy of religion or the history of religious experience.

The History of Epistemology

Watson's treatment of the history of epistemology is in the tradition of Hegelian dialectical analysis. That history is the history of the failure of empiricism or (subjective) idealism to account for knowledge. Watson considers Locke to be the father of modern epistemology, and he finds that the problems of Locke are resolved, or raised to a new level, by Berkeley's idealism. Problems raised by Berkeley are corrected by Hume, who nonetheless exacerbates earlier empiricist error. Without rehearsing Watson's account, observations can be made about his assumptions and method.

Watson accepts the classical distinction between knowledge (*epistémé*) and opinion (*doxa*). Knowledge, as opposed to opinion, involves an element that is

permanent, necessary or *universal.*[53] Aristotle said that "'the same thing cannot at once belong and not belong to the same object in the same respect . . .'" (*OP* 375). This was not merely a formal law, but a law of reality and of knowledge in his view, according to Watson. This latter principle of non-contradiction is fundamental to science, according to Aristotle, for there can be no science without attaining to the universal: science is comprehension by the intellect of that which could not be otherwise, while opinion is a matter of probability. Empiricism, however, can present no ground for universality or permanence in knowledge. In empiricism mind is passive with respect to the world, which means that the bridge between knower and known must be made by the plurality of impressions of sense. In this view, knowledge is the agglomeration of discrete *sensa* which are afterwards mechanically combined and compared. Induction or understanding is generalization from some perceptions and the conditions of those perceptions to all similar conditions. As he traces the history of philosophy from Locke on, Watson finds problems with all of these empiricist claims.

The first and most obvious objection with empiricism is that a group of discrete *sensa* can never be anything more than that, if the mind has no active role in knowledge. For Watson, the criticism of empiricism here is actually a *reductio ad absurdum*, an unrelenting dissection of perception which shows that particulars are just particulars, indeed, that particulars vanish away to surds, unless universalizing mind can be found, either behind them in the world as a whole, or before them in the subject.

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[53] In Watson's reading of Aristotle, knowledge (*epistēmē*) as opposed to opinion is based on universal judgments, which express the essence of things. The condition of all such judgments is that each must have one definite meaning, which entails that each judgment must affirm or deny something (*OP* 320).

Exemplary here is his treatment of Hume, the arch-empiricist. Taking up Locke's sensationalism, Hume held that everything in knowing is ultimately reducible to sensation, a series of impressions or feelings. Here is the cardinal error of empiricism: "The only connection in the objects of knowledge he can admit is that arbitrary order in which feelings succeed each other. There can therefore be no necessary element either in common experience or in the sphere of mathematical or physical truth." A series of discrete entities such as feelings can never be united, no discriminations between them can be made, nor any identities (or even similarities) discovered: "in one word feeling is a multiplicity and nothing but a multiplicity" (Watson 1876d, 116, 117).

Hume hit upon the chief problem of philosophy, according to Watson: "Is knowledge possible at all? or, more definitely, Are the conceptions of substance and causality necessary and objective, or subjective and arbitrary?" (Watson 1876d, 117).[54] Hume's answer was that what is called a "universal" is merely the result of "'custom'," that is, habitual sequential association (*OP* 353).[55] Thus again, all ideas are particular and every proposition must be singular: "A 'universal' proposition, in the sense of one which expresses the permanent nature of an object, is a fiction" (*OP* 355). In place of the necessity and universality that are assumed whenever the concepts of substance and causality are used, Hume would put uniformity of experience or generality, that is, an order in the succession of feelings which is habitually observed. The rising of the sun in the east is something to which one is

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[54] Watson will say again that epistemology is the chief or primary task of philosophy, understood as addressing the question of the relation of knowledge and existence (*OP* 11).

[55] Hume's mathematical doctrine can be summed up: 1. mathematical judgments rest upon impressions of sense; 2. they are singular; 3. they are only approximately true. Watson notes that these propositions are Mill's as well (*OP* 357).

accustomed, and the "lawfulness" of its so doing is just a matter of uniform experience, not the necessity of lawful relations. But if the connection is to be attributed to the observing subject, and not to the observed object (*OP* 16), one thereby surrenders objective necessity. "Hume's doctrine is therefore at bottom a denial of all law" (*OP* 18), a rejection of "the assumed unity and systematic connection of nature" (*OP* 19).[56] "No number of observations can ever rise to the dignity of a necessary law" (*OP* 16).

Watson echoes the Baconian insistence that induction does not proceed *per enumerationem simplicem* (*OP* 88): "For the only warrant we have for our particular judgments is that of particular experiences, and no number of particular experiences can carry us beyond those experiences" (*OP* 69). We do not have universal experience, and so our impressions of sense *per se* (for example, that two straight lines do not enclose a space) are not universalizable conceptually.[57] "It would be legitimate only if we were certain that we had exhausted all the instances, and such certitude is practically not obtainable" (*OP* 88). Watson's chief criticism of J. S. Mill and the entire tradition is that no summary of particular judgments attains

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[56] Neither Hume's "bundle" theory of sensation nor his understanding of causation as the habitual sequence of impressions permits a system of nature, "because there are no universal and necessary judgments" (*PBR* 60).

[57] Watson does not note it, but this is Hume's rebuttal of the teleological argument: the claim that the universe is orderly and shows evidence of design requires knowledge of the universe in its entirety, for the known world may be a small pocket of order in the midst of disorder: "A very small part of this great system, during a very short time, is very imperfectly discovered to us; and do we thence pronounce decisively concerning the origin of the whole? . . . But is a part of nature a rule for another part very wide of the former? . . . Is a very small part a rule for the universe?" (Hume 1948, 22-23).

unconditional law: "Generality is not necessity" (*OP* 70).[58]

The heir of Hume, Mill, understands induction to be the process of inference by which we move from some to all (*OP* 83), but Watson argues (following Kant) that as we never have the "all," induction in Mill's sense can never be reconciled with the fact of knowledge or with that necessity which distinguishes knowledge from mere ideas. Therefore Mill should eschew general propositions and limit himself to particular or singular judgments (*OP* 83). However, even this position is impossible, for on the premises of radical empiricism even particular judgments are not permitted. Not only can I not be sure that beyond the point of my observation two straight lines might enclose a space, but beyond the time of my observation the same lines might meet: "For aught I can tell they may take a sudden freak when I am looking the other way, and alter their whole nature" (*OP* 72). Thus Watson's rejection of Mill's empiricism hinges on his conviction that by permitting alternative worlds (where squares might also be circles, where "there is no absolute fixity in the quantitative relations of things"), Mill has denied the possibility of real knowledge, of knowing things as they really are (*OP* 10). Mill's atomistic conception of knowing implies for Watson the possibility in principle of final disorder and unintelligibility, which in turn implies that nothing, not even the most assured "empirical fact" is known.

In this way, empiricism leads to scepticism. Not only is knowledge as a

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[58] Watson finds the same difficulty with Leibnitz's treatment of knowing. Leibnitz observed that we do not have the whole world before us to establish connections; as we cannot carry our pursuit of these connections to the point of establishing distinct conceptions of things, we must distinguish between contingent truths of fact (matters of causation) and self-evident truths of reason. As reality thus lies beyond the possibility of our discovering it, Watson says this doctrine leads to the denial of all knowledge (*PKE* 20).

relation between subject and object not understood: under analysis not only the object, but the subject too dissolves in sheer flux, a mathematical point with no experiential magnitude. A castle of knowledge appears to build itself up from blocks of discrete data, but Watson argues that in fact one never gets beyond the individual blocks. Universal judgments are obviously impossible, and, on examination, even general judgments shrink to singular judgments, and then evaporate into ineffable momentary sensation. The castle vanishes in thin air. No distinction between knowledge and opinion is possible, and the triumph of science is undercut by radical doubt.[59]

Like Kant, Watson was impressed by Newtonian science, and the lawfulness or apparent universality and necessity of causal relations in a mechanically conceived universe. His criticism of empiricism assumed not merely the fact of necessary elements in knowledge, but also the necessity of natural relations. The laws of nature are not merely empirical generalizations (an "essentially sceptical solution" [PBR 90]). Moreover, "[a]ny relaxation of its rigidity [i.e., that of natural law] will logically lead to the dissolution of the universe by its reduction to a mere assemblage of accidental particulars. Nature, as the sciences assume, is so welded and compacted together, that, as Hegel said on one occasion, it is at bottom an identical proposition to say, that the annihilation of a single atom of matter would destroy the whole universe."[60] On the physical level, this means the strict determinism of

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[59] "There can be no 'science of nature' unless universal propositions are possible, and Locke's doctrine makes all such propositions impossible" (OP 341).

[60] PBR 90. Hegel's comments indicate the relation between the universality of natural law and the inadequacy of analogy in his and Watson's thought: "The assertion that stones fall when raised above the ground and dropped certainly does not require us to make this experiment with every stone; it does perhaps mean that the experiment must have been made with a great number, and from this we can then

matter in motion: "[T]he state of the whole universe is the consequent of its state at the previous instant, and if any particular state could ever occur a second time, all subsequent states would also recur, and history would repeat itself" (*OP* 92).[61]

Berkeley's Subjective Idealism

Watson's Hegelian approach means that he must read the detour of Berkeley's idealism as a proper progression from Locke and as an anticipation of Hume. According to Watson, Berkeley corrected the inadequacy of Locke's theory by doing away with the supposed object beyond the scope of the mind. He observed that the thing which produces the "simple ideas" of sensation is not really known, and therefore that the reference of these ideas to the thing itself must be an activity of mind (*IRE:H* 238). But if there can be no immediate knowledge of an independent external reality, then on what basis can these conscious beings distinguish fiction and reality? Like Locke, Berkeley thought that fictions are produced by the arbitrary play of the mind, or are improperly associated ideas; one could distinguish truth from unreality because the "ideas of sense" are "strong," "lively," "distinct," steady, orderly, coherent, in comparison with mere imaginings. As Berkeley could not find the source of these distinct qualities in the existence of things beyond the mind, he concluded that it is God who is the cause of these ideas of sense in our minds, and

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by analogy draw an inference about the rest with the greatest probability or with perfect right. But analogy not only does not give a perfect right, but on account of its nature contradicts itself . . . . But the instinct of Reason does in fact take such laws for truth . . . . That a stone falls, is true for consciousness because in its heaviness the stone has in and for itself that essential relation to the earth which is expressed in falling" (Hegel 1977, 152).

[61] This repetition does not happen because no two states of the universe are identical, he notes.

that without any mediation by matter.[62] Thus, Watson observes, Berkeley makes "a sudden leap" to God as the generator and guarantor of reality (*IRE:H* 339, *OP* 344).

Locke had understood universals to be produced by abstracting qualities from a series of experienced objects. Berkeley disagreed with Locke, denying that one can think "universals" as abstractions--for example, "human being" as the sum of all known individuals with any differences erased. When one thinks of human beings, one thinks only of individuals, or rather, of particular perceptions (*OP* 346). Though it is not explicit, in Watson's view Berkeley anticipates Hegel's rejection of thought as abstraction: "The whole doctrine from which the ordinary view of abstraction results rests upon the false assumption that perception without thought gives us a knowledge of concrete things, and that thought consists in the elimination of differences. . ." (*OP* 350). This theme of the unity of perception and thought (or understanding) in their distinctness will recur in Watson's many criticisms of "abstraction."

Berkeley's weak notion of universality was salutary for correcting Locke, but it had its own deficiency. Berkeley is a *subjective* idealist, Watson notes. That is, despite his unphilosophical recourse to divine aid in the knowing process, Berkeley cannot establish universality or necessity in knowledge, for the thoughts of the individual mind are particulars. Berkeley asserts that mathematical propositions are a symbolic relation of a particular idea to other particular ideas. Similarly, he thinks

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[62] Berkeley writes in §29 of *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, "But, whatever power I may have over my own thoughts, I find the ideas actually perceived by Sense have not a like dependence on my will. When in broad daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or no, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view . . . . There is therefore some other Will or Spirit that produces them" (Berkeley 1962, 78).

that an imagined or actual individual triangle has only a particular existence. Watson concludes that if Berkeley meant by this that the triangle merely has a place in the succession of feelings, which he must have done, then he confused the particularity of successive states of consciousness with the consciousness of determinate objects. Berkeley's subjective idealism thus leads immediately to Nominalism, Watson says. "It is obvious that, on this doctrine, our world is split up into a number of separate minds, each of which is in perpetual flux, and that the only identity to be found in them is an identity of the names applied--not to identical but-- to similar succession of ideas." As Watson had found in the thought of Locke, science is thus rendered an impossible pursuit, for "a science involves universal propositions and Nominalism admits of none" (*IRE:H* 241).[63] Against this Watson insists that the existence of the determinate concept, an individual triangle, demands a certain permanence in spatial relations as grasped by thought. Conceived objects cannot be reduced to particular feelings or impressions.

In Watson's view, Berkeley's insistence that reality is essentially relative to mind (and not to matter) was correct. Nonetheless, he fell into that makeshift philosophy, subjective idealism, when he confused the relativity of all things to mind with the notion that "reality is present only in the immediate states of the percipient subject" (*OP* 348). The "permanent" or "fixed" element in knowledge still had no proper explanation. This accusation of subjective idealism is a recurring one in the history of idealism: Kant will criticize Berkeley for it, Fichte will charge Kant, and Hegel will accuse both Fichte and Kant.

The task as Watson sees it is to find in the perceptions and thought of the

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[63] "We cannot say, *i.e.*, that 'the planets move in ellipses,' for 'the planets' and 'ellipses' mean the series of ideas in an indefinite number of individual minds, a series which is perpetually coming and going" (*IRE:H* 241).

individual that permanence, necessity or universality that marks *knowledge*, as opposed to the surd of inchoate *experience*.[64] Throughout Watson's presentation it is clear that the problem (before Kant and Hegel) is a failure to hold together the plurality of impressions or perceptions and the unity of thought, or particularity and universality; when one is stressed, the other is unaccounted for. Like Aristotle (and Hegel) Berkeley has found the universal in the particular, but then he has lost it, for each subject's mind is individual. (Watson must think that Berkeley's simple appeal to a divine source for the individual's ideas is not philosophically permissible.)

Kant's Answer to Hume

Watson's treatment of the empiricist tradition is in essence Kant's treatment of Hume. The primary significance of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* for Watson is not its distinctions among perception, understanding and reason, its delineation of the categories of the understanding, or its limitation of "pure" or speculative reason. Rather, its import lies in its proper grounding of knowledge: "[T]he proof of the universality and necessity of judgments [is] that experience is inconceivable except upon the supposition that there is in it an element which as originated by thought is *a priori*" (Watson 1876d, 119). Again, "[t]he Empiricist should learn from a study of Kant that the only reality his own premises will allow him to retain is that which remains after all thought and existence have vanished; and the less prejudiced reader, in making the thought of Kant his own, may perhaps be led to see the necessity of cleansing it of all taint of Empiricism" (Watson 1876d, 134). Kant saw that dogmatism leads to scepticism, Watson observes, and that "the possibility of

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[64] "Knowledge, if it is to be more than an empty name, must contain a permanent element that is unaffected by the perpetually changing phases of the individual consciousness" (Watson 1876d, 114).

question, Does experience involve, as its condition, universal and necessary notions?" (Watson 1876d, 118). For there to be knowledge, universal judgments must be based on particulars in perception. Kant wanted to justify the use of the principles of understanding used in the sciences (for example, that of causation) against Humean scepticism. He also wanted to establish the illegitimacy of their deductive use in regard to the supersensible--God, the soul, and freedom.

Kant found that in mathematics it was discovered early that the proper method is not one of collecting particulars (for example, those of a triangle), nor of abstract reasoning, but a combining of perception and conception (*PKE* 36). Hume's *bundle theory* of sensation and of causation as an habitual sequence of impressions does not permit a system of nature "because there are no universal and necessary judgments" (*PBR* 60). In fact, pure mathematics and pure physics demonstrate universality of judgments, necessarily true for all minds, in all times and places.

So too, in Watson's words, "In the discovery of particular laws of nature, not less than in the establishment of mathematical conclusions, the mind must bring a certain conception with it and, so to speak, reconstruct nature, and only then is it able to interpret the facts of observation" (*PKE* 37). Both subject and object meet in knowing: in the Kantian phrase, thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind (Kant 1965, A 51, B 75).

Hume's epistemology does not work because "[t]here is no way of distinguishing between an objective sequence [of ideas in the mind] and an arbitrary sequence, so long as we confine our attention simply to the succession of states in consciousness" (*PKE* 201). Kant has overcome this problem: if the mind can only perceive according to forms belonging to it, then all perceptions must conform to the fundamental condition of space and time. Judgments that state the nature of objects

fundamental condition of space and time. Judgments that state the nature of objects in terms of space and time are thus universal and necessary judgments, and not limited to the moment of perception, as Hume in his associationism had thought. Therefore, in contrast to the empiricist view of perception, Watson insists that we do not see the position of something with our eyes; rather, we think it as a limit in continuous space. Magnitudes are not sensible and there is no sensible line; instead, we perceive a line by producing a succession of colours before our mind (*OP* 57, 63).

Kant distinguished between perception and understanding. While in perception individual things are apprehended, in understanding one has "the comprehension of the principles by which these are constituted into objects and connected into a system" (*PKE* 39). Objects can enter the connected system of experience only on the supposition that our thinking faculty has a "fixed and unalterable constitution," which enables it to systematize experience, joining things in unvarying ways (*PKE* 39). An example is the conception of causality, which is "the necessary mode in which our understanding introduces order and system into the world of our particular experiences" because "causality is bound up with the very character of our thinking faculty" (*PKE* 40). If we account for our experience of an object like a house, the succession of ideas which we have is not mistaken for succession in the object because of the synthetic operation of the understanding which supplies some rule governing the combination of ideas (*PKE* 202-03). "Every true induction is therefore either a law of nature or a result of laws of nature; and the problem of induction is to ascertain the laws of nature, and to follow them into their results" (*OP* 89).

The Unity of the Subject as the Fundamental Condition of Knowledge

For Kant the certainty of knowledge is found in the fundamental condition of knowledge, more basic than forms of perception or concepts of the understanding. This condition is Kant's "transcendental unity of apperception." Watson explains that in Kant's account,

> as objectivity involves in some sense the necessary connection of
> elements of perception in an individual object, or the necessary
> connection of objects with one another in one system of experience,
> there must be a transcendental condition lying at the basis of our
> knowledge of objects, or, what is the same thing, our knowledge of the
> system of nature. T is transcendental system or ground of all
> objectivity must be absolutely universal, *i.e.*, it must be the
> precondition of every possible object of experience . . ." (*PKE* 145).[65]

This ground of all objectivity is self-consciousness.

It is on this Kantian foundation of the transcendental unity of apperception that everything else rests: "We are, therefore, entitled to affirm of the objective world all that is necessarily involved in the unity of self-consciousness" (*PKE* 189).[66] So "such a principle [as causality] could never be brought explicitly before the mind, did it not already lie *a priori* at the basis of our experience" (*PKE* 205).[67]

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[65] "Those [sensible] impressions we do not 'make': they are 'given' to us; but their interpretation as 'objects,' or, what is the same thing, our knowledge of nature as a system of 'experiences,' is due to the character of our perceptive and intellectual faculties, which compel us to present our perceptions as objects in space and time, as belonging to a single system, and as connected together in the unity of a single self-consciousness" (*PBR* 59).

[66] Again, "we can only explain the unity of our self-consciousness by showing that the synthesis of the understanding in the constitution of the system of experience is the necessary condition of the unity of our experience" (*PKE* 211).

[67] The method is not dogmatic, assuming the truth of indemonstrable principles, but systematic "because, as we have seen, the supreme principle of all possible

Consciousness can be described as a series of discrete states, as the empiricists do describe it, but the synthetic unity implied in all consciousness of objects presupposes that objects are permanent in change (*PKE* 196). This is the only possible answer to Humean scepticism: the universal point of view is indispensable to the experience of the reality of the object, for "if the subject were actually limited to the sensation of the moment, he would not be able to say that the object is real independently of his sensation" (*IRE:C* 60).[68]

The Hegelian Revision

Watson is a Hegelian interpreter of the history of philosophy, and of Kant as well. Hegel inherits much from Kant (and from Fichte and Schelling), though he makes substantial revisions as well. One revision which is particularly significant for Watson is the denial of Kant's "thing-in-itself," the supposed source of the impressions of sense, or an inaccessible reality behind the appearances. Watson states explicitly that the *noumenon* represents the failure of Kant to carry through his idealism to its proper (Hegelian) conclusion, and he views the *noumenon*, with Fichte and Hegel, as a "gratuitous fiction" (*STI* 250-51).[69] Thus Kantian

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experience is the unity of self-consciousness, a unity which is possible only because the categories are themselves a system standing under the unity of self-consciousness; whence it follows that, although experience is only of phenomena, it is necessarily of phenomena connected with one another by the universal and necessary principles of the understanding" (ibid., 194).

[68] Thus "experience is made possible by the universalizing power of the mind" (*IRE:C* 60).

[69] Watson also notes that the concept of the *noumenon* is responsible for Kant's mistaken conception that space and time are purely subjective (1876d, 133). This subjectivism is in contrast to Hegel's "objective" idealism.

agnosticism about the real world is replaced by Hegelian knowledge, and the difference between appearance and reality is relativized. To put it otherwise, there is no object which does not have a subject, or there is nothing that is not in some sense known, for all things are necessarily related to mind.

This is of course relevant for the question of God and metaphysics. Hegel's reasoning (and here he is pursuing a theme in Spinoza) is that the finite and the infinite are necessarily and dialectically related; as Watson (and Caird) would say, a limit to thought is only known when it has been transcended. Thus consciousness is not finite, or rather, it realizes itself in limiting and transcending itself.

Hegel and Watson agree that Kant was a *subjective* idealist, for in their view the Kantian self (the "transcendental unity of apperception") does not successfully transcend empirical or "psychological" elements, and thus cannot be truly universal. Watson comments that Kant's "proposition 'I think' or 'I exist thinking,' is an empirical proposition. As such it presupposes empirical perception, and the object thought is therefore a phenomenon, not a thing in itself. Now . . . it seems as if the thinking self were merely a phenomenon, and that our whole consciousness is a mere illusion" (*OP* 411). This of course was Watson's complaint about Berkeley. Kant seemed to Hegel to imply that each individual manufactured his own world: Hegel's own idealism was "objective," for in it universal Reason comes to consciousness of itself merely by means of human beings.[70] This is the pattern for Watson's own "Speculative" idealism.

Watson asserted a view of the self that in its universality and internal self-differentiation went beyond Kant:

> In all the varying operations of thought, therefore, the Ego or Self remains as the permanent factor. And further, this abstract self, while

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[70] See the "Introduction" to Priest 1987, 7-9.

it seems to be perfectly simple and immediate, is in reality universal, for each thinking being, like myself, is a self, and for this very reason capable of thought. Now, this self, which is common to all intelligences, is not, like a sensation, perfectly simple; for, from the very fact that it can make itself its *own* object, it contains distinction or difference within itself. And just because I can think away from all my particular states, I am capable of having something as an object of thought; in the very act of apprehending self I apprehend not-self" (Watson 1872, 30).

Here we have a simple introduction to the Hegelian metaphysic.

Watson's Hegelian Project

When one turns from Watson's discussion of empiricism, his Kantian critique of empiricism, and his exposition of Kant, to his historical expositions of religion as this is found in works like *The Interpretation of Religious Experience* or *The Philosophical Basis of Religion*, it is more difficult to show Watson's sources in the Hegelian philosophy. However, there is no question that his method and assumptions are Hegelian. Watson writes,

> . . . Hegel . . . found within the sphere of experience a number of phases, all of which are equally real, though none is a complete and adequate manifestation of the absolute except the most concrete of all. Hegel, therefore, sought in the idea of a spiritual Unity, *i.e.*, a Unity which is essentially self-manifesting and self-knowing, for the true principle which should explain life, art, and religion" (*IRE:C* 323).

The explanation of life and religion is Watson's project too. That is, he presents the development of religions, theologies, and philosophies of religion in terms of the emergence of contradiction and the achievement of (temporary) reconciliation familiar to us as the thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialectic.

> The principle of thought, if we are to express it generally, is neither identity nor difference, but identity-in-difference. This, in fact, is

merely to say that intelligence is a process in which separate
conceptions, which are contradictory of each other, are both held at
once. Nor is this merely accidental; for there is no way in which
intelligence can reach an all-reconciling conception except through the
long and toilsome 'labour of the negative,' *i.e.*, by first setting up what
seem to be adequate conceptions, next awakening to the consciousness
of their inadequacy, and then advancing to a more adequate
conception (*OP* 381).

In religion this development begins with animism and totemism and proceeds

through the monotheism of Jewish and Greco-Roman religion, to Jesus'

consciousness of the fundamental identity of God and humankind. The truth that

Jesus taught *in nuce* is obscured by Greek theological ideas, so that the history of

religion becomes the (dialectical) development of a proper understanding of God and

the divine-human relation, traceable from Augustine through to Kant. Since

Watson's God is the self-existent, self-objectifying, and self-knowing deity of

Hegelianism, he is able to address the empiricism and agnosticism of his day with

confidence. Watson's task is also to correct religious errors like pantheism and

mysticism, so that Constructive Idealism can provide the needed philosophical

foundation for religion in the modern world.

III. *John Watson and Christian Orthodoxy*

The "Age of Transition"

John Watson lived and worked among people who thought of themselves as living in an age of "transition," an age which demanded that "religion" take "science" with greater seriousness. An anonymous author in *The Canadian Monthly and National Review* for September, 1876 noted that the Senate of the University of Toronto had just produced a new curriculum that, he thought, neglected the sciences. Reviewing the first part of this curriculum, the author commented,

> Whether University sages like it or not, the truths of natural science, and even its hypotheses and unsolved problems, must be treated with consideration. The ostrich policy is always a bad one, but pre-eminently so in a transitional age, when everything which our fathers deemed stable is floating about in the eddies of inundation . . . . Natural science . . . has partially undermined our religion, it has laid seige to our metaphysics, turned upside down moral philosophy, intuitional or utilitarian--in short, asserted the supremacy over human intellect and human conscience ("Current Events" 1876, 264).

In the judgment of many of Watson's peers, the situation called for the accommodation of religion to science, and of the activity of God to the "laws of science." In a *Queen's Quarterly* article published in 1877 and entitled "The Church and Modern Thought," George J. Low wrote of "the increasing difficulty of believing in God's immediate and miraculous intervention, through increasing knowledge of the laws of nature. We are seeing more and more clearly day by day that every phenomenon is the result of law, and the field of man's belief in the direct agency of

the Deity is continually narrowing as every fresh discovery resolves some hitherto unexplained phenomenon" (Low 1897, 2-3). If it was increasingly difficult in Watson's era to believe in a "God of the gaps," theology, too, had humbly to assume a titular role in the democracy of science: "Theology has been well called the Queen of the Sciences; but if she would retain her throne she must learn to reign as a constitutional monarch; and when an act has passed triumphantly the Commons and Lords of Science, Theology must needs give her royal assent" (3).

John Watson agreed with the contemporary analysis, and added cultural and political factors to it:

> [I]t is now a mere commonplace that we live in an age of transition and unrest. The tremendous advance of the physical and especially of biological science; the rise of that consciousness of the claims of all men to the full development of their powers; the wide and free intercourse between all nations and the consequent liberation from individual, social and national prejudices; all these things have quickened the mind of man and suggested objections to traditional ways of conceiving the world (Watson 1895b, 43).

The profundity of change, the retreat of obscurantism, religion and convention before science--these themes were not new in Watson's day, but they had assumed great importance in the minds of many of his generation. This is the context in which Watson's thought was to provide a new foundation for religion.

John Watson and "Christian Orthodoxy"

Claude Welch has asked a question that has arisen time and again in modern theology: "Can theology be sustained as a truly independent enterprise, either on the basis of revelation or of feeling, without becoming simply discrete and isolated from the generality of human culture? Or can theology be sustained as a claim to universal truth without being finally subordinate to the other sciences and thus

losing its integrity?"[71] The latter question, directed, perhaps, by the theologian to

the philosopher of religion, is relevant for a discussion of John Watson's thought.

Does Watson's philosophy undermine the integrity of Christian theology?

It would be difficult not to agree that it does, and to agree with A. B.

McKillop's claim, that, "judged by any general understanding of the fundamentals of

Christianity," Watson "scrapped much" to preserve a heterodox essence of the

religion. And Watson did so consciously. In 1925, late in his career, Watson

revealed the extent of his revision in a personal letter lamenting the decline of

religion:

> Of course a heavy burden is laid upon in these days. But if we only
> keep before us the idea that religion--or rather theology--must be
> based upon a final synthesis, there is the hope of a return to the earlier
> faith in things divine. The professional theologians, for the most part,
> are useless, because they will not face the question. What is
> Christianity? The degree in which they have discarded dogma is an
> index of their approximation to 'rationality.'[72] Some of them cling to
> the creeds in the old setting . . .; few are prepared to deny the
> incredible belief in the Virgin Birth. A better state of things demands
> more courage (Watson 1925h).

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[71] Welch 1972, 107. Emil Fackenheim intends something very similar, but from the philosophical side, when he says that Hegel's whole philosophy, and especially his philosophy of religion, is "haunted" by a dilemma: "*Either the representational form is essential to its content, and this is why philosophy requires religion (and the absolute philosophy the Christian religion) as necessary presupposition. But then how can philosophy transcend or transfigure the representational form without loss of the religious content? Or else philosophy does indeed achieve its unprecedented feat: but then was not the representational form all along inessential to the religious content? And does not then philosophy presuppose religion, if at all, per accidens?*" (1967, 162, his emphasis).

[72] Watson is not speaking ironically here, but referring to an author who thinks that religion should be based on "irrationality," a notion extremely repugnant to Watson.

The only solution, he says, is the developmental model as an interpretation of the universe. "Once admit that the human intelligence cannot contradict itself, and it becomes obvious that the Universe is essentially rational; and so interpreted, the Universe is what in theological language is called 'God.'"[73] McKillop is right: Few in the churches in Watson's day (or ours) who looked back to the catholic creeds of the church, to the Bible, or to the "Fathers" of Protestant liberalism, as authoritative in any significant sense, would describe Watson's views as orthodox. Indeed, for Watson, orthodoxy was part of the problem.

McKillop's criticism of Watson, however, lacks theological and philosophical sophistication. McKillop takes as an example of Watson's heterodoxy the latter's address to the Kingston Y.M.C.A. in 1901, in which Watson claims that by intellectual inquiry his generation were "penetrating a little deeper into the nature of things, and learning to re-think the embodied thoughts of God" (Watson 1901c, 233). This "large claim," McKillop comments, "was an expression of a piety shorn of the Christian's awareness that because of the sinfulness of man, he could never fully achieve identity with the mind of God, however much he might strive for it" (1979, 207). In fact, Watson's statement could be read as a simple affirmation of the natural sciences, on the assumption that the world as created is "the embodied thoughts of God."[74] Advancing the same point, the orthodox Christian Francis

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[73] Ibid. In a paper delivered to the St. Louis Hegelians, Watson's former student, L. P. Chambers of Washington University said that "for Bosanquet and Watson at least, God is the Universe, but the Universe in the fulness of its nature" (n.d. 8-9). In his letter, Watson continues by noting that things have gone from bad to worse: "The present state of decently educated men is 'parlous.' I find that they don't go to church at all, or only occasionally to please their wives, or get credit for a Philistine respectability. An awful state of things!" (Watson 1925h).

[74] This notion of the world created after the divine ideas goes back to Philo, and through him to Plato's *Timaeus*.

Bacon could quote Proverbs 20:27 ("The spirit of man is as the lamp of God, wherewith he searcheth the inwardness of all secrets") while warning against a presumptuous attempt to scan the thoughts of God (Bacon 1965, 203-204). McKillop's conclusions about Watson's view of the human mind are correct, but on *this* evidence the verdict could only be "not proved."[75]

McKillop has not caught the subtlety of Watson's position. For example, his straightforward criticism, following Passmore, that Watson's idealism is merely a "polite form of naturalism," might be answered: if Watson's is a "*natural supernaturalism*,"[76] it is also a "natural *supernaturalism*." In other words, if God's immanence in world-history is stressed, this is not, at first glance, to deny that God transcends the world, nor is it to deny that a transcendent God can act in particular events in the world. Again, McKillop's assessment is ultimately correct, but it is not so simple as he suggests.

Watson and "Pantheism"

Hegel's system was described by some as "pantheism" from the start, and John Watson's thought was criticized for the same thing.[77] Though the term

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[75] More helpful would be the quotation of Watson's question, "Can we know God without being God? This is a question with which every philosophy of religion must grapple on pain of annihilation" (*PBR* 18-19). Not surprisingly, Watson's answer to his question is No.

[76] This was Carlyle's description of Hegelianism, according to Watson (1894a, 548).

[77] Hegel responds in several contexts of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1962) to those who bring the charge of pantheism against philosophy (e.g., 1:96ff.). For criticism of Watson contemporary to him, see McKillop 1979, 209-216, especially concerning Watson's correspondence with J. M. Grant of Toronto (Watson 1916a).

"pantheism" was a creation of the eighteenth century (Shaw 1983, 423), its meaning

is found in the Church Fathers. The theological criticism that is intended by

"pantheism" is the assertion that one has confused God and his creation. So

Augustine writes against the Stoicism of Varro: "[T]hat soul of yours . . . could never

arrive . . . at its God; at the God, that is, *by* whom the soul was created, not *with*

whom it was made--the God of whom it is a creature, not a part, who is not the 'Soul

of all things', but the God who created every soul . . ." (Augustine 1972, 7.5, 261-

262). The definition of "pantheism" as the view that God and nature are simply

identical (Shaw 1983, 423) is too simple; what is intended by "pantheism" is more

than a simple equivalence of "world" and "God." Any divine immanence implies

some kind of transcendence: to say that God and the world are identical, without

remainder, *would* make pantheism simply atheism or naturalism, but in fact

pantheism implies the immanence of something which can be distinguished from that

in which it is immanent.[78]

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[78] To say that the world is God or divine is to say more than that the world is the
world, and the reverse is true if one describes God as the world. It is that "more"
which signifies transcendence in pantheism. So J. R. Illingworth comments that "to
speak of immanence or indwelling inevitably implies some kind of distinction
between the indweller and the indwelt. . . . . Thus transcendence and immanence are
not alternative but correlative conceptions in theology" (quoted in Lampe 1983,
207). Paul Tillich observes that pantheism "does not mean, never has meant, and
never should mean, that everything that is, is God. If God is identified with nature
(*deus sive natura*), it is not the totality of natural objects which is called God but
rather the creative power and unity of nature, the absolute substance which is
present in everything" (Tillich 1951, 234). Hegel makes the same point in his
Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: no one worships even a totality of
particular, contingent things, but the universal which is implicitly found in them, the
"Totality, in which the Universal is thought of only as that which comprehends all
individual existences . . ." (1962, 1:96-97).
    The implication of transcendence in the notion of immanence (resembling the
necessary relation between finitude and infinitude in Spinoza's thought) means that

There are several theological reasons for opposition to the confusion of God and creature. The creation of the world from nothing and the sovereignty of God over his creation, the holiness of God, the command to worship God alone, the creaturely freedom of human beings, and the uniqueness and completeness of the incarnation—all could be marshalled against the confusion of God and creation in Watson's thought.

Excursus: The Relation of Creator and Creation in Christian Doctrine

On the *creatio ex nihilo* it must be observed that the biblical writers do not approach the question of the making of the universe from a philosophical point of view. So Paul's aside regarding the God in whom Abraham believed, "who gives life to the dead and *calls into existence the things that do not exist*" (Rom. 4:17) does not rule out the possibility that the things which are called into existence are not made from something else. The same is true of a passage in the Apocrypha: "Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again . . ." (2 Macc. 7:23). Many passages indicate a straightforward faith in God as maker of the chosen people, of humankind, or of elements of the cosmos (see, for example, Pss. 33, 104, Gen. 1 and 2, Isa. 40). The newness of the new may be relative, not absolute.

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the difference between pantheism and "panentheism" is a matter of emphasis. So the implication of "panentheism" according to John Cobb (1983, 423), that "God's inclusion of the world does not exhaust the reality of God," would apply equally to pantheism in all its forms. As will be seen, however, the distinction between pantheism and panentheism reflects the ambiguity of "the All" in German idealism: is the All the totality of particulars without remainder, or is it that and something more, an unbounded mind or being? The pan*en*theist is conscious of the rejection of pantheism in classical Christian theism, and thus stresses the transcendence, the infinitude or unboundedness of that which comprehends "the All."

Indeed, some commentators, including Bernhard Anderson, have argued that creation out of nothing is not found in the Bible (see Anderson 1984, 15), and this is certainly true if one brings to the notion of creation *ex nihilo* a developed philosophical understanding. Within the Bible itself, however, others have discerned a development from "an anthropocentric view of creation, which sees the limits of the world only in a horizontal direction (Gen. 2), to a cosmic, total view of creation" (Esser 1975, 383). Walter Eichrodt (agreeing with Gunkel, Procksch, Zimmerli, and Von Rad) has argued on textual grounds that the beginning of the world described in Gen. 1:1 is absolute, not relative; the implication is that creation is *ex nihilo* (1984). Eichrodt says, "A relative interpretation of the expression ['in the beginning'] would place an emphasis on the autonomy of the chaotic matter contrary to the whole concern of this creation story" (Anderson 1984, 72). The metaphysical trajectory of the biblical affirmations about God and the world leads reasonably to the notion in Philo and Augustine of pre-existent matter on the boundary of being (compare the biblical chaos) *which itself was created by God.*

The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* may have been directed primarily against any dualism, rather than an ontological monism which would understand the creation as a form or externalization of the being of God.[79] It is the theme of the holiness of God, which would counter the suggestion that God and the world are finally one, though again, the biblical authors are not writing philosophy. According to H. Seebas, the basic idea of holiness in the Bible is not *separation*, but *encounter* (1975, 224), implying nonetheless the otherness of creature from Creator. Paradigmatic here might be the theophany of Isa. 6, in which the theme of holiness

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[79] A further objection to the specifically *pan*theistic confusion of Creator and creation is that the "fallen" world as a whole cannot be divine, if God is good. Either the divinity of the world or God's goodness would have to be denied.

combines both immediacy and mediation of presence: the prophet *sees* Yahweh, but he is "high and lifted up" (1); the angels say that Yahweh is "Holy, holy, holy," yet "the whole earth is full of his glory" (3); the prophet confesses his guilt, but he is cleansed by an agent of Yahweh. Mediation is not surpassed here or elsewhere by a *unio mystica*. This conclusion is supported by the theophany in Job; God's answer to the sufferer--"'Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?'"--reveals that he only "plays with the illusion of infinity" (Terrien 1983, 372).

The understanding of the Spirit of God in the New Testament indicates a "more immediate" relation between *Holy* Spirit and human spirit, but the two are not elided. So, for example, when Paul writes that "when we cry 'Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15-16), and, "we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26), there is no loss of one of the "personalities" (either divine or human), though the relation is intimate and beyond human understanding. Paul can say explicitly that just as no one "knows a man's thought except the spirit of the man which is in him," so "no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:11; see 2:9-12).[80] Against those who maintained an apophaticism on Neo-Platonic grounds, the late Eastern Christian mystic, Gregory Palamas, claimed that God's unknowability (an epistemological notion of holiness) must be understood as a consequence of his transcendence, and not as the result of (transcendable?) human finitude (Pelikan

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[80] Thus Geoffrey Lampe is mistaken to apply the monothelite phrase, "one theandric operation" (1977, 46) to divine inspiration, if he is implying that the distinction of human and divine wills is lost. Lampe admits this when he rejects "reductionist" senses of Spirit, and asserts that "[t]he Spirit acts on the level of human personality" [48], so that the work of God comes "to involve a real two-way relationship between himself and free, responsive, creatures" [207].

1974, 262-65).[81] That which makes the Spirit "holy" is that it is and remains God's free Spirit. It is not possessed by God's people, nor merely an effect upon human beings, nor a human quality.

The first and second commands of the Decalogue, to have no other gods before Yahweh and not to make an engraved image of anything on earth as an object (or means) of worship (Exod. 20:3-6), indicate how important it is for the tradition that God's otherness be acknowledged in worship. This theme 's the basis for much of the prophetic criticism of religion in Israel during the monarchy and after, and it was prominent also in the Iconoclastic controversy and in the Reformation.

Not only are a proper understanding and worship of God contingent upon a grasp of the Creator-creation relation (or, at least, a grasp of what the Creator-creation relation *is not*), the proper understanding of the creaturely freedom of human beings depends upon it too. In developing this theme of creaturely freedom, George Hendry writes, "God as being does not wish to monopolize the whole of being, he does not regard it as an inalienable prerogative; he relinquishes some of it to another, whom he sets apart from himself, and who is separated from him by--nothing" (Hendry 1982, 288). What is intended by this language of being as *ousia* or power is a notion of dependent independence or independent dependence on

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[81] Palamas argued that his adversaries needed to go beyond negative theology, for God was not only unknowable, but beyond the unknowable (Pelikan 265). Interestingly, Pseudo-Dionysius argues for the use of anthropomorphic language for God on the ground that God infinitely transcends any description of him, and one is less likely to mistake an anthropomorphism for literal description than if one uses the language of ideas (*Celestial Hierarchy* 2, 3).

the part of the creature, in which relative freedom is a reality.[82]

One might think of the incarnation as the event which nullifies the separation of Creator and creation, but its uniqueness and completeness excludes this possibility. This uniqueness is expressed in Scripture in relational terms. So the superiority of the Son of God even to the angels depends, according to Heb. 1, on the unique relationship of Son to Father. Paul also presents Jesus Christ as the one "in whom all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible . . . -- all things were created through him and for him." Further, Christ is the object of trust and worship, who has triumphed over the "principalities and powers" which are seen as hostile to human freedom (Col. 2:15, 18). In short, the attitude of the New Testament writers was not to relax the exclusivism of Jewish monotheism, but to understand the human being Jesus as the only exception.[83] In the Chalcedonian definition the Council agreed, too, that the incarnation is complete in the sense that

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[82] The kabbalistic doctrine of *zimzum* (originally of pantheistic provenance [Blau 1972, 1]) is perhaps the earliest expression of the notion that the infinite God withdrew himself and thus allowed the world to be created out of the "nothing" which remained. This notion has been taken up by Christian theologians from Nicholas of Cusa to Jürgen Moltmann. The latter writes, "God does not create merely by calling something into existence, or by setting something afoot. In a more profound sense he 'creates' by letting-be, by making room, and by withdrawing himself." This self-limitation of God is "the beginning of that self-emptying of God which Philippians 2 sees as the divine mystery of the Messiah" (Moltmann 1985, 88). For Moltmann the notion of creation as a resolve of God (and the risk of the appearance of arbitrariness that this entails) can be wed to the notion of creation as the expression of the divine nature, and so nature and will in God are kept together in the divine love. Moltmann finds that Paul Tillich does not accomplish this balance: "By identifying the divine creativity with the divine life itself, Tillich is really abolishing God's self-differentiation from the world he has created" (1985, 84).

[83] It is arguable that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit does not involve the same challenge to monotheism, in that there is continuity with the description of God as Spirit in the Old Testament.

it is not a mixture or confusion of divine and human natures in which the subject is neither entirely divine nor entirely human. In denying *relative* humanity or divinity, the Fathers excluded the possibility of other mediate beings, even those which might bear a lesser degree of divinity.

One might seek theological support for a subordination of the historical particularity of the incarnation to a general redeeming work of the Spirit of God by recourse to the Eastern Orthodox tradition, with its insistence that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and not from the Father and the Son. From the Eastern viewpoint, one might argue that the historical particularity of the gospel events must be interpreted as merely one expression of the Spirit's universal immanent activity. In the Greek tradition, however, the procession of the Spirit from the Father only pertains to the Trinity apart from the world (that is, the distinctly immanent or *theological* activity). In relation to the world (the *economic* activity), the Eastern tradition, like the Western, accepted the biblical witness to the "sending" of the Spirit from Father and Son, and thus also anchored the universal in the particular and historical.[84] Against any general identity of human and divine natures, one might observe that the Eastern doctrine of the "deification" of believers did not teach that God and humankind would become one, for with the West it accepted the union of

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[84] In a masterful essay defending the Eastern Orthodox view of the procession of the Spirit from the Father alone, Vladimir Lossky makes it clear that he (and the tradition) are referring to the Trinity apart from any economic relations: in terms of the relations of the Trinity *ad extra*, Lossky agrees that God has made himself known "through the incarnation of the Son, to all who have received the Holy Spirit, Who proceeds from the Father *and is sent into the world in the name of the incarnate Son*" (1974, 89, emphasis added). Lossky notes that it would not be exact to say that the procession through the Son "signifies solely the temporal mission of the Holy Spirit" (94). The temporal mission is a specific instance of divine eternal manifestation, and it is on this plane of the *existentia ad extra* that procession through the Son is appropriate (94).

universal and particular in the exclusive subject of the Chalcedonian definition, that is, in Jesus Christ (Pelikan 1974, 193-94).[85] Eastern bishop Gregory Palamas avoided the absurdity and blasphemy of thinking that the "deified" believer became "God by nature" by teaching that "'the deifying gift of the Spirit is not the superessential ousia of God, but the deifying activity [ἐνέργεια] of the superessential ousia of God'."[86]

The contrast between these theological doctrines and Watson's thought can be demonstrated in many contexts. For example, he writes to a correspondent, "There is to my mind no objection to speaking of God as 'Creating'--provided the 'Creation' is not supposed to be the bringing into being of something not already involved in the nature of the world. But the notion of a 'creation' out of 'nothing' I regard as unthinkable and thus to [be] an unbearable dualism" (Watson 1913a). The charge that Watson's thought is ultimately a form of religious naturalism seems to be sustainable: "[T]here is nothing outside of the one unity [of the universe] which explains or accounts for it, since beyond it there is nothing: the only cause to which we can assign it is itself. All forms of existence are therefore explained by this unity, but the unity is not explained by anything else" (*OP* 180). Similarly, when he writes:

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[85] The biblical text most commonly cited to argue for divine-human commonality of nature is 2 Peter 1:3-4 with its use of "participation"; on this, however, see Bauckham 1983, 180-81.

[86] *Triads* 3, 1, 34, quoted in Pelikan 1974, 267. "Participation" does not apply to the Persons of the Trinity in Orthodoxy: "[W]e cannot find in orthodox writers expressions which treat consubstantiality as participation by the Son and the Holy Spirit in the essence of the Father. Each Person is God by nature, not by participation in the nature of another" (Lossky 1974, 83). Here is another difference between God and those who become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

"All being manifests Him, and *without that manifestation He could not be*" (*PBR* 438, emphasis added), Watson makes God's existence depend upon the world, which dependence is impossible for classical theology.[87] Watson considers as "blasphemous" the notion of the "independent existence" of the material world (*PBR* 245). Classical theology would agree that the world is not absolutely independent of God, but insist against Watson that its freedom rests on God's independence of it.

The Expansion of the Homoousios to All Humankind and to Nature

Following Hegel, Watson treats the relation of God to the world and to the self in a way that the Christian tradition had reserved for the relations within the Trinity. Further, Watson's theme of the identity of human and divine is clearly an expansion of the doctrine of the two natures of Christ which takes in all of humanity. He describes this "essential identity of the human an   ·ine natures" as "the central idea of Christianity" (*CI* 5),[88] and it is clear that he has in mind the identity of God with *all* conscious beings. For Watson the "plain and obvious sense" of "man was made in the image of God" is "that man shares in a measure the nature of God" (*PBR* 212). In Watson's view, Jesus taught that the whole human race is a "single

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[87] The source of this is indicated in Claude Welch's summary of Hegel's view: "God, one may say, is true though not real apart from his manifestation in the world" (Welch 1972, 102).

[88] Similar statements abound in Watson's writing, e.g., "[M]an is not a devil, but in his real being a 'son of God'" (*CI* 93); "[W]e must grant that the ultimate principle of the universe is a self-manifesting spirit, and *that man is identical in nature with God* . . ." (*PBR* 176, emphasis added). This, of course, has Hegelian roots: "[T]here cannot be two kinds of reason and two kinds of Spirit; there cannot be a Divine reason and a human, there cannot be a Divine Spirit and a human, which are *absolutely different*" (Hegel 1962, 1:33, his emphasis).

spiritual organism, . . . and this community of life was held to be possible only because man is identical in nature, though not in person, with the one divine principle which is manifested in all forms of being" (*CI* 1).[90]

Further, God is "the informing spirit of both *nature* and man" (*IRE:C* 248, emphasis added). The identity of God and humankind is only the high point of the identity of God and the cosmos. So Watson claims that in contrast to the Jewish distantiation of God, during his early ministry Jesus showed the presence of God in nature, that is, His immanence, especially in the parables: "[T]here is a tender and solemn light on the most familiar things because God is felt to be present in them, not hidden behind them" (*CI* 90). "Thus God works not *upon* but *through* the things which have come from his hands."[91]

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[90] This is faithfully Hegelian: as Küng observes, "As early as Frankfurt Hegel's entire thought is reducible to the merging of the *one* divine-human reconciler through the Spirit into all. In this way biblical Christology can be speculatively demythologized and faith in Christ speculatively ideologized" (1987, 157).

[91] Ibid. The mainstream of Christian orthodoxy, from the Fathers on, would not accept Watson's claim that God does not work "upon" the things he has made, and while it would accept that God does wor'. "through" the things he has made, it would be very circumspect about God's presence in the world. The rejection of Stoicism by the Fathers (with odd exceptions like Tertullian) made the language of divine containment or permeation suspect, except for the *perichorēsis*, or divine interpenetration, of the persons of the Trinity. The thought of Athanasius is typical when he writes, "God is self-existent, enclosing all things and enclosed by none; within all according to his goodness and power, yet *without all in His proper nature*" (*De Decretis*, Ch. 3, Section 11, quoted in Gilkey 1959, 96, emphasis added). Augustine soived the problem of God's omnipresence (presence which does not entail a loss of divine freedom and goodness, nor of creaturely freedom) by borrowing Plotinus's paradoxical conceptions of omnipresence, and his view became conventional: "[I]t is the one true God who is active and operative in all those things [i.e., natural processes], but always acting as God, that is, present everywhere in his totality free from all spatial confinement, completely untrammelled, absolutely indivisible, utterly unchangeable, and filling heaven and earth with his ubiquitous

God does not work externally upon the natural world, for "nothing is more certain than that no form of religion which is based upon an interruption of the regular course of nature is now credible. Hence Christianity, if it is to survive, must be compatible with the fullest recognition of the reign of law" (that is, the law of nature) (*PBR* 186). This means that prayer cannot involve the request for a change in the divine will regarding something on earth: "Prayer is the expression of our dependence upon the Infinite; and of our conviction that, 'all's well with the world,' though we are not always able to see in detail that it is so. I do not think that we have any right to pray for the removal of fever . . . . [P]rayer to alter the constitution of things is to me a blasphemous wish . . . ." (Watson 1913a).

Watson and the Question of the "Finality" of Jesus Christ

John Watson's treatment of the doctrine of the incarnation and his view of Jesus immediately raises the question, What is the significance of Jesus Christ for his philosophy, and is this significance adequate by any theological standard? For most of Christian history, and even for that nineteenth-century liberal Protestantism which could re-interpret Christ in terms of the religious consciousness, Jesus Christ is unique in his saving work. This theme may be described as the "finality" or "exclusivity" of Christ, but the meaning is the same: it is asserted that there is a difference between Christ in his person and work, and other persons, which is not merely quantitative but qualitative. So Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote, "But, for the Christian, nothing belongs to the consciousness of grace unless it is traced to the Redeemer as its cause, and therefore it must always be a different thing in His case from what it is in the case of others--naturally, since it is bound up with something

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power which is independent of anything in the natural order . . ." (Augustine 10⁻², 7.30, 292).

else, namely, the peculiar redemptive activity of Christ" (Schleiermacher 1963,

Section 100, Part 3, 431).[92] That other "Father" of liberal Protestantism, Adolf von

Harnack, similarly insisted upon the particularity of the historical figure of Jesus

against any attempt to see Jesus only as one among many (Pauck 1984, 103). Karl

Barth, as critic of the liberal theology closest to John Watson's thought, contradicted

that which in Watson's thought went even beyond liberalism:

> Because *Deus non est in genere*, every theological method is to be
> rejected as untheological in which God's self-revelation is apparently
> recognized, but in fact is subsumed beneath a higher term, whether
> that of truth, or that of divine revelation in general, or that of religion,
> or that of history, so that it now has to be interpreted in the light of
> this higher comprehensive idea. . . . With whatever earnestness and
> sincerity we may attempt to speak of the God who is embraced by
> such a system, in the last analysis we are not speaking of God but of
> the higher synthesis furnished by our controlling idea" (Barth 1957,
> 311).

A. B. McKillop observes that John Watson left leading churchmen of his day

"with a Christ who was, at least in part, 'hellenized'--a Christ who embodied in his

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[92] Schleiermacher is recognized generally as the best representative of nineteenth-century Protestant liberalism; as Richard R. Niebuhr says, "Religiously speaking, we must concede the nineteenth century to Schleiermacher," "Friedrich Schleiermacher," in Peerman and Marty 1984, 17. Against Hegel's speculative theology, Schleiermacher wrote, "When I read that this unity of God and man is manifest and real as an actuality in the person of Jesus, I think that it can be a beautiful and true expression of our faith. But when I read that the certitude of this truth is vested in the concept of the idea of God and man, or in knowledge, then, with all due respect to the profundity of this speculation, I must reiterate that I cannot acknowledge that this truth grounds the certainty of my faith" (H. Bolli, *Schleiermacher-Auswahl*, 62-63, quoted in Berkhof 1989, 55). Karl Barth acknowledges what he sees is Schleiermacher's inconsistent christological commitment when he remarks that Schleiermacher "preferred to . . . become and remain a christocentric theologian with an intensity paralleled by few famous theologians" (Barth 1982, 106).

conduct, not only traditional Christian morality but also the standards informing the 'sweetness and light' of Matthew Arnold's conception of culture" (McKillop 1987, 109). If this were so, it would not mean an inadequate Christology *per se*, it can be argued that every generation, despite itself, has read its cultural values into the person of Jesus. The question really is, Is the Christ reduced to a Hellenic or Victorian figure, so that he is finally no more than another great figure in history? Against McKillop, it should be noted that Watson's Jesus is not Hellenic, but both a reflection of the Victorian historical imagination and a Hegelian philosopher. It is this last identification which raises the theologically troubling question about Jesus' lasting significance. Apparently this significance lies only in Jesus' dialectical religious thought and its premise and conclusion, that is, the identity of human and divine natures described above.

In *Christianity and Idealism*, published first in 1896, Watson depicts Jesus as a (Lutheran) philosophical idealist, who rejects the "external," the simply material, the legalistic, yet finds in the tradition that which is eternally and "spiritually" true. So Jesus' distinction of ceremonial and moral law is an advance on Judaism, for it distinguished what depended upon the unchanging nature of humankind and what was temporarily suited to a stage of human development. Watson observes that "a law which is accepted purely on authority, is all [in all contexts] equally binding," but Jesus went back to the fundamental moral ideas of the law and the prophets: "Thus he is enabled to grasp the Law in its purity and universality, and to contrast it with the unspiritual interpretations of the scribes" (*CI* 66). The essence of the law is brotherly love, which in turn is traced by Jesus back to "a fundamental identity in the nature of God and man . . ." (*CI* 68).[93] In this, Jesus is applying the principle of

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[93] "The same principle is applied to other moral laws; in all cases Jesus traces back the command to its source in the nature of man as identical in nature with

evolution, about which so much is being said in Watson's day, to religious ideas (*CI* 73). Though Watson does not say so, this principle ⸱ more precisely the Hegelian dialectic of finite and infinite: Jesus taught that "[t]he beginning of the spiritual life . . . consists in an entire surrender of the finite. But this is only the negative side of his teaching: the positive side is the direction of the whole being to the infinite and eternal, or the laying up of 'treasures in heaven'" (*CI* 86-87). Jesus' saying in Matthew 6:22 ("If thine eye be single [i.e., sound], thy whole body shall be full of light") is made by Watson to refer to the emergence of Hegelian Reason as Spirit, in which (in Watson's words) the "transformation of the soul is the new creation of the world: the mind to which everything seemed an insoluble riddle now sees the confused and indistinct mass of objects fall into their proper place in the organic unity of the whole" (*CI* 87).[94] Jesus was engaged in a project of Hegelian identity, dialectic and synthesis: "[A]s always, Jesus holds by both sides of the truth: the essential identity of the religious consciousness in all ages, and the process of expansion which it undergoes as it comes to a fuller consciousness of what it contained implicitly from the first" (*CI* 106).

As philosopher of religion, Jesus sees the spirit of God present in the world of nature and in the consciousness of man, and thus the kingdom of God is not future, but already present. Watson insists, "Holding these views he could not possibly believe in any sudden or miraculous change which should break the continuity between the present and the future" (*CI* 95). The Pharisees in their "crass materialism" sought a sign from Jesus, that is, they denied the presence of God in

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God" (*CI* 69).

[94] Compare Hegel: "Reason is Spirit when its certainty of being all reality has been raised to truth, and it is conscious of itself as its own world, and of the world as itself" (1977, 263).

nature and ordinary human experience, but Watson says Jesus refused to give any sign: his truth was self-authenticating. Jesus employed the conventional apocalyptic imagery, but he really meant that good triumphs over evil "by the persistent labours of those who live in the truth" (*CI* 96). Watson writes before Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906) presented readers with a more historical, "apocalyptic" Jesus, a portrayal which destroyed the foundation for the liberal Protestant or idealistic Jesus. Thus Watson's use of "spiritual" and "material" as alternative categories of interpretation strike the reader today as impossible.[95]

Jesus, Reason and Authority

The question of the finality of Jesus occurs in Watson's thought as the question of Jesus' authority. Watson will not allow that Jesus received revelation from God which was not available to anyone at any time, for that would imply (the Jewish notion) that God is inaccessible to reason. According to Watson, Jesus appealed only to reason, to that which was self-evident or could be made so. "Thus for him [Jesus] 'faith' is that openness to light which is a form of reason: it is, in fact, reason in its purest form. What Jesus called upon men to believe he supported, not

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[95] As Messiah Jesus brought a kingdom of heaven which was a "spiritual," not an "earthly" kingdom and Peter is rebuked "for the materialism of his conception" of the Messiah (*CI* 80, 100-101). "The kingdom of heaven was entirely independent of earthly power" and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (who want to sit at the right and left hand of Christ in his kingdom) is criticized for her "naive materialism." The kingdom of heaven "was so purely spiritual in its character that it could not possibly be connected in the mind of Jesus with the political supremacy of Israel." As "the end of human life is not external prosperity, but the development of the spirit," external prosperity is no sign of "spiritual elevation." The Jews have "unspiritual ideas" in contrast to Jesus' own (*CI* 81, 82, 85-86, 92).

by an appeal to authority, but by an appeal to truth itself" (*CI* 104).[96] Jesus'

method in the beatitudes was not to derive truth from scripture, but to state truth "in

the form of aphorisms, which shone in their own light" (*CI* 63).[97] Jesus' larger

method, in Watson's reading, is that of the Hegelian philosopher, and therefore the

finality of Jesus is the finality of his Hegelian *method*, and the uniqueness of Jesus

lies in the fact that he is the first to grasp *explicitly* and state its metaphysical

foundations and moral essence. So, for example, the Hegelian reconciliation of

opposites in a higher harmony is the idealization of the "very core of Christian

ethics"--loving one's enemies. Watson considers it self-evident that it is this core

"which gives it its superiority, and makes it inconceivable that its principle can ever

be transcended" (*CI* 69-70). As Watson would show, the philosophical method of

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[96] Reason is expanded to take in the meaning of "faith": "'Faith' is thus that union of intellectual candour and moral simplicity which flows from the vision of God" (*CI* 105). Watson generally does not use the term "revelation"; by his term "rational faith" he means a confidence in reason which keeps the philosopher at the task of reconciling the apparent oppositions of existence in a higher synthesis. The ground of this confidence is the human participation in the divine Reason which comes to self-knowledge in the history of the world, and pre-eminently in the history of (Hegelian) religious philosophy.

[97] It is obvious today that in his anxiety to find a philosophical Jesus Watson ignores the singular authority which Jesus claimed for himself, according to the gospel writers: so in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus does not claim that his teaching is self-evidently true, but prefaces his response to the traditional teaching with the phrase, ". . . but I say to you . . . ." (Matt. 5:22,28,32, etc.; cf. 7:29). That Jesus' "signs" or "acts of power" were an appeal to an "external" authority is stated or suggested in a number of contexts, e.g., "'[T]hat you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins'--he said to the paralytic--'I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home'" (Mark 2:10-11). In contradiction of Watson, it should be observed that the beatitudes (and the entire Sermon on the Mount) strike sensitive readers with their radical description and demand, the strangeness of the new aeon, and have provoked many attempts at relativization and historicization such as that of Tolstoy (see Thielicke 1966, 332-82).

Jesus would be adopted by others, and its foundations would be discovered again in the history of religion and philosophy.

Can Jesus be Transcended?

If Watson's Jesus is a philosophical critic of earlier religious forms, it is appropriate to ask whether Jesus himself might be transcended. When Watson writes that "Jesus does not accept even the teachings of the 'law and the prophets' without first bringing to bear upon it the light of his own higher consciousness" (*CI* 107), he implicitly raises the question whether the consciousness of Jesus might be transcended, whether the consciousness of Watson, higher still, might be brought to bear upon Jesus' teaching.[98] To put it in Watson's terms, is Jesus in any sense a final authority? In *Christianity and Idealism* Watson presents a Jesus who is implicitly an authority for his readers, and he argues that Jesus' authority is really the self-evident authority of his teaching. Before his later work, *The Philosophical Basis of Religion* (1907), he read Adolf von Harnack's famous *What is Christianity?*, originally published in 1900, in which the author advanced a view of the Christian religion which claimed to be oriented to historical research, rather than traditional dogmatics. One can see in *The Philosophical Basis of Religion* that inasmuch as the historical Jesus is taken more seriously, the contrast is heightened between the inessential historical husk and the conceptual kernel. Watson writes,

> If, therefore, a distinction is to be drawn between the permanent and
> the temporary element in the teaching of Jesus, as Harnack maintains,
> must it not be on the ground that the former is in harmony with the
> nature of things, while the latter is not? In other words, the permanent
> element in the teaching of Jesus must be held to command our assent,

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[98] As McKillop notes, the older school of Scottish Common Sense realism and anti-speculative orthodoxy would find this to be "intellectual arrogance" (1987, 100).

> *not because it has the impress of his authority*--for if so, all that he
> taught would be equally authoritative--but because it is true (*PBR*
> 180).

The discovery of the degree of truth in Jesus' teaching is made only "by a complete philosophy of religion" (*PBR* 181).

In Watson's Gifford Lectures (published as *The Interpretation of Religious Experience* in 1912) Watson summarizes the view of Jesus and his teaching found in contemporary New Testament scholarship.[99] The Jesus he presents is the apocalyptic announcer of an imminent end, calling for an "interim ethic" of the abandonment of social ties. Further, the kingdom this Jesus announces has not begun, but will be an intervention by God from outside the natural world. Watson cannot simply discount the new historical consciousness of Jesus among his colleagues, but he thinks that a place can still be found for this Jesus in his program.

> We cannot, it is contended, explain away this eschatological idea of
> the Kingdom of God by interpreting it in a purely spiritual sense, or
> viewing it as but the imaginative setting of moral and religious ideas.
> On the other hand, it is even a greater mistake to regard the moral and
> spiritual ideas of Jesus as something secondary and incidental; for only
> by projecting himself into a world of ideal conditions was he able to
> realize the true purpose and will of God. Thus, while the apocalyptic
> hope supplied the outer framework of his teaching, it was the higher
> spiritual interest that for him was always paramount (*IRE:C* 6).

This recovery of Jesus for idealism is ambiguous for Watson, as historical study has made us aware that the world of ideas in which Jesus moved is so different from our own. We can only enter into Jesus' world by that study, but then we are struck by the strangeness of that world. The overwhelming difficulty for us is the miraculous in-breaking of the kingdom, which is now incredible to us, both because it has not

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[99] Watson credits his colleague, E. F. Scott, and Scott's work, *The Kingdom and the Messiah* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1911).

yet taken place, and because it is incompatible with that gradual process of evolution which is basic for our world of ideas.

In his earlier work, Watson presented a philosophical Jesus who was forced to accommodate his true thought to the external forms of his contemporaries. In the later book, Jesus is understood as a child of his age; therefore it is "impossible for us to accept without criticism even the spiritual ideas expressed by Jesus" (*IRE:C* 7). Watson makes no attempt at such a criticism, however, but neither does he attempt any spiritualizing exegesis. In fact, this part of his book betrays unclear thought, for Watson then explains that the problem is that so many new controversies have arisen since Jesus' day that Jesus' love ethic (the summary of the Law, Matt. 7:12), "absolute and comprehensive as it is," does not immediately solve our difficulties. Similarly, in light of contemporary conflicts of science, politics, religion and philosophy, he says, we must ask about the meaning of Jesus' expression of "the deepest principle of religion," the unity of the true nature of the human with the divine. On the one hand, the historical divide has opened between Jesus and Watson, and the connection between Jesus and Watson's idealism appears strained; on the other hand, the bare principles supposedly first made explicit by Jesus, or in his life, are used as Watson has always used them, as the basis and conclusion of his philosophical program. For Watson, the truth about God is not grounded in God's action in Christ, but is an ahistorical, universal teaching only exemplified in the teaching of Jesus and in the things to which Christ submitted.

This conclusion is confirmed after Watson has made his transition from the description of past theological and religious views to philosophy of religion proper. In his discussion of finitude and infinitude Watson says simply that God is not present in any particular event or series of events, but only in human history as a whole (*IRE:C* 248). Corresponding to this, he subordinates the particular divine acts

of theological description to a philosophically-based, world-historical schema. So in the idea of the incarnation, Watson says, "we come upon the only purely Christian idea in the whole doctrine. Stripped of its artificial form, what is affirmed is that it is the very nature of God to communicate himself to finite beings; that, loving his creatures with an infinite love, he can realise his own blessedness only in them" (*CI* 214-15). Again, "The doctrine of the incarnation must . . . be understood as implying the indissoluble unity of God and man, not in any external and artificial sense, but as an expression of the essential nature of both. It is but another expression of the principle that God is at once immanent and transcendent" (*IRE:C* 289). Here the freedom of God as Other is transformed by Watson into a nature shared by humankind and God, a divine immanence necessary to divine self-realization.[100] Further, this necessity is only "affirmed" in an "idea" of incarnation, or is the expression of a principle derived elsewhere. Watson's "spiritualizing" treatment of the resurrection of Christ follows the same path: "Christ after the flesh, the historic person, has passed away, but the Christ of the spirit remains forever, for he is one with that ever-growing life of humanity which consists in the progressive conquest of goodness by the living power of goodness. The history of man bears witness to the undying power of this divine spirit, which can never cease to be the indwelling spirit of God shaping human destiny to ever nobler ends. . ." (*IRE:C* 289). This, of course, subordinates Jesus Christ to a general "ever-growing life of

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[100] There is no explicit attempt by Watson to reconcile and overcome the opposition of contingency and necessity in the incarnation, as is found in Hegel. For Watson, truth is necessity: "It would thus seem that we must either regard all knowledge as contingent, or all as necessary; and, in fact, the idea of contingent truth is a self-contradictory conception: truth does not admit of being divided into two kinds, and it is at bottom tautological to say that all truth is necessary. To be true and to be necessary are the same thing" (*PBR* 425-26).

humanity," an "indwelling spirit of God" in the history of humankind. Thus universality is purchased at the cost of particularity, despite Watson's Hegelian intention to take the particular and contingent with real seriousness.

Renovating Soteriology in Favour of Gnosis and Moral Striving

In Watson's re-interpretation of the Christian religion in a universal philosophical schema he sometimes limits the "orthodoxy" he is renovating to one particular strand in the tradition, which he then rejects as contrived, an inadequate husk from which he then recovers a philosophical kernel. So the doctrine of the atonement (understood as substitution) he dismisses as "this highly artificial doctrine" (*CI* 212).[101] It is "artificial," perhaps, because as an analogy it has been pushed too far from the time of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, and it now seems inadequate to our initial notions of divine justice or human responsibility. Watson, however, does not see that the correctives to those inadequacies might lie not in rejection, but in *other* analogies. Or perhaps he does see this, but wishes instead to depict God in metaphysical terms, rather than as an actor in history. So sin ("one of the central ideas of Christianity") is identified only with crime, and God with a judge, "but sin is not crime, nor can God be regarded as a judge" (*CI* 212). Sin instead is "a

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[101] Resurrection likewise suffers reduction to an attenuated immortality: "[T]he meaning of Jesus seems to be that, as the consciousness of the living God involves the consciousness of man as identical in his essential nature with God, we must believe in the eternal continuance of this fundamental relation. To see what man is in his true nature is to know that his life comes from God, and that only in the consciousness of his union with God does he learn what in essence he is. The essence of man is his life, *i.e.* his conscious existence, and this must be as eternal as God." (*CI* 108). Watson may have had a text from Hegel in mind: "Knowing himself in God, he at the same time knows his imperishable life in God; he knows of the truth of his Being, and therefore the idea of the *immortality of the soul* here enters as an essential moment into the history of religion" (Hegel 1962, 1:79).

desecration of the ideal nature of the sinner, the willing of himself as in his essence he is not" (*CI* 212-13). It is by reference to God as ideal that human beings condemn themselves (*CI* 212-13). Classical theism would agree with Watson's interpretation as one aspect, but could not accept the denial that sin is an offence to One beyond human conscience or ideal.[102]

The result of Watson's revision is that soteriology is cut free from the particularity of Jesus Christ and is made a combination of gnosis and moral striving: "Man can therefore be saved from sin only as he realises in his own life the self-communicating spirit of God. In taking upon himself the burden of the race, he lives a divine life. This is the secret which Jesus realised in his own life, and to have made this secret practically our own is to be justified by faith" (*CI* 214-15). "[E]ach man gains his own perfection by self-conscious identification with all the rest . . ." (*CI* 1, emphasis added). Watson makes no attempt to take seriously the title "Holy" given to the Spirit of God, but considers human and divine spirit as distinctions

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[102] Watson's relativization of evil within human nature is only part of the larger Hegelian reduction of the significance of evil: "[F]rom the highest point of view, evil is a necessary element in the development of a finite self-conscious being, who only becomes good by the exercise of his freedom. What from a narrow point of view is evil, must yet be the condition of the highest good" (*PBR* 359-60). For some theologians Hegel's handling of the problem of evil is the point at which theological criticism begins; while Hendrikus Berkhof agrees that Hegel resisted the loss of the knowledge of God, if not faith in God, in the truth consciousness of the West, he concludes, "For the Christian faith the way of Hegel has been blocked by Genesis 3. His pupil Heine already saw this clearly when he spoke of the snake in Paradise as 'that little private tutoress, who lectured on Hegelian philosophy six thousand years before Hegel's birth'" (Berkhof 1989, 56). Heine's reference is, of course, to the snake's temptation of the original pair in Genesis 3:5: "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Helmut Thielicke likewise objects that for Hegel "evil is a necessary transition in the teleological process," and "his polarity of good and evil does not allow natural things to be good" (1974, 263).

within a whole: "The spiritual life of man cannot be imparted to him from without; it consists in the conscious realisation of the ideal. It is, therefore, a very inadequate conception of life which is expressed in the formula that there is a 'Power not ourselves which makes for righteousness.' The 'Power' which makes for righteousness is the conscious willing of righteousness, *i.e.*, the conception and realisation of the meaning of the world" (*CI* 284).[103] Watson's identification of the followers of Christ with Christ himself as saviour of the world, consonant with his identification of Creator and creation, is equally problematic: "It is not by self-assertion and outward triumph, but by suffering and death, that the true Christ *and his followers* can save the world . . ." (*CI* 101, emphasis added).

In terms of fidelity to Scripture or catholic tradition Watson's attempt to re-found Christian theology on a philosophical basis can hardly be judged a success. The traditional language is often used, but with quite various degrees of consistency with traditional meanings. If his attempt were merely a theological experiment, ventured in hope that something new might be learnt, this significant departure from biblical and traditional theological conceptions would not matter very much. However, Watson is anxious to establish certainty in an age of doubt, and his

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[103] Righteousness is "a law which operates only in and through his self-conscious life" (*CI* 284). "When . . . we say that the Divine Spirit is immanent in the human spirit, we must not think of the relation as that of two separate and distinct individuals, one of which acts upon the other irrespective of the response of his own spirit, but rather after the manner in which the Church speaks of the Holy Spirit" (*IRE:C* 248). While the way of the Spirit is mysterious (cf. John 3:8), and while there is no reason to think that God's Spirit is unaffected by those upon which the Spirit acts (cf. Eph. 4:30), there is no suggestion in Scripture or tradition that the human and divine spirits are in essence one. See the Excursus on the Relation of the Creator and Creation, above.

method admits only *knowledge*, not "speculations" (though that knowledge is "speculative"). Since, to his mind, faith and revelation have proven inadequate to the establishment of religious truth, he has appealed to reason. To borrow the rhetorical flourish he used for his opponents--He has appealed to reason?: to reason he shall go.

IV. *Watson's Thought from the Viewpoint of Philosophy of Religion*

> . . . I feel that the time has come for the old bottles to be broken, and
> that it is the new wine of Christianity itself that must break them, if
> Christianity and humanity are ever to be one.[104]

The Hegelian Correction of Spinoza

There is no question that John Watson's thought was not "orthodox" as most

understood that term, and that the differences between his thought and "orthodoxy"

were often just below the surface of his orthodox religious language (in Hegelian

terms, the language of "picture-thinking"; Hegel 1977). It was argued in the previous

chapter that his religious philosophy cannot be judged a theological success by the

standards that most would employ. However, one must still ask, granting his

conscious revisions of orthodoxy, whether Watson accomplishes what he intends,

that is, a resolution of the problems of classical theism in a philosophically satisfying

and persuasive vision of reality.

The answer to this question can only be given in an examination of that

philosophy. Thus this chapter of the dissertation will consider Watson's adaptation

of method and themes from Hegel and their application to the history of religious

philosophy, a history which culminates in Watson's own (Hegelian) Constructive

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[104] Edward Caird, Letter to Mary Talbot, Nov. 17, 1891, in Jones and Muirhead 1921, 175.

Idealism. In this section we will focus upon Watson's treatment of Augustine's thought, for Watson devotes many pages of his *Interpretation of Religious Experience* to Augustine, and Augustine's discussion of the Trinity invites comparisons with Watson's ontology. It will be argued that Watson interprets Augustine as an early Spinoza. The relation of infinitude and finitude in Spinoza's thought, and the development of this relation by Hegel, is the point of departure for Watson's philosophy of religion. Watson (following Hegel) found Spinoza's account of this relation to be problematic.

It will be argued that Watson interprets classical theology (specifically, that of Augustine) in terms of the Spinozan metaphysic, distorting Augustine's Trinitarian theology and view of the relation between God and world to fit the supposed Spinozan alternatives of dead identity and self-contradictory difference. He does so in order that (like Hegel) he may fault theology (Spinozan *and* classical) for its failure to mediate between an abstract divinity and an unreal, finite world. It will be shown that in fact Augustine does attempt to mediate between the Unity and the Trinity, and between God and world. This *gestalt* derived from the Hegelian critique of Spinoza is applied by Watson to a wide range of religious and philosophical developments. The view is advanced that the universality of Watson's critique lies in its claim that any other system of thought fails to do justice to the unity of all things, or to the reality of difference. It is concluded that Watson has not established the "moments" of the Hegelian dialectic in the thought of Augustine. This failure raises the question of the legitimacy of his method, and of its result, his Constructive Idealism.

Spinoza's Problem of a Finite Infinite

It is first necessary to grasp Watson's point of departure from Protestant orthodoxy. He was persuaded that theology could not be preserved as a collection of positive doctrines connected (as he thought, "externally") to form a system, and that his theological adversaries did not grasp the difficulties with classical theology. To his mind the Hegelian metaphysic offered the only way forward from these earlier metaphysical failures. A correspondent, J. M. Grant, wrote to Watson, repeating George Galloway's criticisms of idealism,[105] and Watson in turn called Galloway's criticisms "inept." He added, "To class me as a 'pantheist' means that he has never grasped my central idea, and indeed I doubt very much if with his superficial categories any solution of the problem of finite and infinite is possible" (Watson 1916b). Here Watson bares the foundation of his metaphysics, and points back through Hegel to the first statement of the problem of finitude-infinitude in Spinoza.

According to Spinoza, the infinity or unlimited nature of God means that he cannot be separate from the world; otherwise the world, as something "other," would be a limitation upon God. The corollary of this is that the finite is essentially infinite. In the deductive elaboration of his monism, Spinoza writes, "A substance of one attribute does not exist unless it is unique, and it pertains to its nature to exist. . . . Of its nature, therefore, it will exist either as finite or as infinite. *But not as finite. For then . . . it would have to be limited by something else* of the same nature, which would also have to exist necessarily . . ., and so there would be two substances of the same attribute, which is absurd. . . . Therefore it exists as infinite, q.e.d."[106] Spinoza's doctrine is thus an attempt to solve what is seen to be a contradiction in

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[105] Galloway wrote several works, including *The Philosophy of Religion* (1914).

[106] *Ethics*, 1, Prop. 8, in Spinoza 1949, 44, emphasis added.

the infinity of God as described by classical theology, a contradiction that goes back to Philo of Alexandria.[107] Watson indicates that (with Hegel) he follows Spinoza in this departure from Jewish and Christian orthodoxy on the Creator-creation relation. "As Spinoza says, at one time we affirm the reality of the finite, and at another time the reality of the infinite, but we rarely bring the two together and face the problem, how there can be a finite which is independent of the infinite, or an infinite which is independent of the finite" (*IRE:C* 54).

Spinoza's monism has its antecedents in the Platonist notion of the universe as a living being, and in the notion that, like an organism, the whole of something is greater than the sum of the parts.[108] There is nothing beyond the totality. Particularity for Spinoza is accomplished by the negation of this totality, or, (to use an awkward expression) by the addition of nothing to the totality.[109] This view of totality and particularization by negation was adopted by Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, and, as a disciple of Hegel, by John Watson as well.[110] So Kant's concept of regulative Reason combines the Spinozan theme of the world as an unconditioned or infinite totality with the notion of finitude as the self-limitation of infinitude, as is

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[107] Philo described God as infinite, beyond knowledge in his essence if not his existence. See "Spinoza and the Religion of the Past," in Wolfson 1965, 248.

[108] Spinoza was conversant with the emanational pantheism of Plotinus, though his thought departed from some of the tenets of Neo-Platonism ("Spinoza and the Religion of the Past," in Wolfson 1965, 252-54).

[109] "[F]initeness is in truth partly negation, and infinitude absolute affirmation of existence of some kind . . ." (*Ethics,* 1, 8, in Spinoza 1949, 45).

[110] George John Blewett observes in a Hegelian work contemporary with Watson that just as Greek foundationalism culminated in Parmenides, so the modern equivalent beginning with Descartes culminated in Spinoza (1908, 59, n. 2). Blewett was influenced by Edward Caird and T.H. Green, but does not seem to have influenced, or to have been influenced by, John Watson.

indicated when he claims that the concept of possible reality not only "comprehends all predicates *under itself*, it also contains them *within itself*, and the complete determination of any and every thing rests on the limitation of this *total* reality."[111] Watson (following Hegel) would concur with this aspect of Spinozism.

For Spinoza, too, the world's existence is logically necessary. To say that God could have willed not to create the world, Spinoza asserts, is like saying that two angles of a triangle could be equal to two right angles.[112] For Spinoza, as for

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[111] A 577, B 605, in Kant 1965, 491. "All true negations are nothing but limitations--a title which would be inapplicable, were they not based upon the unlimited, that is, upon 'the All'" (A 575-576, B 603-604, in Kant 1965, 490; see also A 578, B 606, 492).

Spinoza's description of mind is that of a totality internally determined by various modes: "[I]t is evident that our mind, in so far as it understands, is an eternal mode of thought which is determined by another eternal mode of thought, and this again by another, and so on *ad infinitum*, so that all taken together form the eternal and infinite intellect of God" (*Ethics*, 5, 40, Note, in Spinoza 1949, 278). Fichte, too, speaks of one substance/mind, within which particulars arise: "There is initially only one substance, the self; within this one substance, all possible accidents, and so all positive realities, are posited" (1979, 136). As in Spinoza and Kant, this arising of the particulars is by negation: "The [empirical] self is *not* posited in the self [i.e., absolute self, Substance] to the extent, i.e., with that measure of reality, wherewith the not-self *is* posited. A measure of reality, i.e., that attributed to the not-self, is abolished within the self" (ibid., 109).

Hegel is in this school as well: "Religion is not consciousness of this or that truth in individual objects, but of the absolute truth, of truth as the Universal, the All-comprehending, outside of which there lies nothing at all" (1962, 22).

[112] *Ethics* 1, Prop. 17 in Spinoza 1949, 56-57; see "The Philonic God of Revelation and his Latter-Day Deniers," in Wolfson 1965, 18. Spinoza's claim is reminiscent of Hegel's remark, quoted more than once by Watson: "As regards the reciprocally determining context of the whole, metaphysics could make the--at bottom tautological--assertion that if a speck of dust were destroyed the whole universe would collapse" (Hegel 1990, 86).

Watson, the world is essentially related to God as (necessary) accidents to substance.[113] Spinoza's ideal of rational understanding means that explanation is a demonstration of "the necessary connection of essential properties with the substance of which they are properties." Thus, "[t]o explain is to exhibit as *causa sui.* But from this it follows that there is and can be only one ultimate explanation, only one cause, only one substance." The result is that "all relations are internal and necessary, none external and contingent" (MacIntyre 1972, 532). Spinoza's monism thus treats the world as the classical Christian theologian does the attributes of God. This viewpoint, too, was adopted by Watson in his own positive statement of his philosophy.

In contrast to the necessary production of the world is the classical Christian insistence that God created the world though he did not need it. Etienne Gilson sets this view against the background of earlier philosophical theology: "The universe is no longer suspended from the necessity of a thought which thinks itself, it is suspended now from the freedom of a will that wills it" (1936, 71).[114] John Watson summarizes the same point in the thought of Augustine: "To ask why God willed the creation of the world, is to ask for the cause of that which is its own cause: the will of God is the cause, and to ask for something beyond that will is to ask for something

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[113] "All things, I say, are in God, and everything which takes place takes place by the laws alone of the infinite nature of God, and follows . . . from the necessity of His essence" (*Ethics,* 1, Prop. 4, Note, in Spinoza 1949, 55).

[114] Theophilus of Antioch wrote, "He [God] creates and has created things that are, and whatever He pleases, as He pleases" (Theophilus 1925, 2, 4). Duns Scotus elaborated the theme of contingency: "The creation of things proceeds from God not out of any necessity whether of being or of knowledge or of will but out of pure freedom which is not moved, much less necessitated, by anything outside of itself so as to be brought into operation" (*Quaestiones disputatae de rerum principium,* q.4, a.1, n.3, quoted in Torrance 1981, vii).

greater than that will, *i.e.* for something greater than that which is the source of all greatness" (*PBR* 339). This alternative to a (logically) necessary production of the world might appear to be an arbitrary creation. For Watson this puts a stop to rational explanation: "If the world is due to the divine will, and if its existence is in no way necessary to the completeness of the divine nature, the existence of the world becomes inexplicable" (*PBR* 356-57). In agreement with Spinoza, Watson identifies the contingency of the creation as unreason, and insists that God and world are a totality, and that it is only *within* this totality that necessary distinctions arise. Yet in denying that creation can be explained in terms of some higher principle, in saying that there are limits to reason and knowledge, classical Christian theology was satisfied to risk the appearance of arbitrariness on the part of God. The claim that the motive of creation is love, a divinely-willed generosity, is a form of agnosticism, for the mystery of the divine love of the world cannot then be analyzed in terms of some higher or more transparent category.[115] In keeping with the rationalist tradition, John Watson would not deny the divine, creative and redemptive love, but would interpret it as the necessary fulfillment of God.

Two major differences between classical theology and Spinozism have now been presented: totality as opposed to a separate creation, and necessary as opposed to contingent relations. John Watson would follow the Spinozan (and Hegelian) sides of this opposition, but would follow Hegel in criticism of Spinoza as well.

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[115] In contrast, the question of the ultimacy of the gods in Greek religion and mythology was raised by the Fates. In Christian theology, too, the claim that creation was necessary to divine fulfillment was denied by the doctrine of the Trinity, the divine community.

Hegel's Solution to the Problem of Finite and Infinite

Spinoza had a profound effect upon German idealism,[116] including the

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[116] Before the middle of the eighteenth century Spinozism was seen as the worst form of atheism, and Spinoza was dubbed the "'Euclides atheisticus', the 'princips atheorum'" (Beiser 1987, 48). Beiser notes, however, that during the same time Spinoza was the darling of the religious and political left. Because of the controversy between Moses Mendelssohn and Friedrich Jacobi over the "Spinozism" of their friend, Gotthold Lessing, Spinoza's reputation rose dramatically, so that by the end of the century Spinoza's philosophy was the main competitor to Kant's. Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin, Hegel, Schelling and Schleiermacher all became Spinoza enthusiasts (ibid., 44). For the *Goethezeit* "Spinoza's pantheism seemed to be a viable middle path between a discredited theism and deism on the one hand and a ruthless materialism and atheism on the other hand" (ibid., 60). Sydney Ahlstrom comments: "All across Europe one finds a major turning toward this Spinozan solution for the religious and philosophic dilemmas of the times, from the exiled Russian Decembrist Alexander Hertzen studying Schelling in Munich to Victor Cousin in Paris and his critic Vincenzo Gioberti in Italy" (Ahlstrom 1977, 162).

According to Beiser, German idealistic pantheism has Lutheran roots. "Luther's ideals" of "equality and an immediate relationship to God," coupled with the loss of the authority of the Bible as a result of biblical criticism, led disaffected Lutheran pietists early and late to a Spinozist pantheistic mysticism. Further, Spinozism continued to be associated with the religious and political radical wing of the Protestant Reformation. Pantheism "ensured the possibility of everyone having such an experience [of God], of everyone having direct access to God. The God of pantheism is within me and everyone else, so that, in order to experience him, it is necessary for me only to reflect upon myself. The God of theism, however, is not nearly so accessible. He is a supernatural being who only occasionally makes himself known in nature through the odd miracle. Hence he is accessible only to an elite few, namely, those who are fortunate enough to witness his miracles" (1987, 52). The necessity of the church and its order, too, is obviated with Spinozism.

Sydney Ahlstrom notes that Schleiermacher placed a "dynamic and reinterpreted Spinoza at the center of Romantic theology" (1977, 160). The Spinozan influence is evident when Schleiermacher writes in his *Speeches on Religion*: "All that is finite exists only through the determination of its limits, which must, as it were, be 'cut out' from the Infinite" (quoted in Pannenberg 1990, 25). For the significance of Spinozism in literary and theological circles, especially in Britain, see Ahlstrom 1977, 158-163.

thought of the great G. W. F. Hegel. John Watson read and began notes on Hegel's *Science of Logic*, including those parts in which Hegel addresses Spinoza's problem of finitude/infinitude.[117] Hegel claims that the solution to Spinoza's problem is his own dynamic logic of identity (as opposed to the traditional logic of predication). Watson carefully follows Hegel's argument: finite and infinite as externally related involve self-contradiction, for the infinite is conceived as beyond the finite and thus as limited by it, that is, as not infinite. The result is a false *progressus ad infinitum*: the finite is incomplete and is completed by the infinite as the negation of the finite; yet as simply beyond the finite, the infinite has a limit in it, and thus the finite is re-instated. The alternation continues without end. Hegel's solution, Watson notes, is the recognition that the unity of infinite and finite is tacitly presupposed. In truth, finite and infinite are *inseparable* and not *alternative*. Each finds its opposite within itself (Notes on Hegel, 61).[118]

Hegel begins his *Science of Logic* with the absolute Notions of pure or indeterminate (that is, infinite) Being and pure or indeterminate Nothing, arguing, as he later does with the notion of finitude-infinitude, that they are the same as one another, and, equally, that they are distinct.[119] He writes, "Their truth is,

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[117] Watson's notes cover the material in the first chapter on Being, Nothing and Becoming, and the second chapter on Determinate Being, including Hegel's discussion of Spinoza and the finitude-infinitude problematic.

[118] Wolfhart Pannenberg summarizes Hegel's re-statement of Spinoza: "In order truly to be conceived as infinite, the Infinite must not only be set in opposition to the finite but must at the same time overcome this opposition. It must be conceived both as *transcendent* in relation to the finite and as *immanent* to it" (Pannenberg 1990, 36).

[119] While the argument in the *Science of Logic* concerning Being, Nothing and Becoming is meant to stand by itself, it is not at all as self-evident as Hegel's treatment of the self-propelling dialectic of the finite-infinite relation as presented by

therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other:

becoming, a movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which

has equally immediately resolved itself" (Hegel 1990, 83).[120] Watson sees the

difference between the "inadequate" Christian view of creation and the Hegelian

correction:

> The Christian idea of creation holds that Being originates out of
> Nothing. No doubt this is not a pure grasp of the [Hegelian] principle.
> (It represents 'Nothing' as prior in time, and Being as *succeeding*
> Nothing, and so far it is 'synthetic,' i.e., *adds* Being to Nothing in an
> external way: but the fundamental idea is that Reality is continuous
> origination. . .) (Notes on Hegel, 22, emphasis in original).

We must, therefore, conceive of reality as 'being' with 'negation' in it,

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Spinoza. It can be argued that Hegel's treatment of being and nothing as well as immediacy and mediacy follow the logic of his solution of Spinoza's problem: the self-negating finite and the self-negating infinite. This is suggested when Hegel remarks to his sceptical readers, "But self-styled common sense, if it rejects the unseparatedness of being and nothing, may be set the task of trying to discover an example in which the one is found separated from the other, (*something* from *limit* or *limitation,* or, as just mentioned, the infinite, God, from energy or activity)" (1990, 85, emphasis in original). Later in the same work he writes, "The infinite in its simple Notion can, in the first place, be regarded as a fresh definition of the absolute" (137). Wolfhart Pannenberg claims, too, that the notion of totality, related directly to the finite-infinite relation, is actually central to Hegel's project: "The concept of the whole or the totality functions much more in Hegel's own thought de facto as the category of categories, as the integral of their abstract particularity" ("Theology and the Categories 'Part' and 'Whole'," in Pannenberg 1990, 152).

As noted above, John Watson sees the finite-infinite problematic arising from the Spinozan totality as the point of departure for the Hegelian solution, and this problematic remains the key to his thought (whether or not it was to Hegel's).

[120] Hegel's dialectic has its antecedent in Fichte, who wrote, "The act of seeking in things equated the respect in which they are *opposed,* is called the *antithetic* procedure . . ."; "[A]ll synthetic concepts arise through a unification of opposites" (1979, 111, 120, emphasis in original).

or, more simply, as a self-negating unity. This complex idea of the unity of being and nothing may be best expressed by the term 'becoming' (*Werden*), and hence Hegel maintains that the 'truth' of 'being' and 'nothing' is 'becoming.' Reality, in other words, is not dead, motionless being, but being which preserves itself by ever negating and restoring itself (Watson 1894a, 562).

Hegel criticizes Spinoza for the "abstraction" of Substance from the determinations of finitude, and this observation is not lost on Watson. His frequent references to Spinoza are usually observations on his failure to relate adequately the infinite or absolute to the finite. So Watson observes that "[r]eality cannot be adequately conceived, after the manner of Spinoza, as a Substance which preserves itself by simply persisting unchanged in all the changes of the finite . . . ." Again, "Spinoza makes the unity of all things the central principle of his system, but it is the unity reached by an effacement of difference, not the unity *in* difference . . ." (Watson 1894a, 564, 555). Watson's meaning is that though Spinoza conceives of two infinite attributes of thought and matter, Spinoza cannot keep them apart. Thus he must conclude that the Substance behind these is the effacement of difference, in itself neither thought nor matter. As only the Infinite truly is, the finite disappears and nothing knowable or thinkable remains; the result is that, in Hegel's words, "we are left with pure being, which is pure nothing" (*PKE* 5-7). It is because Spinoza treats the relation of infinite and finite externally that he denies reality to the finite.[121] Watson sketches Spinoza's error: "[W]ith the elimination of finite things,

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[121] This criticism may have been suggested by Spinoza's obscurity. Harry Wolfson observes that Spinoza's choice of the term *mode* for the particular (as opposed to the divine and universal Substance) suggested to subsequent readers the false meaning of something unreal, or merely apparent. See "Spinoza and the Religion of the Past," in Wolfson 1965, 249. Yet Spinoza was obscure about the relation: Alasdair MacIntyre notes that Spinoza seems both to assert and deny that the finite follows from the infinite. "Since, according to Spinoza, everything that is

external and internal, the infinity of extension and thought is established. Both constitute a single unbroken unity, in which finite things are merely limitations, constructed by our imagination, but not representing the real nature of things. The finite is merely the infinite, when the infinite is not viewed in its totality, but is arbitrarily limited. There is in short no real existence but the infinite" (*PKE* 8).[122]

Watson's Differences from Hegel

Though Watson is a Hegelian, two things should be noted of his membership in this school. For one, while Hegel continues in the *Science of Logic* to show how the categories of logic/metaphysics are deduced as thought proceeds toward absolute truth, Watson does not follow Hegel beyond this initial insight into Spinozism, that is, the dialectic of finite and infinite, and indeterminate being and nothing. Indeed, he observes that "[i]t is unfortunate that the plan of Hegel's Logic, which compels him to begin with the most abstract or least adequate determinations of reality, plunges us at once into a region which the modern mind has largely outgrown" (1894a, 560). There is no attempt in Watson's work to deduce logical/metaphysical categories *per se*. Instead he begins with history, either the history of philosophy or of religion, to demonstrate the Hegelian dialectic as the emergence of contradiction

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must follow from God and his infinite attributes, if there are finite modes, they must also follow from an infinite cause. If not, how do they come into being? How could there ever be any finite modes to affect the infinite attributes?" (MacIntyre 1972, 535). This is precisely Watson's (and Hegel's) critical observation.

[122] Watson's teacher, Edward Caird, observes, "Hegel rightly answered those who accused Spinoza of atheism, by saying that he was not an atheist but an 'akosmist'; it was not God, but the world of finite things whose reality he denied" (1907, 1:104).

and its transcendence or "sublation."[123] Watson does not use the term "sublation,"

but speaks of "higher" levels of thought, or the reconciliation of contradictions.

(That he does not state his method explicitly, but only demonstrates it in his

treatment of historical developments, is one of the reasons for the obscurity of his

thought.)

There is a second difference between Hegel and Watson. The Hegelian

system is dynamic: within the totality (consciousness, Being) difference is discovered

by thought, difference that develops to contradiction, and that must be overcome

and reconciled in a higher synthesis. Watson's system is less dynamic. This may be

so because by his time historical accounts of philosophy and theology were more

attuned to the contingency of history, and thus could not as easily be put into service

as bearers of the Idea. Watson quotes T. H. Green, who remarked that Hegel's work

had to be done all over again because of new historical knowledge, with the

development of a complete system of conceptions subordinate to Spirit (1901b, 252).

The Common Criticism of "Blank Identity" or Contradictory Difference

A chief element in Watson's Hegelianism, then, remains the criticism of a

"dead" or "blank" identity. This criticism comprehends Spinoza's Substance beyond

thought and extension, the idea of a God "separate" from the world, or a "Being"

absolutely other than becoming. The problem with Spinozism, Watson agrees, is

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[123] Hegel writes, "'To sublate' has a twofold meaning in the language: on the one hand it means to preserve, to maintain, and equally it also means to cause to cease, to put an end to. Even 'to preserve' includes a negative element, namely, that something is removed from its immediacy and so from an existence which is open to external influences, in order to preserve it. Thus what is sublated is at the same time preserved; it has only lost its immediacy but is not on that account annihilated" (1990, 107).

that it treats a "moment" of the dialectic of Spirit as though it were the whole, freezing the action in abstraction. Pure or indeterminate Being, out of relation to its negation (pure Nothing), and out of relation to the world, is meaningless in terms of that world. Yet there is another "moment" of the Hegelian dialectic which, if made more than "momentary," is equally untrue. The opposite of abstraction is internal metaphysical contradiction in an apparent philosophical unity, demanding the Hegelian philosopher's elucidation and reconciliation in a higher synthesis. An example is an independent nature,[124] or Kantian agnosticism. These two alternatives of abstract identity and contradiction are moments in the development of the Notion which should not be mistaken for the entire process. They are the inverse of one another, and so Watson's thought is situated between identity and difference, criticizing identity for failing to take difference seriously, and difference or opposition for failing to grasp the essential identity behind multiplicity.[125]

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[124] "[T]he conception of nature as an independent reality is a conception which, if taken in its strict sense, contradicts itself. . . . [S]uch a conception does not take us beyond the idea of an aggregate of parts only externally or mechanically related to one another. On the other hand, when mind is separated from nature, it can only be conceived as an abstract unity which, as having no differences within itself, must for ever remain in its abstractness" (*CI* 194).

[125] Emil Fackenheim says about Hegelianism, "From the outset and throughout, the Hegelian system seems faced with the choice between saving the claims of an absolute and therefore all-comprehensive philosophic thought, but at the price of any actual world besides it, and saving the contingent world of human experience at the price of reducing philosophic thought itself to finiteness." "The Hegelian philosophy must be *both* unyieldingly realistic in its acceptance of non-union *and* unyieldingly idealistic in its assertion and production of union" (1967, 76, 229). As Carl G. Vaught observes, Hegel's system is "omnivorous": because Hegel takes difference very seriously, any criticism which attempts to transcend the system is included in it as the negating principle which advances the development of it (Vaught 1989, 35). Watson demonstrates Vaught's point: "That a period of revolt from his [Hegel's] influence succeeded a period of enthusiastic discipleship is not only what we

Like Hegel's philosophy, Watson's dwells in the middle between pluralistic openness and monistic completeness. It assures itself of the last word, for it takes up its adversaries, whether frozen in abstraction or internally contradictory, as the means of its own demonstration. Thus it is the final philosophy. In Watson's words, the "comprehensive vision" of idealism "is the product of that reconciling spirit which has been slowly won by firmly pressing each one-sided system to the point where its defects become clearly visible and a higher synthesis emerges" (Watson 1901b, 255).

A Square Peg in a Round Hegelian Hole: Augustine as a Spinozist

Despite the differences between Spinozism and classical Christian theology, John Watson (following Hegel again) understands their defects to be the same.[126] So Watson observes that besides the impossible notion of an infinite God who can be limited by the world (the point of departure for Spinoza), it is a common habit to conceive of God as source of all reality, on the one hand, and, contradictorily, to conceive of all modes of being as independent existences, on the other (*IRE:C* 54).[127] The latter view is one way of stating the doctrine of creation, in which God

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should expect, but what the progress of thought absolutely demanded . . ." (Watson 1894a, 548).

[126] The reading of Augustine as a Spinozist has its precedent in Hegel's assertion that any "abstract" conception of God as absolute Being is Spinozism, for Hegel's definition would take in Augustine's theology despite its difference from that of Spinoza. Hegel writes, "All else [outside of God], which is real, is not real in itself, has no real existence of itself; the one absolute reality is God alone, and thus He is the absolute Substance. If this conception is held to in this abstract fashion, it is undoubtedly Spinozism" (Hegel 1962, 1:92).

[127] For Hegel, all "systems of simple substantiality," including pantheism, do not get beyond a God who "is Absolute Being, an Essence, which exists absolutely in-

is Creator and the world is contingent creation, but there is "contradiction" only from the perspective of a deductivist rationality, which must be able to demonstrate the necessity of facts.[128] It has been noted that for Watson, as for Spinoza, contingency is ultimately irrational; simple "facts" are an impossibility, because he insists that the meaning of anything depends upon its relationship to the whole. In the Christian tradition, however, the assertion of the "fact" of creation is an implicit claim that reason has its limits, and does not take in the whole, that the contradiction of appearances is not in every case resolvable by thought.[129]

Watson's program is not merely to fault this classical theological tradition, but to present it as a necessary step towards his Hegelian solution of the self-

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and-for-itself, and does not exist through an Other, but represents independence pure and simple" (1962, 3:325). Hegel too found that "where only the substance, the One, ranks as true reality, those who hold these opinions forget that it is just in presence of this One that the individual finite things disappear, and have no reality ascribed to them, and yet they attempt to retain this reality in a material way alongside of the One" (1962, 1:98). This is Watson's criticism as well.

[128] Peter Bertocci comments on the doctrine of creation: "[C]reation, if it exists at all, is as much a brute fact as ultimate Being itself . . ."; "It is no weakness to insist that the act of creation is always irreducible, and that the *how* of it is beyond human comprehension, if our actual experience indicates that creation is never reducible simply to recombination of what already existed" (Bertocci 1970, 217-18).

[129] Wolfhart Pannenberg wrestles with some of the conceptual difficulties bequeathed by Spinoza, while recognizing the impossibility of an identification of God and totality. "In contradistinction to the metaphysical tradition within philosophy . . . the totality of the world is certainly not the real theme for theology, but only the correlate of its real theme, the idea of God. God is not the whole of what exists finitely, and the concept of the whole does not contain God within it as one of its parts. . . . [N]either can the whole be absolute, and therefore it cannot be God--at least not if it, as the whole of its parts, not only constitutes the being-as-part of its parts, but conversely is also dependent on the parts whose whole it is" ("Theology and the Categories 'Part' and 'Whole'," in Pannenberg 1990, 142-43).

differentiating totality. If the Hegelian system is true and proper, Watson must

discover contradiction; he should not have to create it. But in fact he glosses over

the differences between that theology and Spinozism, and treats the former as the

latter, with its *difference* without *identity*, and *identity* without *difference*. It is in

deductive Spinozism that the contradiction of finite and infinite is most obvious, and

most obviously in need of Watson's Hegelian sublation.

Augustine and Identity-without-Difference

This is demonstrable in Watson's handling of Augustine's thought. In his

Philosophical Basis of Religion (1907) and *Interpretation of Religious Experience*

(1912) he casts Augustine as a Spinozist,[130] but distorts the bishop's thought in

order to do so. Watson finds that the theologian of the early Church makes

essentially the same mistake in regard to the internal relations of the Trinity, and in

regard to the relation between the changeless, perfect God and the changing world,

as Spinoza in his philosophy. So he claims that Augustine's Trinity of three Persons

in one substance in fact does not really reconcile the one and the three. Augustine

"strove to preserve the distinction of attributes and to combine them into a unity,"

(*PBR* 334) but Watson thinks that he failed: "The absolute 'simplicity' of God seems

to be rather that of a unity which is beyond distinctions than a unity which by its

very nature distinguishes . . . itself" (*IRE-H* 68).[131] Again, Watson claims that "in

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[130] Watson even refers to Augustine, as Goethe had to Spinoza, as a "'God-intoxicated man'" (*PBR* 312).

[131] Watson again is dependent on Hegel's criticism: traditional theology (theology using the categories of the Understanding) "on the one hand, conceives of the Infinite in its own finite fashion, as something which has a determinate character, as an *abstract* infinite, and then on the other hand finds that all special attributes are inadequate to this Infinite. By such a mode of proceeding the religious content is

his eagerness to preserve the unity of the divine nature, he [Augustine] tends to

represent the essence of God as if it were distinct from the Persons, or at least to

accentuate the simplicity at the expense of the distinction of the divine nature" (*PBR*

335). Watson claims that both Augustine and Aquinas reduce "the Persons of the

Trinity to a refined Modalism" (*PBR* 379).[132]

Augustine's Trinitarian Balance

While it is well known that Augustine tended to stress the unity over the

trinity,[133] Watson fails to take seriously Augustine's own attempt to balance the

two. In fact, Augustine was aware of the danger of treating the nature of God as

though it were distinct from the persons. When he writes that the three Persons are

not made *out of* the same essence, but have an identity of essence,[134] he is ruling

out any tritheism. When he writes that the Trinity is not *in* God, but God *is* the

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annihilated, and the absolute object reduced to complete poverty" (Hegel 1962, vol.
1, 29). Watson completes the Hegelian correction: "The only infinite which can be
reconciled with the finite is an infinite which comprehends the finite without
destroying it" (*PKE* 9). This criticism is really the rejection of a limit to knowledge,
and the rejection of analogy as a *via media* between univocity and equivocity.

[132] This, of course, is ironic, since it is Watson's theology/metaphysics which can
be described more properly as modalist.

[133] See Richardson 1979, 247, 251, 253-54.

[134] "[F]or to God it is not one thing to be, another to be a person, but it is
absolutely the same thing"; "Therefore neither do we so call the Trinity three persons
or substances, one essence and one God, as though three somethings subsisted out of
one matter [leaving a remainder, *i.e.*]; although whatever that is, it is unfolded in
these three. For there is nothing else of that essence besides the Trinity. . . . [W]e do
not say three persons out of the same essence, as though therein essence were one
thing and person another" (*On the Trinity*, 7.6.11, 12, in Augustine 1887, 111, 112-
13; the interpolation is the editor's).

Trinity,[135] he is excluding modalism. Augustine's Trinity is not a simplicity beyond distinctions. Against a modalism that would stress simplicity at the expense of plurality, he writes that "when we speak of this Good [God] as being by nature simple, we do not mean that it consists solely of the Father, or solely of the Son, or solely of the Holy Spirit, or that there is only a nominal Trinity, without subsistent persons; that is the notion of the Sabellian heretics" (Augustine 1972, 11.10, 440). "What is meant by 'simple' is that its being is identical with its attributes, apart from the relation in which each person is said to stand to each other" (440-41). Augustine's unchanging God is not the dynamic divinity of Hegelian (or Sabellian) modalism; nonetheless, Augustine strives like Hegel and Watson to do justice to both unity and difference. What is significant here is that Watson has distorted Augustine's use of (formal) logic to grapple with the Triunity of God,[136] and has cast Augustine's thought in terms of Hegel's criticism, that the divine is a dead identity out of relation to difference. One cannot say that Augustine's God is "self-

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[135] "But can we say that the Trinity is in such a way in God, as to be somewhat belonging to God, and not itself God? . . . Nor does anything pertain to the nature of God so as not to pertain to that Trinity" (*On the Trinity* 15.7.11, in Augustine 1887, 205).

[136] Watson's representation of Augustine's teaching on the Trinity in *PBR* (332-34) is fairly well-balanced, though his treatment of the "memory, mind and will" analogy for the Trinity neglects Augustine's own cautions and corrections in *On the Trinity* 7 and 15. It is thus mistaken for him to say that "[t]he distinction of persons in God therefore means for Augustine the distinction of the different functions which are essential to the divine self-consciousness" (*PBR* 334). As Pannenberg observes, "[T]he sources of the doctrine of the Trinity, in the relationship of Jesus to the Father and in the glorification of the Father and Son through the Spirit, cannot be reduced to the self-differentiating acts of a single divine subject" ("The Problem of the Absolute," in Pannenberg 1990, 40.

modalism,[137] but unity and difference in God are affirmed with as much seriousness as in Watson's own system.

From a Supposed "Dead Identity" to Contradictory Difference

Watson's criticism is thus meant to set Augustine on either side of the Hegelian middle between identity and difference, a "moment" of the dialectic mistaken for the whole. The criticism that Augustine makes the simplicity of God a unity beyond distinctions (*IRE:H* 68) is only one of these moments, that of blank identity. But Watson's Augustine is guilty of freezing the opposed "moment," that is, of difference, and treating it out of relation to the identity. This appears in Watson's further criticism of the Augustinian God: "What is defective in his explanation of the Trinity is that he makes each of the 'persons' express a special 'function' of God, and thus he fails to preserve the absolute unity of God. The attempt to assimilate the three 'persons' to the faculties of memory, intelligence and will is not successful, because Watson does not see that these are different phases of the one self-conscious subject . . . . I think there can be no doubt that Augustine thought of the 'persons' of the Trinity as having a quasi-independent existence . . ." (*IRE:H* 77).

It is not difficult to refute Watson's interpretation here. So, for example, there is no "assimilation" of faculties to Persons of the Trinity in Augustine; rather, he explicitly insists that these faculties are true of each Person.[138] Again, it has

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[137] If God is termed "self-differentiated," then Godhead would be the ground from which the differences of the persons would emerge, and one could speak of God as one *prior* to Trinity. The insistence of the Fathers that the begetting of Son and procession of Spirit are eternal was their attempt to balance the tendency towards a priority, logical or temporal, of the unity of the Godhead.

[138] Augustine writes, "And therefore these three, *i.e.* memory, understanding, love or will, in that highest and unchangeable essence which is God, are, we see, not the

been noted above that Augustine understood the personal distinctions of the Trinity to be the relations between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In relation to the world, on the other hand, each person is described by Augustine as fully and simply God,[139] and no worldly action can be described as pertaining to only one person of the Trinity (the *circumincessio* or coinherence of the divine persons). Of more interest to the argument, that Watson distorts Augustine's thought to make him over as a Spinozist, is the observation that Watson must ignore not only all that Augustine says about the one essence or *ousia* of God, but his own earlier criticism of Augustine's over-emphasis upon unity as well (*IRE-H* 77).[140] In short, Watson does not discover contradiction in Augustine's doctrine of God, but creates a contradiction from what is *paradoxical* in it.

God and the World: Spinozan Totality as Opposed to Augustine's Separate Creation

This conclusion is confirmed when one examines Watson's treatment of the relation between God and the world in Augustine's thought. A corollary of the dead identity of "pure Being" out of relation to the finite world, is the unreality of the finite. It has been remarked that this is a common criticism in Watson's thought,

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Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, but the Father alone," and then proceeds to statements of identical import regarding the Son and the Spirit (*On the Trinity* 15.7.12, in Augustine 1887, 205). Thus when Watson continues by saying that the distinctions "in God's nature between his being, his wisdom, and his love," are "but logical distinctions in the one unity," Augustine would be in complete agreement with this affirmation of divine identity, except for the term *logical*, behind which can be seen the Hegelian self-differentiating principle.

[139] See the "Preface" to Book 8, in *On the Trinity*, in Augustine 1887, 115.

[140] On God as one essence or the supreme existence, see Augustine 1972, 7.2, 255-56.

derived from Hegel's criticism of Spinoza, that an absolute identity or separate God denies reality to the determinate being (*PBR* 360). Here Watson's error of interpretation is patent. For Augustine there is no contradiction in the notion that God is beyond the world, yet he brings into existence the finite particulars which are separate from himself. Now Watson claims that Augustine proceeds on Spinoza's principle, *omnis determinatio est negatio*, "a principle which logically converts reality into the absolutely indeterminate" (*IRE:H* 80). In contrast to this view, Watson says that "it must be maintained that *omnis negatio est determinatio*," and he notes that this observation is made in Hegel's *Science of Logic*,[141] though it goes back, he says, to Plato's allegory of the cave. For Spinoza, all determination is negation because it must be the determination of the one whole of being, according to rational-natural necessity. Augustine does not face this difficulty: contingent, creaturely being is other than God who is Being Itself, and is created (or determined) by God free of any necessity to create.[142]

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[141] 1990, 113. Hegel deduces the relation of finite and infinite as a determination of the finite by self-negation, which determination is its sublation: "Being, absolute being, is ascribed to the infinite; confronting it, the finite thus remains held fast as its negative; incapable of union with the infinite, it remains absolutely on its own side . . . . " (130). However, "[t]he limitation of the finite is not something external to it; on the contrary, its own determination is also its limitation; and this latter is both itself and the ought-to-be . . . . But now further, the finite as the ought *transcends* its limitation . . ." (133). "Something has a limitation in so far as it has negation in its determination, and the determination is also the accomplished sublation of the limitation" (ibid.). One cannot help suspecting Hegel of sleight-of-hand here, the creation of philosophical perpetual motion.

[142] Watson's rationalism will not admit a relation which is contingent and not necessary. The ground for this is his Kantian and Hegelian notion of reciprocal causation: the totality is both cause and effect of itself, in the whole as well as the parts. It is from this perspective that Watson can reject a contingent creation: "To speak of the world existing apart from God is at bottom the same thing as to speak

Misconstruing Augustine's Finite World

Watson, then, misconstrues Augustine's thought as that of Spinoza. Thus he claims that Neo-Platonism led Augustine to the supreme unchangeable permanent Being, but this means that *in itself* (as a Spinozan determination which is only negation) the universe is nothing, at best an image of God as the one Being (*PBR*, 328).[143] In his treatment of Augustine in *The Interpretation of Religious Experience: Historical* he details Augustine's (Spinozan) error, an error arising, as he sees it, from a "difficulty" in Augustine's doctrine of the creation of the world. The difficulty is that inasmuch as the creation is in addition to God it must add to the sum of being. Watson says that Augustine solved the problem by asserting that finite things "as such have no positive being, but are finite just in so far as they have in them an element of non-being; while in their positive being they are identical with the absolute" (*IRE:H* 69).[144] In fact, Augustine had no difficulty with the notion of

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of God as existing apart from the world" (*IRE:H* 82). Of course, this is not so: God may exist separate from the world while the world cannot exist separate from him. It may be that the "dependent independence" of the world may not be reducible to a reversible logical or natural relation, but its incomprehensibility in these terms does not establish its untruth.

[143] Watson comments that Augustine never transcended this "mystical conception of the universe."

[144] In this Watson is repeating what he had written for his *Philosophical Basis of Religion*: "On the one hand, he cannot admit that there is in the world, as distinguished from God, any addition to the sum of being. Hence he maintains that the world differs from God only in having in it an element of negation or privation of being. It follows from this that the world can be said to be, only in so far as it contains an element of being, *identical with the being of God.* And, if so, obviously the existence of the world can only be an illusion, due to the supposed reality of the world in itself,--a reality which it does not possess. . . . [T]his is the logical consequence of Augustine's Neoplatonic doctrine that finite being is purely negative . . ." (356, emphasis added; cf. 360).

the creation as an addition to the sum of being. This is because he understood God, or "Being Itself," in aspatial terms (something he learned from Plotinus), thus radically undercutting the suggestion of monism in the idea of a commonality of being between God and world. He writes, "[I]n spiritual things, when the less adheres to the greater, as the creature to the Creator, the former becomes greater than it was, not the latter. For in those things which are not great by bulk, to be greater is to be better. . . . 'He,' then, 'that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit:' but yet the Lord does not therefore become greater, although he who is joined to the Lord does so."[145]

Thus, with this failure to see the non-reciprocal relation of God and creation in Augustine's thought, Watson errs in two further respects: first, for Augustine, finite being *is* positive being, and second, it is divided from God by a radical difference, which no higher unity can comprehend. As observed above, Augustine rejected any confusion of God and creation, writing that "[t]rue wisdom means to subordinate things created to their creator; distinguishing carefully the building and

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[145] *On the Trinity* 6.8.9, in Augustine 1887, 101-102. The problem, fundamental to Spinozism, that a separate creation would make God finite, was met by the Scholastics' view that the creation of finite beings increased only the number of beings (the term "being" understood analogically). This did not "increase, so to speak, the amount of being." "God and finite things are incommensurable, in the sense that their existence adds nothing to the infinite divine being and perfection" (Copleston 1965-77, 4:217, n. 2).

A "creative neo-Thomist" writes, "The infinite, contrary to an all too common misunderstanding, does not exclude all other being than itself, as though it were a single motionless block already including in itself actually all possible real being. It excludes not other beings but only a *higher level* of being, of intensive qualitative perfection, than itself. In the old Scholastic terminology this was expressed in the classic adage that after creation there are *plura entia, non plus entis* . . . (W. Norris Clarke, "Christian Theism and Whiteheadian Process Philosophy: Are They Compatible," in Nash 1987, 244).

the builder . . . . The person who confuses the artificer and his handiwork understands neither the artificer nor his art."[146] Augustine is not answering Watson's Hegelian criticism of traditional theology, but he has in mind a radical difference between God and the creation when he writes that God "gave existence to the creatures he made out of nothing; but it was not his own supreme existence."[147] This does not rule out the presence of God in his creation, or its dependence upon him. This qualified dualistic conclusion is demanded, too, by his Trinitarian doctrine: as has been shown, "there is nothing else of that [God's] essence besides the Trinity" (*On the Trinity* 7.6.11, in Augustine 1887, 113).

Watson's interpretation appears to be supported in some texts of Augustine. For example, the bishop writes: "I considered all the other things that are of a lower order than yourself, and I saw that they have not absolute being in themselves, nor are they entirely without being. They are real in so far as *they have their being from you*, but unreal in the sense that *they are not what you are*. For it is only that which remains in being without change which truly is."[148] Behind Augustine's description

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[146] *Sermon* 252.10, quoted in Grabowski 1954, 223. It might be observed that Watson (and Hegel) could agree with Augustine here, by interpreting Augustine's "distinguishing" of "building" and "builder" as a relative one, within a transcendent (or fundamental) notional unity. See Hegel 1977, sections 773-774, for an account of the creation of the world as the movement of Spirit beyond the pure Notion of itself, so that the elements of the Notion "obtain a substantial existence relatively to one another" (467).

[147] Augustine 1972, 12.2, 473. Similar in meaning is Augustine's argument (against the Manicheans) that the soul "is not a part of God, nor of the same nature as God, but is created by him, and is far inferior to its creator" (11.22, 454).

[148] Augustine 1972, 7.11, 147, emphasis in the original. Contrast Spinoza: "For since ability to exist is power, it follows that the more reality belongs to the nature of anything, the greater is the power for existence *it derives from itself*" (*Ethics*, Prop. 11, in Spinoza 1949, 49, emphasis added).

is the metaphysics of Plotinus, in which Being flows down from one level to another.[149] This emanational background indicates the presence of pantheistic elements in Augustine's thought; however, Augustine rejected these elements when their character became apparent to him.[150] Thus he writes against the Neo-Platonists:

> What is much more remarkable is that there are some who agree with us that there is one 'First Principle' of all things, and that God must be the creator of all things outside himself; and yet they refuse to accept the good and simple belief in the good and simple reason for the making of the world, namely that God in his goodness created good things, and that all things which do not belong to God's own being, though inferior to God, are nevertheless good, and the creation of God's goodness (1972, 11.23, 454-55).

Watson consistently misunderstands the classical theological view of nothing, as he does Augustine, when he speaks of *creation ex nihilo* as though it were about "nothing" being "added to" the created thing. The "nothing" from which the world is created is not a surreptitious "something" (*mē Ōn?*) which could be an element *in* the

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[149] Plotinus's thought is actually a combination of two conflicting metaphors, emanation and omnipresence, reflecting developments of Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic metaphysics. See Armstrong 1937.

[150] See Humphrey 1986, 69-71. Augustine resembles Watson's Spinoza most closely in his account of the origin of evil, though even here the resemblance is slight. Augustine explains at length in the *City of God* that evil has no cause, and does not arise from an evil nature, but arises in a will which defects from the good. However, he concludes that the evil choice "takes its origin not from the fact that man is a natural being, but from the fact that his natural being is created from nothing" (Augustine 1972, 12.6, 479). Augustine's evil will as "deficient cause" is far from Spinoza's finitude as the addition of nothing to being (as Watson describes it), for the defection of the will is absolutely inexplicable, and not a means to the end of greater variety in the cosmos, or the origin of consciousness, or any other greater good.

created entity.[151] In Augustine the language of creation almost eclipses the

language of finitude and infinitude. Watson simply misreads him when he says, "The

obvious difficulty in this view is that the finite, as finite, has no reality whatever . . ."

(*PBR* 338).[152]

The Knowledge of God: A Further Example of Blank Identity and Contradictory Difference

Watson's project is a demonstration of the Hegelian dialectic in the history of

theology and philosophy of religion.[153] The "moments" of Watson's dialectic--

identity without related difference, and difference without identity--are found by him

within Augustine's thought in the oneness of God and the plurality of Persons, or

the separateness of God and the "unreality" of the finite world. They are also found

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[151] Watson is completely mistaken when he writes that "'nothing' is represented as if it were a material to which a definite form was given by the action upon it or an external cause" (*CI* 265). While there are difficulties with the term "self-caused," Peter Bertocci is on the mark when he insists that "*Creatio ex nihil' does not mean that from nothing at all something comes.* And this 'self-caused' Being creates neither out of nothing, nor from nothing; it creates what *was not*" (Bertocci 1970, 218, his emphasis).

[152] Watson deduces the unreality of the world on the basis of Spinoza's metaphysics, not Augustine's thought, when he writes: "Now, if it is true that negation implies determination, it is obvious that the world cannot be determined at all, if it is supposed that in itself it is purely negative. All that a pure negation can imply is that the world in itself is nothing at all, or, what is the same thing, has no reality from the point of view of God" (*IRE:H* 81).

[153] Hegel is again Watson's primary influence: "The essential moments of the notion or conception of religion show themselves and make their appearance at every stage in which religion exists at all. . . . Thus the moments of the notion or conception of religion appear on lower stages of development, though as yet in the shape of anticipations or presentiments . . ." (Hegel 1962, 1:76-77).

in Augustine's treatment of the knowledge of God. Here Watson has two goals: he wishes to show both the transcendable error and the im: licit truth in Augustine's thought. The error that he wishes to present takes the two forms described above: Augustine freezes the moments of the dialectic in the two alternative positions. Thus on the one hand Augustine is consistently Spinozan in separating God's knowledge of himself from his knowledge of the world (abstraction), and on the other hand he is inconsistently maintaining both forms of knowledge in contradiction, so that the unity of the divine mind is denied. Watson's second goal is to present the kernel of truth in Augustine's thought, as he sees it, which is the divine mind as consciousness and self-consciousness, or as both identical and other to itself.

First to be considered is the error of abstraction. As Watson reads Augustine's doctrine of divine knowledge, the two kinds of objects of the divine mind are distinguished, or rather *separated*.

> In the divine mind are contained the invisible and unchangeable "ideas" which give form to the visible and changeable world; but these ideas constitute the divine nature, and must therefore *be distinguished* from their effect in the phenomenal world. Thus God's knowledge of himself is *absolutely separate* from his knowledge of the world; the former consisting of the eternal and unchangeable ideas, the latter of the transient and changeable course of events (*IRE:H* 68, emphasis added).

Watson wishes to show that there is no mediation in Augustine's thought between the abstract mind of God and the world, and thus that the divine ideas in the mind of God must be entirely separate from the world.

However, Augustine's error of abstraction in Watson's analysis is balanced on the other side by contradiction, the external relation of two opposed elements of thought. Watson accuses Augustine of both errors in the following passage from *Philosophical Basis of Religion*:

> "There is only one wisdom," says Augustine (*De civ.* xi. 10), "in which
> are infinite treasures of intelligible things, and in these intelligible
> things are all the invisible and unchangeable reasons of the things that
> are visible and changeable." In this passage Augustine seems to say
> that the objects of the divine wisdom are the forms or ideas, which
> contain the unchangeable grounds of all things. It would thus seem
> that he *distinguishes* between the divine intelligence and the ideal
> realities which it contemplates. Such a *separation*, however, was for
> Augustine impossible. The only ideas which he can admit are the
> divine attributes, which have no independent existence, but constitute
> the very nature of God. From this point of view it would seem that
> the object of God can only be God's own nature. God's knowledge of
> Himself would thus seem to exclude any knowledge of the world (*PBR*
> 336, emphasis added).

Note that in the previous quotation from *Interpretation of Religious Experience*
Watson had placed the (Platonic or Philonic) ideas on the divine side of the
separation between God and world. Here he claims the opposite--that these ideas in
the divine mind are distinct from the divine nature, and thus outside of God. (Note,
too, Watson's claim of distinction, or rather separation, within the divine Subject.)
If Augustine is consistent, Watson is saying, these ideas must be beyond God's
knowledge, and God should be abstract and self-enclosed, like Aristotle's thought
that thinks itself.

According to Watson, however, Augustine maintains the contradiction, thus
destroying the unity of the divine mind:

> On the other hand, Augustine draws a *distinction* between God's
> knowledge of Himself and His knowledge of the world, and maintains
> in the strongest way the *distinction* of God from the world. The
> knowledge of the world is not merely the knowledge of its eternal
> universal laws, but also of what takes place in it. God contemplates all
> things at a glance, so that what for us appears in time is for Him
> timeless (*PBR* 336-37).

Watson thinks that he has discovered abstraction on the one hand (Augustine's God

who knows only himself), and confusion on the other (God must know only himself, but Augustine says that he also knows the world, and thus God's mind cannot be one):

> There are thus two competing conceptions in Augustine. On the one hand, he tends to identify the eternal purpose of God [i.e., the seminal ideas] with the divine essence, and, on the other hand, he seeks to distinguish this purpose from God's knowledge of Himself. I: we take the former view, we seem to fall into an abstract unity in which all the finite and temporal disappears; if we take the latter view, it is hard to see how the unity of the divine nature is preserved (*PBR* 337).[154]

Augustine, he says, cannot see how God's reality can be maintained unless it is distinguished from the reality of the world, and thus Watson (not Augustine) divides God, as the subject of two kinds of separate knowledge (*IRE:H* 78).[155] Watson's project of demonstrating identity without difference and difference without identity, thus depends upon his rejection of Augustine's mediating elements between the two, the divine ideas.

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[154] "[T]here seems to be this fundamental discrepancy, that God in his own nature is self-complete, and therefore there is nothing beyond Himself to know, while yet He is affirmed to have in His mind a knowledge of all that has been, is, or will be in the world. . . . [T]herefore knowledge of the world would seem to be knowledge of what lies beyond the sum-total of reality . . ." (*PBR* 355).

[155] Curiously, Watson traces the view of God's independence from the world to Neo-Platonism. While it is true that Plotinus's doctrines of "integral omnipresence" (immaterial omnipresence) and "undiminished progression" (production of the world with no loss of "divine" energy) produce some similarity to the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, the more obvious source of Augustine's teaching is the Jewish and Christian view of God as the holy Lord. On Plotinus's teaching and its significance for Augustine, see O'Connell 1968.

Demonstrating the Need for Watson's Conception of God

On the one hand, Augustine's distinctions are exaggerated to separations, so that if Augustine's God is one, this unity is abstract, divorced from the particular and actual; the one God and the plurality of the world cannot be brought under an ontological schema. On the other hand, Augustine's thought (in Watson's interpretation) is itself contradictory, divided against itself, and demonstrates the need of Watson's modalist principle of unity, the totality which determines itself. "From this point of view the reality of the world is bound up with the reality of God: to know what the world is in its true nature is to know that it is a manifestation of God. In this way, and as I believe in this way only, can the dualism of God and the world be overcome" (*PBR* 357).

The real problem that Watson finds in the notion of the divine ideas is that they imply that Being and Knowledge in God are not identical, and it is this identity that Watson considers to be the truth in Augustine's system. "Now Augustine rightly holds that God is essentially self-knowing; in other words, that the distinction of subject and object, when subject and object are identical, is the highest form of being. Thus Augustine, in his doctrine of the Trinity, was intent upon maintaining that God must be conceived, not as pure being, but as the absolute identity of being and knowing" (*PBR* 353). In fact, Augustine does not think that being and knowing are originally or finally identical: for Augustine, God--Being Itself--can know what is not God. Further, the identity of God in Augustine's theology does not entail that there is no being outside of God, nor that God knows only his own being; Augustine is not Spinoza. Augustine does not resort to the notion of a self-differentiating totality as a solution to Spinoza's problem, for he does not see the problem, nor does he resort to a finitude which as a determination is negation. It is only by assuming that he does so that Watson is able to apply the Hegelian criticism of Spinoza to

Augustine.

Persons in the Augustinian Trinity and Moments of Watson's Divine Self-Consciousness

Watson thinks that he sees behind the Persons of Augustine's Trinity an anticipation of his own epistemological description of God. He considers Augustine's psychological analogies to the Trinity and comments that, "[T]he essential truth for which Augustine was contending is that which would be better expressed by saying that God is the self-conscious principle involved and manifested in the existence and process of the universe" (*IRE-H* 78). Watson fails to remember that the analogies of knowledge, love, or memory, mind and will are merely *analogies*. For Augustine there is no simple continuity between these human faculties and the divine nature. So, for example, he cautions in regard to his analogy of mind, memory and will, "But in that [divine] Trinity, who would dare to say that the Father understands neither Himself, nor the Son, nor the Holy Spirit, except by the Son, or loves them, except by the Holy Spirit . . ." (Augustine 1887, 15,7.12, 205). Indeed, so far is Augustine from insisting upon the self-evident character of the relation of the Persons, that he says he speaks "things that cannot be uttered, that we may be able in some way to utter what we are in no way able to utter fully" (7.4.7, 109).

The Difference: Separate, Closed Trinity Versus Worldly, Open Modalism

It is Watson's claim that his philosophy combines unity and trinity in God in a way that avoids what he would call Augustine's errors. It is clear, however, that Watson's philosophical theology is a Hegelian modalism, in which the Persons are phases of God.

[T]he three persons of the Trinity must be viewed as three phases or elements in the conception of God, which may be distinguished by analysis, but which imply one another. God, the Father, must be regarded as an abstract conception of the infinite fulness of being which is involved in the divine nature; God, the Son, as an expression of the essential nature of God as self-objectifying; and God, the Spirit. as expressing the essential nature of God as a self-determinant and self-conscious Unity. But these logical distinctions do not imply that there are three distinct persons, if by this is meant that each is God: to say so is to divide up the divine nature in an illegitimate way: what is true is that God is essentially self-existent, self-manifesting, and self-knowing. In more popular language, we may express this by saying that God must be conceived as a Person, or, as I should prefer to say, as a Spirit; for spirit is that which is capable of manifesting the most extreme distinction without losing its essential identity; nay, that which must manifest the most extreme distinction, while maintaining its unity. Nothing can be foreign to the divine nature, and therefore nothing can destroy its absolute self-identity (*PBR* 354-55).

The difference between Augustine and Watson in regard to the Trinity is not that Watson's modalism privileges unity over trinity. (In fact, one can speak loosely of Augustinian modalism within the immanent Trinity, inasmuch as the Father is the "the beginning (*principium*) of the whole divinity" (4.20.29, 85) and the Spirit is the unifying principle of the deity [Richardson 1979, 245].) The difference is rather that the unity in trinity of Augustine is complete, because it is separable conceptually from the world: one can imagine the non-existence of the world (if only by negation). In contrast to Augustine's divinity, Watson's unity in trinity is incomplete, because even the unity provided by philosophy (Hegel's Absolute Knowledge) remains open to the actual plurality of the world and of historical development.

What from Watson's point of view is the blank identity of "pure Nothing" or "pure Being," the *ex nihilo* of creation or the worldless God, is from the Augustinian point of view the claim that human thought cannot go back beyond the beginning or

out beyond the universe.[156] Augustinian knowledge of the supersensible is analogical, not absolute; for such finite knowing, being (or in Watson's word, reality) is not only within, but also beyond, the reach of human minds. One's view of either the finitude or the boundless capacity of human reason is determinative for the mode of one's thought and speech about God. It is rationalist confidence and its univocal language which leads immediately to that development of contradiction of finite-infinite which pre-occupied Hegel, and leads to Watson's criticisms of Augustine. H. P. Owen makes the Augustinian observation that if one could use univocal language for God's infinity, one would reach self-contradiction, "for the essence of a finite entity (however high it might be on the scale of being) is to possess a form which acts as a limit that excludes other forms" (Owen 1972, 192). The univocal mode is that of a finite subject describing a finite object; describing the formed exhaustively is theoretically conceivable. (One assumes that this would be the case, too, for an infinite subject.) For an infinite object, or God, however, only the analogical mode is possible, for the relation of this object to formed or finite things is not itself within the envelope of finitude. In the Augustinian view, the ambiguity of analogy is the necessary consequence of creaturely finitude.[157]

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[156] Augustine 1972, 11.5, 434-35. There is a resemblance here between Augustine's thought and Kant's in the limitation of understanding to space and time. Augustine finds absurdities in the questions of the philosophers regarding the creation (when and where did creation take place?) in a manner similar, too, to Kant's antinomies of Reason. Both have a place for agnosticism; in the case of Kant it is more thorough-going, and located only in the use of "pure," as opposed to "practical," reason.

[157] See below, Chapter V.

Conclusion: Eisegesis as Indication of Arbitrariness

In conclusion, we observe that Watson is impelled to strain the evidence, making Augustine a Spinozist, in order to fault him for abstraction and contradiction. Augustine's God is One, yet Three, and Augustine clearly thinks that he has a way of mediating between the one transcendent God and the world. Watson must first show that Augustine's God is both the One *in abstraction* from the Three, and from the world, and then show that Augustine *contradicts himself* when he says that God is Three, and when he relates God and the world.

This straining of the evidence is particularly significant for Watson's project, for according to his own understanding of the progress of philosophy, it must proceed necessarily by the eruption of contradiction and the overcoming of this in a higher synthesis. Inasmuch as Watson has failed to do justice to Augustine's thought, he has not laid the ground for his own dialectical alternative. Augustine's "failure" is necessary to Watson's success: the abstraction of God and the unreality of the world (as anticipations of Spinoza's error) are the necessary developments of the Hegelian Notion that call for Watson's Hegelian reconciliation. Thus, while the demonstration of Watson's eisegesis may not be a disproof of his Hegelian method, it raises the question whether the entire project is not in fact arbitrary.

Abstraction and Contradiction Endemic to Non-Hegelian Thought

Watson's "discovery" in Augustine of Spinozan abstract identity and self-contradictory difference is the pattern for his recapitulation of the history of religion and philosophy. So he notes that the transcendence of God in Plato cannot be the last word: "the infinite cannot be severed from the finite, God from man, without becoming itself finite, unless we are prepared to regard the finite as pure illusion" (*CI* 43). We are told that the Gnostics hold the doctrine that God is complete in himself,

prior to and independent of the world. This leads, Watson says, to the view that the world is not truly real, "but is an illusion due to the imperfection of our mode of conceiving the absolute" (*PBR* 278). Despite Aristotle's (proto-Hegelian) protest against Plato's "separation of the ideal and the real," Aristotle's God is self-absorbed, and thus abstract, acting upon the world externally, like a sculptor upon a block of marble (*CI* 43).[158] Abstraction on the one hand (unity without difference) is balanced again by contradiction on the other (difference without unity): he claims that Aquinas's system contains "opposing elements which are only held together by perpetual compromises, that conceal but do not get rid of the contradiction which they hold in check" (*PBR* 396). Fundamental is the contradiction of faith and reason, which results from a view of reason that is limited to causality, and cannot reach higher (*PBR* 396). Only a few in Aquinas's view of things attain to a mystical vision of God, "[t]hus the true spirit of Christianity, which . . . denies any abstract opposition between the divine and the human, is perverted . . ." (*PBR* 396).

Abstraction is found, too, in the view of Herbert Spencer and others "who first conceive of matter and mind as two independent modes of being . . ." (*PBR* 431). Like Augustine, contradiction arises within their systems, for they "then seek to unite them [the abstract opposites] through the conception of an unknown Power

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[158] The history of philosophy also includes anticipations of later (Hegelian) truth. So Watson finds in Aristotle a denial of contingency: "First Philosophy" lifts us above the unhappy state of wonder and convinces us that "from an ultimate or divine point of view the world could not be otherwise than it is" (*OP* 329). However, this viewing of things *sub specie aeternitas* is not supported by Aristotle's text. Instead, Aristotle says only that "God is thought to be *among* the causes of all things and to be *a* first principle . . ." (*Metaphysics,* I, 2, 983a, 5-10, in Aristotle 1947, 248). Contingency in fact has a place in Aristotle's understanding of description (see MacIntyre 1972, 532).

of which both are the manifestation . . ." (*PBR* 431-32). The solution here again is the Hegelian self-differentiating totality: while "Constructive Idealism thus affirms the objective reality of God, it refuses to admit that He can be conceived as a separate and independent Being standing apart from the world and only acting externally upon it; on the contrary, it affirms that He is actually present in the world, and above all in the self-conscious life of man, while yet the infinite fulness of His being is not fully comprehended by us" (*PBR* 431-32). An early reviewer observed that Watson shows "a tendency to unduly emphasize the differences between the views of the two philosophers he is contrasting" (Spencer and Kant), and of misrepresenting the views of Spencer, an indication again of the controlling power of his Hegelian method (Review 1881, 328).

These alternative errors of abstraction and contradiction are found outside the Western tradition. In a treatment which resembles that of Hegel's in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Watson claims that Egyptian and Indian or Hindu religions lack the poetic and artistic faculty that characterizes the Greek, and thus never impart spirituality and freedom to their Gods. He writes, "With the rise of reflection the tendency to unity, which has already shown itself in their henotheism, carries them beyond the tendency to multiplicity, and as their Gods have not been conceived as endowed with intelligence and will, they come to conceive of the divine as a purely abstract being, of which nothing can be said but that it *is*" (*CI* 21, his emphasis). As was the case with Watson's Spinozan Augustine, the result is a denial of finite reality: "If the divine nature is absolutely without distinction, man can become divine only by the destruction of all that constitutes his separate individuality" (*CI* 21). Augustine had to be made over as a Spinozan by Watson, but these religions, with their denial of any separation between infinite and finite, are frankly pantheistic (*CI* 21).

V. *The Janus-faced Philosophy and the Account*
of the Historical Development of Religious Experience

John Watson's method owes its apparent success to its structural
ambiguity[159] in regard to other philosophical or theological positions. That is,
after logical oppositions of abstract identity and unrelated difference are discovered--
ostensibly empirically--in historical religious and philosophical positions, the
philosophical critic takes his or her stance between them. From this necessarily
comprehensive and universal viewpoint the philosopher is always able to fault one
side for a failure to take difference seriously, and the other side for a failure to see
the comprehensive unity of mind that must encompass all differences.

If Watson's method is only *apparently* successful, this does not mean that
Watson's thought fails where classical theism succeeds. Indeed, Watson's thought
has a more immediate rational appeal than classical theism, and in this chapter some
of the reasons for this appeal will be described briefly. However, the success of
Watson's program is "all or nothing": it depends upon its ability to avoid the
ambiguity and agnosticism latent in classical theism by speaking unambiguously of
God.[160] Its success also depends on the transcendence of its fore-runners:

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[159] From the Latin, *ambi-*, "both ways" and *agere*, "to drive" (*Concise Oxford
Dictionary*, 6th edition).

[160] Epistemologies which proceed from methodic doubt and a first principle of
knowledge, such as Descartes' *cogito*, stand or fall with the establishment of that

agnosticism, mysticism and pantheism. In this chapter Watson's treatment of the development from (Kantian) agnosticism to his own Hegelian Constructive Idealism will be shown to pass through mysticism and pantheism, and the view will be advanced that these latter as historical phenomena are again interpreted tendentiously for his dialectical purposes. The order of the dialectical development Watson describes is not consistent, and this again casts doubt on the method (which demands *necessary* development). The universality of the Hegelian method, the movement up the middle between posited alternatives, raises the suspicion that its result, the absolute philosophy, is finally indefinable, and that its progress of dialectical reconciliation is necessarily interminable.

The Relative Rational Appeal of Watson's Philosophy of Religion

Despite the criticisms made above that Watson has misrepresented Augustine as a Spinozist in order to perform his (Hegelian) sublation, situating his own thought between and beyond Augustine's supposed alternatives of blank identity and self-contradiction, it should be observed that Watson's philosophy is *at first glance* more intellectually appealing and satisfying than classical theology (as represented by Augustine). This intellectual or rational appeal fades somewhat as difficulties are discovered which parallel those in classical orthodoxy.

While Watson has misrepresented Augustine's thought, it must be admitted that Augustine's handling of the problems of philosophical theology is less satisfying than Watson's own. For example, in Augustine's view, God's knowledge of the world must mediate between the changeless God and the changing world, and so he

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principle and with each deduction which proceeds in linear fashion from it. Thus they are "all or nothing." (Etienne Gilson notes that this is not the case with Aristotelian realism, which begins not with knowing, but with being; 1986, 76.)

is driven to make that knowledge timeless, as Watson observes. God, Augustine says, sees everything in an eternal moment: "He sees in some other manner, utterly remote from anything we experience or could imagine. . . . In seeing it [the created thing] when he made it he did not duplicate his knowledge, nor did he increase his knowledge in any way; that would imply that his knowledge was less before he made something for him to see."[161] Problems with this static view of divine knowledge strike the modern reader immediately; so, for example, Norman Krentzmann argues persuasively that omniscience and immutability are mutually exclusive (Krentzmann 1973). The problems, philosophical and theological, of an unchanging God have stimulated several projects, including process theology,[162] to re-conceive of God as mutable and passionate.

The Ambiguity of Analogy in Theology

In the area of theological epistemology, the doctrine of analogy also presents problems which John Watson's philosophy appears to overcome. Analogy is described by Aristotle as a "middle way" between univocity and equivocity, but its adequacy in the question of knowledge of God has been questioned seriously by modern students.[163] A chief difficulty with analogical predication is that it appears

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[161] Augustine 1972, 11.21, 452. This image of instantaneous seeing was borrowed from Plotinus's image of the head in *Enneads* 6.5.7.

[162] Watson thought that Whitehead in *Process and Reality* "differs from F. H. Bradley in his interpretation of subordinate points" but "his doctrine as a whole agrees with that of his predecessor" (A study of contemporary philosophy n.d., Bk. 4, ch. 5).

[163] So Frederick Ferré concludes that analogy "seems powerless to supply either fresh knowledge of God or an independent 'middle way' interpretation of the meaning of statements traditionally made about him" (Ferré 1972, 96). The more

to involve an infinite process or regress of affirmation and negation. Thus a positive

similarity of relations (the correspondence of attributes or relations to natures) is

said to exist in the case of God and in that of the creature. For example, the

goodness of God is to God *as* the goodness of the human being is to humankind.

Then the equivalency apparently intended by the "*as*" is qualified or denied to avoid

the suggestion of univocity. Univocity here would transform analogy of

proportionality into analogy of *proportion*; in the latter, it is asserted that the way

the attribute is related to the nature is known in both creaturely and divine cases.

Following the denial of a simple equation between the descriptions of creaturely

being and divine being, a new similarity is affirmed.

The problem remains, however. As the relation between the creaturely and

divine cases is not equivalence (univocity), the new qualification merely renders the

relation vague or imprecise (the threat of equivocity).[164] This weakness is the focus

of John Watson's criticism. In defence of analogy, however, it should be noted that

the result of this analogical two-step is not simple equivocity, but a continuing

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sanguine E. L. Mascall nonetheless comments on the analogy of proportionality, "In
fact, the introduction of analogy as a *via media* between univocity and equivocity
has turned out to be nothing more than an imposing piece of mystification" (Mascall
1949, 106). See Mascall's lucid description of the endless regress involved in the
analogy of proportionality.

[164] For this reason, throughout the history of the Church some theologians have
insisted that the only solution to the threat of equivocation is some univocal
knowledge of God--of his existence, for example. Duns Scotus insisted in his *Oxford
Commentary* that being could be predicated of God and creatures univocally, and
thus an infinite regress of equivocation and agnosticism would be avoided (see I, 3,
2, no. 5; I, 8, 3, 12). Neo-Thomist Mascall combines analogy of proportionality with
analogy of attribution, and makes the latter dependent upon the metaphysical
analogy of being: "Since . . . God's essence necessarily involves his existence, no
statement about him can remain in the essential or conceptual order; it passes over
immediately into the order of existence and the judgment" (Mascall 1949, 119).

ambiguity: the words used for God ("good," "Father") do not mean *anything at all*, but when one attempts to say what they mean, one is caught up again in the regress. On the one hand, it is true that "we see, but through a glass darkly"; on the other hand, it is true that "we see through a glass darkly, *but* we see." The regressive character of this analogical knowledge (which suggests a correlation to the patience of faith) does not make it inferior to knowledge in general: we find the same regression when we attempt to understand the relationship of particulars to universals.[165] Though we may not have an answer to the difficulty of knowledge in general, we believe that we know.

Watson's critique of analogy appears in a number of places, including his account of the philosophy of Clement of Alexandria in *The Interpretation of Religion: Historical.* He observes that Clement uses a method of abstraction (the *remoteo deo*): God is beyond the whole world both sensible and intelligible, and so any attempt to define the divine nature is futile. The method of abstraction is an approximation to a conception of God: one ascends by ideas more and more general, removing the concrete properties of all things, until one reaches "the highest and most abstract of all conceptions" (*IRE:H* 47). A warning against univocity is cited from Clement: "For we must not suppose that the terms used in Scripture, such as *figure, motion, state, throne, place, right hand, left hand,* are literally applicable to the Father of the universe. The First Cause is not in space, but beyond space,

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[165] In Plato's *Parmenides* (132-133), Parmenides shows that the participation of things in the forms (as Socrates presents it) involves an endless regress: "[I]t is out of the question that anything should be like the form, or the form like anything else. Otherwise, in every case, a second form will present itself in addition to the first, and yet a third if the second is like anything; thus there will be no end to this emergence of fresh forms, if the form is found to be like the thing which participates in it" (Plato 1934, 56). The problem in the case of analogy, as in that of participation, is establishing in what the likeness consists--hence the regress.

beyond time, beyond language and thought." Again, "If we speak of the One, the

Good, Reason, Being in itself, or even of Father, God, Creator, Saviour, we employ

terms that are not strictly appropriate." Watson comments, "Now, a Being who is of

this abstract character is obviously not an object of science, nor can his nature be

expressed in human language" (*IRE:H* 47-48). The logical basis of this "false method

of abstraction," common to the thought of the Gnostics, Philo, and the Neo-

Platonists, is a false conception of the process of intelligence. It is presupposed by

Clement that the universal is obtained by abstraction or elimination. Clement has

not seen that this method

> has really emptied the idea [of God] of all meaning; so that, strictly
> speaking, it is neither positive nor negative, but is simply the empty
> abstraction of the unintelligible. The great defect of this conception of
> the process of thought is that it isolates the universal side of thought,
> and the universal, grasped in its abstraction, is nothing that can be
> said either to exist or to be thinkable. . . . [A] God who is regarded as
> the ultimate result of a process of abstraction, continued until all the
> attributes by which knowable objects are characterized have been
> eliminated, is simply the empty idea of that which is the principle of all
> that is, but which is itself devoid of all being (*IRE:H* 49).[166]

Despite this tendency towards agnosticism, Clement has another,

contradictory, impulse towards positive predication. Thus he intends to say

something other than the empty "Being" or "Nothing" which he uses for God: "Like

all Absolutists he assumes that the categories, by which, as a matter of fact, we

characterize God, are in some way analogous to the essence of God, as he would

appear to us could we transcend the limitations of human thought and speech"

(*IRE:H* 50). Despite his claims, Clement implicitly believes that the true universal,

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[166] Watson's similar criticism of Philo is Hegel's rejection of the notion of a
separate God, reduced to a theological slogan: "The inscrutable Being, who cannot
be in any way defined, is little better than the deification of Nothing" (*PBR* 242).

the Absolute, is not completely indeterminate but "infinitely determinate," though beyond the horizon of knowledge.[167]

Yet if it is claimed that knowledge of God is by analogy, then any knowledge of God is impossible, Watson asserts, since analogy depends upon some univocal knowledge of God. So in his discussion of the theology of Basilides, Watson observes that if we speak analogically of God's "will," we must know with what it is contrasted: "We cannot know that 'will' is in any sense applicable to God, unless we know how far it is true, and how far false. Thus we are reduced to the dilemma: if we know what in God corresponds to 'will,' we must be able to comprehend the nature of God; if we do not we cannot know that there is any correspondence whatever" (*PBR* 277).

In contrast to these difficulties in the classical doctrine of analogy, Watson's thought is appealing and rationally satisfying here because it brings the God-world relation under the concept of a dynamic self-differentiating totality, or (self-)consciousness, so that everything contingent is explicable in principle. Rationality is given an unlimited field. Augustine's God is not comprehensible (in the proper sense of the term); the description of God's essence as unchanging suggests less what God is like than what he is not like, a view of analogy formally

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[167] Watson makes the same claim of Philo: "Philo . . . does not mean that God is purely abstract, but only that all the predicates by which created things are characterized are inadequate to express the infinite. Thus his doctrine alternates, like the substance of Spinoza, between the absolutely indeterminate and the infinitely determinate. He is really committed, by the logic of his system, to the former, but he *means* to assert the latter" (*PBR* 221, his emphasis). The same claim of internal contradiction is made of Basilides, *PBR* 274-75.

adopted by Aquinas.[168]

Watson has stated the problem of analogy of proportionality as described above, but he treats the alternatives as *absolute* rather than *relative*: either there is comprehension (not merely apprehension) of the divine nature or there is complete ignorance.[169] He has no room for imprecise or ambiguous but actual or existentially adequate knowledge of God.[170] Watson's philosophy confidently says that God (or the Absolute) is known absolutely. As literal and univocal, "knowledge of God" means both the objective and subjective genitive--God's knowledge, and the knowledge human beings have of God. This "knowing" is the history of Reason itself as it makes its way down to finite particularity and back again through the individual's consciousness to its divine goal.

Watson's philosophy is also appealing because its method, the Hegelian dialectic, ostensibly makes room for every development leading up to it, granting each a place in the overall schema (though, as has been seen, this "making room" involved a distortion of Augustine's thought). In principle, at least, the philosopher

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[168] Augustine's description of God as "Being Itself" is an abstraction conceptually, as Watson (and Hegel) would describe it, that is, it is a description accomplished by a negation of any determinate qualities. But, as in any negative theology, there is also (implicit, if not explicit) a positive ascription of power or simplicity. Thus God's changelessness is the way in which he surpasses in power those things which are subjected to change. See, e.g., Augustine 1887, 5.2.3, 88, or Augustine 1972, 12.2, 473.

[169] This epistemological "All or Nothing" is the correlative of the Enlightenment conception of divine omnipotence, with its attendant problems (see McLelland 1988).

[170] Like analogy, "'negative theology' seeks to guarantee that human speech about God is in fact about *God* and not a *concept of* God. This implies that there is, in principle, something which man cannot know about God, and it is this position against which Hegel's entire project is directed . . ." (Hart 1991, 192-93).

is eminently fair and comprehensive, saying, "Yes, but . . .," to all previous

participants in the philosophical conversation, seeking the true insight which must be

recovered from its inadequate expression.

Further, the method is the goal. That is, Watson's solution to the problems

of theology and philosophy of religion is a method that takes its place beyond all

"one-sided" solutions as the solution which by definition cannot be one-sided. At the

same time, the method is oriented to the actual world, so that, in principle at least, its

goal is the overcoming and reconciliation of all contradiction, confusion, (apparent)

irrationality and evil, not merely in philosophy, but in life.

Is Watson's Hegelian Logic Ambiguous Despite Itself?

This last positive aspect of Watson's thought is also the point at which further

criticism begins. It has been observed how Watson situates his own thought between

the polarizations of unity without difference and difference without unity. It

appears, then, that the validity of his criticisms is guaranteed by the method, and not

the matter under examination. Since *all* thought involves universals and particulars,

unity and plurality, or likeness and difference, *any* conception of things (except

Watson's Hegelian conception) can be criticized for one-sidedness, for failing to take

seriously one of the two elements. So an analogous criticism might be that all

previous Trinitarian views have fallen into modalism or tritheism, and that the truth

lies in the middle, at both extremes, or in the oscillation between them: one suspects

that the "solution" is merely a re-statement of the problem. Is anything new being

said? If it is new, is it definite in relation to previous statements?

This is an important question considering Watson's criticism of traditional

"absolutisms" and the ambiguity of analogy. The superiority of Watson's system

depends on the elimination of ambiguity from metaphysics, or on the success of

language in saying what is actually intended. However, there is good reason to think that Watson has only removed the ambiguity of analogy from the classical theological description of God to incorporate it in the ambivalence of his method and its results. Watson's Hegelian inversion of Spinoza's principle (in which "all determination is negation" becomes "all negation is determination") should lead to the finite world. Thus the eruption of the negative is a further determination of the totality in being and thought. However, it may be instead an ontological *via negativa*; that is, it may render a form of consciousness or metaphysic which is only describable as *not* the previous dialectical alternatives, neither that of mysticism nor that of pantheism, neither that of (Bradleyan) absolute idealism nor that of personal idealism. Under examination, it may be that inasmuch as Watson's metaphysic or form of consciousness *is* determined and describable, it is only a re-statement of the alternatives, simply asserted as their sublation. Ambiguity may be exorcised from language about the absolute only to return to haunt the dialectical process, and its result, the God known by it.

In this part of the argument two points will be established. First, it will be argued that Watson's treatment of all thinkers and schools in philosophy of religion is a repetition of the Hegelian sublation of Spinozan contradiction. It will be shown that, as was the case with Watson's handling of Augustinian theology, so it is with his presentation of mysticism: Watson tailors mysticism to produce a flawed anticipation of his own Constructive Idealism. In this way, his method guarantees his results. Secondly, the contradictions of, say, mysticism and pantheism, which are supposedly transcended in Watson's Constructive Idealism, will be seen to re-emerge in the ambiguity or indeterminacy of his Absolute. Either the Absolute is an affirmation of an identity of all things, a totality which is more than a sum of the parts, and thus in some sense transcendent, or it is an assertion of the independence

of the many, a claim that the totality is not known except in its parts, its movements, the historical and spiritual dialectic.

Does Watson Transcend the Alternatives of Pantheism and Mysticism?

Watson wrote when the amateur philosopher Herbert Spencer, "the nineteenth-century publicist *par excellence*," was in his heyday (Passmore 1957, 41). Spencer was only the popularizer of an agnosticism which in the debate between religion and science among late Victorians had achieved intellectual ascendancy.[171] He was typical of those Victorian intellectuals who would not be thought morally and religiously careless, but were decidedly outside the Church. On the possibility of knowing the "Absolute," he was influenced by the agnosticism of the Scottish philosopher William Hamilton (1788-1856). Religion and science were reconcilable, Spencer thought, but knowledge of God he limited to an "'indefinite consciousness which cannot be formulated' of the Absolute" (Passmore 1957, 39).

Spencer's jejune agnosticism represents Watson's real philosophical opposition, the agnosticism of Kant, and so it is necessary to change the focus of this examination from ontology in the thought of Augustine, Spinoza, and Hegel, to theory of knowledge. Watson is pre-eminently a Kant scholar and Kant, Watson argues, is an agnostic and dualist. Watson follows the post-Kantians, who themselves depend upon Spinoza, to overthrow (or over-reach) Kantian agnosticism. Watson's method is the Hegelian dialectic of finite/infinite. In the development of

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[171] Spencer's agnosticism was derived from Hamilton and Mansel. Darwin's supporter T. H. Huxley coined the term "agnostic." Historian of ideas Leslie Stephen wrote *An Agnostic's Apology*, first published as an essay in 1876, and as a book in 1893 (Passmore 1957, 38). The Gifford Lectures of 1896-98, James Ward's *Naturalism and Agnosticism* (1899) were a response to the popularity of the positions of Huxley and Spencer.

this dialectic, Watson allies Kantian agnosticism with mysticism; the latter is then opposed to pantheism, represented archetypally by Spinoza. Pantheism in turn gives way to Watson's own Constructive or Speculative Idealism. The point of departure, however, is Kant.

Kant and the Limitation of Reason

According to Watson, Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1787) limits the reach of reason in opposition to the metaphysical "dogmatism," or ungrounded claims about the absolute or God, of the "Leibniz-Wolffian philosophy." At the same time, he makes metaphysics and theology the equivalent of a diminished appendix to ethics in *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). Knowledge for Kant is an accomplishment of Understanding under the guidance of Reason, but Reason *per se* has no constitutive role.[172]

Kant is led to this conclusion by a consideration of the knowing process. According to him neither a representational nor a phenomenalist understanding of knowledge is adequate to explain how it is that we know. For Kant, experience is inconceivable except on the supposition that there are *a priori* or necessary elements in it contributed by the mind (Watson 1876d, 119). (Thus with Berkeleyan phenomenalism and against representationalism, Watson observes, he holds that the

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[172] The Wolffian trust in reason alone produced antinomies or contradictions in reason itself. Kant was compelled to resolve those contradictions in a way acceptable to reason; he wanted to justify the use of the principles of understanding used in the sciences (e.g., causation) and to prove the illegitimacy of their use in regard to the supersensible. This was the Critical method as opposed to Dogmatism and Scepticism (*PKE* 32). "Criticism, then, is a systematic attempt to free reason from self-contradiction by an examination of the conditions under which it operates" (*PKE* 35). Hegel takes over these contradictions as the principle by which his system moves forward to reconciliation.

criterion of the validity of knowledge lies within the mind, and not beyond it.) It is because the object as known is not entirely a construction of mind, but requires the "sensible intuition" or *sensa*, that Kant's famous distinction is created between the thing as it appears to the mind (the *phenomenon*) and the thing as it is in itself (the *noumenon*).

John Watson notes that Kant's distinction between the appearances and the thing-in-itself was a bulwark against the phenomenalism of Berkeleyan idealism; that is, the thing-in-itself is a *residuum* which cannot be idealised. It was also a defence against empiricism and scepticism, which would fragment knowledge into particulars, and then dissolve these particulars into inchoate *sensa*: the forms of perception and categories of the understanding, schematised by the imagination, are the universal and necessary elements which make knowledge of the object actual knowledge.

Kant's Agnosticism: No Knowledge of the Thing-In-Itself

The "agnosticism" in Kant's "transcendental idealism" consists in the fact that the subject and the *noumenon*, or thing-in-itself, never meet. The thing-in-itself is a postulate of the understanding, not an inference from sensation.[173] It is an indescribable "something" which must be thought to lie behind the appearances but is distinguishable from them. "The value of the conception of a noumenon is not

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[173] The senses present objects as they appear and understanding as they are, but "*as they are*. . . meaning that the objects must be represented as objects of experience, that is, as appearances in thorough-going inter-connection with one another, and not as they may be apart from their relation to possible experience . . ." (Kant 1965, A 258, B 314, 274). Thus objects are known as they are in empirical understanding, and not "transcendentally," as if we know what they are in themselves -- which must remain unknown.

positive, that is, it does not entitle us to assert that an actual object such as we think exists. Its value is rather negative, its main use being to prevent us from assuming that objects of experience are things in themselves. . . . The conception of a noumenon thus serves as a check to prevent sensibility from claiming to be co-extensive with reality" (*PKE* 223-24).[174] So the thing-in-itself, though conceptually necessary, appears to be a mere limiting concept.

Kant's *phenomenon-noumenon* distinction, Watson thinks, is a form of agnosticism about *ultimate* reality, too. Because of the limitation of Reason, in Kant's view there can be no cosmological or teleological arguments for God, nor grounds for a supersensible substance like the soul (*PKE* 158). It appears then that the attempts of metaphysics to determine the nature of the supersensible are foiled by the necessarily experiential character of knowledge (*PKE* 41). On the other hand, there are hidden benefits for faith in Kant's agnosticism, which merely await corrections of the Kantian program.[175] In his *Schelling's Transcendental Idealism:*

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[174] "[S]ince that which is not appearance cannot be an object of experience, the understanding can never transcend those limits of sensibility within which alone objects can be given to us" (Kant 1965, A 252, B 309, 270; A 245, B 303, 264). "What objects may be in themselves, and apart from all this receptivity of our sensibility, remains completely unknown to us. We know nothing but our mode of perceiving them--a mode which is peculiar to us, and not necessarily shared in by every being, though, certainly, by every human being" (A 42, B 59, 82).

[175] The apparent disaster for faith of Kant's limitation of knowledge is really a triumph, Watson claims, for if the ultimate realities cannot be the objects of sensible experience, then neither can they be disproven by that experience. "If the world of sense is not reality in its absolute nature, but only reality as it appears when refracted through the medium of our perceptive and thinking faculties, nothing in the nature of the sensible world can be brought forward which is fitted to overthrow the supersensible" (*PKE* 42). (So Criticism differs from scepticism in holding that when reason examines its own products, it is at least able to determine what the ultimate nature of reality is not, *PKE* 35.)

A Critical Exposition (1882), Watson observes that Kant's thing-in-itself as a supersensible world, manifesting Supreme Reason, is hidden from us by the limitations of our minds. If taken literally, Watson says, this *proton pseudos* of the Critical Philosophy "leads to the grave of all sound philosophy in the unknown and the unknowable" (*STI* 31).

Transcendence of the Thing-in-Itself

It was not long before critics like Jacobi noted that Kant's thing-in-itself could be done away with, for on Kantian grounds the relation between the supposed source of appearances and the appearances themselves--a causal relation, for example--must be a creation of mind, and not of the relation itself. The result is an uncompromised idealism: "Idealism explains the consciousness of objects from the *activity* of intelligence. Intelligence is purely active or self-determined, since it is that on which all else is to depend" (*STI* 40). The thing-in-itself must be a mental fiction. Watson agrees with the critics that the *noumenon* represents the failure of Kant to

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For Watson it is clear that Kant's *noumenon* is not a mere limiting concept, but a *something* beyond knowledge -- the self, the totality of things, *and God.* Further, if Kant's agnosticism about the supersensible is mistaken, Watson has located the problem in Kant's narrow view of our perceptive and thinking faculties. "The idea of God, in other words, must be a fiction, if the world of sense is an absolutely real world. On the other hand, if the unconditioned is free from the limitations of the sensible, there is nothing to hinder us from maintaining that the supersensible is the true reality . . . " (*PKE* 43). Kant seeks to "postulate" the "supersensible" of God and the self on another basis than scientific knowledge, that is, on the basis of practical reason. But if the Kantian reasoning is reversed, Watson suggests, the supersensible can come into its own without this recourse to the moral consciousness. If, in Watson's words, "the world of sense" is *not* "an absolutely real world," then the idea of God is not necessarily a fiction.

carry through his idealism to its proper (Hegelian) conclusion.[176] As Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Hegel saw, he notes, the *noumenon* is a "gratuitous fiction" (*STI* 250-51). Fichte saw that the existence of the *noumenon*, whether as mental fiction or not, must nonetheless depend entirely upon the subject. Knowledge is had necessarily by a subject: "[H]ad it only been distinctly conceived sooner, we should long since have been rid of the thing-in-itself; for it would have been recognized that whatever we may think, we are that which thinks therein, and hence that nothing could ever come to exist independently of us, for everything is necessarily related to our thinking" (Fichte 1979, 57). Watson echoed Fichte's correction of Kant, finding "the vulnerable spot in the critical theory of knowledge" (*PBR* 79) in the "assumption . . . that the data furnished to us by our sensible experiences are infected by certain fundamental and insuperable limitations, with the result that what we call knowledge is not really the comprehension of that which *is*, but only of that which *appears*" (*PBR* 78). Watson also notes that the concept of the *noumenon* is responsible for Kant's mistaken conception that space and time are purely subjective (Watson 1876d, 133).[177]

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[176] Lewis White Beck notes that "Kant has appeared to some historians as a tragic figure who repeatedly drew boundaries he could not cross and left empty spaces he could not fill because he found that the human mind was not capable of doing either. . . . [T]he speculative idealists were impatient with the whole conception of a mind that constantly reminded itself of its limits and the dangers of speculation" (Beck 1972, 301). Directly contrasting in tone are Berkeley's words: "We should believe that God has dealt more bountifully with the sons of men than to give them a strong desire for that knowledge [of infinity] which he had placed quite out of their reach" (Berkeley 1962, 46). Fichte shows the same confidence, though it is based on the grounding of all things in self and not in Berkeley's God, a God separate from human consciousness.

[177] This criticism must be understood from the viewpoint of a Hegelian objective idealism or empiricism, and not that of Aristotelian realism.

Kant limits the categories of Reason and the schemata to human (finite) intelligence, and denies that in the principle of self-consciousness we reach a real knowledge of intelligence as it is in itself, an infinite intelligence. Here, Watson claims, Kant confuses two different propositions: first, that the finite intelligence requires to be explained by relation to the infinite intelligence; and, secondly, that human intelligence is by its nature incapable of knowing things as they must present themselves to an intelligence free from all limitations. Watson says the first is true, the second false: Human thought can know things as they appear to an infinite intelligence (*STI* 32-33).

The critical evaporation of the thing-in-itself in German idealism may have its historical source in Spinoza's statement of the problem of the finite/infinite, for early in his career Fichte was a Spinozist. However that may be, Spinoza's discussion of finitude and infinitude was perfectly suited to the transcending of Kant by German idealism. Spinoza wrote, "The Idea of the Mind, I say, and the Mind itself follow in God [or Absolute Substance] from the same power of thinking and by the same necessity. . . . For as soon as someone knows something, he thereby knows that he knows it, and at the same time knows that he knows that he knows, and so on, to infinity."[178] Spinoza can say simply that "the human mind is part of the infinite

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[178] *Ethics,* 2, Prop. 21, in Spinoza 1949, 100-101. See also 2, Prop. 47, Note, 161-62. As Wolfhart Pannenberg shows, this notion goes back to the *Third Meditation* of Descartes and the response of Descartes to criticism of that meditation by Caterus. In the *Meditation* Descartes argues for the existence of God on the ground that the idea of God (an infinite substance) could not be generated by Descartes himself: "And I must not imagine that I do not conceive infinity as a real idea, but only through the negation of what is finite in the manner that I comprehend rest and darkness as the negation of movement and light. On the contrary, I see manifestly that there is more reality in infinite substance than in finite substance, and my notion of the infinite is somehow prior to that of myself" (Descartes 1960, 45). Behind this source in turn may be the thirteenth-century scholastic Heinrich of Ghent

intellect of God."[179]   In his *Philosophy of Kant Explained* Watson shows that he knew the source of the doctrine of the self-transcending power of mind. Spinoza, he says, has shown the impossibility of ascribing a separate reality to the finite as such; the necessary complement of the finite is the infinite: "From the point of view of knowledge this may be expressed by saying that knowledge of the finite involves knowledge of the infinite" (*PBR* 10). In words reminiscent of Spinoza, Watson observes that "[t]he human mind as knowing is identical in its essential nature with the infinite mind . . ." (*IRE:C* 242).

To say that Mind is infinite is to say that everything is within the reach of Mind. This epistemological axiom of transcendence is the basis for Hegel's ontological point, that finite and infinite, or subject and object, are not alternative but inseparable, an identity-in-difference. Watson comments, "Surely it is self-evident that a world lying beyond our knowledge is for us nothing at all: it is at best the hypostasis of 'pure being'; which, as Hegel has shown once for all, is unthinkable, and is only supposed to be thinkable because we unwittingly inform it with determinations stolen from the thinkable world that we do know" (*OP* 440-1). "Hegel ... converted the absolute distinction of appearance and reality [*phenomenon* and *noumenon*] into a relative one, and found within the sphere of experience a number of phases, all of which are equally real, though none is a complete and adequate manifestation of the absolute except the most concrete of all. Hegel, therefore, sought in the idea of a spiritual Unity, *i.e.*, a Unity which is essentially

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(Pannenberg 1990, 26).

[179] *Ethics*, 2, Prop. 11, Corollary, in Spinoza 1949, 88. Spinoza continues, "[T]herefore, when we say that the human mind perceives this or that thing, we say nothing else than that God has this or that idea . . . in so far as he is manifested through the nature of the human mind."

self-manifesting and self-knowing, for the true principle which should explain life, art, and religion" (*IRE:C* 323). The same point is made when Watson considers the idea that the finite is an illusion: "When it is said that the finite is an illusion, it is implied that this illusion has at least the reality of a subjective appearance. But the recognition that the finite is an illusion implies that we have somehow transcended the finite and comprehended the infinite" (*PBR* 456-57). This is Kant's point, pushed to consistency, that the criterion of the validity of knowledge is within the circle of mind, and not beyond: the real is the rational.

British Idealism and the Relativity of Knowledge

The British idealists turned Spinoza's argument, adapted by Fichte and held by Hegel, as a weapon against any form of agnosticism.[180] Frederick James

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[180] This tradition goes back through Hegel and Schelling to Fichte. Hegel writes, "To speak of the bounds of human reason is, however, an unmeaning form of words. That the reason of the subject is limited is comprehensible from the nature of the case, but when we speak of Thought, infinitude is none other than one's own relation to self, and not to one's limit; and the place in which man is infinite is Thought" (Hegel 1896, 494). Again, "To make such an assertion [as that limitation of thought cannot be transcended] is to be unaware that the very fact that something is determined as a limitation implies that the limitation is already transcended" (Hegel 1990, 134). "[S]uch characteristics as finite and infinite, subject and object . . . are undoubtedly different, but are at the same time inseparable too. . . . [T]hey are absolutely different, but . . . they are inseparable" (Hegel 1962, 1, 56). Pannenberg summarizes, "The notion of the finite as such can therefore not be thought without already thinking the Infinite at the same time -- at least by implication, certainly not always explicitly" (1990, 25).

In Watson's study of Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* the same Spinozan point is made: the apparent independence of the object of knowledge is really a function of the limitation of the self *by* the self; "A limit, however, which is made by intelligence, intelligence must be capable of removing, and as a matter of fact the process of knowing is the perpetual transcendence of a self-created limit" (51).

Ferrier, influenced by Fichte and an influence upon Watson,[181] expressed it in terms of a necessary knowledge of "the Absolute": "We can be ignorant only of what can possibly be known; in other words, there can be an ignorance only of that of which there can be a knowledge."[182]

Another influence upon Watson, T. H. Green, appeared to waver between Kantian and post-Kantian views of reason and knowledge. According to Watson,

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Fichte argued the same point, that "the finite spirit must necessarily posit something absolute outside itself (a thing-in-itself), and yet must recognize, from the other side, that the latter exists only *for it* (as a necessary noumenon)," and this "is that circle which it is able to extend into infinity, but can never escape" (Fichte 1979, 247).

This is the tradition which Ferrier, Caird and Watson would follow. Another in this camp is F. H. Bradley, who writes: "[T]o urge that our knowledge is of a kind which must fail to transcend appearance, itself implies that transcendence" (Bradley 1893, 2).

[181] Watson's teacher Edward Caird was at St. Andrew's from the winter of 1856 to the spring of 1857 while Ferrier was lecturing on the "History of Philosophy" and "Knowing and Being." Watson himself read Ferrier's *Lectures on Greek Philosophy* and *Institutes of Metaphysics* while an undergraduate and before studying with Caird. Ferrier's intellectual stance is similar to that of Watson: it may have been that Watson learned from both Ferrier's example and instruction that the proper method of philosophy from the start involves refutation, and that the philosopher's task is to show how his thought contradicts the errors of popular (i.e., empiricist) thought. According to Ferrier, the method of philosophy is to convict "the natural opinions of man of being contradictory" (Ferrier 1854, 35). This, of course, has roots in the Hegelian understanding of the history of philosophy.

[182] Ferrier 1854, 404. "If 'the Absolute' can be known only when it is known out of all relation to the faculties of *all* intelligence, it is obvious that there can be no cognisance of it in any quarter--not even on the part of omniscience" (374). This, he thinks, is self-evidently mistaken. Further, he assumes that the reverse is the case: what could be known to God hypothetically must be within the grasp of human beings as well, inasmuch as the mind is the same, whether God's or that of a human being.

Green held that "as the world of experience exists only for a self-conscious being, we must interpret reality as a spiritual, not as a mechanical, system. On the other hand, Green holds that it is only by a gradual process that the spiritual system which constitutes reality comes into existence for us. The world is the manifestation of a spiritual being . . . ." To this point Watson is in agreement, but Green parts company when he says (in Watson's paraphrase) that "this being must be conceived as an 'eternally complete consciousness,' which is in no way affected by the process of experience in us." This contrast of our gradually growing consciousness and the world as it is for the eternally complete consciousness leads Green to deny that we know God "in an absolute sense."[183] Watson criticizes Green for failing to justify his earlier contention that there is no opposition between knowable reality and reality as it absolutely is. This lapse would revert to Kant's dualism of knowledge and faith (*PBR* 140).

Edward Caird, Watson's teacher, made the same Spinozan observation from the epistemological perspective: "We are conscious of ourselves in relation to, and distinction from a world, and therefore, implicitly, of a unity which is beyond this distinction, *i.e.*, of God. This is the circle out of which we never get, and within which all knowledge and all our scepticism is necessarily included. Any attempt to establish a dualism which is not merely the relative of difference in this unity seems

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[183] For Green ontology and epistemology are closely linked: he claims that "'to know God we must be God'," for knowledge of God means knowledge of the spiritual unity of the world (*PBR* 140). It was noted that Watson asked Green's question in the first pages of his *Philosophical Basis of Religion*: "Can we know God without being God? This is a question with which every philosophy of religion must grapple on pain of annihilation" (*PBR* 18-19). For Watson knowledge demands a final identity-in-difference.

to me to refute itself . . . ."[184] Watson too insisted on the necessity of unlimited

knowledge: "[A]n intelligence which is absolutely limited would never know that it

was absolutely limited, since in that case it would be beyond the assumed limits" (*CI*

158). Reality--including the Absolute--must be within reach of the mind, if

knowledge is possible at all.

Watson's Conquest of Agnosticism

Watson uses the Spinozist formula of self-transcendence to surpass

agnosticism as he explores the development of religious philosophy from

agnosticism, to mysticism, to pantheism, to his own position, "Constructive

Idealism," in the concluding chapters of his *Philosophical Basis of Religion*.[185] His

treatment of the movement from agnosticism to mysticism is the same as that of the

movement from Augustine to his own Hegelian correction, involving the

transcendence of abstraction and contradiction. The order is reversed, however:

instead of presenting an abstract identity like Augustine's God (or Spinoza's

Substance), and then the emergence of contradiction (Trinity, divine ideas), he

describes the dualism (Spencer's mind and matter), and then the one Unknown that

is said to lie behind that dualism. Watson's own thought moves up the middle by

denying difference without identity on the one side, and identity without difference

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[184] Letter to Mary Talbot, June 3, 1891, in Jones and Muirhead 1921, 169.

[185] In contrast, George John Blewett considered the agnosticism of the late
nineteenth century to be "[a]gnosticism for its own sake," and not that which "in
ancient and medieval times, was simply one of the moments of Mysticism" (1907, 4,
n. 1).

on the other.[186]

In the chapter on "God and the World," Watson criticizes the dualism of
Spencer and his agnostic, "scientific" peers, with their inadequately related spheres of
mind and matter. Constructive Idealism, Watson maintains, has shown the
inadequacy of Materialism, and of the independent reality of individual minds.
Mind in us, he insists, comes to consciousness of itself "only in so far as it
comprehends the world as an embodiment of a supreme reason" (*PBR* 431); thus he
rules out epistemological pluralism (including subjective idealism).[187] "The
doctrine of such thinkers as Herbert Spencer and others, who first conceive of matter
and mind as two parallel but independent modes of being, and then seek to unite
them through the conception of an unknown Power of which both are the
manifestation, [Constructive Idealism] rejects on the ground that an unknown Power
cannot be known to be manifested in the totality of our experience, but especially in
our own nature, as knowing, feeling, and willing" (*PBR* 431-32).[188] Watson

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[186] In the early *Kant and his English Critics* (1881), Watson noted the differences
between Spencer and Kant: Spencer assumes the existence of *noumena* independent
of mind (a dualism of nature and mind), while Kant's *noumena* are posited to lie
behind phenomena, but cannot be known (301-302). While the former is a dogmatic
position and the second a critical one, both are dualistic.

[187] This goes back to Kant, who held that there is no Cartesian immediate
knowledge of oneself, but only a mediated knowledge, through the world.

[188] This presentation is familiar: here we have Spinoza's Substance beyond
relation (Spencer's "unknown Power") and two independent modes of thought and
extension (Spencer's "force" and "intelligence"). Spencer invited Watson's Hegelian
critique, because his conception of the Unknowable (perhaps God) was
accomplished by abstraction; he writes, "[T]he most abstract conception, to which
Science is slowly approaching [in its description of causes], is one that merges into
the inconceivable or unthinkable, by the dropping of all concrete elements of
thought. . . . By continually seeking to know and being continually thrown back

overcomes Spencer's agnosticism by the Spinozan negation of finite intelligence: the unknown Power (like Kant's *noumenon*) must be explicable in terms of a higher unity, one that can relate it to the differences (force and intelligence), if it is within the reach of mind at all. Constructive Idealism thus affirms the objective reality of God, he says, but a God who is not separate from the world, a God who is known above all in the conscious life of people, though "the infinite fulness of His being is not fully comprehended by us" (*PBR* 432). Spencer begins with dualism, however, and cannot expect to produce identity.

Watson finds implicit truth and error in Spencer's position, but it is the error made explicit which drives thought forward to a higher conception of things. Watson's philosophy agrees with that of Spencer and other scientific agnostics in treating nature as subject to inviolable law. The agnostics, however, cannot find a way to relate mind and nature, for the principle posited as the ground of both is itself inexplicable.[189] The self-contradictory character of agnosticism--knowledge of the unknowable--means that it should be a half-way house to idealism, an "unconscious admission of the inadequacy of the scientific view of the world" (*PBR* 433). Watson counters the pluralism of scientific agnosticism, its difference without identity, with an insistence upon identity, but this in its turn appears to raise the question of identity without difference. Thus he says, "It may still . . . be objected that in seeking

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with a deepened conviction of the impossibility of knowing, we may keep alive the conviction that it is alike our highest wisdom and our highest duty to regard that through which all things exist as The Unknowable" (Spencer 1910, 109-110). This suggestion that the Unknowable might be identified with God brought Bradley's riposte, that "Mr. Spencer's attitude towards the Unknowable seems a proposal to take something for God simply because we do not know what the devil it can be" (quoted in Passmore 1957, 40, n. 1).

[189] Here again is Spinoza's abstract Substance, or Schelling's Absolute, called by Hegel the "night in which all cows are black."

to escape from Pluralism we have fallen into an abstract Monism, which must assume the form either of mysticism or of pantheism, both of which are fatal to our higher interests" (*PBR* 434).

From Agnosticism to Mysticism

The contradiction of dualistic agnosticism drives thought towards the monism of mysticism and pantheism. In Watson's implicit Hegelianism the progression from stage to stage is not direct, but the result of the emergence of contradiction in a prior unity that encompasses both agnosticism and mysticism. This unity is found in the fact that both agnosticism and mysticism assert that there is no positive knowledge of the absolute: when its implications are pressed, mysticism reveals its similarity to agnosticism, in that its Absolute is robbed of definiteness, and it "lapses into the pure Being which Agnosticism expressly affirms" (*PBR* 435). Contradiction then emerges from this identity: "[W]e must recognize that, while Agnosticism and Mysticism are thus in one respect identical, there is a fundamental difference in the process by which each is reached, and, therefore, a fundamental difference in their implicit meaning" (*PBR* 435). The agnosticism of Herbert Spencer and his scientific peers is founded on what Watson calls "his limited view of knowledge as confined to the objective world," whereas the denial of positive knowledge of God in mysticism has the opposite reason, that "the whole sphere of scientific knowledge" is "concerned with what is not in the highest sense real" (*PBR* 436).

Mysticism, like Augustine's thought in Watson's interpretation, falls into the Spinozan error of abstraction, a reality which is identity-without-difference. So mysticism considers the predicates of thought to be negative, not positive, and only applicable to the finite (*PBR* 436), just as (in Watson's reading) Augustine had

characterized the finite as the negation of being. As in Augustine's theology the world is separated from God, so, too, mysticism separates the world from God (*PBR* 437). Watson admits that mysticism does present a mediation between the mystic and God: the mystic rises above the finite and communes directly with God. So "in spirit Mysticism is just the reverse of Agnosticism," for mysticism turns away from the secular to occasional communion with the divine, while scientific agnosticism denies that the infinite "can be brought within the circle of the finite" (*PBR* 437).

From dualistic agnosticism to monistic mysticism--finite to infinite, difference-without-identity to identity-without-difference--religious philosophy is prepared for a higher reconciliation. Mysticism corrects agnosticism by its affirmation of a transcendent Unity, but its blank identity requires correction in turn by a view which does justice to the truth implicit in both agnosticism and mysticism:

> Now, the conception of the Infinite which I am seeking to defend
> agrees with Mysticism in maintaining that in communion with the
> divine man reaches the true consummation of his being, all other
> modes of consciousness being in various degree inadequate and
> relative, and in holding that such communion is no mere act of the
> intellect, but involves the response of the whole man. The
> fundamental distinction, on the other hand, between the two doctrines
> is, that whereas for Mysticism the world of nature, and even all the
> ordinary processes of knowledge and action, are condemned as finite,
> and therefore as beyond or beneath the sphere of the divine,
> Constructive Idealism maintains that not even the most infinitesimal
> atom of matter or the faintest trace of feeling, not to speak of the fair
> creations of imaginative genius or the solid constructions of reflective
> thought, could possibly exist, were they not involved in the Infinite
> and supported by its continual presence and spiritual energy (*PBR*
> 437).

The movement of thought here has been from a criticism of agnosticism as inadequate to the unity of reality, to mysticism as inadequate to the differences in the world. So he writes, "In contrast to this essentially irrational doctrine [mysticism],

we maintain that the world is no arbitrary product of the divine nature, nor can it be held that God is complete in Himself independently of the world. All being manifests Him, and without that manifestation He could not be" (*PBR* 438).

Historical Mysticism and Watson's Hegelian Re-interpretation

Yet the mysticism which Watson is describing is actually an emanational pantheism, perhaps best represented by the thought of Plotinus, in which the lower forms of reality are produced from the higher, and return to the higher in a mystical ascent. In this mysticism there *is* a connection between the transcendent One and the plurality of the world. Also, the finite is *not* "beyond . . . the sphere of the divine," although, as in Constructive Idealism itself, it certainly is "beneath" that sphere: Watson's obscuring of the similarity between this mysticism and his own position indicates the tendentiousness of his analysis.[190] He takes cognizance of the production of the world from the transcendent first principle, but he fails to realize that the world of Neo-Platonism, like the world of Spinoza, Hegel and himself, is a necessary production and not an ("arbitrary") creation. Further, he does not take seriously the return of mind or form (the return of finite spirit through the All-soul and *Nous* to the One): mysticism "first extrudes the world from the Absolute, and then *vainly seeks to restore it to its original source. . .*" (*PBR* 438, emphasis added).

In fact, Plotinus was as anxious as Watson to deny any fundamental dualism between his productive supersensible principles and the sensible world; alongside his

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[190] For both Constructive Idealism and mysticism, as for Spinoza, the finite is not *beyond* God (i.e., God is not a simple identity absolutely out of relation to the finite). Further, Watson's idealism no less than mysticism *subordinates* the finite to the infinite or there would be no particular significance in the ascent to God in either of them. Watson's treatment of mysticism appears to be a dubious exercise in splitting hairs.

emanational model of reality he placed one of "integral omnipresence," in which the higher hypostases are present to the lower ones, but not spatially, a conception he could only attempt to convey with paradoxical images (O'Connell 1968). Watson appears to be oblivious to this immediate mediation, a mediation comparable in some respects to Watson's (and Hegel's) treatment of finitude/infinity. Thus Watson does not see the close similarity between Plotinus's thought and his own. Far from being an improvement upon Plotinus's mysticism, the Constructive Idealist would only be echoing it when he said, "that no device is needed to unite the finite to the Infinite, because they have never been, and cannot possibly be, separated. From all eternity to all eternity, the world is the self-manifestation of the Divine . . ." (*PBR* 438).[191]

Watson elaborates upon the divine identity expressed in the diversity of the world, in opposition, he thinks, to a mysticism which abstracts the divine from the world. In fact, however, the distinctions between Constructive Idealism and actual mysticism *in regard to the world* are so minor as to be negligible, and amount to no more than a bare insistence that in his philosophy the finite is taken more seriously. The mysticism Watson describes is actually a metaphysic in which the concept of emanation and return demonstrates mediation between elements of a self-differentiated reality (the One, *Nous*, the All-soul, the particular souls of humans, animals, and the forms of lower life), while "integral omnipresence" maintains an

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[191] Plotinus is addressing the same anxiety to maintain a fundamental identity with his doctrine of the omnipresence of the higher principle in the finite when he writes, "The Intellectual-Principle [*Nous*] remains an integral, multiple by differentiation, not by spatial distinction. Soul too? Souls too . . . . For soul is not articulated, section of soul to section of body; there is integral omnipresence manifesting the unity of that principle" (*Ennead* 6.4.9, in Plotinus n.d.). The concern here is for an identity-in-difference which takes both seriously, a concern shared by Watson and all his predecessors in the tradition.

immediate identity of all in the *Nous*. As was the case with Augustine's thought, Watson can accomplish his purpose with mysticism only by ignoring whatever conflicts with his thesis of bare, transcendent identity, distorting the historical data and metaphysical pattern.

In regard to the divine, however, there is one difference which appears to be major: that "God is not revealed to us in an ecstatic vision in which all distinctions, including even the distinction of subject and object, vanish away" (*PBR* 439). Watson is insisting (against a mystic like Plotinus) that the highest unity or identity is not beyond thought, or that difference is within the identity of consciousness:

> Now, the idea of the divine, as we maintain, implies the consciousness
> of the ultimate principle which unifies all existence as manifesting itself
> in and through our self-consciousness, which itself is possible only in
> and through the consciousness of the world. Hence, if it were possible
> for us to transcend the distinction of self and not-self, as the mystic
> affirms, we should at the same time destroy the consciousness of the
> divine as the unity which comprehends both (*PBR* 439).

Watson holds that, in contrast to Neo-Platonic mysticism, the progress of reason remains rational through and through, with no departure to a blank infinite beyond the determinations of the finite. There is, however, a fundamental ambiguity to this claim, as will be seen below in the discussion of Watson's final position, Constructive Idealism.

From Mysticism to Pantheism

According to Watson, the unity found in mysticism's transcendent principle had delivered thought from the pluralism of agnosticism. Yet that unity is abstract, so Watson must turn to a metaphysic--pantheism--which takes difference seriously by not denying the continuity of the particular with the divine. However, this in turn appears to threaten the independence of the finite. He observes that "[i]t may seem . .

. that in refusing to admit the separation of God from the world and the self, we have only escaped the defects of Mysticism by falling into Pantheism. If the finite has no independent reality, but is in the last analysis a phase or aspect of the infinite, must we not hold that only God is, and therefore that all other beings, including ourselves, are but modes of the one and only Being?" (*PBR* 440).[192] Against pantheism, Watson will maintain that the finite is more than a mere mode. In *The Interpretation of Religious Experience: Constructive* Watson opposes two similar views of the subject of knowledge: personal idealism and absolutism. "[W]hile it is certain that the conception of absolutely independent individuals is untenable, it is of the utmost importance that we should not fall into the opposite mistake of viewing the world as a unity which completely abolishes all individual subjects, by reducing them to phenomenal aspects of a single Unity in which they are transformed or transmuted, we know not how" (234).[193]

In the latter chapters of *The Philosophical Basis of Religion*, Spinozan pantheism arises as the manifestation of internal contradiction between the inseparable yet mutually exclusive divine attributes of thought and extension.[194]

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[192] Watson's goal, a description of a relative independence of the finite, is the same as that of classical theism.

[193] The "absolutism" is not named, but it is that of Bradley in *Appearance and Reality* (1893).

[194] See Watson, *PBR* 440-47. "The assumed independence of the external world and finite minds is therefore denied, and it is affirmed that the totality of finite objects and of finite minds have no reality in themselves, but exist only as modes of the divine attributes of thought and extension" (*PBR* 441). In this system of thought, Watson observes, the divine, inseparable attributes of infinite extension and infinite thought, or nature and mind, do not conflict, for neither infinite can limit the other. However, the two attributes are also mutually exclusive. (Spinoza writes, "Those things which have nothing mutually in common with one another cannot

Earlier in the same work we recall that Watson treated Augustinian theology as a kind of Spinozism, but in that context he found fault with the *abstraction* of the divine Being. Here it is Spinoza's *dualism* which is the point of critical departure. (The reason for this reversal will be given below.) If the God of mysticism is transcendent, that of pantheism is immanent, or rather the world is immanent in him. Watson summarizes the pantheist position: "[T]he finite as such has no reality, while yet it is real when it is viewed as it truly is, viz. as a phase of the Infinite, which is present in every part of it, and in every part with equal fulness" (*PBR* 442-43).

Watson has reached the penultimate step in his development of the inner logic of religion in *The Philosophical Basis of Religion*. Constructive Idealism and

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through one another be mutually understood, that is to say, the conception of the one does not involve the conception of the other," *Ethics*, axiom 5, in Spinoza 1949, 42). The result of this mutual exclusivity, Watson thinks, is that the unity of God is threatened. Spinoza's answer to this apparent contradiction is "that each completely expresses the infinite; a solution which is merely verbal, or which only covers over a fundamental dualism in the divine nature" (*PBR* 441). Frederick Copleston's criticism is the same: Spinoza's handling of the mind-body problem was merely "a verbal elimination" (1965-1977, 4:223).

Spinoza, Watson says, answers the objection by saying that these differences are *distinctions, not separations*, which as aspects in the Absolute are identical. Watson is not persuaded that the difficulty has been met. On the one hand, the divine appears to be divided, while on the other, the unity of the world is inexplicable. Extension, which is the essence of all extended things, cannot mark one thing off from another, for it is itself absolutely continuous. Thus plurality is a fiction of the imagination, which disappears when we see things *sub specie aeternitatis*, or as they really are. Watson finds the same problem with Spinoza's finite ideas. Thus we have the alternatives Watson found in Augustine: in Spinoza's Substance, an abstraction detached from the finite world (Augustine's Being), and in his infinite thought and extension, a plurality of attributes incapable of reconciliation with the One (Augustine's divine ideas, or the world as created). For criticism of Spinoza by Hegel, see the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3:320-327.

pantheism agree that the world can have no reality apart from God, and "therefore that the finite as such has no existence." Unlike mysticism, pantheism agrees with agnosticism "in seeking for the real within the realm of ordinary experience, and by the exercise of reason," Watson says (*PBR* 444, 443). However, Spinoza's pantheism of the *deus sive natura* is a conception of the divine as manifested equally in both mind and nature, taking no regard for the fuller clarity of that manifestation in mind. This is so because of Spinoza's method, which is to abstract all the differences from things, reducing the universe to "the two great antithetical distinctions of matter and mind, equally related to a single permanent and unchanging substance." While Constructive Idealism "agrees with Pantheism that matter and mind are both manifestations of the divine," it "denies that they manifest it in equal degree" (*PBR* 444-45). Here is Watson's answer to McKillop and to Passmore: Absolute or Constructive Idealism is not the polite form of naturalism because naturalism would "level down" mind to nature, and Watson would "level up" nature to mind.[195]

> It is because Pantheism is contented with the first vague consciousness of the divine as the unifying principle of all modes of being, that it fails to determine it as not merely a unity, but as self-conscious and rational.[196] Constructive Idealism, on the other hand, clearly grasping the truth that the physical world has no independent being, but is merely a phase in the life of mind, refuses to see in it the final revelation of the divine; and therefore it affirms that while the divine presupposes and manifests itself in the external world, its true nature is only disclosed in and to man, because he alone finds that in comprehending himself he is comprehending the ultimate principle of all that is (*PBR* 445-46).

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[195] The expression is T. H. Green's, but is used by Watson for all nineteenth-century philosophies which viewed the universe ultimately in terms of mind rather than matter.

[196] This is reminiscent of Hegel's comment, that "everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not merely as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*" (1977, 10).

Watson does not say it, but this is the Hegelian philosophy, which is philosophy become fully conscious of itself.

Watson is persuaded that his sublation has moved beyond pantheism. We are to recall the ascent which we have made from the first superficial view of reality as a collection of particulars externally related, through the natural laws of physical science which reveal a system of nature, to the organic unity of the world, to the presence of knowing beings in whom this rationality comes to self-consciousness, and finally to "the comprehension of the whole as the expression of an absolutely rational principle." It should now be plain, Watson says, that we cannot grant that "the Divine is expressed with the same degree of fulness in each of the stages mentioned . . ." (*PBR* 445). It is only when this principle of development "is grasped in its complete and final manifestation that it reveals itself as self-conscious and rational."

A Critique of Watson's Development of Religious Philosophy from Agnosticism to Pantheism

Critical observations may be made of Watson's handling of the developments of agnosticism, mysticism, pantheism and his own Constructive Idealism. For one, his account of the development from agnosticism through to pantheism varies from one context to another. In his treatment of Augustine it was found that Watson criticized orthodox Christian theology as though it were Spinozism, neglecting the difference between the Christian doctrine of creation and the Spinozan production of a necessary world. Both were faulted for an abstract infinite. In the latter chapters of the *Philosophical Basis of Religion*, however, Watson begins the treatment of religion by considering mysticism, which he faults for the same abstraction. He then moves on to Spinozan pantheism as the next dialectical development, and

representative not of *abstraction*, but of *dualism*. The explanation for the difference in Watson's treatments is that Spinozism is his paradigm for *all* religious development. That is, the critique of Spinozism's abstract identity and dualistic separation is Watson's hermeneutical key for Augustine's theology and for (Neo-Platonic) mysticism.

Accordingly, every religious doctrine can be represented in terms of Spinoza's errors, which in Watson's Hegelian view are two "moments" of the dialectic which prepare for the (partial) reconciliation which follows. The history of the philosophy of religion is plastic, for as all systems (except the Hegelian) in Watson's interpretation err in both these ways, they can be understood as anticipations or further developments of others. It was noted above that in *The Interpretation of Religious Experience: Constructive*, it is the *plurality* of independent minds in personal idealism (compare Kant's subjective idealism) which prepares for the identity of Watson's absolute, or Constructive, Idealism. In *The Philosophical Basis of Religion* it is the undifferentiated *unity* of pantheism which plays the same role. In the latter instance Constructive Idealism provides the difference-in-identity, distinguishing mind from matter, and placing the former above the latter as a fuller expression of the Absolute. So, too, the alternative systems both fail to treat the finite world properly: mysticism robs the finite of reality (*PBR* 436-37) because it denies the divine reality of the world, but so does its dialectical opposite, pantheism (*PBR* 446), because its emphasis upon the general presence of the divine in the plurality denies the *independent* reality of that world.[197] The critique of Spinozism

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[197] In its tendency to deny the reality of evil, Watson's Constructive Idealism resembles mysticism and pantheism. The parallel with pantheism can be shown as follows. Pantheism treats evil as an illusion on the grounds that the finite is not real. It "denies that the finite has any independent reality whatever, and therefore it consistently affirms that evil, as such, has no existence" (*PBR* 454). The

is also the paradigm for Watson's interpretation of agnosticism; while in the

Philosophical Basis of Religion agnosticism is criticized first for its pluralism and

internal contradiction, in *The Interpretation of Religious Experience: Constructive* it

is simply rejected for its abstract Absolute, pure Being.[198] Thus every religious

system or philosopher is assimilated by Watson to Spinozism as interpreted by

Hegel. Dualism or identity are both penultimate to Constructive Idealism, which

turns these alternatives into perpetually recurring moments of its own

demonstration. This elasticity of interpretation suggests again that the method

produces the desired results regardless of the matter under examination, that the real

fault found by Watson in every philosophy of religion is that it is not Hegelianism,

and that there is *no* philosophy that is not a preparation for Watson's omnivorous

system.

This comprehension and transcendence of former systems is both the glory

and the weakness of Watson's philosophy. Its power to subsume everything beneath

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Constructive Idealist, however, denies the reality of evil ("as such") by reducing it
teleologically to a moment of the Absolute: "[F]rom the highest point of view, evil is
a necessary element in the development of a finite self-conscious being, who only
becomes good by the exercise of his freedom. What from a narrow point of view is
evil, must yet be the condition of the highest good" (*PBR* 359-360). (One might
compare Bradley's remark: "The world is the best of all possible worlds, and
everything in it is a necessary evil," Bradley 1893, xiv). Again, Watson writes, "The
willing of evil is only the willing of negation in this sense, that it is willing that which
is contrary to good; but the negation of good is just as positive as the negation of
evil, and indeed the one is the correlative of the other. . . ." (*PBR* 360). A "negation
of good" which is necessary and positive (cf. the *felix culpa*) of course threatens to
deny the difference between good and evil, or in other words, to call evil illusory.
See note 102 above.

[198] "Reduced, as it logically is, to the pure abstraction of Being, the most that can
be said for Agnosticism is that it clings desperately to the idea of a unity, which it is
unable to reconcile with its theory of knowledge" (*IRE:C* 190).

itself depends upon its logic. The system "works" because the empirical elements (historical forms of "pantheism," "mysticism") can only be grasped by the logical opposition of identity and difference, an opposition so fundamental to human thought that one cannot escape it. Though explicating what it means to say that *this* is *this* and not *that* may be problematic (witness Plato's *Parmenides*), thought itself seems to be impossible without the "three laws"--identity, non-contradiction, and excluded middle. The Hegelian logic goes beyond the Aristotelian, but the notions of identity and difference are not left behind.[199] Even if one is not persuaded by the Hegelian dialectic, one cannot avoid these forms of thought. The result, however, is that one suspects the system of a grand tautology, the "circulation of the same." Earlier systems such as Augustinian theology or mysticism are trimmed on the Procrustean bed of the identity-difference alternative. Whatever contradicts the thesis is ignored. Augustinian orthodoxy, mysticism and Neo-Platonic pantheism *do* demonstrate mediation between opposed elements, but Watson must ignore these and deny their cogency to justify his own Hegelian method.

Aside from the failure of Watson's system to grasp truly the empirical elements, there is a problem with his description of the teleological movement of Reason immanent in history. The dialectical progression of religious philosophy is

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[199] For Hegel, to say $A = A$ is to admit both an identity (A is itself) *and* a difference (A can be compared with itself, and thus must be other to itself); otherwise the equation would be meaningless. Thus one can say that difference arises within identity. Yet Hegelian Reason does not leave the logic of the Kantian Understanding behind in favour of a mystical *coincidentia oppositorum*: the dialectic gathers up the differences in a grander construction, without effacing them. Though this basic opposition of identity and difference is inescapable for any philosophical system, one may attempt to deconstruct (not destroy) the philosophical construction, and ask about what remains unthought in such a philosophy, such as the meaning of being (Heidegger).

not demonstrated, for Watson has no one consistent statement of the progress of religious history. According to his Hegelian view of history, actual philosophical positions should show an order of development, in which contradiction arises within a unity, and is overcome in a higher, more inclusive and determined synthesis. The recurrence of previous positions can be explained as that which is preserved from previous "sublations." However, Watson does not show that the development is actually towards greater philosophical determination or definition. So while agnosticism may be like mysticism *in terms of its logic*, there is no historical evidence that its nineteenth-century form arose from roots that comprehended mysticism as well, nor that it was more developed in form than its earlier expressions. This is not merely to claim that Watson's reasoning is illegitimately *a posteriori*; it is to suggest that it is arbitrary. One suspects that Watson could reverse the order of any development, and show the logical-historical necessity of *that* as persuasively.

VI. *Watson's Constructive Idealism and the Re-emergence of Ambiguity*

Recurrence of a Plotinian and Spinozan Concrete Mysticism?

John Watson's philosophy is a Hegelian result of the development from earlier stages. Against the expression of simple identity in any preceding philosophies, he has insisted upon the equal reality of difference, while in the face of unqualified duality or difference, he has asserted a more fundamental unity. Thus he has defined his position by negating those "partial" or "one-sided" statements on either side.[200] However, Watson's resolution in Constructive Idealism fails to transcend the previous contradictions, in particular those of mysticism and pantheism. Moreover, it can be argued that Watson's system resembles the mystical philosophy of Plotinus and the pantheism of Spinoza (as each does the other). There is the same emanational pattern from the simplicity of the One to the complexity of the Many, and a return through mind. So Watson writes in *Christianity and Idealism* that "the world, while it never loses its unity, is continually growing in complexity and systematic unity" (136). Mind goes over into the plurality of world in order to bring this plurality back to the unity of mind: "The whole process of knowledge consists in the ever more complete reduction of particulars to the unity of an organic whole" (*CI* 137) in which the particulars are not lost, but are grasped in terms of that whole. It is this last notion, the grasp of particulars in a new vision of

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[200] Here again is the Hegelian principle of "all negation is determination."

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all things united, which is particularly reminiscent of the epistemological "ascent" to the Absolute in Plotinus and Spinoza. In the thought of Plotinus, the ascent of the soul to *Nous* results in a vision of the Platonic eternal ideas of all things, including oneself, in simultaneous identity-and-difference. Plotinus writes in *Enneads* 6.5.7: "To Real Being we go back, all that we have and are . . . .; by our part in true knowledge we are those Beings. . . . Since not only ourselves, but all other things also are those Beings, we all are they; we are they while we are also one with all; therefore we and all things are one." "When we look outside of that on which we depend we ignore our unity; looking outward we see many faces; look inward and all is the one head. If man could but be turned about--by his own motion or by the happy pull of Athena--he would see at once God and himself and the All" (Plotinus, n.d., 536).

Watson's Absolute is also similar to Spinoza's third kind of knowledge, which Spinoza describes in the *Ethics* as proceeding "from an adequate [scientific] knowledge of the essence of things"; "and the more we understand things in this manner . . . the more we understand God; and therefore . . . the highest virtue of the mind, or . . . its highest effort, is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge" (Part 5, Prop. 25, in Spinoza 1949. 269). In the preceding Proposition Spinoza writes, "The more we understand individual things [in terms of "scientific" knowledge], the more we understand God." Thought's ascent to God in Spinoza (*scientia intuitiva*) is *not* immediate (a mystical leap beyond finitude) but (like that of Hegel and Watson) mediated through scientific knowledge (*cognitio secundi generis*). Frederick Copleston thinks that Spinoza's deduction of the structure of nature from the divine attributes is a framework for seeing all things as one great system dependent on infinite Substance. "If this is the correct interpretation, it means that in the third level of knowledge the mind returns, as it were, to individual

things, though it perceives them in their essential relation to God and not, as in the first level of knowledge, as isolated phenomena" (Copleston 1965-77, 4:236). If Coplesto 1 is correct, the third level of Spinoza's knowledge. as a vision of all things ir God, resembles the mystical vision of Plotinus's *Nous*, and Watson's vision of the systematic totality as divine. The conclusion of Spinoza's and Watson's systems could be described as a form of "extrovertive" mysticism, in which the external or phenomenal world is transfigured by a Unity which is present in it.[201]

The Conceptual Ambiguity of the Absolute Philosophy as the Result of the Dialectic

The analogical knowledge of the Absolute as the "middle way" between univocity and equivocity, is condemned by Watson in favour of his univocal knowledge, or participation in the Absolute. As has been shown, however, his project does not show itself to be a necessary process of reason. The supposed contradictory elements in mysticism and pantheism are negated, but Watson's higher harmony remains ambiguous as a philosophical position. It lacks definition or concreteness: the negation of the previous dialectical alternatives leaves an absolute philosophy and a description of the Absolute as abstract or indeterminate as is (in Watson's view) the God of classical theism or the One of Neo-Platonism. A connected question has to do with the relation between philosophy and the Absolute: inasmuch as Watson's *absolute philosophy* is a concrete, historical expression of Spirit, is it truly *absolute*, that is, the last word in philosophy, or is there a further expression of Absolute Spirit to come? These lines of thought suggest that an examination of the Absolute and of the Self in Watson's thought will reveal a

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[201] The term is that of Stace (1973). As Rowe and Wainwright observe, it is probable that R. C. Zaehner refers to the same experience with the term "nature mysticism" (Rowe and Wainwright 1973, 252, n. 3).

fundamental ambiguity, corresponding, ironically, to the ambiguity of analogical knowledge of God in Augustinian theology.

The Ambiguity of the Self and of the Absolute

In describing Watson's doctrine of God, it is found that one is describing his concept of the self as well. There can be no neat separations, or even sharp distinctions between God, self and world. The reason for this becomes apparent when one recalls that Kant denied that knowledge of a noumenal reality was possible in regard to God, self and world: with the post-Kantian fall of the separation of *noumenon* and appearance in the thought of Fichte and others, God, self, and world must be considered less as entities than as the poles of necessary relations. So the Self is considered in necessary relation to not-self (Absolute or world), ·· the world is thought as the object of a necessary subject (which subject is self or God), and God (or the Absolute) is conceived as Spirit which necessarily posits the other and knows itself only through the other (self or world). The controlling model in these conceptions is the relation of subject and object in the act of knowing, and in this context John Watson demonstrates the tendency to transform substances into relations: "Subject and object are identical in this sense, that the whole reality of the knowing subject consists in its relations to the object, and the whole reality of the object in its relations to the subject" (*OP 445*).[202] The loss of a relatively

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[202] When one compares this statement with Augustine's treatment of the differences of the Trinitarian Persons, one sees how modalist is Watson's epistemologically-based ontology. For Augustine, the only attributes not "communicated" in the Trinity are those which distinguish the Father as Father in relation to Son and Spirit, the Son as Son in relation to Father and Spirit, and similarly with the Spirit; nonetheless, the Father is not the Son, and so forth. Watson, however, makes the *realities* of subject and object consist only in their relation. One immediately wants to ask, What is it that keeps the insubstantial

independent world (a *noumenon* behind appearances) means the assimilation of God and the self as *subject* in relation to this subject-posited world. Because of this similarity in their relations to the world, ambiguity found in Watson's teaching on the Absolute is also ambiguity in his doctrine of the self. Thus the two can be treated together, though problems peculiar to the notion of the Absolute (or God) arise. This is so because Watson assumes the traditional theistic conception of God at some points, though this conception is not easily reconciled with his Hegelian view of the Absolute.

The Self as Source of the Self and the Other, and the Self as Opposed to the Other

Ambiguity is discovered in Watson's conception of the self when one asks the question, Is the "self" what is commonly understood by that term, opposed to another (the "not-self"), or, because "the world" does not exist independently of the subject, is the object finally comprehended by, or included in, the subject? Is the object truly "other," or is it finally the subject, in a unity beyond the subject-object distinction?[203] On the one hand, Watson assumes a "self" as popularly and personalistically conceived, the finite centre of consciousness and activity. On the other hand, he presents the self as a presupposition of knowledge or goal of human volition (the Self), which transcends all particularity or finite individuality. Indeed, the difficulty of coherently conceiving of the self in relation to the Absolute may be

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endpoints of this relation from collapsing in upon one another?

[203] Realist Etienne Gilson would locate the source of the difficulty here in the Cartesian method: "You can start with thought or with being, but you cannot do both at the same time. . . . If you wish to avoid ambiguity it is here that a stand must be taken" (Gilson 1986, 84).

the Achilles heel of idealism.[204]

If the self is itself, and not the other, then there is no surpassing the subject-object relation. So Watson claims that "the distinction of subject and object cannot be transcended, because it is involved in the very nature of the real world" (*OP* 444). Watson agrees with Bradley's claim that it is untenable to hold that "'in reality there is nothing beyond what is made thought's object'." However, he adds a *caveat*--"that there is nothing which is not made 'thought's object' is manifestly untrue, if the 'thought' here spoken of is thought as it exists for man" (*CI* 150). The force of this is that it is only the Absolute or God which can literally comprehend the world. For the self (and all human selves), on the contrary, there *is* something that is not made "thought's object." The self as subject is finite, meeting its opposite as correlative.

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[204] This problem, a recurring one in the history of idealism, was first raised among the post-Kantians by Fichte. Fichte avoided a simple solipsism by distinguishing between the finite or personal subject and the infinite or absolute subject. It was the latter which manifested itself in the form of the finite subject and the phenomenal world. This was difficult to reconcile with his assertion that all knowledge is confined to that which lies within consciousness. "Part of the difficulty [of reconciling a thorough-going idealism with the importance of an objective world to the activity of the self] arises from the indeterminacy of his fundamental concept of the self or ego, an indeterminacy which frequently leaves it unclear whether it is intended to carry implications of the sort customarily associated with its use in everyday contexts or whether, on the other hand, it is to be interpreted in a fashion that involves a more or less complete severance from these" (i.e., in an absolute Ego) (Gardiner 1982, 123).

A similar problem of the relation of self and the Absolute is found in Hegel's notion of self-consciousness. Wolfhart Pannenberg, agreeing with Feuerbach, notes that "if we begin with the thesis that self-consciousness is the 'ground' and 'truth' of all consciousness of objects, then every thought of an absolute ground of subjectivity must be the product of subjectivity. Consequently, the necessity of presupposing an Absolute could not be explicated ... without immediately running into the supposition that we are dealing with a merely human projection" (Pannenberg 1990, 46).

Yet in other contexts Watson's self is not set in opposition to the not-self, but includes it. As such the notion of self is beyond its common meaning, and shares in the attributes of the transcendent God of classical theism. So Watson can refer to the self as *causa sui*, a term reserved for God by at least some philosophical theologians:

> Thus there is no mind which is not self-produced. We must define mind as a self-conscious energy, which in all its activity is at once object and subject. . . . Thus, in point of fact, the thinking subject is the product of its own activity: which is merely to say that it can only be defined as a self-active being, a *causa sui* . . . (*OP* 426).

Here we also see the self as creative and inclusive of the world (the object). This same creative or productive power is implied when Watson says that the self-activity of the individual is will, and it is by this that the world as ordered has arisen for the individual. When we speak of will, he says, we emphasize the activity of the subject, and when we speak of thought we emphasize the product of this activity, and these two are inseparable aspects of the one self-conscious subject; thus will and thought, subject and object are identical (*OP* 480-81).

Watson claims, moreover, that the subject is not *in* time (like the classical theist's unconditioned divinity), but is conscious of its own activity as a process *involving* time (*OP* 427). His handling of the problem of the unity of the self in the face of change in time is reminiscent of the theological problem of God's immutability and his knowledge of the world.[205]

> It must be observed . . . that an 'idea' is not an individual state which exists apart from the whole conscious life of the subject. . . . [W]hat we must say is that in the process of conscious life *the subject, remaining identical with himself,* successively directs attention to different aspects

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[205] For Augustine's solution to the problem of change in time but not in God, see Chapter V, note 101.

of the ordered world within which his whole mental life goes on. But, while this temporal aspect of the conscious life is real, it is, relative to the complexity of the conscious life as a whole, a superficial and comparatively unimportant characteristic of it. The undue importance attached to the temporal aspect of the conscious life has arisen from the sensationalist doctrine, that the mind is composed of a number of individual states occurring one after the other, and only externally 'associated' (*OP* 447, emphasis added).

The suggestion of divinity is found also in Watson's claim that a condition of self-hood is permanence and the consciousness of permanence (*OP* 472-73).

"Self" and "self"

We find hints here of conceptual contradiction: qualities of a transcendent being and a limited one do not mesh easily. It may be thought that reconciliation would be accomplished if one set Watson's remarks in the context of a dynamic *exitus* and *reditus* of mind. This indeed is Watson's Hegelian conception of the Absolute, also paradigmatic for the universal movement of thought in individuals. The common notion of personality, he notes, emphasises the exclusivity of one person from another, the self-centredness of individuality, which is not adequate to the Absolute. "The absolute is not an abstract person, but a spirit, a being whose essential nature consists in opposing to itself beings in unity which whom it realises itself" (*CI* 267). Even the human is not "merely a person," for the first consciousness of exclusivity is supplemented by a conception of the human as "essentially spirit, that is, a being whose true self is found in relation to what is not self" (*CI* 266). The individual is "essentially self-separative: he must go out of his self-centred life in order to find himself in a truer and richer life" (*CI* 202-3).

The notion of the self as identity-in-difference in fact results in two competing notions of the self. The self of the *causa sui* is really two, the causing and the caused,

the infinite and the finite. For this reason, Aquinas rejected the definition of God as

causa sui, for it is illogical to say that God is self-caused, as he would first have had

to exist before he could cause himself.[206] The modern source of the notion is

Spinoza, who begins his *Ethics* by defining "cause of itself" as "that whose essence

involves existence, or that whose nature cannot b. conceived except as existing" (Part

I, Defn. I, in Spinoza 1949, 41). In his metaphysic this is substance, or God (Part I,

Props. 6, 11, pp. 44, 48).[207] The *causa sui* re-appears in Kantian "reciprocity," or

reciprocal causation, in which effects are also causes of their causes.[208] (Kant and

Watson have in mind Newtonian gravitation.) It is also found in Fichte's ambiguous

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[206] *Summa Theologica,* q. 2, art. 3, in Aquinas 1948, 25-26. Against the notion of a finite God, E. L. Mascall makes the point that the Christian tradition "alleges that a God who was less than infinite, self-existent, and self-sufficient would be altogether inadequate to give the world its existence and moreover would require an explanation for his own. To posit a finite God as the ground of the world simply leaves us with two beings whose existence clamours for explanation instead of one . . ." (Mascall 1949, 125; cf. Moltmann 1985, 84).

[207] E. L. Mascall finds that there are ambiguities in Spinoza's concepts of *causa sui* and substance. Mascall observes that *causa sui* is defined by Spinoza in such a way that it means both that which cannot be conceived except as existing, and that which cannot be conceived unless it exists. Further, substance appears to be defined as that which is distinct and can be *conceived* without reference to anything else--this applies to all things, finite and infinite; on the other hand, the meaning of substance in the same phrase seems to be that which can be *explained* without reference to anything else--and this would apply only to God. Spinoza confuses the two meanings, and the result is his claim that God is the only substance, and that what appears to be another substance is only a mode of God (Mascall 1949, 36-37).

[208] Kant writes, "Now in a *whole* which is made up of *things,* a similar combination is being thought; for one thing is not subordinated, as effect, to another, as cause of its existence, but, simultaneously and reciprocally, is co-ordinated with it, as cause of the determination of the other . . . . This is a quite different kind of connection from that which is found in the mere relation of cause to effect . . ." (Kant 1965, B 112, p. 117).

Self, which is either the transcendent, god-like Self that posits the derivative self (and the not-self in opposition), or the derived self of the empirical consciousness. John Watson uses the notion of the self in an ambiguous way to meet different difficulties in his idealism. So he must account for the obvious limits of individual consciousness, while avoiding the "subjective idealism" of Berkeley and Kant. Again, absolute identity of the self is demanded if the world is truly one, and not a plurality of worlds in individual consciousnesses, yet it is self-evident that one individual consciousness is not identical with another. Thus he characterizes the self now one way, then another.

The Self-Identical Subject

This fundamental ambiguity regarding the self works itself out in ambiguous statements about the relation of the subject to the world of things. In the first place, Watson founds the unity of all things on the fact that it is one mind that knows, so that the world or the not-self is subordinate to a prior or ultimate unity of Self. This first theme has been examined above, but it bears re-examination from the perspective of the self:

> Surely it is self-evident that a world lying beyond our knowledge is for us nothing at all: it is at best the hypostasis of 'pure being'; which, as Hegel has shown once for all, is unthinkable, and is only supposed to be thinkable because we unwittingly inform it with determinations stolen from the thinkable world that we do know (*OP* 440-41).

> There is no reality except intelligence, and hence it cannot create a reality other than itself; and, on the other hand, the world cannot create intelligence, for this would mean that a nonentity created the one and only reality (Watson 1896, 1897, 261).

Though the "knowledge" or experience is not further defined, there is nothing to suggest that it is the experience of a transcendent divinity, beyond the experience of

individuals.[209] In fact Watson *must* intend a reference to an individual subject, for

he must found his epistemology on the experience of the individual who knows. Yet

this subject is not merely individual, for individuality is relativized by the process of

knowledge. Instead the subject is indeterminate.

> That world [of our perception] is from the first a connected whole, in
> which every element is on the one hand referred to a single world, and
> on the other hand to a single subject. Nor can the one be separated
> from the other, *for the unity of the world is made possible by the
> unifying activity of the subject.* It must also be observed that this
> unifying activity is *not the activity of a principle which merely operates
> through the individual subject:* it is essentially the activity of a self-
> determining subject, which is conscious of a single world only in so far
> as in every phase of its experience it is self-active (*CI* 135-36, emphasis
> added).

> What idealism maintains, therefore, is that the impossibility of having
> the consciousness of any object which cannot be combined with the
> consciousness of self is a proof that the world is a rational system (*CI*
> 137).

Since there is no knowledge of anything beyond the ordered world, the existence of

that world depends solely upon the knowing subject; the indeterminate or infinite

Self is the source of everything that can be known, and thus, the source of

everything.

The Correlative Subject and World

Watson also advances a view contradictory to the notion that the subject is

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[209] Watson observes that the universal conceptions involved in knowledge "are
not peculiar . . . to this or that man, nor to man as distinguished from God; but they
are universal forms of all intelligence, the manifestation of the very nature of the
Supreme Intelligence, in whose image our intelligence is made" (Watson 1896, 1897;
258). The system of ideas resulting is thus viewed "as an expression of the
intelligence which he derives from and shares with God" (259).

the source of all, when he posits both one "intelligible universe" or "reality" and "one

kind of intelligence" (*OP*37). Here there is an apparent balance of significance, so

that the known world is a correlative something with which the (finite) self must

come to terms.

> Existence is one, and intelligence is one. . . . I propose therefore to
> start from the principle *that there is one intelligible universe and one
> kind of intelligence.* This is not, I think, an assumption, because, as
> we have seen, any one who begins with the supposition that the
> universe is not intelligible, and that there are two kinds of intelligence,
> falls into insoluble contradiction" (*OP*37).

> If . . . we apprehend what is, we do so in virtue of our own self-
> activity; but what we apprehend is not an arbitrary product of our
> activity, but what belongs to the actual nature of reality (*OP*187).

> There is no object for the subject except in so far as the subject has,
> with more or less completeness, grasped the object, *i.e.* grasped the
> universal nature of it; and therefore the whole objective world exists
> only for the subject who thinks it. . . . Self-consciousness just consists
> in the subject thinking himself. But in this thought of himself is
> included the whole content of his conscious life; and therefore to think
> himself is to think implicitly all that has entered into his experience.
> There is thus no phase of the real which exists beyond thought; the real
> exists only in the medium of thought (*OP*, 480).

These quotations resemble those immediately above, except that here the object has

an apparent independence. It is true that the universe, as object, is not independent

of the subject, but its correlative nature does not permit the subsumption of the

object under the subject. In contrast to the explanations for knowledge which

ground everything in the subject, Watson can explain here that the world is self-

consistent both "because the world is a systematic unity, *and* because reason in all

self-conscious beings is an organic unity . . . (*CI*136, emphasis added). The first

reason given is actually tautological--the world is a system because it is a system--but

the tautology underlines the duality of the explanation: the orderliness of the world, and not merely the organic unity of reason in all subjects, is a second reason that order is found in the world.

The two conflicting views of the self (as the source of the not-self, and as the opposite of the not-self) come into sharp relief when Watson discusses the philosophy of idealist Rudolf Hermann Lotze (1817-1881). Lotze ..as popular in America in the 1870's and 1880's, and influenced that other leading idealist philosopher, Josiah Royce. Henry Jones, who followed Edward Caird in the Chair of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow, wrote *A Critical Account of the Philosophy of Lotze* (1895). Though an idealist, Lotze was a pluralist, holding that the difference between persons (God and others) was unsurpassable. According to Lotze, Watson says, the subject only comes to consciousness of an object that is already determined. Knowledge is the opposition of the object to the subject. If the subject were able to transcend this opposition, he or she would *become* object, but would have no *knowledge* of it. Though Watson does not say this, such a transcendence in Watson's view would put the subject in the position of the Neo-Platonic mystic, for whom final transcendence is an ecstasy beyond knowledge.

> Lotze, in short, goes further even than Mr. Spencer. The latter denies that *we* can ever transcend the opposition of subject and object; the former adds that *no* intelligence, however perfect, can ever transcend it. It follows, according to Lotze, that knowledge can never *be* the 'thing itself.' Now the whole of this reasoning rests upon the assumption that we can have a knowledge of reality only if the distinction of subject and object is transcended; and, as this distinction is one 'never to be transcended,' there can be no knowledge of reality. The simple answer is, that the distinction of subject and object cannot be transcended, because it is involved in the very nature of the real world. Lotze assumes that the object exists apart from the subject, and then he puzzles himself to find out how one can pass over into the other. There is of course no intelligible answer; for, if the subject is

separate from the object, and the object from the subject, they never
come into contact at all. But there is no object apart from the subject,
and therefore no need that the one should either *be* or *become* the
other. The real world is a unity in which the fundamental *distinction*
is that of subject and object; but it is only a *distinction*, not a
separation. Subject and object are *identical* in this sense, that the
whole reality of the knowing subject consists in its relation to the
object, and the whole reality of the object in its relation to the subject.
We may, therefore, say that the subject *is* the object, if we are careful
to add that what is meant is the total reality in its two distinguishable
aspects of knower and known. One difficulty which is felt in accepting
this view arises from the fact that the 'object' or 'world' is usually
identified with the world of nature, which seems to be distinct from the
subject as a knowing, feeling, and willing being. The restriction,
however, is perfectly arbitrary; the 'object' or 'world' includes *all*
phases of reality, and only in this wide sense can it be said that it is
identical with, or rather correlative to, the subject (*OP* 444-45).

Watson struggles here to resolve the subject-object relation either with an ultimate

opposition of the two ("the distinction of subject and object cannot be transcended,

because it is involved in the very nature of the real world") or an ultimate identity

("the subject *is* the object, . . . the total reality in its two distinguishable aspects of

knower and known").

The ambiguity of his conclusion is indicated when he writes that the object as

all phases of the world "is identical, or rather correlative to, the subject" (*OP* 445).

In another context Watson reverses the order of the alternatives and indicates the

logical necessity that governs the thought: "The system of experience, then, as we

may fairly argue, presupposes a thinking intelligence as its correlate, or rather as the

condition without which it could not exist at all" (*PBR* 85). He cannot decide

between correlative or reciprocal dependence on the one hand, and unilateral

dependence on the other, between the correlative and the identical, and so glosses

over the great difference between these relations. In response he would likely

observe that this is the Hegelian dialectic, in which the absolute is "a spirit, *i.e.*, a being whose essential nature consists in opposing to itself beings in unity with whom it realises itself" (*CI* 267). If this is his meaning, he should have said that the object is identical *and* correlative. Such an answer would point again to the ambiguity of the absolute in Watson's thought, as described above, but it also would clarify the indeterminacy of his notion of the self as subject. Either the subject transcends the subject-object relation, comprehending the subject-object relation at some point in the process, or the self as subject remains eternally locked in opposition to the object, the not-self (as Lotze would hold). To maintain both views is to remain in ambiguity.

Ambiguity in the Transcendence of the Subject-Object Relation in the Absolute

Ambiguity continues to appear as one pursues the question, Is the subject-object relation transcendable, that is, is it surpassable in the absolute? Watson addresses this question in *Christianity and Idealism*. In response to those who think that the absolute should be conceived as something higher than a self-conscious subject, Watson argues that the distinction of subject and object is not a limitation. It could only be such a limitation if there were something incomprehensible in the object, which is not the case.

> The view which is here maintained is that, in the absolute, subject and object are absolutely identical; in other words, that the subject is its own object. If it is objected that in that case there is no distinction between them, the answer is that as the subject comprehends all reality, there is in the absolute no distinction *between* subject and object, but there is an infinity of distinctions *within* the absolute. (*CI* 268).

Here it seems that not only has the *separation* between subject and object disappeared, but even the distinction between them. This contradicts what Watson

says in his *Outline of Philosophy*, "that the distinction of subject and object cannot be transcended, because it is involved in the very nature of the real world" (*OP* 444). Aside from outright contradiction, there is the obscurity of his conclusion, with its unhelpful contrast of distinctions "between" and "within" the absolute. Apparently he is affirming a subject, a Self, which surpasses the derivative subject and object. The question remains, Is there a distinction (among the "infinity of distinctions") between subject and object in the absolute?

In *An Outline of Philosophy* Watson sets the duality of subject and object within the context of the final unity of the subject and comes close to balancing the two conceptions. Discussing Kant, he observes that self-consciousness gives rise to the Idea of "a unity in which the opposition of subject and object is completely transcended" (*OP* 429). "Complete transcendence" does not mean the surpassing of the subject-object relation: "For that unity cannot consist in the mere elimination of the distinction of subject and object--which could only result in the idea of a purely abstract being, with no determinate character--but in a concrete unity in which the distinction of subject and object is preserved while it is embraced within a single self-consciousness" (*OP* 429). Thus "the rational subject is for itself at once subject and object, self-determined and self-determining" (*OP* 430).

In an earlier passage of the same work, however, this supposed balance is more an unstable wavering back and forth between mutually-opposed positions. At one moment he stresses the unity, the self as all-inclusive, and at the next he implies a self or subject that is opposed by not-self (*OP* 187-88). So he claims that if our knowledge were absolutely complete, we would be absolutely identified with the object. This identification of subject and object would not mean the destruction of our self-activity (or our knowing), but its perfect realization. It seems that Watson is affirming the point noted above, that the subject-object relation is never transcended,

but his language points in another direction: "We therefore see that absolute individuality would mean the *absolute* transcendence of the opposition of subject and object" (*OP* 187-88, emphasis added).[210] However, with the human being this absolute transcendence remains an ideal that is always sought and never found: "If he had no self-activity, he would never get beyond the first opposition of subject and object; if he had complete self-activity, he would absolutely transcend the opposition." If one grants to Watson an absolute knowledge which does not leave behind the subject-object distinction, one wishes to know why he writes repeatedly of the "absolute" transcendence of this relation. In knowledge, he asserts, the subject is continually abolishing the distinction between subject and object, "but it is a distinction which for him is abolished only in idea."[211] Not satisfied with this, he adds, "Yet in a sense the opposition is already abolished." He continues by observing that if the subject were entirely unconscious of the unity of subject and object, there could be no consciousness that actual knowledge falls short of the ideal.

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[210] Compare the thrust of the claim that absolute self-consciousness is the "perfect unity of subject and object," "a unity" which "admits of no degrees . . ." (*CI* 199).

[211] Watson's discussion of mysticism reveals both the difficulties inherent in his views and the fact that he does not really advance beyond mysticism. He writes, "To think is to define, and even if we take thinking in its highest form as the consciousness by the self of the self, we introduce definition, and therefore limitation; for even self-consciousness is the consciousness of the unity which is identical in all modes of consciousness, or, in its purest form, the unity of the subject as consciousness, and of the subject as an object of consciousness" (*PBR* 434). Thus Watson agrees with the mystic's claim that even the highest form of thinking is defining or limiting; mysticism goes beyond this, the mystic claims, to "a Unity, in which all differences are dissolved, even the difference of subject and object." In light of the discussion to this point, the mystic could ask Watson if his Unity of self or consciousness does or does not transcend the difference of subject and object. If Watson agrees with the mystics that thinking means the introduction of limits, does he agree with them too in the transcendence of those limits, i.e., in mysticism?

Yet this consciousness of partiality would be impossible if the subject were not beyond it in idea. The consciousness of knowledge, and of its limits, "involves the consciousness, actual or ideal, of the unity of self and not-self" (*OP* 188). The curiously repetitious form of Watson's argument is the continual positing of limits, and the surpassing of these limits in idea--the endless dance of the finite and the infinite that Watson thought he had left behind.

The Absolute as Implicit Knowledge and as Complete Knowledge

Ambiguity appears, too, when one asks what it is that makes absolute knowledge "absolute." As noted, Watson holds that "self-activity" is enough to overcome the first opposition of subject and object, but it is not so complete that the opposition is absolutely transcended. "In self-conscious energy, object and subject are identical. In man this energy of self-consciousness is not complete, because man is not completely self-conscious. But in the absolute there must be complete self-consciousness" (*CI* 199). Complete self-activity or self-realization appears to be the complete determination of the world as object and of the subject as knower, so that they are in some sense one without ceasing to be two. Absolute knowledge, then, is *complete*, explicit knowledge, the knowledge of all that is and all that can be, without remainder. It is clear that no human being has (complete) absolute knowledge ("a complete knowledge of the world is never attained" [*CI* 137]); it is only the knowledge the Absolute (as subject) would have of itself. Similarly, he writes that "it is manifest that the absolute cannot be realised, as it truly is, in beings lower than man. . . ."; he then adds, significantly, "that even in man it is not realised in its absolute completeness" (*CI* 261, emphasis added).

But Watson uses the term in another way, which one might denote as the (implicit) absolute. By this is meant the notion that to know a part is to know the

whole as a unity, for all things must fall under the unity of consciousness. This usage appears when Watson engages the arguments of Henry Sidgwick. He claims that Sidgwick has confused complete and absolute knowledge: there is not an *absolutely complete knowledge* of reality, but a knowledge that *reality is absolutely complete* (*OP* 334). Sidgwick's views assume that knowledge is the accumulation of particulars, but, as Watson has established in demolishing the empiricist's epistemology, "[k]nowledge is never of the mere particular" (*OP* 40). Thus to know a part is implicitly to know the whole. As one moves up the scale from things to conscious beings, one finds that only a principle of self-conscious reason explains the latter (*PBR* 433), and must explain the universe. Thus Watson's philosophy as possessing the principle of self-consciousness is (implicit) absolute knowledge, whose proof is the demonstration of itself as the inevitable result of disciplined thought. Watson indeed can say that in its climax such thought "loses itself in the all-embracing glory of God . . ." (Watson 1872 [1988], 39). Absolute knowledge as implicit knowledge of all things *is* possible for finite minds.

These two senses of the term "absolute knowledge" are the dialectic of finite and infinite: absolute knowledge as *complete* always lies beyond finite, actual knowledge, but absolute knowledge as actual knowledge is consciousness that the individual can move beyond the finite "in idea," that is, by thinking the idea of the self-differentiating and self-conscious principle. So Watson claims that human beings do not have explicit knowledge of all things--the (complete) absolute--only partial knowledge--the (implicit) absolute. Thus the two "absolutes" are distinct: the unknowability of (complete) absolute knowledge is immediately annulled by (implicit) absolute knowledge, but then this unknowability is posited afresh, in an apparently endless dialectic. The question raised by this dialectic is whether there is at any time anything like unambiguous knowledge of the Absolute (knowledge

individuals would have of the Absolute as object, the totality of self-differentiated reality)? With his two uses of the notion of the absolute (complete and implicit), Watson must answer No; ambiguity is inescapable.

Is Absolute Knowledge Conceptually Possible?

The significance of this ambiguity for the integrity of Watson's philosophy of religion is very great. If (complete) absolute knowledge is finally the consciousness that only the absolute Subject (God) has of himself, and *if this complete knowledge cannot be had by any human being, then no human being can know the absolute or God unqualifiedly.* Knowledge of God by the human subject is not exhaustive, and therefore on Watson's terms is not univocal knowledge. (In the language of representation as opposed to that of Hegelian Reason, the world of experience is God, but God or the world is more than that which can be known by persons.) But this *qualified* knowledge of God is very similar to that analogical knowledge described by the Fathers and repudiated by Watson.

Here we recall Watson's discussion of Green's epistemology and metaphysics: Watson says that according to Green, "it is only by a gradual process that the spiritual system which constitutes reality comes into existence for us." "The world is the manifestation of a spiritual being," yet "this being must be conceived as an 'eternally complete consciousness,' which is in no way affected by the process of experience in us." Watson sees a contradiction here: the opposition of our gradually growing consciousness and the world as it is for the eternally complete consciousness leads Green to deny that we know God "in an absolute sense." Watson must reject this re-introduction of the Kantian *noumena* (*PBR* 140). The conclusion would appear to be that, for Watson, God as subject grows in experience. Yet Watson rejected this. Armour and Trott asked the question that served as our point of

departure: "If God is not 'a Being which grows in experience,' [as Watson claimed,] "are we back with the God who is a mystical transcendent unity quite apart from nature which *is* a process?" (Armour and Trott 1983, 314, quoting *IRE:C* 125). Watson would not permit this either.

Watson's opponents in argument can never pin him down, for they think of the absolute as somehow beyond what is known in human experience. Watson both denies this by his part-implies-the-whole movement of thought (the implicit absolute), and affirms it by the claim that our knowledge is not absolute (complete), like the self-consciousness of the absolute intelligence. Watson's responses to critics are seldom straightforward. When he faces a question that goes to the heart of the ambiguity of the self in his thought, that is, whether the individual subject can be identical with the universe as a whole, he responds that this problem is based on a mere misunderstanding. "It is not contended that the individual is the whole, but only that the whole is for the individual always the unity of subject and object, the one being essentially involved in and correlative to the other" (*OP* 445-46). The question really asks about the connection between the individual subject and the universe as the totality which is known: Is this knowledge had by some transcendent Self, or by that individual subject? Watson's answer skirts the issue.

The Ambiguity of Hegelianism as Absolute Knowledge

Yet Watson ambiguously suggests, too, that even absolute (*complete*) knowledge is not beyond human knowledge. As was shown, he claims on the one hand that the absolute (complete) is not known. So he agrees with Kant that complete self-consciousness is impossible in a being whose conscious life is always developing; self-consciousness is only possible in the process of knowledge, and as knowledge is never complete, self-consciousness is never complete (*OP* 428). On the

other hand, however, he concludes his response to Sidgwick by stating: "[a]n adequate system of philosophy is . . . a rational system in which all the conceptions by which reality is grasped are viewed in their orderly connection, as illuminated by that conception--or 'Idea' as Hegel calls it, with a tacit reference to the Platonic ἰδέα or εἶδος and the Kantian *Idee*--which is presupposed in all, *but is only explicitly known as the final result of the whole process*" (*OP* 336, emphasis added). Here again, as he had suggested in his use of the terms "*absolute* transcendence" of oppositions, Watson is suggesting that human beings know, or at least *will know*, the absolute (*complete*).[212] This is the ambiguity of Watson's eschatology observed in the previous chapter, but viewed from the angle of human subjectivity: is the goal realized, or does the human subject forever reach after an absolute knowledge beyond one's grasp, though somehow implicit in the grasping?

Can the Absolute as Subject Know Anything?

Even if one grants to Watson an absolute (*complete*) knowledge at the conclusion of the world process, a difficulty appears which points again to the metaphysical roots of Watson's ambiguity or confusion. According to him, on general epistemological grounds established by Kant (against Descartes), if a subject is not conscious of anything beside itself, then knowledge is impossible. There must be an object opposed to the subject as other:

> If we suppose that in being conscious of himself, the subject is
> conscious of nothing else, it is manifest that such a being would have

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[212] When Watson writes that "[t]he religious consciousness . . . implies that reality is itself self-conscious spirit, not merely that it admits of complete self-consciousness in some future and hypothetical age" (*IRE:C* 124), he qualifies this "futurist eschatology" by reference to present (implicit) knowledge, while not indicating whether complete self-consciousness is possible for human beings now or later.

no consciousness even of himself. For all reality would for him be
limited to determinations of himself, and therefore he would never
contrast with these determinations the determinations of other forms
of existence (*OP* 186).

However, if this is followed to its conclusion, it is fatal to Watson's conception of the

absolute as self-knowing, because, according to Watson, the Absolute (conceived as

subject or "Self") knows nothing that is not the determination of itself. Therefore

absolute knowledge would be impossible even for God. The problem is related to

that of the infinity of God, a problem which Watson thought Hegelianism had

solved: is the world an addition to the reality that is God? If one answers with

Spinoza and Hegel, No, then God's knowledge of the world is knowledge only of

God. This re-directs attention to the "Self"-"self" distinction above: on the one hand,

Watson would say that the "Self" produces the world (or posits the not-self) from out

of itself (in his more Hegelian language, that Spirit self-differentiates); on the other

hand, the finite "self" is engaged in the knowing process in opposition to the not-self.

As was observed in regard to Fichte, the two meanings of "self"--finite and infinite--

are confused. The axiom noted above, that the subject knows itself only through the

other, is in direct conflict with the notion of the "Self" (or Absolute) as productive of

the known world. One implication of this is that if knowledge for finite subjects

cannot be restricted to the self, then the (self-)knowledge that God has must be

different in kind from that of human beings. And this in turn coheres with the

Fathers' view of an analogy only, between divine and human knowing.

The Ambiguity of Self and the Return of the Kantian Noumenon

The ambiguity of self (Self as comprehensive of self and other, or self and not-

self in perpetual opposition) also appears in Watson's consideration of that which

might exist but not be known. Knowledge for him depends upon the unity of mind,

whether, as in Kant, the unifying principle of "transcendental apperception," or the unity of the self-differentiating, self-knowing reason of Hegelianism. Any introduction of a surd element, whether Aristotelian matter or the fundamentally inchoate *sensa* of the empiricists, means that the unity implicit in knowledge is vitiated entirely. Despite his insistence that the rational is the real and the real is the rational, one can see the persistence of something like Aristotle's unintelligible matter or Kant's *noumenon* in Watson's uncertainty about the epistemological and ontological status of that which lies beyond knowledge. As has been noted, Watson insists that there is no perception or knowledge of that which is not intelligible, a formed matter: anything beyond the reach of mind is equivalent to "pure nothing". However, "pure nothing" comes back to haunt him when he discusses "The Feeling Soul" in *An Outline of Philosophy* (449ff.).

Although the world of our experience is only possible for a thinking subject, Watson does not deny that there is a stage in individual life that is prior to experience. Yet this stage of feeling, he says, is metaphysically insignificant. The idealistic view "denies that, in our thinking experience, there is any mere 'manifold,' [of sense experience] maintaining that, when the sensitive life has become an object of knowledge, it has been transformed by being determined as a knowable aspect of the one world which exists only in the medium of human thought" (*OP* 450). It is clear here that the sensitive life becomes something knowable, is transformed, and so forth, which implies that there is something beyond knowledge that comes to be known. If this is correct, Watson is admitting the Kantian dichotomy of *noumena-phenomena*, except that the *noumenon* is now pre-conscious sensation and not a thing hidden behind the sensations. Just as Watson had to overthrow Spencer's vague "Reality" beyond the distinctions of subject and object, mind and matter, so the foundation of his philosophy of mind depends upon either the denial that this

"experience" is anything, or the inclusion of the psychologist's so-called "pre-conscious experience" within consciousness. Watson attempts to take both routes, but the result is ambiguity again.

Pushing the Noumenon Into Non-Existence

In his pursuit of this problem, Watson quotes Bradley, who says that at the feeling stage there is nothing beyond what is presented, including no perception of difference and likeness and no relations. There are no feelings, just *feeling*. As Bradley says, "'It is all one blur with differences that work and that are felt, but are not discriminated'."[213] Watson objects to Bradley's use of the term "presented," because there is no subject-object distinction at this stage, and the term is more appropriate for the level of perception. Similar criticism is made of Bradley's use of the term "experience". Watson rejects the view that feeling is the model for the unity of consciousness, saying that it is only "the undifferentiated possibility of unity and difference," without being one or the other (*OP* 453). (Here is an echo of Hegel's argument with Schleiermacher over the latter's "feeling of absolute dependence.") Emotion is not this feeling, he observes, for in emotion the subject has passed through the discriminating stages of perception, imagination and thought, and come back to itself. Watson objects again to Bradley asking if the feeling life is discrete or continuous; a better question is, Is the feeling life neither discrete nor continuous? Watson affirms that it is neither.

"Feeling" as Something on the Border of Being

However, Watson can only pursue this *via negativa* so far, reducing the pre-

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[213] *Mind,* O.S. 12:343, quoted in *OP* 451.

conscious state to a surd beyond thought and reality. To continue in the same direction would be to fail to come to terms with the new interest in the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious in nineteenth and early twentieth-century psychology. Watson's Hegelian philosophy claimed to take seriously the scientist's partial experience of the world, and to transcend it. So he takes another tack when he writes that the feeling life is "the vague awareness of unity and difference, but explicitly neither the one nor the other" (*OP* 453). "Perhaps we cannot better state the character of the purely feeling being than by saying that it is a felt unity-in-difference, understanding that neither the unity nor the difference is 'explicit'" (*OP* 455).

This is a reversal of his argument which is fraught with difficulties. For example, one asks who it is that feels or is vaguely aware of this unity-in-difference? Watson answers that it is not the self--"the Ego"--for we are not yet at the stage of such explicit (self-)differentiation. The result is that there is a "being" which "feels" and yet is not a self, and there are "feelings" but not really feelings *of* anything. Despite his disclaimers, his acknowledgement of the intelligibility and reality of this pre-conscious state is at the same time the admission of a fundamental dualism of self and world (in which the "feeling being" is the implicit subject). Inasmuch as it is part of the world of mind and exists, Watson must overcome this dualism and transform this "feeling being" into the transcendental Self as the primordial unity from which self and not-self arise.

Concerning the possibility of something existing beyond the reach of mind, then, Watson is ambiguous. He denies the existence of such a *noumenon* categorically, on the grounds that it would be for us nothing at all. Yet he admits it as well, when he describes the "feeling being." However, he claims that this consciousness is a kind of unconscious, for there is no division into subject and

object. At another point, however, he says that there is a vague awareness of the self and not-self distinction (or unity-in-difference). The contradictory lines of his thought are indicated when he refers to "an undifferentiated unity-in-difference" in the feeling being (*OP* 457); in this phrase he attempts to grant priority to the unity of the (transcendental) subject while denying that unity and difference are explicitly present. (This may be clearer if one expands his terms as "undifferentiated undifferentiation-in-differentiation.") The ambiguity of the self (as either the all-inclusive Self or the self in opposition to the correlative not-self) thus is expressed in Watson's handling of the ambiguously *noumenal* pre-conscious.

The Absolute and the World Before Minds: Beyond Subject and Object

It is clear that God, self and world are integrally related in Watson's Hegelian thought. Not only does Watson's notion of the self spill over into categories usually reserved for the divine, but his concept of the Absolute is ambiguously identified with the natural world. This comes to light in his discussion of the Absolute and the evolution of that world. As has been shown, he will not admit the existence of an Absolute separate from the world that is its expression. His argument for the existence of the Absolute is that such a self-determining and self-conscious principle is logically prior to knowledge of the world.[214] As in the naturalistic evolutionary view of things there appears to be no *temporal* priority of mind to matter in history,

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[214] "Now, no other principle than one which is self-conscious can explain the existence of self-conscious beings; and as these include and yet transcend all other forms of being, the universe must be held to be, when properly understood, self-conscious and rational. Thus, by following out the presuppositions of reality as known to us, we at last reach the idea of an absolute subject-object, in which the distinction of subject and object is seen to be a distinction within an absolute identity" (*OP* 173).

so the existence of a physically and biologically organized world before there were minds capable of cognizing that world seems to be fatal to his idealism. An obvious difficulty is that if Watson denied the pre-existence of a distinct Absolute subject, then he would be granting with realists the existence of an object, the world, necessarily beyond the scope of particular minds, as this object would exist before these minds did. As with other reappearances of the Kantian *noumenon*, the resulting epistemological dualism would mean the destruction of his Hegelian project.[215]

Equally pressing is the question, How can one conceive of the subject which produced and knew an object before there were any particular minds? As Watson asks, "If external nature has no reality apart from a creative intelligence, how, it may be asked, are we to explain the fact that prior to the advent of life and intelligence upon the earth, there was, if we are to believe the majority of scientific men, nothing but inorganic nature?" (*PBR* 128-29). He cannot have recourse to the Christian doctrine of creation, in which the divine mind in some sense pre-exists and is separate from the world, nor to a source of the world in the supersensible principles of Neo-Platonism, for these solutions would be, in his own terms, dogmatic, not scientific. Therefore there is a serious difficulty when Watson writes of "the actual" as "a manifestation in various degree of one self-conscious and self-determining

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[215] An early anonymous review raised precisely this objection against Watson's identification of Reality with Intelligence: "Geologists tells us that a time was, at a remote period in the history of the earth, when neither man nor any other animal existed on it. Apart from revelation, then, and dealing with the subject not theologically but philosophically, it may be confidently asserted that, at that time, no intelligence existed on the earth, or, for all we know, anywhere else in the universe. Does any one doubt that a noumenal universe existed then, although so far as we know or can prove, no intelligence existed capable either of knowing a phenomenal universe or of imagining an ideal one?" (Review 1881, 328).

spiritual being" (*CI* xxxvii). A similar problem arises when he writes that "[t]here is no 'world of things' as distinguished from the 'world of ideas,' but only a single real world which exists nowhere but in intelligent experience" (*OP* 442-43). The world clearly existed before mind did.

To solve his problem with the existence of a self-conscious spiritual being before the dawn of consciousness, Watson must ignore the theme of difference or duality in the Absolute. So at one point the Absolute as self-consciousness or subject-object gives place in his argument to the theme of the continuity, or rather the *identity*, of nature and consciousness:

> The changes in the world . . . are not absolute transitions. There is no break in the continuity of the world process. It is the same world which persists through all the changes . . . Therefore, the appearance of life and consciousness upon the earth cannot have been their absolute origination; in other words, the primitive nebular matter must be conceived as involving, for one who grasped what it implied, all that comes out of it (*PBR* 128-29).

If the Absolute is not yet expressed in recognizably mental forms, that is, in particular minds, social realities, religions, or philosophies, it still is implicit in unknown and unknowing nature.

This stress upon the unity of the world before mind creates difficulties for Watson's philosophy, however. If he means by this that there is no subject-object relation before the advent of consciousness, but an identity necessarily beyond any division of consciousness and life and nature, then this is contradicted by other claims that consciousness is irreducible:

> For consciousness is not, as we have seen, something that can be separated from other modes of reality, *nor is it something that can be reduced to other modes of reality*. None the less, it is possible only because the nature of existence as a whole makes it possible. If consciousness were incompatible with the nature of the universe, it could not be: since it is, it must be regarded as a mode, and the highest

mode in which existence presents itself (*OP* 173, emphasis added). Watson's entire argument against the empiricist tradition depends upon his demonstration that mind cannot be reduced to matter (or to sensa) without making the fact of knowledge completely inexplicable. Mind is *logically* prior to matter: the unity of consciousness must be presupposed to explain the knowledge of anything. Hence, as has been said, he stresses the *difference* between subject and object, or mind and world, within an identity that is itself subject or mind.

On the other hand, if Watson means that mind, as implicit in nature, nonetheless exists as mind so that the subject-object relation is eternal like the world, then he is driven to some kind of panpsychism, in which consciousness characterizes all of nature, including the mineral. L. P. Chambers of Washington University advanced this panspychic interpretation of Watson's thought on different grounds, writing that "since some of our ideas, i.e., the objects of sense perception, are extended, the mind must also be extended, since it is the field of known objects" (Chambers n.d., 2). This would make Watson's epistemology coherent, but it would also raise questions for his metaphysics: for example, is nature really other to mind, if nature is a physical and mental reality?

There are thus competing views of the Absolute in relation to the world before there was consciousness. Watson does not resolve the question of whether mind or intelligence implicit in nature is truly mind or is reducible to something else (either matter, or a *tertium quid*). So on the one hand, the Absolute is simply identical with the universe, or "existence," beyond the distinction of subject and object. On the other hand, the Absolute is one and other, consciousness and nature, the self-differentiated subject of the world as object.

Watson might have abandoned a Hegelian notion of Absolute Mind or Spirit going over into its opposite and producing the world of nature, in favour of an

emergentist view of consciousness in which entirely novel events occur. In this view, the irreducibility of mind would only apply to it *after* mind arises. Before the birth of consciousness nature would be all there is; afterwards, consciousness would be evidence that the Absolute (the universe) is then self-conscious. This solution, however, would bring fresh problems, particularly for the notion of the Absolute. So the "idea of an absolute subject-object" may be implied by the rationality of the universe, but in terms of *existence* (rather than idea) the absolute (the universe) could only *come to be* the subject of itself as object. Watson's arguments demand *logical* priorities: that a single subject is necessary in order to speak of the world, and a world is necessary for there to be a subject which knows. These arguments work with little difficulty in a timeless universe in which life and mind have always existed with the physical and chemical. It is when he attempts to make them cohere with the *temporal* priority of nature that Watson's arguments run into the ambiguity of becoming. For example, one asks: if it only *becomes* absolute, is the Absolute truly absolute? This is, of course, the problem of the notion of divine mutability in any theology. Watson in fact does not advance the emergentist view. The conception of the Absolute before the existence of minds remains problematical, and the question is not really decided: Is the universe itself self-conscious (and therefore self-differentiated) before the advent of conscious beings, or is it simply nature, in which a potential for self-consciousness is to be found? When Watson writes that "The absolute is not an abstract person, but a spirit, *i.e.*, a being whose essential nature consists in opposing to itself beings in unity which whom it realises itself" (*CI* 203), he suggests the former; when he admits the absence of a creative intelligence in the world before humankind, he seems to affirm the latter.

The Ambiguity of Totality and Infinity

The ambiguity of the Absolute in Watson's thought can be traced to the ambiguity of Spinoza's totality of things which is central to the thought of Hegel and Watson.[216] Watson insists that the totality is all there is; there is nothing beyond. Yet the totality is *more than a sum of its parts*, and thus it is in some sense (self-)transcendent. This notion of totality works well when one considers organisms, whose life is not merely an agglomeration but something that arises naturally from a physical and chemical basis. However, the transcendence of the self or of the parts in the biological sphere is in relation to a wider world: one describes the identity or action of the organism in relation to an environment.[217] Spinoza's totality, however, cannot be more than the sum of its parts, for that (even qualitative) difference must be itself a part of the totality. *In other words, the notion of the self-transcending totality (as agent or individual) is self-contradictory.* So Emmanuel Levinas observes the contradiction of transcendence and totality, and argues for the precedence of the former: "Dans l'idée de l'infini se pense ce qui reste toujours exterieur à la pensé." "[L]a transcendence refuse précisément la totalité, ne se prête pas à une vue qui l'engloberait du dehors" (Levinas 1971, xiii, 269).[218] This

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[216] We recall here Wolfhart Pannenberg's observation that "the concept of the whole or the totality functions much more in Hegel's own thought de facto as the category of categories, as the integral of their abstract particularity" (1990, 152).

[217] The particular biological notions of emergence and organism are helpful in science only in relation to that which can be delimited. "In every system forces of a higher order are *potentia* present which, however, become manifest only if that system becomes part of a configuration of a higher level" (Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *Problems of Life* (1952), 150, quoted in Ian Barbour 1971, 333).

[218] This is reminiscent of the discussion of the One in logical relation to the concepts of whole and part in the first hypothesis (sections 137-142) of Plato's *Parmenides* (1934). Parmenides says that if the One is, it cannot be many (a re-

contradiction in the notion of the self-transcending totality might go unnoticed if Watson (following Hegel) did not insist equally that the totality is the interdependent many, not known *except in its parts*, its movements or moments, the historical and spiritual determinations and dialectic of which it is composed.

This contradiction or conceptual ambiguity can also be viewed in terms of the relation of finite and infinite, the paradigm for the process of self-differentiation. It was noted above that Hegel rejects Spinoza's alternation of finite and infinite *ad infinitum*, insisting both on their absolute difference and absolute inseparability. Hegel criticizes the eternal alternation of finite and infinite as it re-appears in Fichte, but his own reconciliation appears to re-state exactly this dynamic of limitation (determination) and self-transcendence within the whole.[219] One has the lingering suspicion that Hegel has taken Spinoza's problem of finite and infinite, and

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statement of Zeno's axiom), and therefore the One cannot have parts or be a whole. The consequence is that the notion of the One must exclude the concepts of sequence, schema, extension or inclusion, all of which involve alterity. A corollary of the first hypothesis is that the One is infinite (137d; Brumbaugh 1961, 56). This infinite One cannot include or contain anything (not even itself), that is, it cannot be the totality as either container or contained (138b).

[219] Hegel says that Fichte's thought continues its oppositions of self and not-self into eternity; in this idealism, "I have to deal with my activity alone; but there is always an externality therein present which still remains, and which is not explained by my activity. This Beyond which alone remains to the undetermined ego Fichte calls the infinite check upon the ego, with which it ever has to deal, and beyond which it cannot get . . ." (Hegel 1955, 495). Hegel notes that the repulsive counter-force of Fichte is the Kantian thing-in-itself "beyond which even Fichte cannot get, even though the theoretic reason continues its determinations into infinitude" (ibid). Hegel claims that Fichte presents a parallel contradiction in the ego, which is the absolutely unconditioned positing of the ego, its infinitude, and a positing of limits and conditions upon itself, its finitude; Hegel says that Fichte's attempts to distinguish and unite these fail (497).

presented it as the solution; indeed, that he has presented the solution as the endless re-stating of the problem: "The [true] infinite, therefore, as now before us is, in fact, the process in which it is deposed to being only *one* of its determinations, the opposite of the finite, and so to being itself only one of the finites, and then raising this its difference from itself into the affirmation of itself and through this mediation becoming the *true* infinite" (Hegel 1990, 148, his emphasis). The ambiguity becomes clear if one asks, Which is the true infinite, the process or the result of the process?

While a full discussion of Hegel's treatment of Spinoza or of the finite-infinite relation is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is enough to note that many commentators have observed an ambiguity in Hegel's thought regarding the Absolute. Daniel Berthold-Bond comments, "What does Hegel mean when he speaks of 'the end,' 'the completion,' 'the consummation,' 'the fulfillment,' of history and of knowledge? There seem to be two basic alternatives; either the completion Hegel speaks of is absolute or it isn't. That is, either Hegel's eschatological vision is of an *absolute* End, where no further progress in history or knowledge is possible, or it is an *epochal* conception, where the completion he speaks of is the recurring fulfillment of successive historical epochs, leaving the future open to progress" (Berthold-Bond 1989, 115). Berthold-Bond refers to critics, from Marx and Engels to Stephen Crites and Georg Lukács, who find Hegel ambiguous or inconsistent on this point.[220]

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[220] See Berthold-Bond 1989, esp. Chapters 6 and 7 on "The Question of Completion," considered in terms first of Christian eschatology and then of philosophical consistency. One of the earliest critics would be Christian Hermann Wiesse, who wrote to Hegel in 1829, "You yourself, honored teacher, intimated orally to me one day that you were entirely convinced of the necessity of new progress and new forms of the universal Spirit, . . . without, however, being able to give me any more precise account of these forms. . . . However, this conviction finds itself in flat contradiction with your systematic teachings, which, far from

It has been seen that John Watson describes the phases of religious development as identity-without-difference, or "blank identity," and difference-without-identity, or self-contradiction. The unity or identity of all things in Watson's Hegelian system depends upon the connotation of self-identity in the notion of the totality, while the contradictory difference depends upon the idea of self-transcendence, or the finite-infinite dialectic. In Watson's own notes on Hegel, the unity of the totality and the difference of finite and infinite compete for pre-eminence: "[T]he universal method of speculative thought . . . consists in grasping a whole as containing distinctions within itself. The whole is thus self-active or self-differentiating: it would not be a whole if it did not differentiate itself, and it could not differentiate itself if it were not a whole." Here the identity of the totality is brought to the fore. In the same notes, however, identity is correlated equally with difference (or with identity-in-difference); "the *distinction* of finite and infinite is as essential as their unity" (Watson, Notes on Hegel, his emphasis). The opposed

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demanding such a progress of the world Spirit, on the contrary definitely exclude it" (133). One is reminded again of Emil Fackenheim's observation, that Hegel's system is oriented both to a monistic totalitarianism and to pluralistic openness (see note 125): the latter openness seems to preclude an absolute end to the process, while the infinitude of the process would preclude its absoluteness.

H. B. Acton observes that commentators are divided over whether Hegel denied the principle of contradiction, and thus affirmed the existence of contradictories, or claimed that contradictions exist in thought, but these contradictions disappeared in the Absolute Idea. The anxiety here is that raised by ambiguity: if contradictory propositions can both be true then truth cannot be distinguished from falsehood. Acton does not explicitly resolve the issue, but in describing Hegel's distinction between Reason and understanding he appears to side with those who put the Absolute beyond contradiction, resolving the tension between identity and identity-in-difference (or process) in a higher unity (Acton 1967, 3:443-445). Aside from the question of the resolution of contradiction in Hegel's philosophy, the disagreement of commentators suggests a fundamental ambiguity, or at least obscurity, concerning contradiction in Hegel's thought itself.

emphases explain how the Hegelian critic can always find something to fault in the "blank identity" or "contradictory difference" of previous philosophical or theological statements. It also explains the continuing indecision in Watson's thought about the Absolute, as either the *telos* of philosophy and history, which nonetheless cannot be determined positively, or the process which is determined (or determination) but not final or complete. The indeterminate relation of the Absolute as process or result, or between the Self as absolute and the self as individual consciousness, is the wavering between a notion of identity (the totality) in relation to the plurality (identity-in-difference) and an identity that transcends the dialectic of identity-and-difference.

The Ambiguity of the Hegelian "Sublation"

The ambiguity involved in the notion of the self-transcending totality finds its expression in Watson's Hegelian *Aufhebung*: a movement beyond simple opposition which both leaves the opposed elements behind and takes them up in a higher synthesis. The "taking up" of thesis and antithesis only alternates conceptually with their overcoming. So in Watson's treatment of the self, and particularly of the subject-object relation, the opposed elements are alternatively preserved (the permanence of the subject-object relation in the Absolute or absolute knowledge) and left behind ("absolute" transcendence, or complete self-identity). Watson's criticism of analogical knowledge was that it was ambiguous, ascribing some property to something and then denying it. Yet one might say that, far from improving on this, his sublation is the phasing of ambiguity.[221] The only way that

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[221] The difference between the negative move of analogy in the Fathers and in Hegelianism is that the former is a "closed dialectic--it *corrects* the anthropomorphisms inherent in positive theology and plays no further role--while

ambiguity could be avoided would be for Watson to posit a difference which is non-dialectical, or one that is not posited on the basis of a prior identity.[222] For Hegel this would be to revert to the wooden categories of the Understanding, and for Watson this would be to revert to pluralism, in which the aim of complete intelligibility is given up.

Ambiguity and Deconstruction

Another way of describing Watson's adversary, ontological pluralism, would be as the surrender of the "totalizing" ambition of metaphysics, an abandonment of the attempt to reduce the heterogeneity of its "discourse" (Hart 1991, 33). This is the language of a Deconstructive critique of metaphysics, and while the analysis of ambiguity in Watson's thought does not depend upon Deconstruction, the critique is suggestive. For example, it has been shown that despite Watson's attempt to repress

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negativity for Hegel plays a *constitutive* role" (Hart 1991, 191).

[222] One might avoid dialectical difference by adopting a Thomist or "immediate" realism, in which being is the first principle, rather than thought. Etienne Gilson rejects the Cartesian starting-point of methodical doubt and *cogito* as abstract and arbitrary, and faults the deductivist logic which attempts to prove the existence of the external world. Realism (and not a so-called "critical realism") "holds that the mind is able to grasp immediately a reality independent both of the thought which represents it and of the act of thought which apprehends it" (Gilson 1986, 55).

Emmanuel Levinas attempts to break free of the Hegelian dialectic with a "metaphysic comme Désir" in which there is true non-dialectical difference: "L'idée de l'Infini suppose la séparation du Même par rapport à l'Autre. Mais cette séparation ne peut reposer sur une opposition à l'Autre, qui serait purement anti-thetique. La thèse et l'anti-thèse, en se repoussant, s'appellent. Elles apparaissent dans leur opposition à un regard synoptique qui les embrasse. Elles forment déjà un totalité qui rend relative, en l'intégrant, la transcendence métaphysique exprimé par l'idée de l'infini. . . . *La corrélation n'est pas une categorie que suffit à la transcendence*" (1971, 23-24, his emphasis).

the ambiguity of classical theism in his own univocal treatment of knowledge of God, that ambiguity has erupted elsewhere in his Hegelian thought. This is reminiscent of the (Freudian) deconstructive notion of repression, in which it is maintained that if differences are repressed in an onto-theology, they will re-surface in some other place within it (Hart 1991, 112).

More significant to the parallel between Deconstruction and the treatment of Watson's ambiguity is the observation by Deconstructionists that "any attempt to unify heaven and earth by means of the *one* structure—to explain the material in terms of the ideal, or *vice-versa*—will inevitably result in structurally undecidable statements which count against the explanatory force of the theory." This observation is made on an analogy to Gödel's theorem of the formal undecidability of propositions in arithmetic systems (Hart 1991, 110, 83-84). An example of an indeterminate structural notion is that of the *centre*:

> [I]t has always been thought that the centre, which is by definition, unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which governs the structure, while escaping structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the centre is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it. The centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its centre elsewhere*. The centre is not the centre (Derrida 1978, 279).

This indeterminacy of meaning is parallelled in Watson's description of the Absolute and the self; it would apply as well to those Spinozan and Hegelian notions of totality and infinity described above as ambiguous.

It has been argued that Watson wavers between a notion of identity in which the self-identical is in relation to the plurality (identity-in-difference) and one in which the self-identical transcends identity-and-difference. This was shown both in his criticism of earlier metaphysics (from Augustine to Spencer), and in his Hegelian

notion of sublation or synthesis. In the Deconstructionist view this ambiguity regarding identity arises because the self-identical--totality, self, absolute, infinite--is not prior, but is derived from pure or non-dialectical difference, or *différance*. If all determinations of identity "are broken apart by the necessity of alterity, reference beyond to an other" (Ryan 1982, 14), then the self-identical which transcends identity-and-difference is a chimera--the "presence" or "transcendental signified" which cannot be re-presented.[223]

While the parallels are fascinating, the argument presented here does not depend on the persuasiveness of Deconstruction. If the Deconstructionist claims are true, then Watson's ambiguity in regard to the Self and the Absolute would be not merely a failure to explicate unities dialectically (such as finite and infinite Self), but an ambiguity unavoidable in any metaphysics. However that may be, it has been argued that ambiguity as conceptual imprecision, or internal contradiction in Watson's thought has flawed his attempt to re-formulate the Christian religion.

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[223] If Deconstruction "reveals that both identity and difference, as defined within metaphysics, are in fact conditioned by a form of pure negative difference-- *différance*--so that both identity and difference can be said to be determined modifications of *différance*" (Hart 1991, 133), then it would appear to be the reverse, or dialectical opposite, of the Hegelian system, in which a pure transcendent identity is both condition and conclusion of identity-in-difference. It should be remembered that the Hegelian system lies between what Fackenheim called a totalitarian monism and a pluralistic openness, and that Derrida could even call Hegel a philosopher of *différance*. Dialectical opposition between Deconstruction and Hegelianism, of course, would be the admission of the possibility of some kind of Hegelian sublation, and the Deconstructive move would be relegated to the position of a negative moment. If such a synthesis were possible, then the ambiguity of Watson's thought (on the self and the Absolute) would be capable of some explanation/resolution. If not, the ambiguity would be irreducible.

The Historical Overthrow of the Idealistic School

The ambiguity of the Hegelian sublation, with its roots in Spinoza, eventually led to the overthrow of the Idealistic school, and of John Watson's Constructive Idealism, which was a part of that school. Analytical philosophers (especially Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore) faulted idealism for its equivocation. So Russell's objection to idealism, though stated differently, is similar to that of the present writer's: there is a fundamental equivocation in the notion of identity-in-difference, so that it means on the one hand, absolute identity (or identity-without-difference), and on the other, identity-in-difference. In *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy* (1961) Russell claims that Hegel confuses the two possible meanings of the copula "is," which are identity (Socrates is the philosopher who drank the Hemlock) and predication (Socrates is mortal). If predication is treated as a form of identity-statement, then there is not simply identity between, say, "Socrates" and "mortal," but also a difference (not all mortals are Socrates). Hegel mistakenly treats this as an identity-in-difference, in which the particular, "Socrates," is the universal, "mortal." For Russell this is nonsense. In "The Monistic Theory of Truth" (1910) Russell criticizes the conflict of monistic and dualistic elements in Absolute Idealism in a manner reminiscent of the treatment given above of the subject-object relation in Watson's thought:

> Again, the axiom of internal relation is incompatible with all complexity. For this axiom leads . . . to a rigid monism. There is only one thing and one proposition. . . . But this one proposition is not quite true, because it involves distinguishing the predicate from the subject. But then arises the difficulty: if predication involves difference of the predicate from the subject, and if the one predicate is *not* distinct from the one subject, there cannot, even, one would suppose, be a *false* proposition attributing the one predicate to the one subject.

We shall have to suppose, therefore, that predication does not involve
difference of the predicate from the subject, and that the one predicate
is identical with the one subject. But it is essential to the philosophy
we are examining to deny absolute identity and retain 'identity in
difference.' The apparent multiplicity of the real world is otherwise
inexplicable. The difficulty is that 'identity in difference' is impossible,
if we adhere to strict monism. . . . In short, the whole conception of
'identity in difference' is incompatible with the axiom of internal
relations . . ." (168).

This ambiguity is found not only in the notion of the Absolute, but in that of

the self (either the self-identical Subject or the self correlative to the world). Russell

complains of the term "experience" that it is used by the idealists to establish their

epistemology in a way that is foreign to that epistemology (1910, 159-160). On the

one hand, the Idealists think of experience in conventional (realist) fashion, as that

which a subject has of an object. In this view truth and falsehood are mutually

exclusive, in correspondence with the subject-object distinction. On the other hand,

these Idealists argue that only the *totality* of possible "experience" is true (in terms of

the discussion above, the Self as the one source of subject and object).

Russell's central objection to Absolute Idealism (or to its "axiom of internal

relations") is that it subsumes relations under natures, so that if two objects are in

relation, this "implies something in the 'natures' of the two objects, in virtue of which

they have the relation in question" (Russell 1910, 160-61). In essence, Russell is

objecting to what MacIntyre observes to be Spinoza's (deliberate) confusion of

description with *definition*, so that all properties (*and relations as properties*) are

necessary and none accidental.[224] Russell's problem with the conflicting notions of

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[224] MacIntyre 1972, 532. The result of this confusion is what E. L. Mascall calls
Spinoza's essentialism. The same objection is made by Russell of Hegel's thought.
Katharina Dulckheit (1989) observes (contra Russell) that Hegel distinguishes
between essential judgements (involving the "is" of identity) and qualitative

truth in Idealism like Watson's can thus be traced to the ambiguity in Spinoza's thought regarding the totality.

John Dewey too wrote the obituary for objective idealism in the early decades of this century, and, like Russell, he pointed to a basic ambiguity or inconsistency in its view of experience. In an autobiographical essay Dewey praises his Idealistic teacher George Sylvester Morris of the University of Michigan (from which University Watson received the D. Litt.), and compares him to Watson: ". . . his idealism was wholly of the objective type. Like his contemporary, John Watson, he combined a logical and idealistic metaphysics with a realistic epistemology" (Dewey 1934, 152). In an essay on Objective Idealism Dewey takes this dual orientation to task: "With reference to experience *as it now is*, such idealism is half opposed to

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between essential judgements (involving the "is" of identity) and qualitative judgments (involving the "is" of predication). (This corresponds, in Aristotelian terms, to the difference between essential and accidental properties.) However, Dulckheit says, Hegel then relativizes the distinction between them, for "if one wishes to know the essential nature or identity of the subject, qualitative judgments will not suffice, since even the longest list of properties will not enlighten us in that regard *unless* the term in the predicated place expresses the essential character of the subject. And this, [Hegel] argues, is possible only if *S[ubject]* and *P[redicate]* are identical in their difference" (117-118).

As Dulckheit shows (119-123), however, Hegel's treatment of the Law of Identity does not just relativize the two kinds of judgment, but effectively subsumes the predicative use under the essential: "Thus essential judgments which must express identity also exhibit difference which is precisely what accounts for the fact that they can also be informative" (123). This means that there can be no predicative uses of "is" which would apply a purely contingent or accidental quality to the subject; not surprisingly, Dulckheit observes that, for Hegel, common predicative judgments are only "correct" at the level of the Understanding, while "truth" is reserved for the essentialist judgements of Reason (117; see note 16). Whether or not Hegel's solution of the problem of identity is as persuasive as she obviously finds it, Dulckheit admits the objection that "the solution is effective only because, ultimately, it assumes an Hegelian point of view" (126).

empiricism and half committed to it,--antagonistic, so far as existing experience is regarded as tainted with a sensational character; favorable, so far as this experience is even now prophetic of some final, all-comprehensive, or absolute experience, which in truth is one with reality" (Dewey 1910, 198). Dewey's critique is that of Russell: "experience" has become a "weasel-word." The ambivalence of the Hegelian Idealist towards experience reflects the ambiguity of the notion of the experiencing Self. Either this experiencing self is the absolute identical Self, the condition and conclusion of knowing, from which world and world-knowing self is derived, or it is that individual self, the individual mind in relation to the differences of sensation.

VII. *Summary and Conclusion*

John Watson attempted to save the Christian religion from the agnosticism and atheism of his day by re-founding it on a philosophical basis. He consciously rejected the theological epistemology of the earlier Protestant tradition in which he was raised, with its grounding of faith in Bible, tradition, and axioms of "common sense," and its doctrine of analogy. He claimed that the traditional conceptions of creation or knowledge of the divine faced difficulties which his own did not. Thus the question was raised, How successful is Watson's reformulation of the Christian faith? From the theological perspective, the question demanded an examination of the correspondence of the reformulation with the earlier formulations. Constructive philosophy or metaphysics manifests an impulse towards absolute comprehension or totalization. Thus it may supplant and subordinate God, attempting to make the living God an idea or principle which subordinates all else to itself. Even by the most accommodating reading, Watson's theology departed significantly from the classical theological authorities, including the Protestant liberalism of Schleiermacher. So the translation of the idea of God in theology into the principle of self-differentiating spirit means that the creation of the world is assimilated to the Trinitarian begetting of Son or procession of the Spirit, or that the "two natures" doctrine is applied in effect to all creation, and not merely to Christ.

The response from the philosophical perspective is that the distinction of theology and philosophy itself suggests an arbitrary remotion of the matter of faith

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beyond the reach of modern thought.[225] Having acknowledged the demand for a distinctly theological critique, attention was directed to Watson's objections to classical theism and his Hegelian alternative. Here it was shown that Watson's method is Hegel's correction of Spinoza. This correction is paradigmatic for the development of thought, including classical theism and other religious alternatives such as pantheism and mysticism. It was argued, however, that Watson forced the evidence of the thought of Augustine and others into the dialectical pattern of identity-without-difference and difference-without-identity. So his method was revealed to be an arbitrary imposition on history by the historian's (Hegelian) mind. Grant his analysis and method, and the contradiction supposedly found in every other form of thought[226] must be sublated in a higher harmony, an identity of the identity-and-difference.

It was argued that the result of this method is itself ambiguous, neither one dialectical alternative nor another, a Constructive Idealism which is forever building, but never built. Inasmuch as its structure *is* evident, it appeared that Watson's absolute philosophy is not a new development, but is merely composed of the fragments of its predecessors, pantheism and mysticism. Problems of eschatology continue to dog Watson's system: thus one might say of Watson's "absolute knowledge," *if absolute, indeterminate and indescribable; if determinate and*

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[225] This is the tone of Hans Küng's remark, that his intention in *On Being a Christian* (1977) was "precisely not to play off the 'God of Israel and Jesus' in a naive, biblicistic manner against the 'God of the philosophers', but, on the contrary, to be on the lookout for dialectical connecting links" (*The Incarnation of God*, 1987, xi). Wolfhart Pannenberg agrees in principle, rejecting what he sees as Barthian fideism, in *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (1985).

[226] One might call the production of contradiction in the thought of another "ambiguation," except that this term is now used in the different context of deconstruction.

describable, not absolute. Here is that basic epistemological dynamic of negative and positive in analogy which Watson had thought was superseded. Conceptual ambiguity was traced in Watson's thought about the Self and the Absolute.

In the analogical way of knowing God, the likeness and the unlikeness can be pursued in an endless dialectical regress. So "creation by the word" is like the obedience effected by the command of the king or patriarch. It is also completely unlike it. Implicit in this regress is the double assertion, first, that God is known (the like) and, secondly, that God is not known (the unlike). In terms of the analogy of being, the positive likeness of worldly and divine being is that which leads to the problem (for theism) of the Spinozan totality, inclusive of God and the world.[227] The negative unlikeness is the counter-claim that God is "that than which no greater can be thought." The positive and negative elements of analogy lie uneasily beside one another in human thought, only held together by a rational faith that the opposed elements are reconciled in the One to whom the word "God" points, if not

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[227] Paul Tillich's notion of the "God beyond God" is helpful as a corrective to a naive anthropomorphism. However, as it seems to capture this transcendent God in a concept, it immediately brings itself into question. Here again is the finite-infinite dialectic: Is the "God beyond God" itself transcendable by something higher, that which cannot be thought? Here we see the connections between the regress of analogy, mysticism and negative theology. Because we may be deceived by the "spiritual" or intellectual character of our metaphors, Pseudo-Dionysius insisted on the bold use of anthropomorphism to describe the God who has revealed himself; as soon as we think of God's arm we are qualifying our thought. In a stimulating essay, Robert Scharlemann observes that the early Karl Barth understood God's actuality as prior to the logical form of contradiction, so that theology might begin "with a revelation that is unaffected by the differences between belief and unbelief, theism and atheism, being and non-being, optimism and pessimism and all the rest" (Scharlemann 1982, 80). Scharlemann thinks that this original intention was obscured by Barth, but one wonders if Barth's "deconstruction" of theism were merely one moment of the analogical alternation.

in thought about God.

For John Watson's Hegelian philosophy the analogical language of Christian theism must be surpassed by a univocity of reason that attains completion and closure. The rationalist project is a totalizing one, an attempt to take God and the world into thought without remainder. By its own standards, the continuing presence of ambiguity is its undoing. The endless regress of positive and negative in the dialectic must attain higher, intelligible, final harmony within thought itself. However, Watson's concept of the Absolute and the absolute philosophy are little different in terms of ambiguity than the indeterminate Being of classical theism, which he rejects.

The origin of the ambiguity in Watson's thought was traced to the notion of totality, which on Spinozan premises both is, and is not, more than the sum of its parts. Ambiguity was also found in the notion of the infinite as the *process* of differentiation and self-transcendence, and the *result* of that process. To object to Spinoza's finite-infinite whole is to find the finite *non capax infiniti.* This could be seen to be a return from the Romantic seeking of the infinite in the finite to a (Neo-Kantian) limitation of reason. (Kant treated the finite-infinite whole as an antinomy of pure reason; Kant 1965, A 426, B 454, 396-402).

As one reviews the life and thought of Canada's first great philosopher, one is impressed with the energy John Watson devoted to his task of philosophical construction and teaching. He brought the "dry light" of his mind to bear on the intellectual and religious anxieties of his day, as, in words he used to describe Caird, "a humble, though not a slavish, follower of the great masters of speculation" (Watson 1909d, 259). There is a poignancy to this optimistic discipline and zeal, when one considers the brief hegemony of idealism, and the shock of world events in the second decade of the century. One cannot but admire the intellectual courage

and determination implied in a passage such as this:

> No dualistic ... conception of the world, in whatever form it presents
> itself, can be regarded as a satisfactory solution. No doubt the greater
> complexity of the material to be interpreted adds to the difficulty of
> the attempt to provide an adequate synthesis; but, however great that
> difficulty may be, nothing less than a comprehensive doctrine,
> embracing all the facts, can give satisfaction to our highly critical age
> (*IRE:C* 324).

This rational satisfaction escapes us, and the problem lies in the comprehensive

doctrine itself, but Watson's mere attempt "to see life steadily and see it whole" has

proven instructive.

John Watson's Influence in Philosophy

John Watson was a member of a school, not its founder. His chief influence

among other philosophers appears to have been as an expositor and critic.

Nonetheless, he was an astute student and critic of others' philosophies, and his

ability to make clear what was difficult drew the notice of others, including the

specialist on Kant, Norman Kemp Smith, and the pragmatist John Dewey. Kant

had compared his philosophical project to the Copernican revolution, which led

many interpreters to say that just as Copernicus replaced the earth with the sun as

the centre of things, so Kant attempted a fundamental revolution in epistemology.

But, Smith says, Watson is the only commentator to grasp Kant's meaning correctly

and unambiguously--to prevent the naturalistic implications of the Copernican

theory; Green, Caird, and others all failed to catch Kant's point.[228]

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[228] "Kant's hypothesis," Smith notes, "is inspired by the avowed purpose of
neutralising the naturalistic implications of the Copernican astronomy. His aim is
nothing less than the firm establishment of what may perhaps be described as a
Ptolemaic, anthropocentric metaphysics" (Smith 1965, 22, n. 1). Smith notes that
Watson and Caird, following Hegel, interpret Kant in such a way as "to ignore those

In his review of Watson's *Hedonistic Theories From Aristippus to Spencer*

(1895), John Dewey makes no criticism, but is lavish with praise:

> Philosophic exposition is at its best as to style in this book of Professor
> Watson's. I could with difficulty name another book which might at
> once command so thoroughly the respect of the specialist and receive
> comprehension by the layman as does this lucid, direct piece of
> exposition and criticism. It may be of service to teachers of ethics to
> point out that the expositions of the various authors, mainly in the
> authors' own words, are well proportioned, condensed and accurate,
> and, in some cases, the best available substitutes for a perusal of the
> original texts, and in all cases a helpful accompaniment of such perusal
> (Dewey 1972, 354).

Neither Dewey nor Smith (or anyone else) brought Watson's particular version of

Hegelian idealism under informed critical scrutiny. Nor would any other

professional philosopher take up Watson's mantle and develop his thought.[229]

R. A. *Wilson's* Miraculous Birth of Language

The particular and significant influence of John Watson can be seen,

however, in a book by one of his students, a Professor of English Language and

Literature at the University of Saskatchewan. Richard Albert Wilson published *The*

Miraculous Birth of Language (with a preface by George Bernard Shaw) in 1948. In

it he advances a form of Watson's idealism, though he does not mention his teacher's

name in text or index. He does refer to Hegel, however. After observing that

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aspects of Kant's teaching which cannot be stated in terms of logical implication" (1,
n. 2).

[229] In the *Festschrift* to Watson given after fifty years of teaching at Queen's,
none of the contributors indicates an indebtedness to Watson (*Philosophical Essays*
Presented to John Watson, 1922). The historical surveys by Queen's own James
Cappon ("A School of Idealism") and by R. M. Wenley ("Beati Possidentes")
describe the school of Caird, with only occasional incidental references to Watson.

modern realists may not accept his (Wilson's) rather "out-moded idealism," he adds

that his view has persisted from pre-Platonic to post-Hegelian times, and that it is

likely to survive the current anti-idealistic frame of mind (172). Like Watson,

Wilson sees himself as following Hegel beyond Kant (191). One suspects that

Wilson studied Hegel in one of Watson's courses on the *Science of Logic*. Despite

the absence of any reference to Watson and the presence of references to Hegel, the

influence throughout is that of Watson, and is seen both in Wilson's method and in

his matter.

Wilson describes himself as an "emergent evolutionist," and his aim is "to

discover if possible what specifically happened when man emerged from animal

nature into a new world, whose new conditions necessitated articulate language" (97,

124). Both Wilson and Watson think of life and consciousness as *the* significant

developments in the evolution of the world, and the chief challenges to the

mechanistic interpretation of reality. Against this mechanism Wilson, again

following Watson, advances the view that life and mind did not issue from a lifeless

and mindless physical world, but were present from the start implicitly.

> I assume . . . that man in his complete life, his mental powers and his
> moral purposes, no less than in his physical organism, is a natural
> product and a natural part of the world; and that in the general
> evolution of the matter-life-and-mind of the world man eventually
> emerged from some original diffused or permeating life-and-mind
> force into an actual, individualized, objective organism and explicitly
> purposive agent as we now find him. To regard man's physical
> organism as having come out of the world by natural evolution, and
> his mental powers and moral aims as having come in some accidental
> way from other than natural sources, is a dualism of modern
> mechanistic thought which seems as naïve from a philosophic point of
> view as any of the older superstitions which it has replaced. If the
> world is in verity the organic unity which we claim it to be, then man is
> not merely *in* the world or *on* it. He *is* the world at the highest point
> of its physico-mental life that we know on this planet; and the specific

purpose of the present treatise is to differentiate this last phase of the
world, that has emerged to actuality in the body and mind of man,
from its next lower phase in animal life (121-22).

In its themes this is pure Watson. The method of argument is Watson's too: Wilson
agrees with his scientific peers that everything is natural, but then insists that nature
must include life and mind. This view of things is then reversed, so that nature is
"levelled up" to life, and life to mind, yet all this without ceasing to be nature.

Wilson follows Watson in criticizing identity without difference, and
difference without identity. So, according to Wilson, Darwin believed in "the
organic unity of the world from matter to man" (101). Darwin would be correct,
but, Wilson says, in his emphasis upon the unity of all Darwin overlooked and
obliterated the cardinal difference between animal intelligence and human
intelligence (113). Here is the blank identity rejected by Watson. However, in
Wilson's analysis Darwin also lapsed into *dualism*, and described the world as
though it involved *separated* things. Thus he spoke "of man *and* the world as two
separate though related things rather than as two phases of the one thing" (100).
Here is the contradiction which, for Watson, demands the philosopher's
reconciliation.

Wilson views the controversy stirred by Darwin in the familiar terms of blank
or undifferentiated identity and absolute difference. So some evolutionary theorists
insist that the difference between human beings and animals is absolute (a matter of
"difference in kind") while others insist that it is relative, a matter of degree. Wilson,
like Watson, objects to any notion of an *absolute* difference in kind. At the same
time, the relative differences cannot be effaced in a blank identity: the "legitimate
boundaries" between the two have been "blurred" over the previous sixty years
"through the pressure for unity by Darwin and the neo-Darwinians" (111).

Wilson has a strong grasp of the historical progress of ideas and schools, and

of the significance of history for his own investigation, but unlike Watson, he does not see a Hegelian sublation here which transcends and preserves the opposed views. Instead there is merely a sense of ebb and flow: "But now that the pressure is relaxed by the lapse of time and the disappearance of opposition, these differences are emerging into notice again, and the time has come in our thinking when their characteristic differences must be analyzed . . . and their significance specially marked in relation to one another and to the general underlying unity" (112). Wilson views all ideological conflict in terms of the swinging pendulum: "Every new truth, however, must at first make its way against the jealous prejudices of the old, and by the very spirit of aggression necessary to expel the old the new truth is apt to develop its own prejudice in the manner of a defensive armour" (183).

There are therefore differences between Watson and Wilson, where Wilson has gone beyond Watson's own positions. The monism of Wilson's "matter-life-and-mind force" appears at points more panpsychic than Hegelian, more a matter of Substance (with its language of "force") than Subject: "The life-force, or mind-force, or whatever we may call it in its earlier stages, works within the sensuous material of the world, and gradually shapes and moulds this material first into what we now call inorganic formations, and then, in the ripeness of time and environment, into those organic forms . . . ."[230] Thus the panpsychism or panlogism that seems to be logically required of Watson is made explicit in Wilson. Wilson writes of the emergence of a spatial form of mind in animals: "But centred within its body is the new power which we call *mind*, which, through the avenues of the sense-organs of sight, hearing, and smelling, radiates or reaches out a certain distance into space and

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[230] Wilson 1948, 132. Considering the similarity to Bergson's "life-force," it is curious that Vitalism is not discussed by Wilson, as it was by Watson, nor is Bergson's name found in the index.

time, beyond the body's limits, so that the animal's individuality, by this new power of mind, extends beyond its own skin, beyond its own material body, and holds in its mental grasp, and actually occupies mentally, a much larger space-and-time environment than the body occupies" (154). Panpsychism with its spatial preoccupations is left behind, however, when Wilson claims that the difference with the *human* mind is that all of time and space is contained *within it*, rather than it being contained by circumscribed time and space. The human mind rises free above space and time and contains them within its "own ubiquitous and omnipresent self, 'a universal here and now'."[231] This is the familiar theme of the self-transcending power of mind, derived from Spinoza through Hegel and emphasized by the British post-Hegelian idealists.

The use of "omnipresent" and "universal" to describe mind indicates how closely Wilson comes to divinizing reason, yet his Subject is not what others mean by deity. For Watson there was no difficulty using the term "God" to describe the self-differentiating totality, for that which "Personal Idealists" intended by the personal he believed could be subsumed under his notion of the Absolute. For Wilson this has ceased to be possible. The term "God" connotes anthropomorphic agency and limited personal ends, he thinks, but the "central creative force of the world" in his organic hypothesis can neither be known nor conceived with such definition (177). As Feuerbach had reversed Hegel, making the divine Spirit merely the projection of

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[231] Wilson 1948, 191. In Wilson's thought there is the typical uncertainty of idealism regarding the relation of absolute and individual consciousness. So while here we read that mind *contains* time and space, elsewhere Wilson says that the "new (inward) mental space-time world *radiates from its centre in man's physical organism*" (200). The language of containment is another way of describing transcendence or aspatiality, but this is in direct conflict with the language of radiation. This is reminiscent of the conflict of metaphors of aspatiality and radiation in Plotinus's philosophy. See note 149 above.

the human spirit, Wilson reverses Watson, making the God necessarily known in the evolution of religious experience into Spencer's Unknown.

Wilson's aim is not the establishment of a viable philosophy of religion, but the defence of human freedom against biological reductionism. There is the same Hegelian pattern, but it is *nature*, not Reason, which comes to consciousness of itself: "Man is nature at the highest point of her activity; and when we speak . . . of man investigating nature in knowledge, we mean . . . that nature, emerging into consciousness at her apex in man, is now busy exploring from that peak the lower cycles of her own nature." If Passmore's and McKillop's remark that idealism is the polite form of naturalism is not *apropos* for Watson, it is certainly so here.

Wilson's thought has a decidedly empirical orientation, and he breaks with Watson and the entire idealistic tradition when he admits a distinction between the world of mind and the world of sense. For Watson, the world of mind is the only world, as no object exists (or can be conceived) which does not have a subject. It is on this basis that the organic unity of the world is maintained. Wilson however admits objects without subjects and conceives of the emergence of mind from nature as creating "duplicate worlds" of mind and sense (199-200). Here is the very dualism which he (following his teacher Watson) has decried earlier. Wilson has lost sight of the Hegelian self-othering and return of the Absolute, and put in its place a simple evolution of nature up to (individual) mind, which mind then re-traces the steps of nature, using language to fill the new mental world. It was observed above that Watson did not answer the question of the existence of an absolute subject before and apart from individual minds, in the pre-human period of the world's history. Wilson takes the problem more seriously and answers that the subject (the "matter-life-and-mind force") *emerges*, but this "solution" merely seems to cloud the issue. Was that which emerged truly mind before it emerged? If not, then Wilson's dualism

seems appropriate, for nature and mind are ultimately distinct, and not subsumable under some higher unity. If so, then nature is another, self-alienated form of mind, and the absolute subject exists independent of particular minds.[232] Difficulties with either solution persist.

R. A. Wilson, then, shows the inheritance of Hegelian idealism from John Watson, combined with a rejection of some Hegelian elements, rendering a logically looser, naturalistic ontology.

The Indefinite Character of John Watson's Influence

Posidonius was the arch-reconciler, the arch-eclectic, and it is of interest to note at once how wide was his influence, and how short-lived, and how utterly his books have perished (Glover 1929, 46).

Nothing will have been disproved, but everything will have been abandoned.[233]

The consensus among historians on the wide influence of John Watson's thought was noted in the introduction. Two things should be considered, however. For one, it must be admitted that in the absence of direct attribution it is impossible to isolate Watson's influence from that of others in the same camp, especially after idealism became the dominant philosophy in the English-speaking world. (Even allowing for distinctive individual differences, there is a great deal in common between the thought, not only of John and Edward Caird and of T. H. Green, but of

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[232] This is the import of Wilson's words when he writes that "the organic hypothesis . . . assumes that mind is a basic and permanent element in the world, self-determining and purposive in its nature, and the directing agency in the evolutionary process throughout its history" (244).

[233] George Santayana, *Winds of Doctrine*, 211, quoted in Macquarrie 1988, 44.

F. H. Bradley, William Wallace, Bernard Bosanquet,[234] Henry Jones, R. L. Nettleship, Andrew Seth (Pringle-Pattison), John M. E. McTaggart, J. S. Mackenzie, and John Henry Muirhead. The same would be true of those who worked in Canada, including John Clark Murray, George Paxton Young, George John Blewett, James Gibson Hume, Jacob Gould Schurman, James Edwin Creighton, James Cappon, as well as the Americans Josiah Royce, George Sylvester Morris, H. C. Brockmeyer, W. T. Harris, and G. H. Howison.) Forms of thought and catch-phrases similar to Watson's were prevalent both in the greater philosophical world and in Canadian public life, education, and the Church. Secondly, even if Watson was chief among the idealists in his influence upon the thinking of those who taught with him or studied under him, there is no evidence that this influence was philosophically or theologically profound, and good reason to think that it was superficial.[235]

With the *caveat* that *proving* dependence would be extremely difficult, it is worthwhile to consider *probable* influence by Watson upon those in his sphere. Then the role of Watson's philosophical ambiguity will be considered as a contributing factor to the slightness of his influence, and a suggestion for further research will be made.

It is reasonable to assume that if Watson's phrases and notions are found in the writings or speeches of those who worked with him, he has had some influence

[234] Edward Caird was the leading light in Scotland, and, presumably, in Canada. According to H. B. Acton, Bradley and Bosanquet "dominated the philosophical scene in Great Britain" (Acton 1972, 4:115).

[235] Obviously a degree of conjecture is required when it is argued from silence that Watson's influence on theology is negligible; so, for example, Watson may have closed the door to "Common Sense" or empiricist epistemology for many students, students who would nonetheless not go through the door marked "idealism."

upon them. So Watson's peer O. D. Skelton, Professor of Political Science at Queen's, held to the ideal of "unity in difference" though he was not an idealist *per se*. For example, in *The Canadian Dominion: A Chronicle of Our Northern Neighbour* Skelton concludes by observing that Canada had to offer the world the achievement of "difference in unity," and that this might "seem an idealistic aim," but nonetheless one worth following (1920, 276-77). In his pamphlet *The Language Issue in Canada*, he argues that French may be the required language of instruction in Quebec because "[w]e want unity, not a drab, steam-rollered uniformity. The man who forgets the rock out of which he is hewn is no better Canadian for it; to repress old traditions before we have given new ideals is questionable policy" (1917, 24). Idealism in its moral aspect lies in the background, too, in Skelton's observations on political leadership in *The Day of Sir Wilfred Laurier: A Chronicle of Our Own Times*. "The path followed was not as ruler-straight as the philosopher or the critic would have prescribed. The leader of a party of many shades of opinion, the ruler of a country of widely different interests and prejudices and traditions, must often do not what is ideally best but what is the most practicable approach to the ideal" (1964, 325). These slight allusions to themes also found in Watson is the extent of any idealistic influence here.[236]

Watson's influence is more evident in the early work of Queen's political scientist Adam Shortt, who had been a gold medallist in philosophy under him. In an article written in 1901, Shortt argues that duty and freedom are one, as "the central feature" in the development of a moral people "is the growing personality, or

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[236] Skelton's *Socialism: A Critical Analysis* (1911) does not show any evidence of Watson's influence, though he summarizes Hegel's philosophy with competence and presents Marx's thought in detail (96ff.). Even if Skelton were impressed by Watson's philosophy, his more empirical orientation would not incline him to adopt Watson's metaphysics or method.

self, which in its more or less clear consciousness of a rational freedom, spontaneously recognizes its responsibility for conduct." These words could have been written by Watson himself. Similarly Watsonian is Shortt's comment that the ordinary individual acts and thinks "uncritically" "upon the principle that the rational is the real" (Shortt 1901, 354). In an article written a year later, the idealistic influence is reduced to a brief observation in the introduction: though "to the eye of pure reason," Canada's chaotic political past "may seem but a poor product for so long and so strenuous an effort, yet it has in it more of stability and promise than might be suspected" by some (Shortt 1902, 142). The empirical orientation of political science did not encourage extended philosophical interpretations, and Shortt's other writings from this period sound no idealistic notes.

Another Queen's professor, New Testament scholar T.R. Glover, claimed that his mind was transformed by conversation with Watson as they went walking regularly, and Glover eulogized these events in some mediocre poetry (Sweezey). His *Studies in Virgil* (1904) was dedicated to Watson. The depth of Watson's influence is questionable, however. In his *Christ in the Ancient World* (1929) one finds general idealistic themes of the development of the human mind (or spirit) over time, freedom, a "higher life" and so forth,[237] but the tone is pessimistic about history,[238] in contrast to Watson's optimism. Without naming Watson as his

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[237] E.g., "If we may turn the Greek word [Hellenism] into something more like ordinary English, Christianity triumphed because it squared best with the world's best intelligence, because essentially it liberated the human mind and gave it a chance to develop to the full range of God's conception for it" (Glover 1929, 10). The spiritual crisis at the end of the Greek empire is described as a loss of faith in reason (19); the battle of Salamis is a dividing line in experience and consciousness. Watson would find the description philosophically congenial.

[238] Glover finds the men of his age, like those of the Hellenistic age, to be half-educated and shallow (42).

source, Glover remarks, "I have heard the first function of a universit͟ defined as to break up men's dogmatism and put them at a universal point of view. I know no better account of it, but it is not always achieved."[239] For Glover the inevitability of progress is an impossible notion; by the 1920's his own time has become an age of brass. For him, too, the person and teaching of Jesus is central to history and religion in a way that does not fit well with any notion of progress in religion (1929, 117-122). These quotations of Glover and Watson's other peers come from works written during or after "the Great War," when the confidence of idealism (interpreted largely as moral philosophy, rather than epistemology) was challenged or waning because of events on the world stage.

Idealistic patterns of thought and expression, presumably from Watson, can be seen in the thought of George Munro Grant, Queen's legendary Principal for the years 1877 to 1902. Grant was not an intellectual, and never a disciple of Watson's; in fact, Watson was critical of Grant's thinking, saying that he was "utterly unspeculative" and that his theological notions were "traditional and antiquated" (Watson, Principal George M. Grant). He also faulted Grant's ability to manage others for his purposes, wondering whether Grant should be compared to "Jesus Christ or to Napoleon Bonaparte" (ibid.). According to Michael Gauvreau, Grant retained a faith in "'supernatural facts'," a miraculous providence, and the uniqueness of the Incarnation, all of which Watson could not have abided (1991, 155, 160). Hilda Neatby notes that Grant was known to be a man of conservative tastes and evangelical faith when he came to Queen's in 1877, though he was also from the start a believer in free enquiry and impatient with ecclesiastical narrowness (1978, 232-33). Ramsay Cook observes that, despite Grant's "liberalism," he did not

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[239] 1929, 115. This definition is quoted in connection with Glover in Sweezey n.d., 45.

reject such traditional Protestant notions as sin, the necessity of personal conversion, or the centrality of the cross of Christ (1985, 185).

Despite the differences in theological orientation, however, there is some evidence that Watson influenced Grant towards theological immanentism. So in the first volume of the *Queen's Quarterly* Grant gives an interpretation of Canadian development as "a gradual evolution towards unity, a development which involves opposition" (Grant 1893, 160). He extrapolates from the fact that descendants of French and British rivals sit side-by-side in Parliament to the borrowing of the federal system from the U.S. and that of the parliamentary, cabinet and judicial systems from Britain: "Our political evolution has had the same lesson for us [as the racial]. It has taught us to borrow ideas with equal impartiality from sources apparently opposite." Here are echoes of Watson's Hegelian dialectic, though Grant (like Skelton) is not presenting a Hegelian reading of Canadian history; the transcendence of opposites is replaced by a mere borrowing and mixture.[240] The same story of unification is true, Grant says, of Canadian religious experience: Presbyterians years before and Methodists more recently have been unified. On religion itself Grant sounds the common note of immanentism, which Watson would endorse: he asks rhetorically if St. Paul would not say "that we have divorced it [Christianity] from the moral and spiritual order of the world instead of seeing that it

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[240] The notion of borrowing from opposites has a longer history in Canada than idealism: Nathanael Burwash observed in 1860 that Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists and Congregationalists "each absorbed something of the special quality of the other, the Presbyterian Methodist fervour without its eccentricities and the Methodist Presbyterian sobriety without its coldness. A new form of spiritual life was developing . . ." (quoted in Van Die 1989, 156).

is that which interpenetrates, interprets, completes, and verifies that order . . . ."[241]
While it cannot be proven that the influence is Watson's alone, it is likely that it is
primary. The conclusion is that the Idealistic influence, such as it is, is not profound,
but a matter of generalities and phrases.

However, Watson's ideas are much more obvious in an essay on religion in
the same volume of the *Queen's Quarterly.* In the article "Does Historical Criticism
Do Violence to Special Revelation?", J. A. Sinclair's explicit intention is to reconcile
in good Watsonian fashion the notion of a revelation from beyond the immanent
world and its wisdom, and the work of biblical criticism which brings such a notion
into question (1894, 291). In fact, however, he uses Watson's thought to counter a
high view of scriptural authority, which view is never explicitly stated. To do this he
makes use of the principle of the necessary unity of subject and object in the knowing
relation. "[T]here is one necessary condition to which Special Revelation must
conform in order to be a Revelation *for us.* That condition is, that Special
Revelation must not make an absolute break in the unity of the consciousness to
which it is given." The author is handling Watson's principles, but without Watson's
reasons or powers of reasoning: Watson himself would attempt to show that special
revelation is merely the making explicit of natural knowledge that was implicit. The
author claims that the alternative to his condition is that the supernatural would be
separated from the natural and the Divine Mind would act upon the human being
only in his or her "non-rational states." Here again is the immanentism and the
insistence upon the rationality of the real which goes back to Hegel. Further,
Sinclair writes that "[i]nspiration must not so destroy the unity of consciousness,
underlying separateness of personality among men, as to destroy that

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[241] 1893, 161. It is interesting that Grant speaks of an hypostasized "Christianity"
pervading culture, rather than the Spirit of God doing so.

communication of mind with mind by which we are able to learn from one another."
He continues by claiming that, as the identity (or unity) of the subject means the
continuity of experience, without contradictions, so Special Revelation cannot
contain explicit contradictions in itself, or in relation to ordinary consciousness.

Sinclair's assumptions about the rationality of "revelation" and of the unity of
consciousness are Watson's own, though the argument itself is quite inferior to those
of Watson. Though he follows Watson faithfully when he says that knowledge is the
process of removing by thought the (apparent) contradictions of experience, he does
not seem to see the significance of this for his own method. Borrowing again from
Watson's philosophy, Sinclair thinks that the trustworthiness of Scripture lies not in
the inscrutability of its origin, but in "its transcendental power of meeting the truest
need of its time," or an accommodation to changing needs and circumstances (1894,
296). Thus it must be read "in the light of the different phases of human
development."

One can see throughout Sinclair's presentation the adoption of Watson's line
of thought (most probably from Watson himself) without a true grasp of it.
Watson's conclusions, which have their origin in an argument concerning the
necessary conditions of knowing, are turned into dogmatic principles. So, for
example, Watson would dispense with the fear that God might act upon the human
being in his or her "non-rational states" by denying that the non-rational can ever be
a "state" of the human being. Thus Watson himself wrote of John Barton Perry's
'irrational religion' that "it is another of the preposterous attempts to preserve the
essence of religion by basing it on unreason."[242] "Reason is the comprehensive

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[242] Watson's hostility to the irrational (or anti-rational) is indicated by his
criticisms of Friedrich Nietzsche's thought: Nietzsche's enthusiasm is "crack-
brained," his metaphysics "crude and one-sided," his doctrine "preposterous," and so

intelligence, and if we can't base religion upon it, religion must go" (Watson 1925h).
Similarly, to say that inspiration must not destroy the unity of consciousness that
underlies the separateness of personality among men would be, from Watson's
viewpoint, a confusion of thought. To begin with, Watson would not admit the
possibility of an "inspiration" which might impinge from outside upon the unity of
consciousness. One wonders how many others in pulpit or journal adopted
Watson's thought (or thought like it) in a similar dogmatic, uncomprehending
fashion.

In her *Idealism Transformed: The Making of a Progressive Educator*, B.
Anne Wood presents a study of the work of a prominent student of Watson, John
Harold Putman. Putman followed extramural courses from Queen's, from 1894
until he graduated with the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1899. For twenty-seven years
he was an inspector of Ottawa public schools, and he had a wide influence on
educators and education in Ontario and British Columbia. Like others, Putman
shows that he assumed Watson's metaphysics as a set of first principles, but in his
case, the metaphysics is immediately and unceremoniously wedded to a pragmatic
goal: "'If education be a never ending progress in grasping relations, if every step
forward in seeing relations reveals relations not previously recognized, if everything
in creation has some relation to every other thing, if nature including God and man
is a unity, then the social and business life of the community is a starting point for
the social life of my school."[243] Putman was a "practical idealist" who combined
what he learned from John Watson with the thought of contemporary psychological
theorists and with the philosophy of the pragmatist John Dewey (Wood 1985, xii).

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forth (Watson 1898d, 54, 53, 50).

[243] Quoted in Woods 1985, 33.

In Putman's thought, Watson's idealism is subordinated to a pedagogical technique. Preachers and teachers, he writes, make the student "feel that he can do better, and that he will do better." "They try to lodge in his mind the idea that he is better and stronger than he really is, hoping that a man who thinks well of himself and has an ideal of a higher self unrealized will make some progress towards virtue."[244] Putman began as an idealist, but Wood argues that the ironic outcome of his career was the furtherance of a pragmatic or utilitarian view of education as a socialization process which would produce harmonious citizens. One sees in Putman's application of Watson's thought a quick declension from Idealism as formal philosophy to its popular namesake.

In A. B. McKillop's presentation of the influence of Hegelianism, primarily that of John Watson, in Canada from the 1890's onwards, there is the same indication of superficial appropriation. For example, McKillop quotes the letter of a concerned Methodist clergyman, who wrote in 1906:

> I find many in this Conference saturated with what they call "The new ideas," and it has become a sort of fad--a pretence of scholarship--to parade radical ideas .... It [Hegelianism] is abstruse and difficult to combat, but so far I have been able to maintain my positions simply by denying their first postulates, and when the onus of proof is put on them they fail to "make good." I find that nearly every man who passed through "Queen's University," and a coterie who follow this set, are preaching Hegelianism. It is a sad plight.[245]

If the writer is accurate concerning his success in argument against them, it is an indication that Watson's students did not learn the master's method. The recipient

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[244] Ibid.

[245] Rev. C. T. Scott to Albert Carman, Feb. 28, 1906, Carman Papers, vol. 18, no. 123, Archives of the United Church of Canada, Toronto, quoted in McKillop 1979, 210.

of the letter, Albert Carman, was General Superintendent of the Methodist Church for over three decades, beginning in 1883; Carman himself could simply dismiss the Hegelian idealism of Watson which appeared in the "new theology" as "'heathenism'."[246]

Ambiguity and the Irony of Secularization

The ambiguities in John Watson's notions of God and the self have been presented to this point as internal conceptual inconsistencies. Is the Absolute absolute or not? Is the self what we ordinarily mean by "self"? These and other ambiguities mean that Watson's thought can be expressed in either of two ways: he can describe God and the world in the language of personal relations and external agency, the traditional language of theology, or he can use the more abstract language of philosophy, of a first principle or the Absolute, and of reciprocal causation which leaves behind any notion of personal agency or relations between individuals.[247] The meaning, Watson would insist, is the same (though the ambiguity of the concepts says otherwise). It is for this reason that the reader can find in Watson either statements that strike one as orthodox and conventional, or quite heterodox by contemporary standards. This goes some way to explaining how Leslie Armour can say, "The Divinity of Jesus, the doctrine of the Trinity, the centrality of the New Testament all remain and yet belief has been revolutionized" (Armour 1988, 11). Those of Watson's peers and students who, like Grant, might be

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[246] Quoted in Cook 1985, 192.

[247] The ambiguity of the Hegelian method is suggested when one learns that Josiah Royce, like Watson, tried "to find a middle position between a theism which would reduce God to the level of being a self among selves, a person among persons, and an absolute idealism which would leave no room for the concept of God as personal" (Copleston 1965-77, 8:299).

described as evangelical or orthodox in their faith, would find much in his work that would appear to be a fresh and rational defence of traditional truth. Others who were looking for a philosophy of religion pursued according to reason alone would find an Absolute (and an Absolute Philosophy) which is entailed by the mere fact of knowledge itself. In consequence, Watson's thought would have a broad appeal as long as its ambiguities were not obvious, or until its confidence in the progress of reason appeared to be exaggerated.[248]

This has relevance for a current dispute concerning religion in Canada in the late-Victorian and pre-War period. It was noted in Chapter I that, according to A. B. McKillop (who follows Hilda Neatby), those like John Watson who were attempting to salvage the Christian gospel by reformulating it in modern categories, instead ironically advanced its transformation into an ethical imperative to social service ("the social gospel").[249] An alternative interpretation is that of Michael Gauvreau, who rejects the notion of a "direct linear process of secularization, by which theology becomes first philosophy and then sociology," because this "fails to explain why many Canadian clergymen resisted the resolution of their religious traditions into either philosophy or social science" (1991, 7). The opinion of Margaret Van Die was noted above, that "what may appear [to McKillop] to be idealism can just as easily be an expression of late-nineteenth century postmillennialism and a modified form of Christian perfectionism" (Van Die 1989,

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[248] The short-lived popularity of Watson's thought parallels that of Edward Caird. J. R. Fleming comments that though he "made Hegel for a while actually popular," Caird's "underlying philosophy did not long retain its vogue" (1927, 229).

[249] Regarding the Alumni Theological Conference, Neatby comments: "There was a shift away from the assumption that the kingdom of heaven must come through spiritual change in the individual, to the suggestion that the millennium could be approached, at least, by volunteer social work and also by social legislation promoted by men of goodwill" (1978, 234).

211-12, n. 93). Gauvreau argues that Methodist and Presbyterian evangelical theology survived until the first decade of the twentieth century because it was flexible in the face of modern currents of thought, and entered into constructive dialogue with some elements of it. This theology, he says, was "evangelical," by which he means that it was oriented to the Bible, activist, and popular, in contrast to abstruse philosophical theory and speculation (8). It became irrelevant "not because it had been absorbed into the new social sciences, but because it did not remain open to the questions of human nature and society that traditionally had informed the evangelical creed" (7). Until this demise, leaders in the churches like George Munro Grant "were able to strike a delicate balance between their creed and elements of critical thought." In any case, Gauvreau claims, it was pragmatism rather than Hegelian idealism which dominated the universities from the turn of the century to the First World War (160, 286ff., 272-73).

Does the study of John Watson's thought indicate a way of reconciling the interpretations of Canadian religious history as given by McKillop and Gauvreau? Though one cannot be conclusive at this point, it may be that the ambiguity of references to God and the gospel in the idealism of John Watson, his students, and others, encouraged a superficial agreement between evangelical ways of thinking and speaking about God and those of speculative philosophy--despite profoundly different theological and metaphysical assumptions. Conclusive demonstration of this hypothesis might be difficult: it would require showing that different people took from Watson and his Idealistic peers different things, according to their theological or philosophical orientations. The superficial appropriation of Watson's thought by writers like J. A. Sinclair suggests that though few really understood him, many would have borrowed phrases or notions such as that of "spirit," or "the organic nature of society," as a way of expressing a conception of the Christian faith which

was otherwise largely traditional. If this is so, then Gauvreau is correct, and McKillop's view of the pervasiveness of idealism *as a theology or philosophy of religion* is overdrawn;[250] as a loose collection of assumptions about the immanence of God in the progress of church, or society, or "the human spirit," the philosophy could be found everywhere.[251] The stress upon religious and moral zeal might unite those who read Watson or were instructed by him and the other idealists, with those many who had not broken with the evangelical tradition of Methodism or the orthodoxy of Presbyterianism.[252]

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[250] See Gauvreau 1991, 272. Gauvreau claims that William James's concern for experience "spoke, in a way that the abstract idealist philosophy of John Watson could not, to professors and preachers concerned, above all, with the practical task of influencing and transforming the spiritual life of the individual" (273).

[251] Ramsay Cook illustrates the pervasiveness of one or more of these general assumptions not only among conservatives like Albert Carman or "liberal Protestants," but among contemporary secular humanists; on Carman, see 192; on liberal Protestantism, 184-185; on the "Religion of Humanity," 61ff.

[252] The editor of the *Christian Guardian* could write that "today we emphasize *life*. The spirit of this age is intensely practical, and while it does not discredit dogma, it insists that applied ethics are of greater importance" ("Our Change of Emphasis," June 5, 1912, quoted in Van Die 1989, 146).

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