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The Universe in the Universe: German Idealism and the Natural History of Mind

IAIN HAMILTON GRANT

Abstract
Recent considerations of mind and world react against philosophical naturalisation strategies by maintaining that the thought of the world is normatively driven to reject reductive or bald naturalism. This paper argues that we may reject bald or 'thoughtless' naturalism without sacrificing nature to normativity and so retreating from metaphysics to transcendental idealism. The resources for this move can be found in the *Naturphilosophie* outlined by the German Idealist philosopher F.W.J. Schelling. He argues that because thought occurs in the same universe as thought thinks, it remains part of that universe whose elements in consequence now additionally include that thought. A philosophy of nature beginning from such a position neither shaves thought from a thoughtless nature nor transcendentally reduces nature to the content of thought, since a thought occurring in nature only has 'all nature' as its content when that thought is additive rather than summative. A natural history of mind drawn from Schellingian premises therefore entails that, while a thought may have 'all nature' as its content, this thought is itself the partial content of the nature augmented by it.

1. Introduction: That a Universe Exists[1]

If we take it to be true that thought and its objects occur in one and the same universe, what must a nature be in which the concept of nature may arise? We need not begin by asking whether such a nature is, since there is in fact at least one, namely, that in which the question of whether nature is can and does in fact arise. Nor will we stipulate in advance whether such a nature is reducibly ideal or transcendental, that is, a universe of thought only; or

[1] 'That a universe exists: this proposition is the limit of experience itself' F.W.J. Schelling SW II, 24; *Ideas* 18. Schelling's works are cited according to the edition of K.F.A. Schelling, *Schellings sämmtliche Werke* (SW), XIV vols. (Stuttgart and Augsburg: Cotta, 1856–61). The *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* is in SW II, 1–343, and is translated as *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (hereafter *Ideas*) by E.E. Harris and P. Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

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whether by contrast it consists in the irreducibility of its objects to the concepts formed of or from them. Rather, we take it as primary that the medium in which the question we posed is in fact posed shows an importantly recursive character, making nature into the object and the concept under investigation. That investigation therefore concerns the nature of nature, and is the province of the philosophy of nature.

This is the problem forged from the conclusions Kant reached regarding the domains of the concept and of freedom, that is, of nature and purpose, in the *Critique of Judgment*. Yet it is a problem recurrent wherever, as for example in McDowell,[2] the transcendental constitution of nature – its irreducibly conceptual nature – is maintained, in part against those, such as for example Rescher,[3] who maintain a conceptual or explanatory idealism exceeded ontologically by objects irreducible to such explanations.

To begin to address these problems therefore makes an account of its first formulations, in the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling, into a desideratum. The following paper therefore proposes to investigate the problems encountered by any transcendental account of nature by way of a detailed reading of Schelling's formulations of them in the Introduction to the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. While often dismissed as 'neomedievalising obscurantism',[4] as the revenge of nature

[2] See J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, second edition (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), and 'Two sorts of naturalism', in *Mind, Value and Reality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 167–197. See also McDowell's 'Responses' in J. Lindgaard (ed.), *John McDowell. Experience, Norm and Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 200–267 and 'Responses' ~~again~~ in N.H. Smith (ed.), *Reading McDowell on Mind and World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 269–305, esp. 274–5: 'The transcendental work [...] is done here by the idea that conceptual capacities figure not only in free intellectual activity but also in operations of receptivity outside our control. Nature is relevant here only in connection with a possible threat to that idea.' Hence, 'once my reminder of second nature has done its work, nature can drop out of my picture'.

[3] Rescher argues this convincingly in N. Rescher, *Nature and Understanding. The Metaphysics and Method of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and *Reality and its Appearance* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010).

[4] As for example in D.J. Depew and B.H. Weber, *Darwinism Evolving. Systems Dynamics and the Genealogy of Natural Selection* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1997), 55. Somewhat bizarrely, the phrase 'medieval obscurantism' was used a century earlier to characterise the opinions held of Schelling by his contemporaneous objectors in W. Wallace's *Prolegomena to the Study of Hegel's Philosophy and Especially of his Logic*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894, 107).

mysticism against the successes of the natural sciences, the philosophy of nature in fact asks precisely the question that the natural sciences cannot, but which they presuppose as their own fundamental orientation: what is nature? Yet Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* begins, as a critique of its transcendental resolution, from the question of how a concept of a nature may arise that is separate from the nature within which it does so and of which it is. In other words, it starts not with what I have elsewhere called an 'eliminative idealism'[5] such as, for example, Moore, Burnyeat and Williams have influentially argued idealism to entail,[6] but from the very problem of conceiving thought as not arising from the nature it is of, both in the sense of having nature as its object and in that of belonging to or issuing from nature, in the manner later proposed, for example, by Peirce.[7]

It is only, Schelling will argue, in separating thought from its initial conditions – in isolating its *termini* – that nature becomes a mere object, a *Gegenstand* for and against a subject, whether this object is, for example, conceptual or actual. Accordingly, the problem of the emergence of the separation of thought from the nature it is in and of remains insuperably primary with respect to either resolution of the nature of nature.

2. Invention and Identity

The problem I wish to address derives from the relative status of termini in transcendental arguments. A transcendental argument is a deduction of the conditions of possibility for some X, where X is

[5] See my *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (London and New York, NY: Continuum, second edition 2008), 59.

[6] For a discussion of these issues, see J. Dunham, I.H. Grant and S. Watson, *Idealism. The History of a Philosophy* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2011), 10–15, 33–7, 205–9.

[7] 'It is somehow more than a mere figure of speech to say that nature fecundates the mind of man with ideas which, when those ideas grow up, will resemble their father, Nature.' C.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, **VII** vols. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1931–58), V, 591. See Peirce's Schellingian confession, especially regarding the *Naturphilosophie*, in a letter to William James of January 28, 1895, cited in B. Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy* (Albany NY: SUNY, 2011), 225n2, as against his claim, in 'The law of mind' (in J. Buchler (ed.), *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover, 1955), 339) never to have contracted the 'virus' of 'Concord transcendentalism', however indebted this may have been to Schelling.

anything actual.[8] Two stipulations should be made. First, the grounds for the satisfaction of a transcendental argument must include the complete discovery of the possibilisers[9] for any actuality = X, or their transcendental deduction will have no end. Second, if X means 'anything actual', then all objects, insofar as they are actual, can in principle be demonstrated to derive from the conclusions reached in a grounded, that is, an exhaustive, transcendental deduction. What cannot be achieved is a transcendental deduction of the transcendental deduction itself, or the stipulation of the conditions of possibility for the transcendental deduction of the source and origin of actual phenomena. The reflexive asymmetry of the transcendental deduction has the important consequence that the deduction itself is non-deducible, or only deducible once the totality of its conditions are exhausted, since it is only by 'carrying the empirical synthesis [of conditions] as far as the unconditioned' that reason 'is enabled to render it absolutely complete; and the unconditioned is never to be met with in experience, but only in the idea'.[10] This means that there are no stipulated conditions of possibility for the emergence or conduct of a transcendental deduction.

These considerations are important because it is by way of such arguments that it is demonstrated that *no nature in itself need exist* in order that I experience. Hence the late Husserl's attempts to 're-Ptolemize' the Copernican turn in accordance with experience.[11]

[8] 'Actual', that is, in the broad sense, indicating some state minimally susceptible of predication rather than, for instance, the modal contrary of 'potential'.

[9] A condition of possibility is a 'possibiliser' just when it is necessary and sufficient for the possibility, i.e. just when it creates a possibility.

[10] See, *KRV* A409/B436; Kant writes: 'reason demands the unconditioned' (*KRV* A564/B593); 'Reason is a power of principles, and its ultimate demand aims at the unconditioned' (*KUK Ak*.V, 401). References to Kant's works are to *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, ed. *Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (AK), XXIX vols. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902-, which pagination is retained in all referenceable translations. Of these, I refer as KRV to *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N.K. Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929); *KUK* to *Critique of Judgment*, trans. W.S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987); *Op.p* = *Opus postumum*, trans. E. Förster and M. Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[11] Edmund Husserl, 'Foundational investigations of the phenomenological origin of the spatiality of nature: the originary ark, the earth, does not move', in M. Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, trans. L. Lawlor and B. Bergo (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 117–131.

Hence also the arguments belonging to Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*, that 'nature' is only possible as a determination of the *nicht-Ich* by the *Ich* that so determines it.[12] Hence also McDowell's argument that any 'nature' that can be conceived as being is a nature that only *can be conceived* to be, and as such, plays neither a fundamental nor even a necessary role in the explanation of the mindedness of the 'world' minds mentate about.[13] Yet since the extensions of transcendental arguments are ultimately conditioned by their termini, such that their conclusions cannot legitimately be extended beyond the *immediate* sphere within which they arose,[14] they limit only *possible objects of judgments* rather than stipulating what *is not*.

That is, transcendental arguments begin and end by reducing nature to experience; or, the alpha and omega of experience coincide in the elimination *from mind* of mind-independent nature. From this, two prospects open: the first is to accept the *elimination* which, since it would have the consequence that nothing that cannot be thought can exist, would result in what Kant would have called a dogmatic monism. In such a case, Schelling's judgment that 'criticism is bound for self-annihilation just as much as dogmatism is'[15] would be correct, since there would no longer remain a thinkable that was non-intuitable, and therefore no discrimination, of the kind on which a critical philosophy relies, between legitimate and illegitimate judgments in accordance with their objects. Arguably, indeed, objects vanish altogether from such a perspective. The second prospect is to accept the *identity* of mind and nature. Since I agree with the relatively neglected German Idealist philosopher Schelling that 'it is not because there is thinking that there is being but rather

[12] J.G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, trans. P. Heath and J. Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[13] See especially McDowell's 'Responses' to Pippin's 'Two cheers for the abandonment of nature', in Smith, *Reading McDowell on Mind and World*, 273–5.

[14] As David Bell writes in 'Transcendental Arguments and Non-Naturalistic Anti-Realism', in R. Stern (ed.) *Transcendental Arguments. Problems and Prospects*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 189–210, here 192, 'The transcendental argument must not invalidly infer objective and or unrestricted conclusions from purely subjective and/or merely parochial premises'.

[15] SW I, 327. F.W.J. Schelling *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, trans. Fritz Marti, *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge. Four Early Essays* (1794–1796) (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 186.

because there is being that there is thinking',[16] I cannot agree with the first conclusion, so will argue for a species of the latter. Yet this much must be noted at the outset: though an Idealist, Schelling insists that being is the reason for thinking, not thinking for being. This means that any blanket dismissal of Idealism as the naïve sub-Berkeleyan caricature with which, for example, Moore and Burnyeat work their various refutations, misses its target, at least in this case. Contrary especially to Moore's account, Schelling's assertion shows that Idealism does not by definition propose the elimination of a mind-independent reality. The onus is on the anti-idealist to show that the idealist is committed to this elimination.

Before continuing, a caveat: the suggestion of an *identity* between mind and nature seems – but only *seems* – to entail a *reciprocity* between them, such as that, for instance, frequently ascribed to Schelling's *desideratum* that 'Nature *should be* [*soll*] Mind made visible, Mind invisible nature'.[17] Yet the 'should be' entails – a point Hegel would make repeatedly against Fichte[18] – that it *is not*. Reciprocity – *Wechselwirkung* or 'operating by mutuality' – amounts to a trap for identitarians regarding mind and nature, since it proposes that the two are reciprocally limiting and exhaustive of the whole. Reciprocity therefore maintains both (a) that everything in mind is in nature and (b) that everything in nature is in mind. Rejecting reciprocity without falling into dogmatic monism therefore means accepting (a) and rejecting (b), thus retaining as irreducible the asymmetry between being and thinking. Yet the onus falls upon such an account to formulate in what such an identity consists if its factors betray a priori differences. Lest the point be lost in jargon: if mind were *not nature*, what would it be?

There are two ways in which Kant accounts for transcendental arguments, two termini he provides for the satisfaction of their deductions. The first concerns the function of apperception, the source to which transcendental deduction leads and from which its legitimacy ultimately derives. The second, simpler in appearance, concerns the 'manner in which concepts can relate *a priori* to objects'.[19] I will briefly address each in turn.

[16] SW XIII, 161n; F.W.J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy* trans. Bruce Matthews (Albany NY: SUNY, 2008), 203n.

[17] SW II, 56; *Ideas* 42.

[18] In *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and W. Cerf (Albany NY: SUNY, 1977), 117, 133–5.

[19] *KRV* A85/B117.

For Kant, a transcendental argument is concluded just when a concept may be traced back to its originating faculties and the question of its legitimate usage thereby settled. Since, Kant claims, we enjoy – as a matter *to be* demonstrated *as* fact – possession of concepts that do not derive from experience, the terminus of the *transcendental* deduction necessary to demonstrating their source cannot terminate in the world as the object nor as the totality of objects of experience, but only in a transcendental *function* that unites concepts deriving from Sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) with those deriving from the Understanding (*Verstand*). It is the function of this function to forge experience. That is, we may say with Lyotard, that such a function is 'subjective' precisely and *only* in the sense that 'the faculty that exercises it is the same one as invents it'.[20] On this understanding, the subjectivity vital to transcendental philosophy is as much *autonomic* as *autonomous*. The generation of experience is what concepts *do*, even unto dreams; yet they must be *apperceived*, that is, grasped by a subject whose experience is thereby generated *as* that subject's experience.

As Kant notes, the imagination does indeed become 'very mighty when it creates a second nature'; but it can only do so 'from the materials that first nature provides'.[21] Experience is therefore forged by transcendental means only given the participation of the paradoxical non-faculty of *receptivity* (*Rezeptivität*). Receptivity is not, strictly speaking, a faculty or *Vermögen*, but rather a capacity 'to be affected by *objects* [*Gegenstände*]' and that 'necessarily precedes all intuition of these objects'.[22] Whence the 'necessity' with which this capacity 'precede all intuition'? The suggestion is that in order that conceiving experience not become a 'frictionless spinning in the void', it must be grounded in an antecedent to which the function of forging experience, remains open. So because receptivity, as the one remaining non-spontaneous power amidst the economy of the faculties – but not, for all that, transparent to nature[23] – is necessary in order to generate experience, it follows that the transcendental deduction of experience yet requires a basis or ground lying outside

[20] J.F. Lyotard, *Leçons sur l'analytique du sublime* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), 15.

[21] *KUK*, AK V, 314.

[22] *KRV* A26/B44.

[23] McDowell has emphasised this point in responding to Robert Pippin on 'leaving nature behind', insisting that 'our conceptual capacities' are not limited to overt conceptual activity, but figure equally in 'operations of receptivity outside our control' (Smith, *Reading McDowell on Mind and World*, 274).

itself and that this ground be set prior to experience. Nevertheless, Kant insists that an argument seeking its terminus in such a nature remains transcendental: 'I entitle', says Kant, '[t]he explanation of the manner in which concepts can relate *a priori* to objects, transcendental'.[24] I thus turn to this second element of Kant's approach to transcendental termini.

Consider the statement Kant has just made: it involves a relation anterior to the *relata*, as the 'manner in which concepts can relate *a priori* to objects'. It is this relatedness, then, rather than the nature and mind so related, that provides the ultimate ground of the subjective function of creating experience – a function, to remind ourselves, that transcendental philosophy paradigmatically fulfils by reciprocally isolating nature from abstraction. Nevertheless, the suggestion that there is an a priori relation between concept and object is a radical one, insofar as it proposes an oblique transection of transcendental autochthony, of the subjectivity attaching to the function by which experience is generated, a fundamental *irreducibility* of the object to the autonomy of the function.

By this account, transcendental philosophy may sustain the relation between mind and nature without stipulating their identity. Yet because the termini of transcendental deduction remain apperception in the first case and relation in the second, the prospect of a necessary antecedent to the autochthonous generation of experience begs the question as to the termination of arguments resulting in either. In the case of generation, regardless of the actual or experienced antecedence of that generation with respect to the subject's apperception of it, a 'first nature' remains necessary. In the second case, that of the *a priori* relation of concept and object, *if* they are so related, this relation is primary either with respect to their separation, or with respect to both subject and object. Neither first nature nor the *a priority* of relation have been deduced, which, as the Preface to the *Critique of Judgment* would make clear, required Kant to revisit the foundations of transcendental philosophy[25] and, ultimately, to abandon the non-conceptual element in the interests of a wholly relative creation, abandoning epistemic support from anything extra-subjective.[26]

24 *KRV* A85/B117.

25 'A critique of pure reason […] would be incomplete if it [had not] already explored the terrain supporting this edifice [of a system of metaphysics] to the depth at which lies the first foundation of our power of principles independent of experience […]' (*KUK* AK V, 168).

26 'He who would know the world must first manufacture it – in his own self, indeed' (AK XXI, 41; *Op.p.*, 240).

It is at this point that Schelling's investigations in the Introduction to the first, 1797 edition of the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* enter the picture. That text contains a prolonged critical analysis of the claims of transcendental philosophy with respect to the self-sufficiency or self-grounding Schelling denies it.[27] Both there and in subsequent editions of this and other of his *Naturphilosophischen* works, Schelling attempts to understand *how it is possible* that mind comes to be conceived as separate from nature. At this stage, then, we note that the form 'how is X possible?' is of course transcendental. Yet Schelling's investigation of this transcendentally formed problem is designed critically and precisely to demonstrate that the ground of transcendental inquiry cannot be closed against its ungrounding, and to supply the reasons for this. What follows will consider only one extended passage, to which I will return throughout.

> [F]or we require to know, not how such a Nature arose outside us, but how even the very *idea* [*Idee*][28] of such a Nature has got *into us* [1]; not merely how we have, say, arbitrarily generated it, but how and why it originally and *necessarily* underlies everything that our species [*Geschlecht*] has ever thought about Nature. [2] [… W]hat we want is not that Nature should coincide with the laws of our mind *by chance* [*Zufällig*] (as if through some *third* intermediary) [3], but that *she herself*, necessarily and originally, should [/] not only *express*, but even *realize*, the laws of our mind, and that she is, and is called, Nature only insofar as she does so. [4] 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 the possibility of a Nature external to us must be resolved. [5][29]

Schelling's questions are then:

1. How do ideas arise [*entstand*] and 'get into us', rather than how we invent or project representations

[27] The Introduction is a sustained four-way (unhelpfully, Schelling does not structure it accordingly) analysis of transcendental philosophy, empiricism, rationalism (especially Leibniz's) and *Naturphilosophie* with respect to their emergence. The critique of transcendental philosophy runs from SW II, 12–34; *Ideas* 10–26.

[28] For reasons the translators do not explain, Harris and Heath render both *Idee* and *Vorstellung* (Kant's 'representation') as 'idea', rendering it unclear, bluntly, where in the Introduction Schelling criticizes transcendentalism and where he praises Platonism.

[29] SW II, 55–6, *Ideas* 41–2.

2. Granting a capacity for arbitrary generation or relative creation, what necessarily underlies this capacity such as is shared by the entire species, transhistorically?
3. Under what conditions would a merely contingent [*zufällig*] coincidence of mind and nature be conceivable?
4. What follows if the identity of mind and nature is given?
5. Why identity does not entail the elimination of concept or nature, nor their reciprocal or mutual maintenance. How does nature come to be conceived as external to us?

All of these problems culminate in the single question, requiring that the first five be developed before we address it. The culminating question is:

3. What is Nature?

Let us start with the first of these Schellingian problems, which pits emergence against projection, or creation against its relativized form. Schelling writes, 'for we require to know, not how such a Nature arose outside us, but how even the very *idea* [*Idee*] of such a Nature has got *into us*'. At this point Schelling is not asking 'how does Nature as such arise?', since we do not, he says, 'require' to know this in order to solve the initial problem, namely how the idea of a Nature arises if it 'gets *into us* [*in uns gekommen sei*]'[30] from elsewehere. Two things are immediately apparent. Firstly, it is not the existence of nature that is at issue, nor whether it becomes or simply is, nor whether the laws of nature are fully formed and unchanging; nor whether the world is eternal; nor whether they arise and develop. This is, however, the subject of extended passages from the Introduction to the *Ideas* which we shall come to below.

Secondly, that the access problem that bedevils transcendental philosophy and epistemology is *inverted*. The access problem is this: to what have we access if the form under which all representation is for us is insuperable? If, that is, no access-instance, since it would be our access-instance, can be independent of our makings, doings or expressings, then this must also apply to the objects we access – that we *represent* – since if it did not, this would disqualify the instance as one of access. While such a problem may be resolved by retreating ever further (or ever higher) into the orders of reference within a domain constituted as without an outside, this postpones, rather than resolves, the issue. For this reason, the access problem is

[30] SW II, 55–6, *Ideas* 41–2.

ultimately a problem of how an ontology may be derived from an order of reference that is not ultimate but infinitely nested.[31] The Schellingian inversion takes place on a twofold basis: firstly, on that of an idea that does not arise *from us* but rather accesses 'us'; whatever the idea might be it does not, that is, *originate* in us – mind, therefore, is only *part* of the idea's trajectory. Nor do we yet know what this 'us' might be. What we do know is that it is an 'us' rather than an 'I'. We learn only later in our passage that the basis of the 'us' is *Geschlecht* – species, kind or 'race' in the sense of 'human race' and which delivers the ideation problem to the domain of nature, rather than delivering the domain of nature from the problem of ideation, which is the standard transcendental route.

The inversion of the access problem from 'how can I know nature' to 'how does the idea of nature enter our species' is therefore *naturalistic* in that it does not presuppose conceptual mastery of what precedes it. Schelling notes that nature grips or even 'conceives' (*begriffen*) those who investigate it.[32] The question therefore of the concept or *Begriff* by which nature in turn is grasped or conceived turns on the capacity of a part to conceive the whole – that is, to achieve for the concept an extension greater than that whole. The two routes by which this is possible are (1) reduction of the conceived to the content of the concept, and (2) maintaining the asymmetry between nature and its concept without the assumption of the limitation of the latter thereby.

A nature that produced a thought incapable of exceeding its point of emergence, a dead end, would not be a nature capable of the concept of nature, of the 'universe in the universe' as Schelling says elsewhere.[33] Accordingly, the concept is not doomed by nature to reduction to the neuroanatomical event from which it emerges, or to limitation by just one side of the separations that produce it – object from intuition, cause from effect, the philosopher from herself.[34] The concept must therefore conceive, grasp or contain the separations that inform it, including, ultimately, the difference separating the concept from nature.

The inversion of the access problem has the following ultimate consequence: it pits a naturalistic creation against the Kantian

[31] A thorough working out of these problems is dexterously performed by Gunnar Hindrichs in *Das Absolute und das Subjekt* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2009).

[32] SW II, 12; *Ideas* 9.

[33] SW VI, 207; cf. VI, 185.

[34] SW II, 13; *Ideas* 10.

representation or *Vorstellung*. The action, that is, of 'arbitrarily generating' a representation disconnected not only from a nature outside me but also arising only within me, may have as its positive element the confident outlook of a nature *to be produced* in the bitter triumph of merely relative creation. But it is a production that can neither be accounted for *from reality* nor in terms of a *reality finally made*. The latter remains a desideratum and as such, acknowledges from the outset that it neither is nor can be an actuality issuing from the transcendental except as such a desideratum. This is why Fichte is correct to argue that all transcendental arguments issue ultimately in practical problems.

With this, we move to the second of Schelling's questions. The question does not concern a representation of nature such as we have arbitrarily generated, 'but how and why it originally and *necessarily* underlies everything that our species [*Geschlecht*] has ever thought about Nature'.[35] Granting that the capacity for 'arbitrary', i.e. non-necessary, generation exists, transcendental philosophy itself demands that we ask *what necessarily underlies this capacity for invention*. Insofar as anything necessary does underlie it, the arbitrary is its product; insofar as it does not, then whatever underlies representation has no relation whatever to representations, which therefore become arbitrary in the strong sense, i.e. that there is no reason for the arbitrary production of representations. Since this is precisely, as we have seen, what transcendental arguments set out to disprove, by arguing that there is an *a priori* relation between concept and object, some necessary basis, of whatever nature, is in fact assumed. This being the case, the question 'what is its nature?' leads to the following problem: either the necessity is a necessity that attaches simply to the function of forging experience, which does not prove but reiterates the claim that there are unmotivated productions of representations. Or the necessity is such as to withdraw the authority for their production from spontaneity – the function of forging experience – and to place it, as Schelling recommends, in the species. Accordingly, the thesis here is that it is in the nature of the species to generate representations, via the introduction of ideas of the same nature as those species into their members *qua* members of a species.

Summing up so far, ideas access species susceptible to them, and that species is one: nature. It is within this one species that the question underlying the difference between arbitrary and necessary generation arises, namely, the question of generation itself. Amongst

[35] SW II, 55–6; *Ideas* 41–2.

the aims of the 'Introduction' to the *Ideas* is that 'philosophy become genetic'.[36] Accordingly, a philosophy must demonstrate itself in 'arising before our eyes' and be tested according to its capacity for 'development'.[37] The question Schelling poses to the transcendental concept of nature is twofold: firstly, what 'reality' belongs to its 'concept of nature'[38] and secondly, from what does it derive, on which the answer to the former depends.

Since Schelling cannot eliminate reality from the transcendental concept of nature without undermining his argument, some reality must attach to it. It is the reality of reflection, which rests in turn on the 'activity of separation [*zertrennedes Geschäft*]' proper to it.[39] Such separation arises from the doubt that the nature I grasp and that grasps me is nature in itself or merely for me; but this doubt is in turn parasitic upon the activity of reflection from which it issues. While what reflection separates is conceptual content – concept from thing, or intuition from object – separation is an activity disturbing an 'equilibrium of forces' original only with respect to the reflection that disturbs it. The theory of action underwriting the withdrawal of force from acting in a world whose forces in turn we feel[40] rests in turn upon dynamics as the 'grounding science' of *Naturphilosophie*.[41] At its root, therefore, is the community of forces necessary in order that there be separation at all and, since no force is possible that is not limited by another,[42] such separation can only be for reflection. The reflective separation of mind from nature is therefore actual precisely insofar as it effects a redistribution of forces affected by dynamic activity in a common nature.

[36] SW II, 39; *Ideas* 30.

[37] SW II, 11; *Ideas* 9.

[38] SW II, 6; *Ideas* 5.

[39] SW II, 14; *Ideas* 11; t.m.

[40] 'The essence of man is action. But the less he reflects upon himself, the more active he is […]. As soon as he makes himself object, the *whole* man no longer acts; he has suspended one part of his activity so as to be able to reflect upon the other. Man is not born to waste his mental power in conflict against the fantasy of an imaginary world, but to exert all his powers upon a world which has influence upon him, which lets him feel its forces.' (SW II, 13; *Ideas* 10).

[41] SW II, 6; *Ideas* 5.

[42] '[W]e may think of force only as something finite. But no force is finite *by nature* unless it is limited by one opposing it. Where we think of force therefore we must always presume a force opposed to it.' (SW II, 49–50; *Ideas* 37).

These considerations give rise to the third of Schelling's problems, namely, how are *arbitrary* or 'chance coincidences' conceivable? Since, as we have seen, these conditions belong not to spontaneity in isolation from nature, but to a production Schelling must claim to be natural, this question concerns how nature is capable of arbitrary production. Even if reflective production is 'arbitrary generation' only *for itself*, that is, to the extent that it acknowledges no means to 'borrow its own reality from actuality',[43] surely this only defers resolving the problem of natural arbitrariness on the basis of epistemic limitation? It should be noted that at no point does Schelling dismiss the reality of reflective separation or its products. He only notes the energetic cost of its production. We may say therefore that production is demonstrably arbitrary to the extent that it becomes incapable of development, stalling upon its encounter with the separation at its root. The test of arbitrariness therefore is the reality attaching to its consequences.

It should be noted, however, that Schelling is not attempting to demonstrate natural arbitrariness but rather to reject the assumption that rests on it, namely, that coincidence is conceivable. The specific 'coincidence' Schelling problematizes is that of nature and mind. To what extent is such a coincidence conceivable as arbitrary? Firstly, we must note that the passage does not demonstrate that the coincidence occurs, nor even stipulate how it might occur. It aims rather to demonstrate that such a coincidence remains inconceivable if it is brought about by some 'third intermediary'. Kant gives us an example of such a third in the concept of relation that underlies the coincidence of nature and mind without causing it. Coincidence, on this view, remains coincidence solely and exclusively if the coincident elements remain (a) capable of non-coincidence such that the bond between them is not one that necessitates; and (b) separable therefore from the bond that unites them.

In his excellent book *All or Nothing*,[44] Paul W. Franks argues that German Idealism was motivated to respond to the sceptical challenges it encountered from neo-Humean and other sources. Franks describes the form these challenges take as the Agrippan Trilemma[45]: to the question '*Why X?*' all answers will either (a) lack justification; (b) supply a justification that retriggers the *Why*-

[43] SW II, 44; *Ideas* 33.
[44] Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments and Skepticism in German Idealism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).
[45] Ibid., 18.

question rather than resolving it, creating a regress, or (c) presuppose what they seek to establish. Thus, when Hume seeks to demonstrate the inconclusiveness of relying on reason to explain nature, he has Philo ask 'What peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain which we call thought that we must make it the model of the whole universe?'[46] Philo's question seeks to demonstrate, contrary to Schelling's account, that there is no reason to assume what is true of the part to be true of the whole. The coincidence, in other words, between thought and the universe, is absolute in the sense of *mere* coincidence. It renders any attempt to argue a necessity, for instance, between the causal patterns involved in the production of thought and those involved in the production of other events or entities, (a) unjustified; (b) retriggers the why question (a); and (c) is regressive. On this basis, no demonstration of coincidence as other than absolute could succeed. The only positive conclusion, therefore, is the impotence of reason on the cosmic scale.

Schelling's strategy, however, is to argue not from coincidence, since, as we have seen, coincidence presupposes a separation the concept is not required to remain on one side of. Rather, he argues from the necessity attaching to the production of thought that Philo's opening gambit itself acknowledges: *given* that such a coincidence occurs – that thought and nature coadvene, so to speak – then no explanation can satisfy the phenomenon unless it is necessitated not at the level of content, but rather of event, by the nature that underlies its possibility. To this extent, Schelling argues in strict transcendental mode, asking after the conditions of possibility attaching to the coincidence of thought and nature.

However, the passage goes on to stipulate the requirements for satisfying the question: nature is ~~only~~ nature when and only when '*she herself*, necessarily and originally [...] not only *express[es]*, but even *realize[s]*, the laws of our mind'.[47] Nature is nature only if it is capable of realizing and expressing the laws of mind. The passage does not state the conditions under which this might occur, since it articulates as fundamental a condition that is not a terminus to a deduction, but rather opens the conditions attaching to the laws of mind to a naturalism whose basis is given neither in experience nor in 'pure thought'. The cost, in other words, of the absolutisation of coincidence is the abolition of absolute termini, and therefore of a

[46] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* Part II, in *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 50.

[47] SW II, 55–6; *Ideas* 41–2.

spontaneity that can be restricted to a single domain of being: if there is spontaneity at all, it belongs to all nature.

What we do learn, however, is that a nature for which mind *is not possible* is not a nature at all. It does not follow from this that there *could be* no nature that did not produce mind, but only that, if mind exists, the nature it considers could not be nature if it were considered incapable of mindedness. As he writes in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 'the concept of nature does not entail that there must also be an intelligence that is aware of it. Nature, it seems, would exist, even if there were nothing that was aware of it'. [48] In consequence, the nature of the problem changes from 'what is the nature of mind' to 'how does intelligence come to be added to nature, or how does nature come to be presented?' (SW III, 345; *System* 5).

The nature that produces mind belongs at once to the nature of species and to that of ideas that access species. Accordingly, if the identity is given – question four – what follows? Firstly, that nature philosophizes, so to the extent that idea and nature are separated, this must be a derivative rather than an original condition. If minds conceive themselves to be other than nature, this too must be a product of natural history, philosophy as 'a discipline of errant reason'.[49] Secondly, insofar as nature is capable of the idea, no thought is not a natural occurrence. Thirdly, insofar as there is thought of whatever kind, *because* it obtains in one domain of being, it cannot be impossible that it obtains also in others. Fourthly, just as we cannot lay claim to the thesis that anything capable of arbitrariness is therefore universally arbitrary, nor can we claim that the identity of thought and nature is incapable of their dichotomy: nature must be equally capable both of their identity and their dichotomy.

Our penultimate Schellingian problem therefore concerns the nature of identity, and its consequences as regards the apparent equivalence or non-decidability of unity over dichotomy, or necessity over arbitrariness. When we consider thought and nature as coincident, and seek reasons for their identity as advening consequently upon their separate natures, such reasons remain arbitrary additions that demand explanation rather than offering any, since such a conception of identity presupposes what it seeks to explain. Moreover,

[48] SW III, 340; F.W.J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (hereafter *System*), trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 5.

[49] SW II, 14; *Ideas* 11.

there is something of a paradox in the claim that X and Y are identical, since if they were, then either X is not X but Y, or Y is not Y but X.

On the contrary view, that identity is antecedent to particulars, it can never be the case that particulars are identical one to another. In fact, as Schelling writes in *Presentation of my System of Philosophy* (1801), 'Everything that is, is absolute identity itself'.[50] On the one hand this affirms a univocal account of identity, that is, to the extent that everything is, it is identity; on the other, it is *in that everything is* that it is, i.e. cannot not be, identity itself. We may say that for Schelling therefore identity attaches to being rather than to beings or that unity is antecedent to duplicity. In other words, identity differentiates rather than integrates.[51]

As a provisional answer, therefore, to the question posed at the head of this section we may say that nature is precisely the identity that dichotomizes, or that self-differentiates into the totality of entities, the universe.

We have seen that opening transcendental inquiries to termini sequestered in particular domains of being remains inconsistent unless it is absolutised, so that such a transcendental philosopher could claim that 'there is being because there is thinking' or 'what being there is is thought-being'. We have not yet seen that nature supplies other termini, but that it replaces one set of terms with a ground that recedes from epistemic or transcendental access precisely where thought and nature separate. What this means is that whatever grounds is not merely logically nor chronologically prior to what is grounded, but rather that there is always an *ontogenetic antecedent* for any product or event that accesses us, despite our inability to recover it. This is what nature is for German Idealism: at once unlimited production and its ruins, the World-Phoenix, as Kant and Carlyle have it,[52] antecedent to the production of thought it necessitates and accordingly unlimitable save through all its possible

[50] SW IV, 119; trans. Michael G. Vater, *Philosophical Forum* **32** (2001), 343–371, here 352.

[51] See Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, 174. Jason Wirth discusses this point in his paper 'The solitude of God: Schelling, Deleuze and Nature as the Image of Thought', presented at the Schelling Tagung, Universität Bonn, July 10 2011 and forthcoming in *Schelling-Studien* **1** (2013).

[52] Kant, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens,* tr. Stanley L. Jaki (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1981), 160, AK I, 321. The 'World-Phoenix' is recurrent throughout Carlyle. See, e.g., *Sartor Resartus* Part 3 ch.7, and *French Revolution* Book VI, ch.1: 'Behold the World-Phoenix enveloping all things: it is the Death-Birth of a

productions and their source. As to these *termini ad quo* or *ad quem*, these limits or sources can never be recovered by a thought that remains, after all, an additional product of these same sources. Therefore the terminus of transcendental philosophy is the philosophy of nature precisely because the latter alone can demonstrate there is no terminus that is not conditioned by a separation antecedent to it.

4. The Universe in the Universe

> What strives against the intellectual or thinking – the real, being as such – of which we may indeed become conscious, and the concept of which consists, however, in not being taken up into the concept.[53]

Having examined the five questions Schelling poses regarding the relation between nature and the concept, we turn finally to the character and function of the concept of nature Schelling recommends. If conception is consequent upon division, how is nature capable of a concept of the divisions antecedent to its emergence – that is, of a 'natural history of mind'?[54]

It is difficult to conceive how a local product, actual as such, may enjoy an extension greater than its initial locus if the locus – the point of 'coincidence' or of separation between mind and nature – is explanatorily sufficient. A naturalism pursuant of neurophysiological reduction therefore could have no account of the concept as such but only its cause, leaving the concept beyond nature's capacities altogether if it consists in anything other than an echo of its cause. Or, if consistent, a naturalism of the concept would seem to condemn it to an extensionlessness in a manner not even Descartes envisaged for thought, making the concept a point insuperably less than its productive context, the creation within which it figures.

While the image of the point-concept retains the asymmetry necessary to overturning eliminative idealism, it simultaneously functions as the limit of nature, its *nec plus ultra*, in that nature does not continue after, but only up to, this point. Yet it is precisely what a concept is that it conceives something. The problematics of

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World!' See, finally, Martin Schönfeld's fine essay 'The phoenix of nature: Kant and the big bounce', *Collapse* **5** (2009), 361–376.

[53] SW VIII, 164.

[54] SW II, 39; *Ideas* 30.

nature and history – which together exhaust 'applied philosophy'[55], Schelling tells us – alter the conception of nature, and the concept of the concept, in accordance with dynamics, the 'basic science [*Grundwissenschaft*]' of the philosophy of nature.[56] While the asymmetry of nature and the concept remains, or while the separation at the latter's root remains actual, the history of a concept is always catching up with the concept from which natural-historical inquiry began and which issues from that inquiry. It is precisely in that conceiving has its history in the separation from the nature that conceived it to begin with that the concept acquires an extension that, while necessarily insufficient to recover its antecedents, is also additional to them, that is *genuinely* consequent upon them. Since, moreover, the concept begins its career neither arbitrarily in mind alone nor coincidentally between mind and nature, but asymmetrically in the nature from which it issues, the concept's history already conceives the separations that form it. The concept's extension, therefore, is always greater than consciousness of it, and what it conceives is its own nature, that is, the nature from which it issues. Accordingly, Schelling will later consider the concept's extension to be subject to 'powers' as instancing its basic recursive function.

It is for this reason that Schelling gives, as the test of a concept, not adequacy to a thing, but operative range, that is, whether it 'admits of *development*'.[57] Only insofar as it does so does it exceed antecedence just as the idea – the concept of the concept – enjoys only part of its career in mind.[58] Indeed, Schelling is at pains to stipulate that concepts do not have prior limits, and defines the idea therefore as the 'infinite' or 'unlimited concept' which is itself 'the concept of the universe'.[59]

The philosophy of nature does not propose to eliminate nature or concept but, in seeking a concept of nature capable of the concept, changes the form in which nature's antecedence is thought into the movements proper to the conceiving operative in nature. A concept is not a thing, an object, nor an abstract container, but a form of movement overcoming its beginning in pursuit of the history of which it is consequent.

German Idealism therefore confronts philosophy both with the insuperability of the philosophy of nature, and with the necessity of its

[55] SW II, 4; *Ideas* 3.
[56] SW II, 6; *Ideas*, 5.
[57] SW II, 11; *Ideas*, 9.
[58] SW III, 553; *System* 172.
[59] SW VI, 185.

application to mind. A consequent outcome of such a programme would consist therefore in the demonstration of the forms in which nature casts the thinking it produces, a demonstration that cannot acquire the terminus Kant demanded transcendental philosophy satisfy precisely because for it, what precedes mind is the nature that is its own, nonrecoverable history. If the philosophy of nature were inapplicable to ideation of all sorts, it would not be a philosophy of nature, but rather of something incapable of mindedness. I take it no naturalist would wish to be in such a position.

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