



# PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT SPEAKER SERIES

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## DETERMINACY, INDETERMINACY, AND CONTINGENCY IN GERMAN IDEALISM

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**Abstract:** Among other innovations, the German idealists attempt to overcome a modal feature of Kant's philosophy, which reorients logic from the form of thinking to the form of possible experience. A modal peculiarity of *a priori* conditions of experience is that, while necessary for us, they lack an absolute ground: they are anthropically necessary yet brute facts. Kant's tolerance for radical contingency in this respect initiates two disputes that shape the development of German idealism. The first concerns the set of *a priori* conditions. With no absolute ground, its determination appears rhapsodic, inspiring Fichte and Hegel to develop methods for rigorously determining the system of such conditions. The second dispute concerns this system's value. Schelling argues that however we construct a system, its value issues from originally undetermined will. I first explain Fichte's rhapsody charge against Kant and outline his genetic deduction of *a priori* conditions. I then illustrate this deduction's application of Fichte's principle of determinability. I then explicate Hegel's rhapsody charge against Fichte before sketching his own speculative determination of the system of conditions. Finally, I reconstruct Schelling's argument that a system's value is indeterminate because willed. While determinacy guides German idealism's highest ambitions, indeterminacy emerges as its natural and unavoidable limitation.