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Chapter 9

"In and of Itself Nothing Is Finite"

Schelling's Nature (or So-called Identity) Philosophy

Michael Vater

When Fichte and Schelling parted philosophical company early in 1802, the chief reason was their inability to come to agreement on the nature of transcendental philosophy after Kant. While they both eschewed Kant's term transcendental argument, by which Kant meant a grand hypothetical-deductive structure that went beyond empirical concepts and hypotheses and secured the possibility of a unified and systematic field of experience and instead used the word 'construction' that Kant used for mathematical procedures, they disagreed considerably on the nature and scope of philosophical construction.

Fichte, in revisions to the Jena Wissenschaftslehre publically announced in the 1797/98 Philosophical Journal which he published, argued that in fulfilling the invitation to "think oneself" the thinker gains access to a territory prior to any divide between subject and object, where thinking and acting coincide.4 In this self-reversion, Fichte finds an alternative to the quasi-objective 'self-positing' that was introduced as system-principle in a epistemic or hypothetical-deductive way in the 1794/95 Grundlage; he now calls it intellectual intuition, an intuition or immediate consciousness of self-positing as positing or self-reverting activity.5 The thinking of oneself initiated by the summons (or intellectual stimulus) to 'think oneself' reveals the agility of self-reverting thought, the ability to tear oneself out of a prior state of repose and initiate novel activity (Kant's noumenal freedom)-or to slide from the function of being 'concept' to that of self-constituting 'intuition.' In the selfpositing revealed in intellectual intuition, the knower is actor, and the agent is real insofar as it realizes itself in folding back upon itself. The intuition that establishes itself in this way is 'one' or sui generis; empirical selves may be deemed multiple in a derivative social context where I-hood is inferred from sensory intuitions of behavior, but self-activity or self-constitution as such

is unique. From Fichte's point of view, then, there is simply no predication possible of anything like an I or its activities to anything that is not capable of thought and free action.

The same year that Fichte announces that alterations to his system are underway, Schelling begins to explore the possibility of an idealistic philosophy of nature or, as he will later call it, a speculative physics. Schelling is at pains in the philosophical reflections that bookend the specific consideration of natural phenomena such as magnetism, light, and gravity in the 1797 Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature to indicate that philosophy of nature is a human undertaking, hence a work of freedom, but that its object is not dead matter or things unseen, in the manner of Kant's things-in-themselves.7 Schelling acknowledges that while he ought to deduce the possibility of nature or an all-inclusive platform of experience, the idea of philosophy is itself the result of philosophy, and that of a universally valid philosophy is as yet "an inglorious ideal." Lacking an a priori starting point, Schelling offers instead a historical-critical introduction to those parts of physics and chemistry that can be accommodated by the idea of opposed forces and their equilibrium. The general problematic that philosophy of nature must work out is a solution to the problem of realism and idealism. Neither a dogmatic system that thinks our knowledge is grounded in causation by external objects, nor a Kantian account of causality from the side of the subject, will suffice. Both Spinoza and Leibniz provide two-sided solutions, but not grounded in human activity. The ideal of a productive or genetic account is borrowed from Fichte's early ideas on the form philosophy can take, and the idea of objective purposiveness embodied in organic nature provides a vision of where a philosophy of nature should go.9 The very idea of a philosophy of nature, however, remains problematic: "Nature should be Mind made visible, Mind the invisible nature. Here then, in the absolute identity of Mind in us and Nature outside us, the problem of a possibility of Nature external to us must be resolved."10

Two years later, with the publication of the First Outline of the System of the Philosophy of Nature, Schelling views the problematic character of the new discipline as surpassed, for the unconditioned is now seen to be present in nature as infinite activity, and nature is viewed not as a field populated by self-subsisting things, but by apparent products or actants, the outcome of limitations. Transcendental philosophy alone has access to the absolute or unconditioned, and that implies that it finds its principle not in any single being, nor in the total aggregate of beings, but in being itself. Any lesser domain, if it is to be a science, must similarly encompass being itself, not aggregates of beings. So the philosophy of nature will take the form of an ongoing deduction of forms of limitation upon unconditioned activity, and be capable to some degree of being integrated into a transcendental philosophy

built on the same model—a scheme followed in great detail by the 1800 System of Transcendental Idealism.

Evidently it is sufficient for Schelling in 1799 that nature is active and composed of finite processes rather than dead extended stuff in order to guarantee that nature is originally dynamic and to confer 'transcendental' status on the philosophy of nature. If all primitive qualities are agents or "actants," somethings which are more like Fichtean 'strivings' than atoms of Cartesian 'extension,' matter can then be 'constructed' out of a plentitude of inhibited actants, each of which is a filling of space and not a cutting out of a patch of pre-existent space. Putting vanishing agency behind observable products makes the field of actants (or actants-become-products) into a form that empiricism can recognize: "The philosophy of nature has nothing to do other than to recognize the unconditionally empirical in these actants. Empiricism extended to include unconditionedness is precisely philosophy of nature." The filling of space is the very definition of matter, and matter in all of its evolved configurations is the field of nature.

On one level, the *dynamic atomism* of the *First Outline* is quite fertile. The 1797 *Ideas* got stuck at the level of organic nature, for its basic construction was a *mechanical atomism*. The *Outline* is able to straightaway tackle that which is the ultimate problem for a mechanism, namely, life, and to append a construction of the inorganic to the primary deduction of the organism. Schelling's primary construction is quite ingenious—a field of incessant change which evolves regulative parameters, where change itself is both the principle of lawfulness or order and the agent of disruption, and the ratios of actant to product determine the emergent qualities in nature. Nature as a whole is an absolute organism, but its singular instances are more or less mutant and only by being realized (or 'produced') all at once approximate the ideal and form a continuum of species which are not chronologically or developmentally related.¹⁴

The crucial question, however, is whether the process philosophy of the First Outline is 'transcendental,' or whether the upsurge of atomic activities postulated behind natural qualities is sufficiently active to qualify as activity in Fichte's sense—self-positing, self-reverting agility. There seems to be a difference between the activity that Fichte claims one can empirically experience in the dyadic situation of responding to the summons "think yourself," in which case two singular instances of I interact on an empirical level, but only the respondent feels the transition between repose and activity, and the indefinite multiplicity, perhaps infinity of actants postulated by Schelling to explain matter and its states. (1) On an empirical level, Fichte can say, much like Gertrude Stein quipping about Oakland that "there's no there there," that there is no I or self-reversion enacted in Schelling's hypothetical plenum of 'little bangs.' (2) Schelling has a metaphysical problem which he explicitly

encounters in the 1801 Presentation of My System, namely, explaining the positing of being as such as infinitely many individual beings or actants without having the systematicity problem Jacobi diagnosed as the fatal flaw of Spinozism, namely, "egress from the absolute." But Fichte also has a problem: (3) Whether and how the 'foot on the accelerator' feeling of agility corresponds to self-constitution or the unrestricted activity indicated by the first fundamental principle of the 1794 Grundlage. Put bluntly, what is to distinguish transcendental argument from the unanchored metaphors of science fiction?

THE FICHTE-SCHELLING CORRESPONDENCE

In the course of making some practical arrangements for a united forum or institute for transcendental idealism in the wake of Kant's 1799 repudiation of the Wissenschaftslehre, Fichte and Schelling are forced to confront differences that had arisen in their philosophical outlooks since 1795. While residing together at Jena they regarded each other as friends and colleagues embarked upon a common project, securing the Critical philosophy from skeptical attack and providing a single systematic form to communicate it. When Fichte resigns his position at Jena over the 'atheism' controversy and moves to Berlin, an exchange of letters begins that shows the two thinkers moving in opposite directions in their common effort to erect a system of transcendental idealism. Building on hints given in the Vocation of Man, Fichte wants to expand the Wissenschaftslehre's ethically based theory of cognition in a theological direction, amplifying the check or summons that determines and ultimately individuates me in social-ethical interpersonal interaction to a theory of interdetermination in an invisible or 'intellectual' world, a community of spirits.15 Schelling had been moving in an opposite direction, toward a philosophy of nature based on idealistic principles, where action was primary and not mere mechanic motion, and where a dynamic or speculative physics would explain the corporeal or material dimension of the individual I's circumscribed agency and cognition. While Fichte's new direction was largely aspirational, by 1800 Schelling had turned the categorical apparatus of action and limitation of the First Outline into a motor for the elaboration of a comprehensive theory, the System of Transcendental Idealism. That work cleverly made the finite subject's cognitive apparatus into an evolution of stages of nature, joined the idealism of the Wissenschaftslehre to it as a second part, a social philosophy-ethics-philosophy of history, and crowned the whole construct with a treatment of aesthetic intuition or artistic genius. A sort of objectivism pervades the whole work: activity cannot appear except as limited, or as exhausted in its product. The first-person point of

view, implicitly guiding the whole Fichtean project of exhibiting the reality of will and its free act as the foundation of the phenomenal world, had seemingly disappeared.

When Fichte upbraids him for the naturalistic tone of the whole project and for the inclusion of a segment on the philosophy of nature in particular, Schelling's reply is that he is engaged in an enlargement of the Wissenschaftslehre, having set off in a direction tangential to the circumscribed territory of the finite agent and her social and moral life, but with the hope of returning to its first principles having enlarged its territory. 16 The agent in Fichte's philosophy, which Schelling calls the *ideal* subject-object, is but a higher exponent or power of a more basic form of subject-object identity, the *real* ground of nature.¹⁷ Schelling's choice of metaphors borrowed from geometry and mathematics is not accidental; both philosophers appeal to geometry, with its conceptual necessity founded upon an intellectual seeing that in turn depends on a process of sensible intuition—the construction of exemplary lines and figures—for a model of how philosophy's work—construction in *intellectual intuition*—must proceed. 18 What Schelling fails to do, either for the reader or for Fichte, is to argue for the basis of the similarity between the moral circle of Wissenschaftslehre and the newly drawn tangent of Naturphilosophie, or between the higher power of subject-object identity we directly experience as moral agents and the sort of agency that nature exhibits in the dynamic motion that makes nature cohere as a dynamic system, or potentially a universal self-regulating organism. One would have to read Schelling's essays in the philosophy of nature almost as carefully as their author to get the point, but the vitalistic view of motion in nature as self-originating and self-regulating has been implicit in the First Outline and 1800/01 General Deduction of the Dynamic Process and is underscored by Schelling's pejorative comments on mechanism and Newtonian experimental science in the lengthy presentation of the philosophy of nature in the 1801 Presentation of My System. The essence of mechanism, readily seen in Descartes and Spinoza, is the belief that physics can deal only with imparted motion or kinetic energy and is in no position to give an account of originary motion. The idea of a self-moving sphere or a cosmic animal whose movements and processes are self-regulated was not foreign to ancient physics, but it drops out of modern physics. Moderns like Fichte, and probably the author and readers of this piece, simply cannot see any similarity between the motion of a natural object, the behavior of the animate being, and the conduct of a cognizant subject. Only if there is an aspect of Kantian willing—initiating a new line of causality in the phenomenal world, independent of what preceded—on view in the world will Schelling's idea of a basic subject-object identity that can be raised to a higher exponent or reduced to a lower one gain any traction.¹⁹

THE NATURPHILOSOPHIE OF SCHELLING'S 1801 PRESENTATION OF MY SYSTEM

In the course of their discussions in 1801 Schelling sent Fichte both volumes of his *Journal for Speculative Physics* and asked him to pay special attention to the *Deduction of the Dynamic Process* and to the *Presentation of My System*. While the latter might be viewed as a public statement responding to items under discussion in the letters, its preface makes but a passing reference to the question of whether Fichte and Schelling are on the same path. It was actually skeptical questions about the possibility of an idealistic treatment of nature and its independence from other philosophical domains posed by Karl Eschenmayer's review of the *First Outline* that occasioned the *Presentation*.²⁰

We need but look to a few points about the *Presentation*, its preface, and the basic model of being relative to individual beings that is propounded in its initial section. Schelling maintains that what he has published hitherto, both the tentative essays in the philosophy of nature and the more polished presentation of transcendental philosophy—including ethics and social philosophy, philosophy of history, and aesthetics—have been but one-sided glimpses of a larger systematic view privately held. This view is the 'indifference-point' between nature and spirit and it has not been on display in earlier works.²¹ In the closing words of the preface, Schelling calls his comprehensive metaphysics 'the System of Identity';²² in later years he will often assert that he used this term once only, in an extra-systematic context, and that the *Presentation* and the works and lectures following on through 1806 were really part of the larger project of *Naturphilosophie*.²³

The system that Schelling offers in the *Presentation* postulates that, foreign as the procedure is to most persons in most aspects of their lives, thinking inhabits a domain of reason governed by the law of identity (A = A) that expresses the logical sameness or ultimate congruence of subjectivity and objectivity. From that point of view, all phenomena or concrete entities are seen to involve a deviation or a doubling, a dissociation of factors such that what is intrinsically real (A = A) seems to exist as indefinitely multiple instances of (A = B), *relative being*. Properly understood, each relative being is an identity or an association of subjectivity and objectivity, rather than their indifference, and not just any difference, but a difference (A = B) inflected one way of the other, as $^+A = B$ or as $A = B^+$ and so more or less subjective or more or less objective.²⁴

So far it might seem as if the notation, not the philosopher, was doing all the talking. But A = A is not a dry logical formula; it is an identity of identity and expresses the ultimate congruence of infinite being and infinite knowing. If there is such an ultimate congruence, it must express itself infinitely in such a way that it exists and knows itself only in and as the interaction

or interdependence of endlessly many finite beings. In the Spinozistic perspective that Schelling employs in this work, being is power and cannot not express itself. If it is infinite power, it exists as endlessly many finite beings, each of which is infinite or identical in itself, and whose finitude or difference is self-annihilating in agency and cognition—sex and love don't make the short list until 1803/04. For our purpose of understanding the workings of nature, it is important to realize that nothing is finite in itself, or that every individual entity, properly understood, is infinite.²⁵ The sorts of relations, frameworks, motions, and processes that nature concretely puts before the philosopher demonstrate the merely apparent or vanishing nature of finitude—or the obsolescence of the individual.²⁶

Schelling translates the evaporating nature of the finite or the hiddenness of its infinitude within appearances into a language that he thinks is precise, so precise that it can be translated into mathematical notation and even given geometrical expression. If the absolute is the primal indifference of subjectivity and objectivity, every finite instance of it is a distortion of identity by difference, or an inflection of indifference toward relatively greater subjectivity or objectivity: every $A = A \rightarrow A = B$, either as $^+A = B$ or $A = B^+$. The notation should make it perspicuous that the difference between the absolute and the finite individual is unreal or a matter of semblance, and that the difference between individuals can be *quantitative*, never *qualitative*.

This yields a grid of four possibilities for ontology: any two items can be qualitatively different or indifferent, or quantitatively different or indifferent. There is no qualitative difference. Quantitative difference distinguishes the 'subjects' and 'objects' of appearance, and also groupings of things relatively subjective vis-à-vis groupings of things relatively objective. There is no explaining what we now call the ontological difference: both being and beings, finite individuals and the absolute, are the same—identity or indifference, only nuanced by a positive or negative quantitative label which is extrinsically attached. All of this gets packed into one formula: the absolute and the universe, or totality of individual finite entities, are identical or qualitatively indifferent, while individuals relative to one another are quantitatively different, as well as groupings or classes of individuals (powers or potencies) that are likewise quantitatively different from one another. Nowhere is there anything qualitatively different. Quantitative indifference obtains in the whole or in the totalities relative to their members (in the potencies), and quantitative difference obtains between individuals and between potencies contrasted to one another.27 There is simply no explaining how quantitative indifference appears as quantitative difference, or how reflection sees things differently than reason—evidently this is the price one has to pay for being a systematic monist. Schelling's attempt at precision and perspicacity here must be judged a failure, for Fichte, who took careful notes while reading these theorems,

straightaway accused Schelling of having introduced difference, quantitative difference, into the absolute—the very thing he was trying not to do.²⁸

Schelling proceeds to the deduction (or construction) of the chief features of nature by deploying two overlapping explanatory schemes: (1) the powers or potencies of relative identity appearing in the guise of difference, where the first has objectivity preponderant, the second subjectivity or ideality, and a third wherein they are equated or reestablished in relative identity, and (2) the ontological expressivity or degree of reality of the three powers: relative identity, relative duplicity, and relative totality. The items grouped under these principles are not 'bodies' or discrete chunks of matter, nor little monadic minds; the A = B's or apparent instances of difference which stand out from the embracing identity which is their sole reality are the shadows of identity distorted, each an entity, so to speak, having a mental and a physical dimension. A's and B's don't exist independently; there are no atomic or corpuscular bodies or disembodied little minds, and there is no Newtonian aquarium space to contain them or entropic stream of becoming to temporally push them along. In their dense self-expression, they establish and occupy the dimensions of space; in their ex-istence they establish the first existent, matter. They act out, as it were, the possibility for identity and difference between one item and another: linearity or the line posited by relative identity and difference of A and B, angularity or the dissociation of one line from another, and their synthesis in depth or dissociation returned to relative identity. If these items are the dimensions of matter, they are simultaneously the construction of space and the occupation of that space.29 Being is dynamic or self-realizing-presumably this is what Plato meant by defining it as power, Spinoza as endeavor to exist, and Leibniz as appetition.

Let us consider Schelling's treatment of one main feature of natural organization in 1801, the deduction of gravity. Matter is a realization of A = B; it is fluid and non-localized. One of its components or tendencies is infinite, active, and empirically invisible: A, the so-called cognizing or associating factor; the other is limited, resistant, objective. The second corresponds to what Kant called resistant force, the first to his hypothetical attractive force. Schelling decided back in 1799 that either these two had to work upon some pre-existing chunk of materiality or that they had to be yoked by a comprehensive third force, the force of gravity. Various regions of matter (the fluid universe) will be characterized more by repulsion or attraction; only the totality will be gravity in its state of equilibrium, the basis of nature's being. But this account is too simple, as static as a mathematical equation. The dynamic element of gravity is that the simple analysis obtains only if A and B are posited as real, as dynamically opposed in any one patch of the primary existent-or among any two patches. 30 This sets up a chicken/egg problem for all of nature: is gravity primary and the associated factors derivative? Or are the

A's and B's primary and their association or identification derivative? And how exactly are the A's and B's said to be both 'real' in this first potency? There seems to be an indecision here at the basis of being: to be continuous or to be discrete? Does reality in its very material basis suffer from a Hamlet-complex at the quantum level? That Schelling at this stage chooses to introduce a distinction he does not clarify until 1809, that of being and the ground of being, is not helpful. The problematic nature of gravity (one item? two? three?) does motivate the elaboration of connection and individuation at higher levels, but there seems to be a root difficulty in trying to map the three elements of the cognitive situation (knowing, knower, known) onto the three aspects of gravity (equilibrium, attraction, repulsion).

If one steps back and reflects on what Schelling has done here in the first step of the construction of nature, one can see that Naturphilosophie is not philosophy of science or some intellectual reconstruction of the findings of empirical science. It is dynamic or speculative physics. Schelling's interest is not in isolated beings or dead entities analyzed down to their ultimate physical components, but the vital pulse of nature (Spinoza's natura naturans) that underlies its mute thereness and materiality (natura naturata). The pseudothings that mechanistic physics takes as the glue that holds its particles together: gravity, light, the dynamic polarities seen in magnetism, electricity, conduction, are the real 'things' of nature—not the work of occult 'forces' but the expression of the power of identity to overcome the shadow difference of individuation or particularity. From the standpoint not of empirical observation and experiment, but of the imaginative (or in-folding) insight of intellectual intuition, finitude undoes itself and is seen to be a willful withdrawal from interdependence, community, or life in what Schelling starts in 1802 to call idea—that which is seen by mind, not by sensible eyesight.31

If the goal of *Naturphilosophie* is to reveal life, complexity, and metamorphosis, then there will be something at work in it that is inimical to definition, fixity, and segregation of phenomena from one another. Nature does not operate as a duchy, church, or university. Redundancy in strategies and explanations will make a linear and hierarchical account impossible, while overlapping accounts threaten the human taste for simplicity, elegance, and paucity of hypotheses. While Schelling does not yet embed a principle of anarchy or 'irreducible remainder' in the bowels of nature, it is not just the tangle of axiomatic deductions that make this text difficult, but the variety of primitive processes that are now and then adopted as explanatory models. There is a simple enough homology that displays itself in the major order or levels: gravity, with its coupling of repulsive and attractive forces; light, with its passage through translucent bodies and its refraction from opaque; and magnetism, with its polarity and reversals of polarity, display a simple taxonomic skeleton. Cohesion in various bodies, variances in mass, and the resistance of

phenomena such as conduction of heat or electricity to kinetic explanations, or of chemical interactions to a simple alterity or oxidation or deoxidization all work counter to the imposition of simple schemes. And *Naturphilosophie* must also deploy these organizational schemes while at the same time reflecting the disorder of the current findings of empirical disciplines. 'Development' in nature is a somewhat contradictory idea too, for in Schelling's time it meant the elaboration of *Stufenfolge*, an archaeological stratigraphy of nature instead of an evolutionary history.³² The whole endeavor itself has to be situated in the history of science and the history of philosophy, which lends the whole enterprise a certain quaintness or irrecoverability.

Naturphilosophie in the 1803/04 Complete System of Philosophy

In lectures delivered at Würzburg in 1803/04 Schelling returned to the Spinozism of the 1801 Presentation, this time providing extensive commentary on theorems which were there presented in the all too brief style of axiomatic derivation. The problematic language of the earlier exposition, with its turgid vocabulary of 'quantitative indifference' and 'quantitative difference,' is replaced by a view of reality as self-expressive or affirmation, an identity (or copula in propositional terms) of affirming and what is affirmed. The two systematic requirements, unity of principle and completeness of explanation, coincide so that the identity of God and the universe is evident and Jacobi's constraint met-that there be no 'egress from the absolute' or derivation of concrete individuals that exist outside the embrace of the absolute. These goals cannot be met, however, without reinterpreting the individuals of the expressed universe as ideal entities, ideas, while the apparent 'real' things of experience or finite individuals are seen to be self-sundered from their ideas, their systematic context, and hence deceptive imitations of the ideal order. In their ersatz self-positing, finite individuals declare a pseudoindependence and translate the absolute's all-at-once expression of reality inside the potencies into a temporal succession or a scission between possibility and actuality, making each individual a private history of the world, or a history of the world from one very determinate location.³³ Once again, Naturphilosophie occupies the bulk of the lectures and does the heavy argumentative lifting: if our senses seem to present us with discrete independent items, and our empirical sciences exhibit law-like interconnection among them, consideration of nature from reason's perspective shows that finitude is a vanishing determination. Upon inspection, what at first presents itself as being turns out to be merely the ground of being.

The System's treatment of God or absolute identity that Schelling offers in 1803/04 is tightly argued from premises both epistemological (the identity of knower and known in knowing) and metaphysical (God is expressive or an

affirmation that is both affirming and what is affirmed). The key point is that when, or if, human cognition lays aside its subjectivity or point of view in intellectual intuition, reason coincides with the absolute's self-affirmation.³⁴ And this divine self-affirmation is not merely logical or a mathematical theorem. It is self-realizing or powerful, a conquest over the possibility of nonbeing:

The form of the absolute affirmation of [and] by itself which constitutes the very essence of the absolute is . . . repeated in reason and its light reveals how we grasp the absolute, true and proper mediation between itself and knowledge. . . . [T]he idea of God in the spiritual world is the first affirmation of all reality; there is no reality other than that which exists and which is affirmed by virtue of the idea of Him, yet this idea has no affirmation outside itself; it is its own affirming and affirmed. The absolute light, the idea of God, strikes reason like a flash of lightning, so to speak, and its luminosity endures in reason as an eternal affirmation of knowledge. By virtue of this affirmation, we grasp the eternal impossibility of nonbeing that can never be known nor comprehended, and the ultimate question posed by the vertiginous intellect hovering at the abyss of infinity: "Why [is] something rather than nothing?", this question will be swept aside forever by the necessity of Being, that is, by the absolute affirmation of Being in knowledge.³⁵

One might call this passage Schelling's 'Hitchcockean moment,' the ontological argument reconfigured as a cliff-hanger, played in the philosopher's home-theater and projected by the Malebranchean internal light. This is the point whence the most extreme conception of Schelling's later metaphysics takes its origin: that the divine is free over against being, even free to exist or not exist. Henceforth Schelling's philosophical imagination continually yokes being with nonbeing—always a moment that is not merely puzzling or self-contradictory, but "vertiginous."

General Naturphilosophie: The Construction of Nature or the Real Universe

Nonbeing continues to play an important part in the Würzburg System, which among all of Schelling's many texts on Naturphilosophie has the peculiarity of placing a general philosophy of nature ahead of a more specific consideration of natural phenomena. General (or ontological) philosophy of nature displays the role of nonbeing, or merely relative being, in nature's particular entities, for the particular exists in a double (or indecisive) way—both in the idea, hence in God, and 'in itself' or in the double frameworks of shadow alterity: space and time, gravity and light, motion and rest, and contraction and expansion. In treating these shadow frameworks, Schelling crafts a picture of

nature from mechanistic elements derived from Spinoza's and Kant's physics and from vitalistic elements borrowed from Leibniz, for the particular in nature is monadic in character: a kernel of spontaneous or self-originated agency beclouded by the passivity enforced by its external relations to other particulars. Indeed the external realm of particulars is like a rainbow, a refraction of the light of infinite substance through the prism of nonbeing; the individual item, the particular that both subsists in the idea and exists in itself, is like the double-image Goethe produced in one of his optical experiments, which involved viewing a lighted object directly through a prismatic lens.³⁶

Space, time and causal interrelation are of course the formal characteristics of appearances, as Kant said, but rather than their being empty a priori intuitions, they are shadows cast by being that has opted to live outside the absolute or to hide its infinity. Though these formal characteristics are amenable to numeration and can be accounted magnitudes, actual infinity has nothing to do with endless or indefinite numeration, argues Schelling, citing Spinoza's example of the actual infinite as the incommensurable areas of two circles. one of which contains the other, but neither of which has the same center. The infinity of matter is first directly seen in the organism, in its self-regulating or homeostatic character—or its being a dense system of systems.³⁷ That the finite individual finds itself placed in endlessly enumerable space and time and finds its ever-perishing substance only in causal relations to others similarly situated is an index of its privative status, its pertaining to nonbeing. Motion, if it is spontaneous, is the interforming (Ineinsbildung) of time and space, but mechanical motion is but externally imparted force exerted upon mass or the bare impenetrable stuff that fills space. Mass or the occupation of space by merely inertial matter (Masse) is the most degraded exhibition of spontaneity or self-movement. The inertial thing exhibits not the rest (or motion) of substance, but only passivity, "an inborn imperfection, like an original sin of matter."38

Newton's physics considers space, time, matter, gravity and light to be independent items of nature, separately quantifiable and interrelated only through mathematical models. Schelling's treatment of these parameters finds them all intertwined and ontologically based. Gravity is not a case of externally imparted motion, or motion of one finite body relative to another. Each quantum of material mass is related to the center, to the infinite substance of nature which is its ground; in this grounding of the apparent motions of individual bodies relative to one another one finds "the true system of preestablished harmony." Schelling criticizes Newton's postulation of attractive force and Kant's hypothetical construction of matter from repulsive and attractive forces; credit goes to Franz von Baader, instead, for positing gravity as an independent and substantial thing, one of which attraction and repulsion are specific attributes. The 'Law of Gravity' that physics seeks is not to be

found in extrapolation from Kepler's laws of the motion of planetary bodies but in a mathematical-ontological postulate: "every point [in nature] is the mid-point." It is futile to search for gravity as a discrete empirical phenomenon, for it is the hidden ground of nature:

The ground of gravity is thus the undiscoverable depth of nature itself that can never step into the light of day, since it is that through which everything is born which sees the light of day, the mysterious night or fate of everything, or the maternal principle of things, since things subsist in it as the ground in which they are conceived and from which they are born.⁴⁰

If gravity is the ground of the reality of things, light is their cause; gravity is the same in all, the identity of essence, or bare particularity, while light is the principle of distinction or *in-sich-selbst-Seyn*.⁴¹ Time and number, which is abstracted from it, are merely apparent features of phenomena, which are simply eternal in the absolute. When the particular is posited in space or withdraws from the eternity of absolute identity, the future is established as the real dimension of time: the negation of totality, the past as the negation of unity, and the present not as their identity but as their mere non-difference. Time is being's eternity in diaspora, a product of imagination, not intuition.⁴²

Special Naturphilosophie: Construction of the Particular Potencies of Nature

The previous section treated the universal frameworks of nature; its treatment of the dual nature of the particular corresponds to the metaphysical deduction of individuals in the 1801 *Presentation*. Where that work talked of the particular or individual entity in terms of identity's appearing as quantitative difference, the Würzburg *System* speaks of relative being *and* nonbeing that constitutes the particular, or the cloaking of intrinsic or spontaneous activity of the monadic instance under the guise of externally compelled or mechanical motion.

In the present section, Schelling has a more complicated picture of nature, its organization, and its products. There are the *three powers* or potencies of nature (as in Schelling's other essay in the philosophy of nature) displayed in the *three dimensions*, and further divided into *form* and *substance*. Inorganic nature is depicted in the first two powers, with the first or more or less objective power displaying a centrifugal movement from unity to totality, or *metamorphosis*; the second more or less subjective power displays a reverse or centripetal movement, a return to unity that is denominated *dynamic process*.⁴³ Under 'form' are ranged the familiar objective features of nature, formerly displayed under the title 'dynamic process': cohesion, magnetism,

electricity, and chemical transformation. Under 'substance' (Substanz, not Wesen) are ranged four processes of transformation or development (comprising the Evolutionsreihe): earth, fire, air, and water in the first or objective potency, and phenomenological properties such as sound, light, and warmth in the second or subjective potency. All the properties and processes discussed are ideal, or features of nature as it appears to us; nature has no objective or in-itself properties—the so-called elements that empirical chemistry attempts to isolate—for nature is but the one substance or matter appearing under different powers or exponents.

I have presented these features in more or less the reverse order that Schelling derives them, for I want to call attention first, to the *dynamic* language of Schelling's categories and classifications such as *Evolution* and *Metamorphosis*, and secondly, to the way all the processes he discusses point to the third potency, organism, and in particular to discussions of *physiology* that are new to this presentation of the philosophy of nature: sound, light and warmth are phenomena for beings so organized as to have ears, eyes, and skin capable of registering variations in temperature. Nature appears only to the kind of particular being capable of perceiving its activities and processes. If there were no subjects of perception, there would be no nature. The perceiving subject, however, is in nature as a part of nature—or as nature folded back upon itself. Says Schelling:

Simply considered, absolute substance is not *intuiting*; it is pure *intuition*. Only in connection to the organism is it mere *intuiting*. In sensibility the innermost and most holy reaches of nature are thrown open as it were, and its true essence brought to light. Here the student might learn to turn at this point of the construction back to the fundamental axiom for the construction of the essence of nature, which reads: *As affirmed, the essence of nature is to be affirming, in infinite ways*. At this point, where it appears as such *in concreto*, this will doubtless become wholly meaningful.⁴⁶

At this point, Schelling's reader might well turn back to the beginning of this section on special philosophy of nature and examine the twelve axioms that Schelling advanced for understanding the metaphysics of nature. One might see there an eclectic mix of elements borrowed from Plato, Spinoza, and Leibniz, but one might better see a struggle to craft a metaphorical language free of *precise* reference to extension, force, imaging, perception, subjectivity or biological life but fundamental enough to support all these overlays upon the primal ontological deed: *affirmation* or *expression*—or perhaps *articulation*.⁴⁷ The vocabulary available to Schelling is at once too tied to particular domains of nature, life, or mind and too pallid to express the 'decision' or 'leap' from nonbeing into being that is the core of things' *originating in while springing forth from* being's sheer power. The need to create new language or violently

appropriate the modes of speech of past thinkers—or to do both at once—will characterize Schelling's later thought, and while there is something irritating about it, it is at least resourceful when compared to the 1801 *Presentation*'s drab palette of mathematical and geometrical properties and logical relations. The ontological thinker is forced both to borrow and break the language of others and will end up looking like both anarchist and plagiarist.

With this in mind we can turn to Schelling's axioms for nature:

- 1. Similar to infinite substance, nature is the identity of affirming and affirmed, expressed in the exponent of objectivity or the real.
- Nature is in itself the creative and productive idea, though it appears as merely produced or created.
- 3. The items that compose nature stand to nature itself as things do to infinite substance.
- 4. In each thing or form of expression, a universal core (Wesen) is joined to a particular form.
- 5. The core reality of the things of nature is the true *idea*, but subjected to the form (or style) of 'reality' in material things.
- 6. If a thing is not or does not contain its own identity, it is subject to an external identity as its *ground*.
- 7. There is no causal interaction among things; each is a microcosm.
- 8. Things are joined internally, as Leibniz expressed it in his notion of *petite* perceptions.
- Finite things maintain their particular being by preserving a constant ratio of rest to motion, or being affirmed to affirmation, or limitation to position.
- This constant relation or homeostasis is maintained by reciprocal or interdependent change.
- 11. Both in substance and expression, the part of nature and its totality are the same.
- 12. Everything in nature pertains to the being and idea of infinite substance.48

Nothing in the above list of axioms is (or ought to be) surprising. Each axiom has historical precedents in the histories of philosophy and of physics. Each is broadly true of material nature and can be extrapolated to express the characteristics of both the organism and mind. And each is relatively hum-drum: philosophy may start in wonder but ought not conclude to the astonishing.

In particular topics of *Naturphilosophie*, the Würzburg system is innovative in its tendency to argue that the higher-order phenomena of living systems replicate the movement between polar opposition and identification seen in the lower-order phenomena of the dynamic process: magnetism, electricity, and chemical transformation, without imposing a single explanatory

paradigm, as Goethe did with expansion and contraction in the morphology of plants. 49 Schelling does take over Goethe's term metamorphosis, however, as a label for the centrifugal activity of the whole first or finite potency, where successive forms of activity are viewed as accidents of a constant 'matter.' In the second or infinite potency, termed dynamic activity, there is a constant centrifugal activity while various chemical 'matters' come and go; activity occurs in the different for the sake of identity and the restoration of identity.⁵⁰ The same two comprehensive or general potencies, considered as at rest rather than in motion, focus on the chemical process where two series of processes one productive of 'selfhood,' another destructive of stability, and their joint product are likened to the composition and decomposition of hydrogen and oxygen in water. There are no primitive 'matters' or elements in nature such as empirical chemistry was beginning to establish, only one substance under various exponents or potencies.⁵¹ One can poetically speak of four proto-elements or processes, as did various ancient Western and Eastern cultures: earth (the soul of selfhood), phlogiston or air (dissolution), water (the antithetical principle) or nitrogen, and fire (all-consuming dissolution) or oxygen.52

There seems to be something quaint or highly philosophical (as opposed to 'empirical') in the explanations Schelling advances here. Even when the same levels of phenomena are explained in a more 'nuts-and-bolts' way via cohesion, gravity on the micro scale, Schelling argues that all physical explanation can be translated into the language of 'chemism,' and the latter interpreted in terms of cohesion. But differences in cohesion are explained not by any change in substance, but only an alteration of form. The so-called elements advanced by empirical chemists are produced merely by changes of state in the one perduring matter, one form supervenient upon another.⁵³

At a crucial point of summary and transition, Schelling makes clear that to this point he has offered two sorts of explanation, one in terms of substance and another in terms of process or form. So the first or finite potency is exhausted in the dual orders of cohesion, on the one hand, and the transformative cycle of elements or 'matters' on the other. The same thing happens in the second or infinite potency, except he has to this point mentioned only a real series or dynamic activity: cohesion, magnetism, and electricity. To this is added a series of alterations in the ideal order where magnetism appears as sound, electricity as light, and chemical dissolution as warmth.⁵⁴ Bringing all these four sets of explanations together, Schelling speaks of the scaffold of nature as the "evolutionary series of matter," including matter's appearance.⁵⁵ Naturphilosophie</sup> is at the threshold of phenomenology; the table is set for the arrival of the subject.

Throughout the constructions of the Special Naturphilosophie Schelling repeatedly says that matter is one and that the hierarchy of forms that nature evolves is one sole process, formation or the in-formation of the universal

and the particular. Put another way, the universal process is *depotentiation* or the resolution of apparent solidity and separateness of entities into the ideality of fire, which is warmth, light and life.⁵⁶ This neo-Aristotelian hylozoism, which is decidedly *philosophy* of nature, not philosophy of *science* as we know it, strives to display biological life and the life of mind at the center of nature—the so-called anthropic program. Fundamental to this program is the display at higher reaches of nature of the coalescence of particularity and universality, gravity and light, light and life.⁵⁷ The key piece of evidence for this ambitious construction (we might say *reconfiguration*) of nature is the organism where an inbuilt teleology turns activity back upon itself in self-sustaining configurations; Schelling says of the organism that it depends not on the (apparent) substance of its matters or components, but on their accidents, whereby the part or function subsists only in and with the whole. This structure gives rise to a self-directing or self-programming purposiveness, the very opposite of the linear teleology built into a machine from without.⁵⁸

Schelling's discussion of the organism is too complicated to follow in detail here, but it follows the pattern of earlier discussions where the organism is assigned three levels or exponents of realization: reproduction, irritability, and sensibility. Reproduction is viewed as a higher form of cohesion, with respiration, secretion, and assimilation likened to organic versions of magnetism, electricity, and chemical interaction. Sexual reproduction in dimorphic plants and animals points toward the spiritual domain; in the first, each could be absolute but instead seeks the absolute in its other, while in love each person could be the totality but instead wills the other and seeks it.⁵⁹

Goethe's paradigm of expansion and contraction is appropriated to treat topics in embryology and physiology. Muscular movement exhibits both activities. The circulation of blood in the arteries and veins is also explained by this alteration; it is the first dimension of irritability, while the second is respiration, and the third voluntary muscular movement arranged symmetrically in the dimension of breadth.⁶⁰

Sensibility is the place where subjectivity breaks out in the organism; the nature of the identity of affirming and affirmed points toward the ideality of nature as a whole. In the forms of sensibility, absolute substance becomes pure intuition, pure seeing, and the inner life of matter is revealed as the identity of being and perception.⁶¹

Perceptivity is not something accidental in matter, it is its essence or very substance, since the core being of matter is *idea*. Perception and substance are not joined as items standing alongside each other, as if matter were somehow doubled; the being of one *directly* is the other. This is the chief thing to understand not just here in this construction, but in the whole doctrine of matter. *Matter as matter is already perceptivity*. 62

There is at times something forced or a little too ingenious in Schelling's inclusive classifications. That sound is extended to cover touch and the latter to include taste is one instance, but that sensory primacy is given to hearing rather than to sight as the first organic interplay of the finite and the infinite seems appropriate, given that thought is nested in language and "[1]anguage is the most sublime thing in nature, the word made flesh."63 But naturalism need not mean vulgar or reductive materialism. Schelling is enough of a materialist to see that thought is located and, as it were, embodied in the brain, and that the intersubjective world of spirit is similarly located in language (Sprache). At this point the objects of science and philosophy (and religion) coalesce, for the human is the place where depotentiated identity-or the absolute itself—is mirrored, where the natural and spiritual worlds join. A new natural science is needed to study this 'human-organism,' says Schelling-and today this makes one wonder whether our neuroscience and artificial intelligence can make do as the 'scientific anthropology' he calls for. For a philosophical construction can only identify homo sapiens as the end of nature and the beginning of the intellectual (geistige) world, the being that, while not exactly existing as the center or at the center of a planetary system, is itself the living center of the cosmos.64

Schelling has more or less done what he promised Fichte he would do: bring the tangent of naturalism back to the circle of idealism; there is a construction of the ideal world in the Würzburg system, but it is brief and uneven and ends with a Hegelian apotheosis of the state. There is undoubtedly too much analogical reasoning and too little empirical evidence behind Schelling's constructs for our tastes, but it is both surprising and heartening that in the end his gaze rests on the inner or invisible spaces where we think the 'holy of holies' lies: the brain inside us and the web of language between us.

NOTES

- A95-96/B131-36.
- A713/B741-A718/B746.
- 3. Speaking more carefully, one must say that Kant offered transcendental deductions of various items in his theoretical and practical philosophies and used the term transcendental idealism to refer to his whole epistemological theory. It offers an anti-skeptical justification of the use of human reason on a priori grounds, arguing that various levels of subjective unification or synthesis are necessary conditions for the possibility of experience. A transcendental argument is one that argues in two directions: from X being a necessary condition of Y, and from Y not only being possible, but being the case, to the X being the case. Where Y is as comprehensive a thing as human experience, the argument will be very broad.

Fichte offers a careful explanation of the procedure near the end of his 1797 First Introduction [to the Wissenschaftslehre], and one as broad as Kant's, for he insists that one is able by this means to arrive at "the system of all necessary representations," or experience as a whole (IWL, 31-32).

Paul Franks has recently called attention to the oddity of Kant's insistence that reason forms a *system*, and that philosophy's main challenge was to provide a *philosophy of everything*. That everything can be explained from one thing or a slim set of coherent principles is a theological (or onto-theological) assumption—no longer widely made by philosophers. Philosophizing in Kant's wake, Fichte and Schelling face an absolute challenge: explain all or nothing. See Franks, *All or Nothing*, 368–72.

- 4. IWL, 109ff.
- 5. IWL, 113-15.
- 6. IWL, 116-18.
- 7. IPN, 58. For a philosophically provocative account of Schelling's earlier essays in *Naturphilosophie*, see Grant, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling*, particularly chapter 6: "Dynamic Philosophy, Transcendental Physics," 187–98.
 - 8. IPN, 9.
 - 9. IPN, 28-31.
 - 10. IPN, 42.
 - 11. FO, 16.
 - 12. FO, 13.
 - 13. FO, 22.
 - 14. FO, 48-50.
- 15. VM, 105–9. Evidently this idea of a common transcendent Will that provides to a multiplicity of finite or individuated wills the vehicle for the knowledge of and action upon one another is what Fichte tries to communicate to Schelling in the difficult sketch for future revisions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* that he penned in the summer of 1801 and sent to Schelling on August 8. See *Correspondence*, in PRFS, 56–58. See also Vater, "*Erkenntnis* and *Interesse*."
 - 16. Correspondence, PRFS, 45-46.
 - 17. Correspondence, PRFS, 44.
 - 18. Cf. PRFS, 94-98 and 207-11.
- 19. Franks views the problematic nature of intellectual intuition as central to the letters' discussions. When the term was first introduced by Fichte in his review of Aenesidemus in 1794, it denoted access to the I's self-constitution: I am because I am. If Fichte now wishes to detach it from the first-person perspective and find in it access to a self-grounding that is shared by all finite subjects, but not exhausted by them, the intuition is problematic, almost as problematic as Schelling's stretching it to a third-person stance, a spontaneity equally on view in nature's organization and the finite subject's agency. See Franks, All or Nothing, 340, 364–65.
- 20. Schelling published Eschenmayer's critique—"Spontaneity = World-Soul, or the Highest Principle of Naturphilosophie"—in the first issue of the second volume of his journal in 1801, and his Presentation of My System in the second. For a more detailed discussion of the latter and particularly of the identity-theory propounded in its first fifty theorems, see Vater, "Schelling's Philosophy of Identity and Spinoza's Ethica more geometrico."

Eckart Förster views Eschenmayer's challenge to Schelling's right to assume the stance of being nature's creator, and Schelling's reply that intellectual intuition allows insight into a sort of self-constitution which, while associated with agency and personality in the finite subject (the highest power), can be 'depotentiated' (or have its exponent reduced) to simply being the agent in nature, as one of the two crucial points of the *Presentation*'s metaphysics of identity. Intellectual intuition involves an "abstraction," an intentional laying aside of subjectivity. See Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*, 247–48, 285.

- 21. Presentation, PRFS, 141-42.
- 22. Presentation, PRFS, 145.
- 23. Schelling, On the History of Modern Philosophy, 120. In contrast, a lengthy treatment of the philosophy of identity that Schelling offers in his first lectures on the philosophy of revelation in Berlin (1841/42) emphasizes the metaphysics, not the natural philosophy, of the earlier period and credits it with three lasting achievements: (1) attaining the status of a purely rational or a priori philosophy, (2) showing that all the entities it considered were merely relative beings, admixtures of being and what ought not be, and (3) deducing as its result the idea of God or the absolute, but in no way touching upon its reality. See Schelling, Philosophie der Offenbarung, 111–21.
 - 24. Presentation, PRFS, 145-47, 158-59.
 - 25. Presentation, PRFS, 150-52.
- 26. Only if individuals exist solely *inside* the absolute can the systematicity requirement for Spinoza's monism as formulated by Jacobi—no egress from the absolute—be maintained of indefinitely many finite instances of being-and-knowing. Schelling tersely states this and comments that it is self-evident (*Presentation*, PRFS, 151). Schelling gets around this awkwardness in his 1804 Würzburg lectures on *The Complete System of Philosophy*, where he returns to Spinoza's *Ethics* once again and offers expansive explanations instead of the cryptic theorems of the *Presentation*, by making the individual or item of appearance a dissociation of the particularity and universality of the *idea* as it is expressed in the absolute, defining ontological singularity in terms of privation or non-being. See Schelling, *System of Philosophy in General*, 175–82.
 - 27. Presentation, PRFS, 155-58.
 - 28. Correspondence, PRFS, 66.
 - 29. Presentation, PRFS, 158-64.
 - 30. Presentation, PRFS, 164-66.
- 31. See Further Presentations, PRFS, 211–16. From this point of view, it is the presence of 'Romantic digressions' in the steady march of the axiomatic deduction of 'scientific facts' that shows its author's real intentions and views. The polemics directed against "atomists" and "physicists," the scorn poured upon the disciples of Newton who frame hypotheses and design discrete experiments, the quixotic defense of Goethe's ideas of the 'unity of light' and the vanishing nature of color in his color-theory, and finally the adoption of Goethe's term metamorphosis for the basic chemical process of oxidation and deoxidization show that Schelling's interest is directed to interrelations, processes and transformations in nature, not discrete elements. See Presentation, PRFS, 174–80. Evidently, Schelling found

Goethe's attempts at *intuitive science* more interesting than Goethe found Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*. See Steigerwald, "Goethe's Morphology," 291–300.

- 32. See Steigerwald, "Epistemologies of Rupture."
- 33. See Schelling, System of Philosophy in General, 175–82. In the course of 1802 Schelling came to see that the true individuals of the identity-system are ideal, organic individuals that in themselves establish ideality and reality, or universality and particularity, in equilibrium, and hence that the pseudo-'individuals' grasped by perception and reflective cogitation are 'fallen' from that organic particularity into a secluded form of individual existence. This withdrawal from the absolute is just the reverse of the self-positing of the Wissenschaftslehre; it is limitation or the simultaneous positing of I and not-I, the shadow of the absolute's complete and powerful self-affirmation. See Further Presentations, PRFS, 215–16; see also SW 6:246–52.

See Whistler, Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language, 90–100, for a cogent discussion of the issues Schelling faces in formulating the theory of ideas and the various models he employs to communicate their trans-finite status.

- 34. See Introduction, PRFS, 13.
- 35. Schelling, System of Philosophy in General, 152.
- 36. System, SW 6:217-29.
- 37. System, SW 6:232-36.
- 38. System, SW 6:243-46.
- 39. System, SW 6:250-58.
- 40. System, SW 6:256.
- 41. System, SW 6:266-67.
- 42. System, SW 6:270-77.
- 43. System, SW 6:318-21.
- 44. See the summary table, SW 6:269.
- 45. System, SW 6:307.
- 46. System, SW 6:433.
- 47. Schelling clarifies the 'affirmation ontology' of the 1803/04 Würzburg Complete System in his 1806 essay On the Relation of the Ideal and the Real in Nature, or Development of the First Principles of Nature-philosophy from the Principles of Gravity and Light, where he emphasizes the dynamic quality of the connection—das Band or the copula—compared to the relatively static items it connects: what affirms and what is affirmed, or the ideal and the real, or substance (Wesen) and framework (Form). See SW 2:259-61. A translation of this key text by Iain Hamilton Grant is forthcoming.
 - 48. System, SW 6:278-81.
 - 49. See Förster, The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy, 271-76.
 - 50. System, SW 6:317-21.
 - 51. System, SW 6:306-7.
 - 52. System, SW 6:309-10, 315.
 - 53. System, SW 6:341-47.
 - 54. System, SW 6:354-69.
 - 55. System, SW 6:370.
 - 56. System, SW 6:346-52.

- 57. System, SW 6:371-77.
- 58. System, SW 6:376-80
- 59. System, SW 6:398-408.
- 60. System, SW 6:418-26.
- 61. System, SW 6:433.
- 62. System, SW 6:434.
- 63. System, SW 6:492; cf. 443-55.
- 64. System, SW 6:487-91.

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