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Dissertation Abstract:

“Subjectivity and Selfhood in Kant, Fichte and Heidegger”

Kant once said that the “whole field of philosophy” is guided by the fundamental question, “What is the human being?” Kant himself, and even more so his Idealist successors, addressed this question by offering transcendental theories of human *subjectivity*. My dissertation explores the philosophical development of the Kantian and post-Kantian theories of subjectivity and their relationship to the often neglected theory of *selfhood* in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. After examining the issues in Kant’s theory which were decisive motivating factors for the post-Kantian Idealists—namely the metaphysical status of the apperceptive I and the unity of reason—I explore Fichte’s metaphysics of subjectivity and his attempt to demonstrate the unity and self-sufficiency of reason. Finally, I argue that the early Heidegger’s theory of finite human existence is best understood as an extension of and corrective to the classical Idealist tradition. I attempt to cash out two of Heidegger’s claims: (1) that his own “fundamental ontology” is pre-figured by Kant’s theory of subjectivity, and (2) that the crucial insights in his reading of Kant share much with the Idealists but also “move in the opposite direction” from them. I argue that Heidegger’s theory of selfhood gives an account of the sui generis features of human existence which unifies our theoretical and practical activities while avoiding the stronger Idealist claims regarding the self-sufficiency and self-legitimacy of reason.