

Minded Nature

On naturalism and the bond between
mind and nature in Schelling's philosophy

Kristoffer Balslev Willert

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Kristoffer Balslev Willert

AU Tryk
Aarhus University

Kristoffer Balslev Willert

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PhD-dissertation

Main supervisor: Anders Moe Rasmussen

Co-supervisor: Thomas Schwartz Wentzer

Assessment committee: Guido Kreis, Kristin Gjesdal, Markus Gabriel

Department of Philosophy and History of Ideas

School of Culture and Society

Faculty of Arts

Aarhus University

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Acknowledgements	6
Introduction	8
0.1. Naturalized metaphysics	10
0.2. The non-metaphysical response	12
0.3. The metaphysical response.....	13
0.4. Method: “everything arises as a sort of dialogue”	16
0.5. Chapter outline.....	18
1. Naturalism Reconsidered	24
1.0. Introduction	24
1.1. Taxonomizing naturalism	25
1.1.1 <i>Extra naturam nulla salus</i>	25
1.1.2. Relations	27
1.1.3. The naturalist spectrum	33
1.2. Liberal naturalism.....	36
1.2.2. The resurgence of Kant and Hegel.....	39
1.2.3. McDowell’s liberal naturalism	40
1.2.4. Metaphysical quietism	42
2. Kant’s Standpoint-Dualism	48
2.0. Introduction	48
2.1. Kant’s metaphysical quietism.....	49
2.1.1. The antinomies	49
2.1.2. Kant’s principle of objectivity.....	52
2.1.3. Debunking the transcendental realist.....	56
2.2. The third antinomy – freedom and nature.....	61
2.3. Kant’s standpoint-dualism	63
2.4. Kant’s “Fact of reason”	67
2.5. Kant’s quietism.....	71
3. Systematic Beginnings	76
3.0. Introduction	76
3.1. A system of the world	76
3.2. Dogmatism and criticism.....	79
3.2.1. Dogmatism as materialism	80
3.2.2. Criticism as subjective idealism.....	81
3.3. Towards a reconciliation.....	83
3.3.1. <i>Of the I</i>	83
3.3.2. The <i>Letters</i>	87

3.4. Pointing towards a Naturphilosophie.....	92
4. Schelling's <i>Naturphilosophie</i>	96
4.0. Introduction	96
4.1. Context and the interpretative landscape	96
4.2. The systematic role of the Naturphilosophie.....	102
4.1.1. Six interpretative models	105
4.2. Schelling's naturalism	107
4.2.1. Nature waking up.....	107
4.2.2. A form of naturalism	111
4.3. The four theses in the Naturphilosophie	113
4.3.1. Schelling's Holism Thesis	113
4.3.2. Schelling's Process Thesis	116
4.3.3. Schelling's Teleological Thesis.....	120
4.3.4. Schelling's Continuity Thesis	126
4.4. Logical or real genesis?	135
4.4.1. Anthropic principles.....	139
4.4.2. The reciprocity of theory and experience	140
4.5. Conclusion: What kind of naturalism?.....	143
5. Schelling's Philosophical Anthropology	150
5.0. Introduction	150
5.1. Philosophical anthropology.....	153
5.1.1. The idea of philosophical anthropology.....	153
5.1.2. Freedom and systematicity	154
5.2. The human subject as decentered and centered.....	157
5.2.1. Schellings' notion of pre-reflexive freedom	157
5.2.2. Schelling's non-reductionism about human agency	159
5.3. Moral subjects: Between good and evil.....	163
6. Schelling's Identity Theory of Mind and Nature	172
6.0. Introduction: Schelling's monism	172
6.1. Schelling's panpsychism.....	176
6.2. Schelling's neutral monism	178
7. Conclusion: Towards an Ecological Thinking	194
7.1. Criticism and imagination	195
7.2. Schelling's non-anthropocentrism.....	198
7.2. Schelling's anthropocentrism	202
References	208
Abstract (English)	232
Resumé (Dansk).....	236

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Introduction

Nature thinks. With our awareness of nature, nature becomes aware of itself. Due to this “auto-epistemic” feature of the world, it doesn’t seem unreasonable to ponder as follows: If what we ordinarily understand as “minds” exist in the same world as everything else, how must this world *be like* in order for it to contain asking, interpreting, self-organizing, knowing, delusional, wondering, blameworthy, praiseworthy, predicating, autonomous, intentional beings?

This thesis develops a metaphysical framework for understanding the bond between “nature” and “mind”. The framework is modelled on F. W. J. Schelling’s philosophy. Dissatisfied, both from a metaphysical (theoretical) and existential (practical) point of view, with the common ways of answering the imposing question above – e.g., Cartesian dualism, reductive materialism, Kantian standpoint-dualism, and Fichtean constructivism – Schelling proposed a framework with historical and contemporary relevance.¹ From a set of simple explanatory principles – e.g., minds exist, there is only one world, nothing comes out of nothing – he argued that we can only make sense of the existence of human mindedness if we recalibrate some of our basic understandings of the natural order. Such a recalibration strives, as Peter Godfrey-Smith has recently said, to deflate certain “crude” conceptions of what it means for something to be *physical* or *natural* that are still caught up in a set of mechanistic assumptions inherited from the 17th and 18th century. To think less crudely about the physical entails that “mindedness” – and its related features such as autonomous agency – is not a human privilege. For example, other organic beings act and think too. In that sense, Schelling’s view has a range of echoes within contemporary theory (e.g., new materialisms) that defies *human exceptionalism* and tries to think less crudely about the more-than-human. That does not entail, as we shall see, that humans are not *distinct* from the rest of nature. But it does mean that this distinctness occupies a point, a very indefinite and potentially dangerous one, on a *continuum* alongside everything else.

¹ By claiming that Schelling can be relevant for contemporary thinking, I follow the track laid out by Heuser-Keßler (1986) and Högrefe (1989) and continued, among others, by Bowie (1993), Sturma (1995, 2000), Schmied-Kowarzik (1996), Frank (1997, 2018), Grant (2006), Gabriel (2006, 2011), Beiser (2008), Kömürçü (2011), Matthews (2011), Whistler (2013), Nassar (2020, 2021), Alderwick (2021), and Schwab (2022).

The radicality of Schelling’s account, which I reconstruct as a Spinoza-influenced² version of what contemporaries call *neutral monism*,³ is that not only do non-human organisms have degrees of autonomy, conceptuality, and sentience (which should not be controversial); we must also understand the inorganic world (“matter”) as being *structurally isomorphic* to the organic world in terms of being self-organizing and active as it is fundamentally *relational*. This is the central aim of Schelling’s so-called *Naturphilosophie*. We could also call Schelling’s monism a form of *naturalism*, but an expanded or open-minded kind. Everything in nature – from chemical substances and blades of grass to human moral agency – (also) contains, to a certain degree, what he calls “ideal” aspects. Everything is, in very different ways, both “ideal” and “real”, both “minded” and “physical”. That is the *neutrality* claim. This does not mean that the inanimate matter is “minded” or “conscious” in any anthropomorphized way. What it does mean is that the inorganic world is, as he says himself, the organic world *in potentia* and that it exhibits structural similarities that does not make the advent of the organic world completely mysterious. If we do believe that organic teleology and human mindedness are *sui generis* aspects of the world, and if we reject that nature acts in mysterious ways – that is, in ways that cannot in principle be explained – then we seem to be left with the idea of the natural world as a *smooth* continuum.

This all sounds a bit abstract and theoretical. However, Schelling’s model is supposed to be all but that. I agree with Harald Holz that we should not understand Schelling’s project solely as a theoretical project that can be detached from its political, social, and emotional contexts.⁴ Rather, what we find is a “critical metaphysics” that delineates a radically new world-picture designed to challenge and replace other world-pictures that, at least since “modernity”, have been governing how we think about our place in what Ernest Nagel called the “cosmic scheme”.⁵ Such a strategy is more imperative today than ever. As I will argue towards the end of the thesis, Schelling’s anti-mechanism and his broadening of the concept of mind in the natural world can have direct influence how to understand and engage with today’s environmental catastrophes that result from what Schelling called the “economic” and “exploitative” view on nature that he associates with Fichte’s idealism and modern philosophy as such.⁶ Whereas other world-pictures entail an “annihilation”⁷ of nature by reducing its myriads of life to machine-like things that have nothing but

² As we shall see in Chapter 6, I couldn’t disagree more with Walter E. Ehrhardt, who claims that Schelling’s main philosophical aim was to undermine Spinoza, that there are “no mutual foundations carrying” their systems (Ehrhardt 1992: 119). For a recent and convincing study of the relation between Schelling and Spinoza arguing that Spinoza had a profound and continued influence on Schelling, see Norris (2022).

³ This has previously been suggested by others, especially Frank (2018), but also Gabriel (2020). However, it has not been systematically unfolded and compared with what philosophers today call neutral monism (and panpsychism).

⁴ Harald Holz (1977: 59).

⁵ Nagel (1954: 261).

⁶ SW, 1, 7, 17 (2018: 13).

⁷ SW, 1, 5, 276.

instrumental value, what Schelling seeks is a basis for humans to develop “sympathetic” relations to the natural world.⁸

0.1. Naturalized metaphysics

Among contemporary philosophers, especially on the Anglo-American scene, a widespread approach is to understand the bond between nature and mind in a way that *explains away* one of its two components. As the inverse of some versions of radical idealism (or “constructivism”), the component to be dissolved is not nature but the mind. What Wilfried Sellars famously called the “scientific image” has, supposedly, outweighed the “manifest image” from which the world appears to contain norms, reasons, free wills, intentions, and actions. As some of these proponents themselves admit, unsettling as it is, this entails a comprehensive “nihilism”, for example regarding moral agency and values.⁹ This tendency is often accompanied by neuroscientific explorations, through functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), of the neural correlates of moral judgements or conscious states.¹⁰ Others, who are particularly fond of biological reductionism, tend to describe Darwin’s theory of natural selection as the “universal solvent” that eats through (or debunks) a broad range of our ordinary self-conceptions and understandings of the world (God first, but then also morality, freedom, selfs, and consciousness).¹¹

Although the “mind” or the “mental” seems to have no universal denominator,¹² the underlying imperative of this strategy is to *eliminate, identify, or reduce* the mind – and associated concepts such as free will, mental causation, teleology, normativity, consciousness, intentionality, reasons, beliefs, or meaning-creation – to something non-minded. As Daniel Dennett has put it: “In short, the mind is the brain. According to materialists, we can (in principle!) account for every mental phenomenon using the same physical principles, laws, and raw materials that suffice to explain radioactivity, continental drift, photosynthesis, reproduction, nutrition, and growth”.¹³ Depending on what Dennett exactly means by “explanation” – brains obviously make minds possible, but is that a *sufficient* or *exhaustive* story? – the tendency among the most hardcore naturalists is to believe (!) that it is false to say that anyone *really* has beliefs or reasons (e.g., for action), just like it is strictly false that the sun rises and sets. These are nothing but phenomenological illusions. At some point, some of these philosophers seem to hope, we will be able to replace mental categories (e.g., beliefs, reasons, free will etc.) with neurological language referring to synapses, neurotransmitters, ganglia etc., that will be better equipped to explain and describe (human) behavior. Since we cannot eliminate what has never existed, what this means is that we should eliminate a set of categories from our scientific and, at some

⁸ SW, 1, 7, 465 (1994b: 132).

⁹ Rosenberg & Sommers (2003); Tartaglia & Llanera (2021).

¹⁰ See e.g., the introduction and contributions in Liao (2016) and Caruso & Flanagan (2018).

¹¹ Dennett (1995: 521).

¹² For a general overview of the different “marks of the mental”, see Pernu (2017).

¹³ Dennett (1991: 33).

point in the distant future, ordinary language.¹⁴ Human products (e.g., history, literature, art, religion etc.) should be studied by using the concepts and methods of the natural sciences (physics, chemistry, and biology, in particular), that is, the “objective, materialistic, third-person world of the physical sciences”.¹⁵ That makes this form a naturalism a rather *puritanical* outlook.

Although its history is long, this materialistic imperative has received a more programmatic, metaphysical, and culturally expansive profile throughout the last 20-30 years in tandem with our increasing capacities to explain, predict, and control natural phenomena (including our own bodies and brains). Just think about the widespread fascination (e.g., in the media or in film and TV) with natural scientific experiments and travels into space; about the universal technological optimism across the globe, currently exemplified by the underlying (although not particularly scientifically and politically well-founded) optimism that (future) attempts to use Carbon Capture Storage can lead us out of the climate catastrophe; or about the development of dating apps that categorize people based on their genetic coding. For good and for bad, some would say, the scientific image of humans seems to have attained a certain grip on ‘us’.

It is interesting that many philosophical proponents (not opponents!) recognize that this kind of strong naturalism is a form of “ideology” with “imperialist” and “hegemonic” tendencies.¹⁶ In contrast to the American naturalists like Dewey, who were ontological non-reductionists and pluralists, this is not merely a matter of *respect* for science. That should be a prerequisite for every sensible philosophy and basic understanding of the world. Rather, this program tends towards using (physical) science as the only viable option for, as Ladyman and Ross put it in their programmatic *Every Thing Must Go: Metaphysics Naturalized* (2007), a “comprehensive” and “unified world-view”.¹⁷ Ladyman and Ross refer to this as a “radically naturalistic metaphysics”, while Allyssa Ney calls it “neo-positivist metaphysics”.¹⁸ Even those hard naturalists that wish to eschew metaphysical idioms, this tendency is inescapable. For example, Dennett writes with a strong metaphysical impulse that what we need is a “single vision of the universe”.¹⁹

Hence, this kind of naturalism or physicalism is thoroughly *metaphysical*. This means, to use Sellars’ phrasing, that it pursues a complete description of “how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term”.²⁰ It is the attempt to template how, in the most general terms,

¹⁴ Examples of this type of eliminativism is widespread. Here is a few examples: Frankish (2017) and Dennett (2017) believe that consciousness is an “illusion”; Pereboom (2001) believes that free will is an “illusion”; Churchland (1981, 1989) and Stich (1983) are eliminativists about a set of mental attitudes and categories such as beliefs; and Benovsky (2018) argues that “selves” or “persons” don’t exist.

¹⁵ Dennett (1987: 5).

¹⁶ Kim (2003: 84) and Papineau (2001: 8).

¹⁷ Ross & Ladyman (2007: 1, 45).

¹⁸ Ney (2020).

¹⁹ Dennett (2003: 13-15).

²⁰ Sellars (1963: 1).

the world hangs together at what we could call a fundamental or universal level. That is, a theory that, as Alyssa Ney puts it, aspires to “completeness in the sense that every fact about the world is either a part of that theory or can be accounted for completely in terms of that theory”.²¹ According to the hard naturalist, every fact about the world can, in principle, be accounted for in complete terms through natural scientific concepts and methods.²²

0.2. The non-metaphysical response

A bunch of philosophers have since the 1980’s and 1990’s attempted to reconstruct – in a certain “non-metaphysical” spirit – central tenets of both Kant and Hegel’s philosophy in order to challenge scientific types of naturalism (e.g., Allison, Habermas, McDowell, Brandom, and Pippin). Their central impetus has been to legitimize the irreducible character of what Sellars famously called the “space of reason” (or normativity) in contrast to the “space of natural science”. That is, the irreducibility of human norms, reason-giving, freedom to think and act, conceptuality, and intentions. Many of these appropriations of Kant and Hegel explicitly attempt to tackle the question of naturalism by proposing a more *liberal* kind of naturalism as opposed to its scientific sister. This strategy involves 1) a descriptive or epistemological dualism between nature and mindedness, and 2) a metaphysical quietism resulting from the irreducibility of each of the two standpoints and the (apparent) impossibility of merging them into one coherent picture. In fact, in describing the structures of our normative space of reason, we are better off, as Pippin says, “leaving nature out of the picture altogether”.²³ We should not, we are told, feel the force of the following question: “[*W*]hat must nature be like for meaning in nature – conceptually informed sensibility and practical reasons having a grip, for example, but also purposive life, organic wholes – to be possible?”²⁴

Most philosophers within this camp are quite happy to refer to their strategy as a form of Wittgensteinian “quietism”.²⁵ In fact, McDowell believes that “constructive philosophy” (metaphysics) is fundamentally ill-founded, impossible and self-deceptive.²⁶ As he says, if someone raises the question of how the space of reasons is constituted, or how it relates to the rest of the natural world, we should offer them

²¹ Alyssa Ney (2014: 53).

²² We can also understand this as a strong semantic naturalism: Concepts invoked by the natural sciences have a special status or perhaps are the only genuine concepts, and hence non-scientific concepts can only be upheld if they can be understood or reduced to scientifically respectable concepts. A strong semantic naturalist will hold that only natural scientific statements are meaningful and/or truth-apt. See De Caro & MacArthur (2008b).

²³ Pippin (2002: 60).

²⁴ Pippin (2002: 60).

²⁵ McDowell (1994: 93).

²⁶ Colin McGinn defends a similar rejection of the possibility of metaphysics, which is often called “mysterianism”. As a result of evolutionary contingency, humans are simply incapable of treating a large range of “metaphysical” questions in a satisfying manner, including the mind-brain-problem (McGinn 1993).

nothing but a “shrug of the shoulders”.²⁷ Assuming 1) that the non-human natural world is a meaningless and purely causal realm without norms and agency, and 2) that the space of normativity is *sui generis*, then 3) we can’t do anything but ignore the request of giving a substantial conception of “nature” that could unify the two spaces or descriptive standpoints. Even though they are metaphysically incompatible, they are, from an epistemological point of view, equally justified and necessary.

0.3. The metaphysical response

From a systematic or explanatory perspective, there is something deeply unsatisfying about this (non)solution. Although we can in fact detect a latent call for “reconciliation” in McDowell’s view, it is never executed. But he seems to admit that *something* about what he calls “first” nature must be able to explain the existence of “second” (human) nature. This latent need for a reconciliation is a result of the liberal naturalist’s acknowledgement of the two following premises: 1) scientific naturalism is unacceptable, 2) *Natur* and *Geist* are not totally unrelated. From this rejection of scientific monism and substance dualism, it would seem that the “how-possible”-question is in fact a meaningful pursuit that can help forming what Sellars called a “synoptic” view of the world with an “eye on the whole”.²⁸

If anything, Schelling aspired to have an “eye on the whole”. Like the quietist, he rejects scientific naturalism. Unlike the quietist, however, he thinks that we can, at the level of metaphysics, give an answer to the question of how nature and mind hang together.²⁹ Although it is common to divide Schelling’s philosophy in different phases, giving him the nickname of the philosophical Proteus, I will attempt to show that, at least in the period of his published and unpublished authorship that I shall concentrate on (from 1795 to 1815), he struggles with one and the same fundamental question: How must reality (nature) be understood so as not to make the existence of minds into a complete mystery or absurdity? This is *Schelling’s original question*. And it is not merely a question of how to fit “consciousness” or “qualia” into the physical universe, which seems, for most Anglophone philosophers of mind, to be our only and last explanatory challenge. For Schelling, *Geist* not only includes subjective points of view, but also freedom, normative agency, teleology, and reasoning.

Different sketches and outlines that attempt to answer the original question are scattered around his published authorship between 1795 and 1809. The aim of this thesis is to reconstruct these sketches into a coherent framework. In short, my main thesis is that Schelling’s metaphysical model provides an interesting alternative to

²⁷ McDowell (1994: 178).

²⁸ Sellars (1963: 3).

²⁹ I couldn’t disagree more, therefore, with Sebastian Gardner’s claim that the “connection as such of mind and matter [...] is quite simply not a primary or self-standing philosophical problem for Schelling” (Gardner 2016: 136).

scientific naturalism and quietism. I will reconstruct this alternative through the following theses:

1. The Monist or Holistic Thesis: Against dualism, Schelling holds that everything exists within one and the same world.
2. The Continuity Thesis: Against strong emergentism, Schelling holds that nothing is in principle inexplicable (*ex nihilo nihil fit*).
3. The Mental Realism Thesis: Against the eliminative naturalist, Schelling holds that minds exist.
4. The Autonomy Thesis: Against the eliminative naturalist, Schelling holds that although every higher level of organization in nature, for example human agency, is *grounded* in lower levels, it is not *reducible* to or *identical* with those levels. Nature's continuum does not exclude distinctness.

I argue for these theses in detail in Chapter 3-5. In Chapter 6, I draw the consequences from them. I argue that what I reconstruct as Schelling's neutral monism (containing panpsychist elements) is a direct consequence of these four theses, which he does not think that the alternatives (Cartesian dualism, Kantian dualism, reductive materialism, Fichtean subjective idealism) can live up to. The gist of the argument is this: Against what he calls one-sided materialism and one-sided idealism, Schelling attempts to construct a philosophical system whereby human mindedness is neither made into a mystery nor into something completely self-grounding and un-natural. As he writes: "So long as the materialist does not acknowledge the legitimacy of the intellectualist, or the idealist the legitimacy of the realist, the system *kat' exochen* [par excellence] is inconceivable".³⁰ In the *Freedom Essay*, he calls this middle-ground a "mutual saturation [*Wechseldurchdringung*] of Idealism and Realism".³¹ This is what I reconstruct as a neutral monism. The view comes about as follows: If we assume 1) that strong emergence is untenable, 2) that the "mental" cannot be reduced to what we currently understand as physical facts, and 3) that humans are composed of the same elements as the rest of the universe, then 4) it is tempting to conclude that everything is constituted from something that is not merely "physical". As I argue in Chapter 6, on the back of this argument, Schelling proposes a kind of neutral monism that claims that everything has "real" (physical) and "ideal" ("minded") aspects. Mind-features and nature-features are, in a sense, bound together *and* distinguishable. This is why Schelling calls it "Real-Idealism".³²

³⁰ SW, 1, 9, 221. When citing Schelling, I generally refer to *F. W. J. Schelling's Sämtliche Werke* [SW] (1856-1861), ed. K. F. A. Schelling, vols. 1-14 (in two divisions, 1-10 and 11-14), Stuttgart: Cotta. All references are first to the division, then the volume, then the page number. An example: "SW, 1, 2, 435" refers to division one, volume 2, page 435.

³¹ SW 1, 7, 350 (2006: 21).

³² Or "Ideal-Realismus". See e.g., SW 1, 3, 386; SW, 1, 4, 89; SW 1, 10, 107.

The hyphen indicates unity as well as difference. What he calls “intermediate links”³³ and “intermediate concepts”³⁴ are crucial here: Freedom, for example, comes in degrees in nature. This is Schelling’s *gradualism*. For example, human freedom, which is distinct in virtue of involving (among other things) moral agency, is different from the freedom or autonomy of other organic beings. But that does not mean that other organic beings cannot in a meaningful sense be called autonomous and purposeful agents. Freedom is in that sense an “intermediate” concept that links the structural similarities and differences across different levels and beings.

There is a vast and continuously growing literature on different parts of Schelling’s philosophy that makes renaissance-talk about his philosophy reasonable, especially when it comes to his *Naturphilosophie*. Related to the topics explored in this thesis, it is interesting that we can extrapolate two opposed lines of interpretation regarding Schelling’s understanding of nature and naturalism. On the one hand, what we can call the non-naturalist interpretations either 1) argue that Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* is anti-empiricist and anti-scientific, thereby following the polemical route begun by Schelling’s immediate critics such as Justus von Liebig, who spoke about Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* as the “pestilence and the black death of the century”,³⁵ or, somewhat related to this, 2) they argue that Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* should be understood within the framework of idealism in that it imposes rational or logical structures to the natural world and attempts to reconstruct nature’s evolutions through these structures.³⁶

On the other hand, much recent scholarship, following the initial clue from Marx’ and Feuerbach’s appreciation of an anti-idealist or materialist core within Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*,³⁷ argues that Schelling offers a naturalism that is relevant for us today. Iain Hamilton Grant has been the arch-proponent of this shift, setting the tone for a series of naturalist interpretations in the Anglophone Schelling-scholarship.³⁸ According to Grant, Schelling’s philosophy, across most of his authorship, is “entirely naturalistic” in that he attempts a “naturalization of the transcendental”.³⁹

My interpretation explores the second track. Although I sympathize with its core premises, I will also argue that some of these naturalist readings tend to undermine the importance of Schelling’s Autonomy Thesis. This will become particularly clear

³³ 2004: 199.

³⁴ SW, 1, 8, 286 (2000: 64).

³⁵ Liebig (1874: 24).

³⁶ These interpreters argue for a “logical genesis”, not a “real” or “temporal” genesis. See e.g., von Engelhardt (1981), Krings (1985), Mutschler (1990), Bonsepien (1997), Berger (2020). Other non-naturalist readings are found in Franks (2007) and, to some degree, Nassar (2010). Nassar opposes reading Schelling as a “materialist”, since Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* does not imply that “there is not reason or ideal that is underlying nature” (Nassar 2010: 318). Gabriel also seems to be against reading Schelling as a naturalist, but that is mainly because he equates naturalism with reductive naturalism (2014). In Gabriel (2015), he modifies slightly and says that Schelling is not a “full-fledged naturalist”.

³⁷ See Frank (2016).

³⁸ Grant (2006). See also Sturma (1995, 2000), Beiser (2008), Whistler & Tritten (2017), Woodard (2021), Alderwick (2021).

³⁹ Grant (2006: 54, 119).

in Chapter 5, where I outline what I call Schelling's philosophical anthropology, which outlines how human beings are distinct from and irreducible to the rest of nature. This aspect of his thinking is either downplayed, ignored, or outright opposed in some of naturalist interpretations by arguing that human features (e.g., values and freedom) can or should be understood *exclusively* from "the point of view of nature".⁴⁰

0.4. Method: "everything arises as a sort of dialogue"

My project attempts to bridge a potential gap between contemporary and past philosophical discussions. From a methodological point of view, I will not primarily work as a *historian* of philosophy concentrating on contextual settings and influences. I will, on the other hand, primarily engage Schelling's ideas with more contemporary philosophical discussions and positions. The aim of this is not only to demonstrate the possibility of a dialogue between Schelling and current trends in philosophy, but also to argue why he brings a decisively novel theoretical outlook to the table.

Here are four methodological principles that shape how I know best to do philosophy:

1. The distinction between so-called "analytical" and "continental" philosophy is inept and merits no serious attention.
2. Philosophy is, among other things, a critical enterprise. Philosophers analyze and evaluate a complex set of human self-depictions, and they analyze and evaluate the reasons for preserving or adjusting these self-depictions. For example, the self-depiction that human beings are nothing but their neural networks, or the self-conception that we are, in one way or another, *over and above* nature.
3. Philosophy is also a creative or performative activity, like every other type of theory-building process. As philosophers we should dare to suggest novel evaluations, interpretations, conceptualizations, comparisons, arguments, critical reflections and so on. This implies that philosophy is an open-ended enterprise.
4. History of philosophy is a proper and indispensable philosophical discipline.

Regarding the fourth principle: There are many distinctions between different ways of doing history of philosophy (that are not mutually exclusive). For example, Rorty famously distinguished between 1) "rational reconstruction", 2) "historical reconstruction", 3) "Geistesgeschichte", and 4) "doxography".⁴¹ And Jonathan Bennett distinguished between interpretations that 1) fit with the author's historical intentions, 2) make what the author says true, and 3) make what the author says

⁴⁰ Whistler & Tritten (2017: 2).

⁴¹ Rorty (1984).

instructive and interesting.⁴² What I do in this thesis lies somewhere between the lines of what Rorty means by “rational reconstruction”, whereby one engages with past philosophers “as contemporaries, as colleagues with whom [one] can exchange views”,⁴³ and what Bennett means by making what the author says instructive and interesting. But this should be done without sidestepping the value and perhaps even necessity of a making a historical reconstruction that fits the author’s intentions and situates or contextualizes her claims.

This is very different from what John Passmore has called “antiquarianism”,⁴⁴ which assumes, following R. B. Collingwood’s *historicist* model for interpreting past philosophy, that each historical period has its own peculiar philosophical problems.⁴⁵ This is particularly clear, Collingwood thinks, in the case of political philosophy (which I, partially, agree with), but is also valid for something like metaphysics: Metaphysics is simply an attempt to delineate the structure and aspirations of human thinking at a particular period. The job of the historian of philosophy, the historicist believes, is to interpret what a particular philosopher or set of philosophers have to say about a particular, historically conditioned problem that we call philosophical. However, that there are no enduring (if not “eternal”) philosophical problems or questions is, I believe, outright false. That Plato, Hypatia, Spinoza or Anne Conway did not discuss and hypothesize problems and answers that are similar in kind to what philosophers today or 200 years ago troubled themselves with is simply a non-starter. To deny that what is today meant by mathematical realism is similar in kind to what Plato proposed in *The Republic* or *Meno*, or to deny that the central issue in Kant’s third antinomy in the first *Critique* is what is discussed today as the problem of free will vs. determinism, is unconvincing. Furthermore, on the crude historicist view, the philosopher is swiftly reduced to a passive node in a historical web (‘Descartes *only* wrote what he did because X took place and he read Y’).

On the other hand, a crude type of ahistoricism has become integral to contemporary philosophy. It is somewhat ironic, in the context of the present thesis, that this tendency is closely tied to the emergence of scientific naturalism. But, as Michael Beaney has argued, even this form of philosophy cannot eschew “talking with a tradition”:

To read only the very latest articles, however, is not to philosophize in some purified atmosphere: one cannot breathe in an ahistorical vacuum. The past is simply telescoped into a shorter time-frame; and once debate develops, the time-frame inevitably expands to reveal its historical roots and engagement with tradition becomes more and more explicit.⁴⁶

My interpretation of Schelling is an exercise in rational reconstruction. Clearly, some parts of Schelling’s work are worthless from a contemporary perspective. But there

⁴² Bennett (2001: 7).

⁴³ Rorty (1984: 49).

⁴⁴ Passmore (1965: 31).

⁴⁵ Collingwood (1940).

⁴⁶ Beaney (2013: 58-59).

are also many parts, I believe, that are worth exploring. Some of the arguments I reconstruct from Schelling's texts are not always explicit but follow, I believe, from things he says when they are suitably reorganized. To extract anything, we ought to pose some questions to the text. As Schelling himself wrote about scientific experiments in a what that can be translated into a meta-philosophical assumption: "Every experiment is a question put to Nature, to which it is compelled to give a reply. But every question contains an implicit *a priori* judgment; every experiment that is an experiment, is a prophecy".⁴⁷ Reformulated: Every interpretation is a question put to a text, to which it is compelled to give a reply. Every interpretation contains an implicit *a priori* judgment; every proper interpretation is a prophecy. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer called this a *fusion of horizons*. Interpreting past philosophy can enrich our hermeneutical space by helping us understand and criticize the philosophical and non-philosophical problems and self-depictions that haunt us today.

Schelling's frequent use of metaphor and high-flown wording makes any reconstructive interpretation reasonably open and challenging. However, as he writes in a footnote in the *Freedom Essay* about his dialogical writing prose and philosophical creativity as such (what he calls "freedom of investigation"), the partial unclarity and lack of definitional stringency is not a matter of accident:

The author has never wished through the founding of a sect to take away from others and, least of all, from himself the freedom of investigation in which he has declared himself still engaged and probably will always declare himself engaged. In the future, he will also maintain the course that he has taken in the present treatise where, even if the external form of a dialogue is lacking, everything arises as a sort of dialogue. Many things here could have been more sharply defined and treated less casually, many protected more explicitly from misinterpretation. The author has refrained from doing so partially on purpose.⁴⁸

One of Schelling's central meta-philosophical claims in the *Freedom Essay*, and elsewhere, is that philosophical production is, in itself, a fallible act of freedom (the hard determinist's construction and presentation of her argument against autonomy is, Schelling thinks, for that reason self-defeating). And this fallible act of freedom is necessarily, as he says in the passage, supported by a dialogue with a tradition: "[E]verything arises as a sort of dialogue".

0.5. Chapter outline

As a result of this methodological point of departure, my reconstruction is not limited to interpreting the linear development of individual texts (although I zoom in on individual texts in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5). For example, Chapter 4 is about Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*. Because he presents his *Naturphilosophie* in outlines and sketches, and because he does it over a long timespan, I reassemble a wide pallet

⁴⁷ 2004: 197.

⁴⁸ SW, 1, 7, 409 (2006: 72).

of texts, concepts, and arguments in order to extract a coherent view. I am less interested in the twists and turns that his thinking takes along the way, and more interested in the elements that can help forming an intelligible view that can still reasonably be ascribed to Schelling's own intentions. This is also the case in Chapter 6, where Schelling's ideas of identity and difference, and how they connect to the relation between mind and nature, are presented. Since he writes on these things in a wide range of texts between 1795 and 1815, my strategy is to reassemble the elements that can help to construct what Bennett called an instructive and interesting view.

The chapters are structured as follows:

In Chapter 1, I construct a taxonomy of naturalism and lay out the promises and problems posed by different types of naturalism. In the first part, I construct the taxonomy (1.1.). I first define naturalism as the thesis that *nature is all there is* and conclude from this that all kinds of naturalism are explicitly or implicitly metaphysical (1.1.1.). After giving a sketch of different relational concepts (emergence, supervenience, reduction, identity, and elimination) (1.1.2.), I construct a logical space of different kinds of naturalism on a graded scale, from soft to hard naturalism (1.1.3.). I thereafter present hard or scientific naturalism as a form of nihilism (1.1.4.). The second part of the chapter is about so-called liberal naturalism (1.2.). First, I extract the central motivation and tenets of liberal naturalism (1.2.1.). I then show how the central tenets have been developed alongside a resurgence of themes from Kant and Hegel's philosophies (1.2.2.). I then go on to analyze the most prominent version of liberal naturalism, namely McDowell's (1.2.3.). I conclude by framing liberal naturalism as a quietist response to scientific naturalism (1.2.4.).

In Chapter 2, I argue that we find a normative or descriptive dualism between freedom and nature in Kant's philosophy as a response to the problem of naturalism, which resembles the metaphysical quietism proposed by the liberal naturalist.⁴⁹ In the first part, I reconstruct Kant's so-called antinomies of pure reason and present his metaphysical quietism alongside his conception of objectivity (2.1.). In the next part, I analyze Kant's third antinomy (2.2.). Thereafter, by linking the antinomy-theory and parts of Kant's second *Critique*, I reconstruct his answer to the problem of naturalism as a standpoint-dualism or epistemological dualism of descriptions (2.3.). I go on to show how he justifies this standpoint-dualism with his introduction of moral consciousness as an axiomatic "fact of reason", which turns out to be structurally similar to McDowell's quietism by recognizing the explanatory impossibility of uniting the two standpoints (2.4.). I conclude by showing why it is indeed reasonable to consider Kant a liberal or quietist naturalist (2.5.).

In Chapter 3, I turn to Schelling. In this chapter, I present two of Schelling's early texts and argue that we already there find an attempt to bridge the gap that he finds in Kant's philosophy through a synoptic, monist model that unifies nature and mind. I begin by drawing out Schelling's idea of the methodological requirements for a philosophical system (3.1.). I then reconstruct what he in his early writings calls

⁴⁹ Parts of this chapter are published in Willert (2022) and Willert (2023).

dogmatism and criticism as scientific naturalism and constructivist subjectivism respectively (3.2.). I go on to analyze the attempts to bridge the gap between nature and mind that we find in *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy* (3.3.1.) and the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (3.3.2.). I conclude with an analysis of Schelling's aesthetic representation of his monist theory in the *Letters* through his analysis of the Greek tragedy representing a point of equilibrium between freedom and necessity ((3.3.2.1.).

In Chapter 4, the longest chapter of the thesis, I reconstruct Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* as an interesting form of naturalism that is relevant for a series of contemporary debates. In the first part, I present the context behind and different interpretations of the *Naturphilosophie*, which I position myself within (4.1.). I go on to reconstruct the systematic role of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* in light of his overall project of constructing a system that unifies mind and nature (4.2.). In the next part, I narrow in on Schelling's conception of *Naturphilosophie* as a discipline that is only possible against the background of a basic "separation" of human beings from nature, and how his *Naturphilosophie* contains a theoretical and practical call for overcoming this separation (4.2.1.). This is followed up by an attempt to extrapolate the naturalistic core of his *Naturphilosophie* (4.2.2.). I go on to reconstruct what I find to be four key aspects of the *Naturphilosophie*: Its *holistic thesis* against mechanistic conceptions of nature, (4.3.1.), its *processual thesis* against substance conceptions of nature (4.3.2.), its *teleological thesis* about organisms as autonomous and teleological agents (4.3.3.), and its *continuity thesis* about nature as one developing and graded system of more and more complexity (4.3.4.). In the next part, I develop Schelling's continuity thesis further and argue that he is not merely proposing a "logical" genesis of nature, but that it also involves real or temporal aspects, thereby anticipating later evolutionary understandings of nature. I do this by arguing, first, that Schelling was not, contrary to what some think, committed to a strong anthropic principle that ascribes to nature as such a rational and teleological structure developing towards cognizers (4.4.1.), and, second, by arguing that he had an attractive view on the relation between theory and experience as one of reciprocity (4.4.2.). I conclude by arguing what kind of naturalism Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* entails (4.5.).

In Chapter 5, I outline what I call Schelling's *philosophical anthropology*, mainly through an analysis of his *Freedom Essay*.⁵⁰ The argument is that the philosophical anthropology supplements his *Naturphilosophie* in that it provides a structural analysis of human beings' distinctness in terms of a fundamental world-openness that the *Naturphilosophie* cannot provide. In the first part, I sketch the idea behind Schelling's philosophical anthropology (5.1.1) and how he frames this project in the *Freedom Essay* as a question of how freedom and systematicity are related (5.1.2.). I go on to portray two sides of his view on human subjectivity. The one side concerns how human beings, qua natural beings, are decentralized beings, characterized by pre-reflexive tendencies in their deliberations and actions (5.2.1.). The second aspect concerns Schelling's positive and non-reductive account of human agency. Human

⁵⁰ Parts of this chapter are published in Willert (2021).

agents are, he argues, dependent upon what he calls their grounds, but they can also stand out from these grounds and impact them in different ways. This is Schelling's *Autonomy Thesis* about human agency (5.2.2.). I go on to show that this thesis consists in a structural claim about the specific marks of human agency or freedom, which is cashed out in terms a fundamental world-openness and, as a result thereof, moral agency (the ability for good and evil) (5.3.).

In Chapter 6, the final chapter, I connect the conclusions from the previous chapters and construct Schelling's general model of the relation between mind and nature. This model is a neutral monism, with panpsychist aspects. This model results from the Monist Thesis (Chapter 3), the Continuity Thesis (Chapter 4), and the Autonomy Thesis (Chapter 5). Schelling's view is the result of a fundamental requirement that he inherits from Kant, namely that our knowledge of the world ought to be systematically unified and ordered. The only way to make sense of the unity of the plurality of manifestations in the world, he thinks, is through a construction of different potencies in the world that all have a similar structure: They are all structured, in one way or another, through two aspects, namely ideal (minded) and real (physical) aspects. I begin by showing how there are good reasons to extrapolate a series of panpsychist aspects from this model (6.1.). I then go on to show, through an analysis of Schelling's conception of "identity", that these aspects are best understood in terms of a neutral monism (6.2.).

In the Conclusion, I sketch a series of practical implications from Schelling's view on the natural world, which we find implicitly and explicitly in his writings. These implications mount up to what I call *Schelling's ecological thinking*. The Conclusion points forward to future research. It begins by outlining a methodological framework for current environmental theory that fluctuates between what I call *criticism* and *imagination* (7.1.). It then argues how Schelling's world-picture contains non-anthropocentrist (7.3.) and anthropocentrist elements that are relevant for contemporary environmental theory in a way that can potentially help to bridge some gaps between so-called "posthumanists" and "humanists" (or Eco-Marxists).

1. Naturalism Reconsidered

1.0. Introduction

In his book from 1922, *Evolutionary Naturalism*, Roy Wood Sellars laconically proclaimed: “We are all naturalists now”.⁵¹ Of course, as he knew, that was not true in 1922, nor would it be today (although it probably comes closer to the truth now than back then). The gist of the announcement is perhaps better translated into a normative call for repentance: “We should all be naturalists now!”.

To analyze whether there is basis for such an imperative, one must understand how people who call themselves either naturalists or non-naturalists cash out the involved term: “naturalism” or “nature”. As a first marker, we could say that a minimal requirement for a satisfactory type of naturalism would be one that is both non-trivial (informative and interesting) and makes it volatile to count oneself as a (global) anti-naturalist. Satisfying this marker has proven to be more than difficult. To quote R.W. Sellars again: “[A]n adequate naturalism has never been formulated and defended”.⁵²

In current and past philosophy, one comes across a plethora of naturalisms and naturalization projects.⁵³ To locate some unified thesis of naturalism can thus seem hopeless. As Richard M. Gale has phrased it, there are “as many different versions of naturalism as there are naturalists”.⁵⁴ The fact that it has been applied to the work of philosophers having as little in common as Spinoza, Hume, Schelling, Marx, Nietzsche, Dewey, Deleuze and Dennett is enough to suggest that we need to draw some rather substantial distinctions between varieties of naturalism. We ought, in other words, to treat naturalism as a *cluster concept*.⁵⁵

I will argue in this chapter that different types of naturalism diverge on the extension or closure principles of their proposed concept of nature. That means that the kind of naturalist one is, or whether one is a naturalist at all, is determined by one’s answer to the basic question: What is nature? In its most abstract version, we can say that naturalism is the assumption that nature is all there is. We can call this *generic naturalism*. However, “natural” or “nature” are elastic words and notoriously

⁵¹ Sellars (1922: vii).

⁵² Sellars (1922: vii). See also Kim (2003: 85).

⁵³ In recent years, the idea and concept of (philosophical) naturalism has received thoroughgoing scholarly attention and scrutiny. See for example Papineau (1993), Wagner & Warner (1993), French, Uehling & Wettstein (1994), Craig & Moreland (2000), Ladyman, Ross, Spurrett, Collier (2007), Maddy (2007), De Caro & Macarthur (2008, 2010), Ritchie (2008), Goetz & Taliaferro (2008), Bashour & Muller (2014), Audi (2014), Clark (2016), Putnam (2016).

⁵⁴ Gale (2010: 55).

⁵⁵ Owen Flanagan (2006: 430-431) has provided 15 examples of what naturalism has been taken to mean.

hard to define.⁵⁶ As Dewey, a self-proclaimed naturalist, phrased it: “There is no word in the history of thought which carries more varied meaning than “nature”; naturalism shares in its diverse significations”.⁵⁷

This model for carving out naturalism implies, and that is another main claim in this chapter, that it becomes difficult to position oneself in or outside the taxonomy of naturalism without implicitly or explicitly invoking some substantial metaphysical assumptions. That is, substantial assumptions about, to quote R.W. Sellars’ son, Wilfried Sellars, “how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term”, or how to create a satisfactory “synoptic vision” of the world.⁵⁸ Even so-called liberal naturalists, who tend to commit themselves to some sort of metaphysical quietism, invoke, or are impelled to invoke, such assumptions in order to count as naturalists in any meaningful sense.

The aim of this chapter is to reconstruct a taxonomy of naturalism and the promises and problems that different types of naturalism pose. All the way from the (super hard) naturalism that happily pronounces itself as a breed of scientism or nihilism through its elimination of any concept or category that cannot be exhaustively explained through the methods, categories, and principles of fundamental physics to the (super soft) naturalism that rejects classical supernaturalism (the occult, the mysterious, the religious, as some would put it). In that way, the rest of the chapter has a certain semantic (analytical) and review-like character that will lay the ground for the rest of the dissertation, where it will be argued that Schelling’s position fits neatly into neither of the two dominant versions of naturalism, scientific naturalism and liberal naturalism, and that his position should be seen as an alternative to both.

1.1. Taxonomizing naturalism

1.1.1 *Extra naturam nulla salus*

Any specific naturalism is committed to a claim about the scope of the natural.⁵⁹ Negatively, any naturalist rejects the existence of the “super-natural”, the “non-natural”, the “a-natural”. Positively, the naturalist assumes that *nature is all there is*.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ As Hans Fink has noted, the words “nature” or the “natural world” are understood in varied and incompatible senses in ordinary language (he makes eight distinctions). Often, it is taken to refer to the world “prior to or unaffected by human, cultural or social intervention” (Fink 2006: 209). Such a view of “nature” is incompatible with naturalism as I define it since it assumes that nature does not exhaust reality.

⁵⁷ Dewey (1984: 74).

⁵⁸ Sellars (1963: 1-40).

⁵⁹ See Buchler (1994) and Fink (2006).

⁶⁰ There is a common distinction in the literature between *methodological* (or *epistemological*) and *ontological* (or *metaphysical*) naturalism, although the two are very much intertwined (Kornblith 2016, Papineau 2020). The two are intertwined in the sense that if our best (or only) way to acquire knowledge about the world is through the (natural) sciences, then what we can legitimately include in our ontology is what these sciences are about, which is the natural. In W. Sellars’ famous words: “Science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is

Hence, naturalism is a form of *monism*. As Thomas M. Crisp has put the naturalist view: “No part of the world, says the naturalist, whether it be the mental, the physical, or the moral parts, requires postulating non-natural entities, forces, or processes to explain and understand its workings”.⁶¹ Naturalism as “anti-supernaturalism” in this sense denies the existence of entities allegedly lying outside the natural world, classical examples being vital fluids, immortal souls, or deities. However, as soon we move towards examples that are seemingly harder to deny *and* naturalize – e.g., modal concepts or moral responsibility – the question arises from a naturalistic standpoint: Are such concepts within the scope of the natural? If so, how? If not, is the domain of the natural then non-exhaustive?

This general and somewhat vague outline of naturalism particularly derives from the self-proclaimed naturalists in America in the first half of the last century that, among others, included John Dewey, Ernest Nagel, Sidney Hook and Roy Wood Sellars. They sought to relate philosophy more closely with science by arguing that reality is exhausted by nature, and that scientific, experimental inquiry should be used to investigate all areas of reality, including what they referred to as the “human spirit”.⁶² In this minimal and anti-dualist sense, naturalism rejects that nature is a term of distinction.⁶³ Rather, nature is an all-inclusive term. As Philip Pettit has sloganized it, this closure principle is no matter what committed to the idea that outside of nature there is no salvation: *Extra naturam nulla salus*.⁶⁴ This entails that a naturalist ought to give an account of the categories or phenomena that, for example, dualists would normally mark as non-natural – no matter whether that entails a broader conception of nature so as to include categories like values or an elimination of the category in question.⁶⁵

Most philosophers have been naturalists in this minimal, anti-supernaturalist sense for the last century or so. This view entails, as R.W. Sellars put it, that the “whole of man must be included in nature, and nature so conceived that his inclusion is possible”.⁶⁶ The last part is crucial: what is required from a sufficient naturalism, according to R.W. Sellars, is a conception of nature that can explain, or make

not that it is not” (Sellars (1963: 173). Since the methodological component implies an ontological one, it is simply wrong to identify naturalism with methodological naturalism, although this happens frequently (Kitcher 1992, Dennett 2005). Those who dub themselves methodological naturalists do not want to make strong explicit ontological commitment, but merely see naturalism as an “attitude” rather than a “doctrine” (see e.g., Maddy 2001, 2007; Ney 2008). However, describing oneself as having a naturalistic “attitude”, does not escape some minimal ontological commitments; in order not to be too vague, a naturalistic attitude needs some content, and this content will imply a more or less substantial metaphysical thesis about the world, no matter where one looks for this content.

⁶¹ Crisp (2016: 61).

⁶² Their central texts are collected in Krikorian (1944). For an overview, see Kim (2003).

⁶³ See especially Randall (1944: 357-358).

⁶⁴ Pettit (1992: 245).

⁶⁵ As John Ryder has pointed out, Spinoza was one of the central figures for the American naturalists, since he “rejected the distinction between nature and anything outside of nature, between the natural and the supernatural [...] Spinoza asserted the continuity of the mental and the physical, that both are available to the methods we have for inquiry into nature” (1994b: 12).

⁶⁶ Sellars (1922: 20).

possible, the existence of human capacities. Although naturalism is often presented as a methodological doctrine somehow prioritizing the empirical, natural sciences in order to understand a phenomena or domain, naturalism contains metaphysical import. This means, as R.W. Sellars said, that naturalism is a “cosmological position [...] naturalism takes nature [...] as self-sufficient and as the whole of reality”.⁶⁷ What distinguishes different kinds of naturalisms therefore comes down to how *inclusive* one’s concept of nature is.⁶⁸ This is, as Barry Stroud has said it, the “real question, and that is what leads to deep disagreement”.⁶⁹

This is where the so-called “placement problem”⁷⁰ or “location problem”⁷¹ surfaces: If nature is all there is to reality, how do we locate meaning, morality and the mental, to take a few examples? As Huw Price puts it: “We seem to have more truths than truthmakers – more stickers than places to put them”.⁷² If we, for example, assume natural science to be the judge of what is real and what is not, then features like values, abstract entities, intentionality, freedom, moral responsibility, modal concepts etc. appear *ipso facto* queer, since they do not appear to fit neatly into standard scientific categorizations. Can they be explained exhaustively through natural science? If not, should they be classified as (useful) illusions? Or are they mysteries that we cannot hope to grasp? How do we square a conception of ourselves and others as meaning-mongering, rational, intentional, self-conscious free agents with a world that appears to consist of nothing but meaningless, mindless, unfree, non-rational stuff? This is the *fundamental problem of naturalism*.

1.1.2. Relations

Naturalism assumes that nature is all there is. But nature appears in a manifold manner, and a range of different (natural) sciences exist in order to account for different aspects or domains of the (natural) world. Therefore, a naturalist ought to give us some account of the *relation* between different natural entities, states, processes, or levels (or between claims or theories about natural entities, states, or processes) – or justify the lack of relation if one believes there is none.

⁶⁷ Sellars (1927: 217). Ernest Nagel similarly talked about naturalism as a “cosmic scheme” and about our “place in it” (Nagel 1954: 261).

⁶⁸ A consequence of cashing naturalism out in terms of the extension of one’s conception of nature is that it becomes difficult to see how one should be a naturalist within one domain (e.g., ethics) and not another (e.g., philosophy of mind). Either something falls within your concept of nature or not. If it does not, and you are still committed to its existence, you are no naturalist as such. It would be peculiar, I think, to be a philosophical naturalist while claiming that some things are not a part of the natural world. If you believe that for something to be natural is for it to be somehow reducible to a natural scientific vocabulary and you believe that a given phenomenon cannot be thus reduced, then you do not candidate as a naturalist in this proposed taxonomy. However, you can still claim that a certain phenomenon can be naturalized (reduced, say) while saying that another can’t – and hence believe things can be naturalized without being a naturalist (as such).

⁶⁹ Stroud (2008: 22).

⁷⁰ Price (2008, 2011).

⁷¹ Jackson (1998).

⁷² Price (2011: 6).

One need not be committed to a progressively levelled or ordered ontology (between, say, the physical, chemical, biological, mental and social/cultural) in order to make sense of the relational categories, but that is often how it is cashed out, whereby each order in one way or another *depends* upon or stands in close relation to its predecessor. However, dependence in such a levelled order need not entail that what depends on something else is less real than what it depends on; one could claim that they are “ontologically on par”. In this section, I will present a selected set of central *relational categories*. I will not evaluate the plausibility of each category regarding whether and how they are suitable for accounting for one or more contested phenomena, but merely outline the general idea behind them. Some of the categories will be applied in more detail later. The relations I will present are emergence, supervenience, reduction, identity, and elimination. But first, two things should be noted:

1) A common trait among proponents of each type of relational category is the assumption that nothing “a-natural” or “supernatural” needs to be introduced in our account of the world and the relations between its different aspects, levels, objects, or domains. In that sense, the emergentist is (usually) just as much of a naturalist as the eliminativist.

2) There are no non-vague and standard ways to cash out any of these relational categories, hence the demarcation lines between them are often blurred among specific authors. For example, the difference between reductionist and identity claims sometimes appears non-existent. Also, one can, of course, be a naturalist and still be committed to different relational categories depending on the phenomenon in question. Hence, one can in principle be an emergentist about consciousness and an eliminativist about free will.

Emergence

An advocate of *emergent* facts allows for the possibility of non-physical (not non-natural) brute facts: facts that cannot be explained by lower, more fundamental facts. However, for exactly this reason, the accusations against emergent bruteness are many: the position is incoherent, anti-scientific, mysterious, or plainly unintelligible, because it violates the *Principle of Sufficient Reason* and epistemological virtues such as simplicity.

According to Kim, the core idea of emergence is that

as systems acquire increasingly higher degrees of organizational complexity they begin to exhibit novel properties that in some sense transcend the properties of their constituent parts, and behave in ways that cannot be predicted on the basis of the laws governing simpler systems.⁷³

Emergentists argue that there are novel or autonomous properties, entities or laws in the world that cannot be reduced to the natural levels or properties (or entities or

⁷³ Kim (1999: 3).

laws) they depend on.⁷⁴ Emergence is therefore meant to conjoin aspects of dependence and autonomy. As Humphreys and Bedau put it: “Emergence relates to phenomena that arise from and depend on some more basic phenomena yet are simultaneously autonomous from that base”.⁷⁵ Hence, emergentism introduces the notion of “truly novel additions to the world” with “unique and distinctive causal” contributions that cannot be reductively explained by that from which they emerge.⁷⁶

The concept of emergence has experienced a renaissance within contemporary science and philosophy since it became out of fashion after its first systematic formulations by the British emergentists in the first half of the twentieth century, represented by C. D. Broad, C. Lloyd Morgan, and Samuel Alexander.⁷⁷ According to them, empirical evidence delivered by the natural sciences forces us to accept that some things cannot be explained, things they referred to as emergent qualities or facts, and that we must adopt, as Alexander called it, an attitude of “natural piety” towards such facts.⁷⁸ They frequently used chemical phenomena as examples of something that trivially depends somehow on physical properties, but also represents genuine novelties in reality whose forthcoming cannot be predicted or foreseen, even by an ideal epistemic agent, and thus cannot be reduced to what they emerge from. This non-predictability arises because emergent properties are “brute facts”.

Contemporary discussions of emergence often distinguish between weak and strong emergence (as well as synchronic and diachronic emergence).⁷⁹ *Strong emergence* is the classical and most standard version which claims that certain high-level properties or phenomena emerge from low-level properties or phenomena without being reducible to or deducible from facts about the lower level. *Weak emergence*, on the other hand, is where a high-level phenomenon emerges from low-level properties or phenomena, where the high-level phenomenon is unexpected but not completely irreducible to the lower level. Hence, it is more compatible with stronger types of naturalism or physicalism.⁸⁰

Supervenience

Normally, it is said that something, A, supervenes on something else, B, when no change can happen in A without also happening in B. No A-difference without a B-difference. This entails a necessity clause with modal force. To give an example, the facts about a certain piece of art and how it is experienced by an audience supervene on the physical facts of this artwork. The beauty of a piece of art supervenes on how

⁷⁴ See Wilson (2021) and Humphreys (2016) for discussions focusing on the diversity of emergentist positions.

⁷⁵ Humphreys & Bedau (2008: 1).

⁷⁶ Morris (2018: 117).

⁷⁷ McLaughlin (1992).

⁷⁸ Alexander (1921: 410).

⁷⁹ See Chalmers (2006) and Humphreys (2016).

⁸⁰ One can also be an emergentist in an ontological and epistemological sense. The first holds that there really are novel and non-reducible properties in the world, whereas the latter, in a radical version at least, claims that emergent properties merely appear novel and non-reducible due to our epistemic limitations. Kant, as we shall see, might be said to be an epistemological emergentist regarding teleological agency.

it is materially composed; two pieces of art cannot, on this picture, be identical in every sense except from the fact that one is beautiful and the other not. Supervenience is hence a sort of dependence relation saying that the existence of one thing (a mental state, say) depends upon the existence of another (a neuronal state, say). No change in the former without one in the latter. Supervenience is therefore an asymmetric relation, which gives primacy to one of the relata – the more “fundamental” one.⁸¹

Reduction

Some believe that a proper understanding of supervenience entails reduction. Literally, reduction means “to bring back”. Hence, to reduce B to A would be to somehow bring B back to A, where A and B could be objects, processes, events, laws, concepts, theories etc. This presupposes a sort of spectrum between higher-level items and lower-level items, almost always with a “direction toward physics”, as Lynne Rudder Baker has said, where “the lower-level item is privileged by being “closer” to physics”.⁸² Claiming that heat can be reduced to kinetic energy or mental states to physical states means that heat can be brought back to kinetic energy, or that mental states can be brought back to physical states – perhaps explanatorily or ontologically. But there is no agreement as to how this “bringing back” should properly be understood.⁸³

We can say, though, that reductionism most often entails physicalism (although it could be argued that some types of idealism, Berkeley’s for instance, include reduction in the opposite direction, where the mental is the reductive base; where the physical is “brought back to” the mental). However, it should be noted that one can be a reductionist about one category (free will, say) and a non-reductionist about another (qualia, say). As Kim puts it: “It may well be that parts of the mental are reducible while the rest is not”.⁸⁴ Thus, we see reductionist attempts within different areas of philosophy: philosophy of mind,⁸⁵ philosophy of mathematics,⁸⁶ moral philosophy,⁸⁷ philosophy of aesthetics.⁸⁸

Identity

The identity theory goes back to Herbert Feigl, U.T. Place and J.J.C. Smart in the 1950’s and was carried on, among others, by David Armstrong with his extension

⁸¹ See Kim (2005).

⁸² Baker (2013: 6).

⁸³ Kim (2005): 34. Reduction is sometimes understood as ontological dependence, supervenience, identity, or elimination. Reduction is used as similar to or compatible with all of these terms. As Van Riel and van Gulick have put it: “The term ‘reduction’ as used in philosophy expresses the idea that if an entity x reduces to an entity y then y is in a sense prior to x, is more basic than x, is such that x fully depends upon it or is constituted by it. Saying that x reduces to y typically implies that x is nothing more than y or nothing over and above y”. (2019).

⁸⁴ Kim (2005:161).

⁸⁵ E.g., Kim (1998).

⁸⁶ E.g., Maddy (1997).

⁸⁷ E.g., Rosenberg & Sommers (2003).

⁸⁸ E.g., Kandel (2018).

of the previous theorists' focus on sensations to include a claim about *all* mental states, including intentional states.⁸⁹ Current versions of this idea is to be found in Patricia Churchland's neuro-philosophical approach, for example in her book *Brain-Wise*: "The mind that we are assured can dominate over matter is in fact certain brain patterns interacting with and interpreted by other brain patterns".⁹⁰ And later in the same book she postulates: "Mental activity is brain activity. It is susceptible to scientific methods of investigation".⁹¹

The basic claim of the identity theorist is that mental properties are identical to physical properties, not just correlative to, emerging from or supervenient upon. This means that there is *one* thing, not *two*. The identity theorist about free will essentially claims that free will is *nothing over and above* certain neurological workings. It is not the claim that the brain *produces* (or grounds or constitutes) certain mental states because that would mean that there are two things. Following Leibniz' Law of identity, identity theorists hence seem to assume that two objects (or states), A and B, are identical when any property of A must also be a property of B. There is no property in what we refer to as the mental that is not also a property of what we refer to as the physical (neurological).

Elimination

The eliminativist explicitly draws the full consequences of strong reductionism and the identity theory. Eliminativism about X – free will or intentionality, say – is the radical anti-realist claim that our common sense understanding of X is deeply misguided since it does in fact not exist and has no role to play in a proper scientific understanding of the mind or any proper understanding of the world as such. Intentional states are not a part of the world; there are no beliefs, no intentions, no reasons for actions, no desires, no wishes.⁹² As John Heil has it:

Anyone whose aim is an accurate view of matters would be obliged to admit that, just as it is strictly false that the sun rises and sets, it is false that anyone really has beliefs, desires, or reasons for action; false that any creature is really guided by imagery; and false that anyone has ever really thought of anything.⁹³

Mental properties, if one is an eliminativist about those, are discarded from our ontology as "danglers" without any explanatory purpose. As Paul Churchland has put it, the "familiar ontology of common-sense mental states will go the way of the Stoic pneumata, the alchemical essences, phlogiston, caloric, and the limuniferous aether".⁹⁴ However, few seem to be full-blown eliminativists about all mental

⁸⁹ See Smart (1959, 2007). Interestingly, Smart says that his conviction in the theory's truth is "largely a confession of faith" (1959: 143).

⁹⁰ Churchland (2002: 1).

⁹¹ Churchland (2002: 30).

⁹² See Ramsay (2019).

⁹³ Heil (2020: 171).

⁹⁴ Churchland (1979: 114).

categories. Hard determinists and so-called illusionists can be said to be eliminativists about free will and qualia,⁹⁵ Hume could be said to be an eliminativist about the self in denying that there is a persisting subject of experience (an ego), and so on.

According to Churchland, eliminativism entails that we ought to “reconstitute” our “mutual understanding and even our introspection” within the “conceptual framework of completed neuroscience”.⁹⁶ The idea is not so much to eliminate certain entities (you cannot get rid of what never was) but to eliminate mental categories from our scientific explanations of the behavior of biological creatures such as humans; what should be eliminated is certain terms that purport to refer to something real. For example, an eliminativist could argue that progress within neuroscience will entail that scientific references to mental or psychological categories will be phased out as something we can build theories around and quantify over and will be replaced totally by neurological language that refers to synapses, neurotransmitters, ganglia etc.

Some people, especially reductionists who do not want to be labelled eliminativists, like to stress that there is an important difference between reductionism and eliminativism; that to reduce the mind to the brain is not to discard the concept of the mind: “There is an honest difference between elimination and conservative reduction. Phlogiston was eliminated, not reduced; temperature and heat were reduced, not eliminated. Witches were eliminated, not reduced; the gene has been reduced, not eliminated”.⁹⁷ However, as Baker has highlighted, the difference is perhaps not as sharp if reductionism accepts different levels of description but one fundamental ontological level:

Many reductivists would protest, “Of course, I believe that what we perceive exists: there are people, computers, and so on. I do not deny that chairs exist. I’m just saying that what they are – really are – is just aggregates of microphysical particles.” OK, but if reductivism is true, the difference between a being chair and being an aggregate of particles amounts to a difference in the description: “chair” versus “aggregate of particles.” Whether one then claims that the chair does not exist (eliminativism) or that the chair is just an aggregate of particles (reductionism) is small beer. If reductionism is true, then, ontologically speaking, no single object is a chair (or a person-sized object). What seems to be a difference in reality between aggregates of particles and people is only a difference in description. All that really exist, all that deserve a place in a complete description of reality, are microphysical particles and their properties. Such particles and microproperties exhaust the ontology.⁹⁸

A global or exhaustive kind of eliminativism (and reductionism, according to Baker) would assert, for example, that microphysics exhausts reality and that everything else are illusions, and that a proper description of reality should therefore eliminate

⁹⁵ Frankish (2017).

⁹⁶ Churchland (1981: 67). See also Stich (1983).

⁹⁷ Kim (2005: 160).

⁹⁸ Baker (2013: 9-10).

everything else from a sound metaphysical picture of the world. The simple answer to questions about purpose, meaning and value is that such questions are senseless since they are ruled out by physics (or the natural sciences as such). This naturalist could for example say that “nature” is all there is, and that nature is nothing but fermions and bosons. A local eliminativist would restrict herself to eliminating one or more (disputed) categories but not all.

1.1.3. The naturalist spectrum

Using the relational categories for constructing a taxonomy of naturalism is complicated by the fact that naturalists are rarely committed to a relational category in a global sense. Instead, they tend to specify that certain categories are suitable for particular phenomena or concepts. One could be an eliminativist about moral values while being an emergentist about consciousness. We must therefore distinguish between *global* and *local* claims. Furthermore, the list of “disputed categories” is neither fixed nor is the meaning of the individual categories totally agreed upon. Is the list, for example, exhausted by the so-called five M’s (Morality, Modality, Meaning, the Mental, and the Mathematical)?

On the most extreme end of such a spectrum would be the naturalist claiming that nature is nothing but fermions and bosons (or whatever physics might say) and that all other concepts have no objective validity as well as no explanatory purpose, and hence that all sciences but fundamental physics should be abandoned (no one, to my knowledge, think this). This would be a global kind of eliminativism. Going further along the spectrum, the less extreme naturalism would be the local eliminativist that takes all but one category or theory to be eliminable. The next would be one that takes two disputed categories to be non-eliminable. And so, the logical space continues along a spectrum in less and less hard-nosed schemes that attempt to safe-keep more and more non-physical categories in their ontological household. At some point along the spectrum, we might bump into someone who thinks that most categories can be “naturalized” (reduced, say) but not consciousness or qualia (e.g., Chalmers and Kim). Further along the spectrum, someone might claim that not only qualia resist physical reduction, but also intentionality, free will and moral values. Along the spectrum, the concept of nature becomes more inclusive, more *liberal*.

It has become common to cleave this spectrum somewhere along the line into two kinds of naturalism: hard and soft naturalism, or scientific and liberal naturalism. Very generally, “hard” naturalists have mainly followed the lead of the physicalist uprising (particularly Quine) in the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s, and this broad group of naturalism has been the driving force in the naturalist program and is what people often mean when they refer to naturalism without further specification. Most hard naturalists jump between eliminativism and supervenience, depending on the philosophical area of discourse at hand, but they generally agree on the physicalist decree that physics must have a special metaphysical priority status; the closer to physics, or the easier it is to reduce it to physics, the more natural or real something is taken

to be. Domains where this is deemed impossible are often considered to be ontologically doomed.⁹⁹

On the other hand, a naturalistic programme has developed rapidly in recent years under the banner of liberal naturalism. Liberal naturalism attempts to maintain the naturalistic spirit without being reductive about most of the contested domains or concepts. Liberal naturalism attempts to fill out a logical space between hard-nosed scientism and supernaturalism. Liberal naturalism – and the broad separation of two types of naturalism as such – is traceable in recent times to especially three authors: P. F. Strawson, in his Woodbridge Lectures at Columbia University published under the title *Skepticism and Naturalism* (1985); the several works of Hilary Putnam in which he invokes a conceptual pluralist framework as a response to hard naturalism; and McDowell’s thinking, especially *Mind and World* (1994) in which the distinction between “bald” and “liberal” naturalism is introduced.¹⁰⁰

1.1.4. Scientistic naturalism

A common feature of hard naturalist positions is an eliminativist or reductive spirit – especially regarding *the mind*. Some of the philosophers that are most explicit about such views are Alex Rosenberg, Paul Churchland, Patricia Churchland, Ruth Milikan, Daniel Dennett, and Keith Frankish. They all tend to adhere to a strong physicalist picture, which entails, as they often explicitly state, “scientism”,¹⁰¹ “nihilism”¹⁰² or “illusionism”¹⁰³ about contested domains or concepts. De Caro and MacArthur have described the aim and motivation behind scientism thusly:

It argues from the great successes of the modern natural sciences in predicting, controlling, and explaining natural phenomena— outstanding examples of which are mathematical physics and Darwin’s theory of evolution – to the claim that the conception of nature of the natural sciences is very likely to be true and, moreover, that this is our *only* bona fide or unproblematic conception of nature. It is the latter claim that earns scientific naturalism the label of “scientism.” The acceptance of an exclusively scientific conception of nature is what leads to the demand for the various projects of naturalizing the mind and its contents (involving, say, ethical values, colors, and numbers) that dominate contemporary research in metaphysics.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ See e.g., Melnyk (2003).

¹⁰⁰ This difference between hard and soft naturalism is also often traced back to W. Sellars’ distinction between the “scientific image” and the “manifest image”, where hard naturalists (right-wing Sellarsians, as they are sometimes called, such as Rosenberg, Paul and Patricia Churchland, Dennett and Milikan) put the weight on the scientific image and its primacy, and soft naturalists (left-wing Sellarsians such as McDowell, Rorty and Brandom) put the weight on the manifest image and defend the autonomy of the manifest image by highlighting the *sui generis* character of normativity – roughly put. The distinction between left- and right-Sellarsians has been said to be inaugurated by Rorty, who supposedly proposed it at a workshop in 1974 where Sellars was present (O’Shea 2016: 2).

¹⁰¹ Ladyman & Ross (2007) and Rosenberg (2011).

¹⁰² Rosenberg & Summers (2003).

¹⁰³ Frankish (2017).

¹⁰⁴ De Caro & Macarthur (2008b: 4).

However, proponents of scientism differ on what they believe should either be eliminated and reduced – and how best to achieve these aims of naturalization. For example, whereas Rosenberg and Paul Churchland tend towards a more comprehensive form of eliminativism, Dennett often assumes that talk about purpose and meaning is legitimate or even practically necessary (in fact, we cannot do without what he calls “the intentional stance”) but simply lacks ontological import.

Another important characteristic of hard naturalism, which is an outcome of the physicalist commitment, is that these positions have become explicitly metaphysical, which is a point of difference from many earlier formulations of hard naturalism (e.g., the logical empiricist call to abandon metaphysics). A self-declared “neo-positivist” metaphysics has been introduced in recent years by several authors.¹⁰⁵ This is most obvious in the range of attempts to naturalize metaphysics by deciding metaphysical questions about the general structures and relations of reality through scientific findings, in particular fundamental physics.¹⁰⁶ This new brand of naturalism is a systematized kind of metaphysics, the proponents have “become hedgehogs”:

They have concluded that there is one big thing that makes almost everything coherent. They share a Darwinian approach to philosophical theory so thoroughly that it would be easy to synthesize their views into a traditional philosophical system.¹⁰⁷

It is about, as Ladyman & Ross say in their groundbreaking *Every Thing must Go: Metaphysics Naturalized*, to bring scientific “hypotheses advanced by the various special sciences together into a comprehensive world-view”,¹⁰⁸ which means that the “point of metaphysics is to articulate and assess global consilience relations across bodies of scientifically generated beliefs”.¹⁰⁹ This is a “radically naturalistic metaphysics” that attempts to “model the structure of objective reality”,¹¹⁰ and for such a task “science respects no domain restrictions and will admit no epistemological rivals”, since with “respect to anything that is a putative fact about the world, scientific institutional processes are absolutely and exclusively authoritative”.¹¹¹ There is, we must understand, no extra-scientific route to metaphysical understanding; the job of any metaphysician is to draw out the implications of well-documented

¹⁰⁵ Ney (2012). According to Ney, the “only legitimate place to begin if one is trying [...] to establish conclusions about ultimate reality” is current physical theory, and the role of the metaphysician should come down to helping the “physicist better understand her own theories” (76-77).

¹⁰⁶ The clearest case in point is probably Ladyman & Ross (2007). Another version of naturalized metaphysics is found in Chakravartty (2017: 3-96). According to Ladyman & Ross, the role of metaphysics is to show how the separately developed and justified pieces of science (at a given time) can be fitted together to compose a unified world-view” (45), how to form a “unified world-view derived from the details of scientific research” (65).

¹⁰⁷ Rosenberg (1996: 3).

¹⁰⁸ Ladyman & Ross (2007: Vii).

¹⁰⁹ Ladyman & Ross (2007: 30).

¹¹⁰ Apparently, they do not want to discard what they portray as Heidegger-inspired studies of the “Lebenswelt” and “social phenomenology”, but such studies are apparently not interested in “objective truth” (Ladyman & Ross 2007: 5).

¹¹¹ Ladyman & Ross (2007: 28).

contemporary science. This idea is comprised in Quine's famous quip that "philosophy of science is philosophy enough".¹¹² Such a view is often accompanied by a self-declared "scientism", which is, according to some, the "central thesis of naturalism".¹¹³ Rosenberg defines scientism as the idea that the "sciences [...] are to be the guide to epistemology and metaphysics. But the more well-established the finding and method the greater the reliance philosophy may place upon it. And physics embodies the most well-established methods and findings", where Darwinian theory is to "be both the model of scientific theorizing and the guide to philosophical theory because it maximally combines relevance to human affairs and well-foundedness".¹¹⁴

As a self-declared physicalist has it, this conclusion is "imperialist" and physics enjoys the status of "hegemony".¹¹⁵ In Dennett's words, Darwin's evolutionary theory is a "universal solvent" that eats through (or debunks) a broad range of humans' ordinary self-conceptions and understandings of the world (God first, but then also morality, freedom, self, and consciousness).¹¹⁶ According to Rosenberg, a naturalist ought not even to claim that evolutionary biology has caught up with physics, since Darwin's idea of natural selection and blind variation is nothing but the fermions and bosons that produce the illusion of purpose. According to Rosenberg, Darwin did not naturalize purpose, he eliminated it. And not just in biology, but *tout court* – also in the human and social sciences. This entails, according to Rosenberg himself, a pervasive form of nihilism: "Scientism can't avoid nihilism".¹¹⁷ We have to be nihilistic about ethics and morality, since all moral judgements are "based on false, groundless presuppositions".¹¹⁸ Darwin forced us not only to be "metaphysical Nihilists denying that there is any meaning or purpose to the universe, its contents and its cosmic history", but also "ethical nihilists" in a Hobbes-inspired sense, since all claims about moral goodness are "either false or meaningless", which "undermine the values we cherish" since "our ethical beliefs reflect dispositions very strongly selected for over long periods", although these can be "instrumentally" fruitful for "human survival, welfare and flourishing".¹¹⁹

1.2. Liberal naturalism

In the rest of this chapter, I will outline and analyze so-called liberal naturalism and its attempt to resurge certain Kantian and Hegelian themes as an alternative to scientism. Firstly, this section sketches what liberal naturalism is supposed to be

¹¹² Quine (1953: 446).

¹¹³ Rosenberg (1996: 10). On the concept of scientism, see Sorrell (1994) and Almeder (1998).

¹¹⁴ Rosenberg (1996: 4). Elsewhere, Rosenberg (2011) writes that science "provides all the significant truths about reality, and knowing such truths is what real understanding is all about" (16) and that physics gives us "the whole truth about reality" (27).

¹¹⁵ Papineau (2001: 8).

¹¹⁶ Dennett (1995: 521).

¹¹⁷ Rosenberg (2011: 84).

¹¹⁸ Rosenberg (2011: 83). As he claims, the "whole idea of "morally permissible" is "untenable Nonsense" (ibid.).

¹¹⁹ Rosenberg & Sommers (2003: 653, 655, 668).

(1.2.1.). Secondly, I present McDowell's Kant and Hegel-inspired version of liberal naturalism (1.2.3.). And finally, I show how liberal naturalism is committed to a quietist response to scientific naturalism (1.2.4.).

1.2.1. The project of liberal naturalism

Liberal naturalism (LN) has advanced as an alternative to scientific forms of naturalism, perhaps even as the most popular non-scientific type of naturalism.¹²⁰ LN attempts to remove the specter of reductive and eliminativist naturalism through a more inclusive or liberal concept of nature which advocates the "diversity of the sciences" and the "plurality of forms of understanding" which its proponents believe to be under strong pressure from scientism.¹²¹ LN should be seen as an attempt to coordinate non-reductionist and non-eliminativist discourses on naturalism as an elastic position; it is meant to occupy a conceptual space between scientific naturalism and supernaturalism.¹²²

Even though it is not "a precisely defined credo",¹²³ Raleigh has attempted the following definition:

Liberal Naturalists insist that there is some range of phenomena that cannot be reduced to scientific entities/features (nor can be properly investigated and theorised using scientific methods) but which are nonetheless perfectly real and genuine features of the natural world and so which need not be thought of as somehow supernatural or "spooky".¹²⁴

We ought, on the liberal naturalist view, to accept (or include in our ontology) everything as true that is needed, to quote Stroud, "in order to make sense of everything that we think is part of the world".¹²⁵ If it is needed to include phenomenality, free will or moral judgements as capable of being either correct or incorrect in order to make sense of the world, then we ought to do it. According to De Caro and MacArthur, the two main protagonists of LN, liberal naturalists share four, overlapping features:

- 1) *Attention to and respect for human mindedness and first-person experiences of the world:*

¹²⁰ See Morganti (2022: 245).

¹²¹ De Caro & MacArthur (2010b: 9).

¹²² However, as we have seen, that space is rather large, and therefore very different views can supposedly be included in the project of LN. That is why LN encompasses such very different thinkers such as Peter Strawson, Lynne Rudder Baker, Susan Haack, John McDowell, John Dupré, Hilary Putnam, Jennifer Hornsby, Huw Price, Jürgen Habermas, and many others. See the contributions in De Caro & MacArthur (2008, 2010, 2022).

¹²³ De Caro & MacArthur (2010b: 9).

¹²⁴ Raleigh (2022: 299).

¹²⁵ Stroud (2008: 33).

“[A] shift in philosophical focus from concern with nonhuman nature to human nature [...] to accurately describe, in Cavell’s phrase, “the full panoply of things” as they figure in our experience or language”.¹²⁶

2) *Non-reductionism towards most contested phenomena and concepts:*

“A nonreductive attitude to normativity in its various guises” without making normativity into something “supernatural, mysterious, or queer”.¹²⁷

3) *Autonomy of philosophy:*

The “need for a new self-image for philosophy after scientific naturalism [...] [A] conception of philosophy as, at least in some areas and respects, autonomous from scientific method, if by this we mean autonomy from specialized data-collection, experiments, expert opinion, and so on”.¹²⁸

4) *Scientific pluralism:*

“[A] pluralist conception of the sciences – and not only in the limited sense accepted by some scientific naturalists who admit that chemistry and biology are irreducible to physics. Our authors are happy to concede that science has no essence and that the very idea of a sharp division between what is scientific and what is not is highly questionable [...] [T]he ideal of the unity of the sciences is an unrealized and unrealizable dream”.¹²⁹

However, to these four themes, I believe we should add at fifth one: *Metaphysical quietism* or *agnosticism*.¹³⁰ Metaphysical quietism is the view that we either cannot or should not ask metaphysical questions about the fundamental or overarching structures and relations of the world as such, e.g., how human mindedness is compatible with non-human nature, or how we can be non-reductionists without positing anything “queer”. This is particularly obvious in the Kant- and Wittgenstein-inspired type of naturalism that we for example encounter in Strawson, McDowell, and MacArthur’s work.¹³¹ I return to this later, but what this means is that the way in which we should (metaphysically) understand the liberal naturalist’s “expanded” or “inclusive” concept of nature¹³² – which includes the *sui generis* character of a list of “things”: mindedness, norms, people, reasons etc. – rarely receives much articulation among most liberal naturalists. Although it is often claimed that contested concepts and phenomena are to be viewed as both “irreducible to, but not incompatible with,

¹²⁶ De Caro & MacArthur (2008b: 14).

¹²⁷ De Caro & MacArthur (2008b: 14). It should be noted that liberal naturalists can include a commitment to ontological reductions about some phenomena. See De Caro & MacArthur (2008b: 18).

¹²⁸ De Caro & MacArthur (2008b: 15).

¹²⁹ De Caro & MacArthur (2008b: 15). For an example, see Dupré (1993, 2008).

¹³⁰ De Caro notes that liberal naturalism is internally divided between quietist and more realist views. Whereas the first assumes a “quietist attitude in metaphysics and, consequently, tend to conceive of both the common sense and the scientific views of the world as indispensable”, the realist version attempts to “revitalize ontological pluralism without falling back into supernaturalism” (De Caro 2015: 206). However, even though what De Caro calls realist liberal naturalism is interested in questions about the existence of non-physical phenomena, it seems to ignore the compatibility question altogether.

¹³¹ Strawson (1985), McDowell (1994), MacArthur (2008).

¹³² See e.g., De Caro & MacArthur (2008b: 1, 13, 17).

the entities that are part of the domain of a science-based ontology”,¹³³ how this *double desideratum* is to be integrated in a coherent world-picture is more or less left in the dark by many of these authors. Although the concept of “nature” plays a crucial role for them, it is rarely unfolded what such a concept would need to contain in order to make “lower level” and “higher level” phenomena unifiable.

1.2.2. The resurgence of Kant and Hegel

The emergence of liberal naturalism hangs together with a resurgence of certain themes from Kant and Hegel’s philosophy, certain aspects of their *idealism*. This resurgence is carried by an anti-metaphysical interpretation of Kant and Hegel’s ideas, sometimes under the banner of “neopragmatist” readings.¹³⁴ The approach to Hegel stresses above all his affinity with Kant’s transcendental framework, his interest in epistemological and social or political questions, while downplaying the metaphysical and nature-philosophical aspects.¹³⁵

Many of these anti-metaphysical or pragmatist readings of Kant and Hegel explicitly attempt to tackle the question of naturalism. The Kantian and Hegelian aspect, they believe, is found in the denial that natural science can give an exhaustive account of human agency; that is, in the denial of hard forms of naturalism.¹³⁶ What is central to them and their reappropriation of Kant and Hegel is the assumption that the space of natural law and the space of reasons are irreducible to each other;¹³⁷ that we ought to assume at least some form of descriptive or epistemological dualism between them, which amounts to some kind of dualism between “nature” or the “physical” on the one side and freedom, agency, reasoning and morality on the other. Between *Natur* and *Geist*. The space of reasons, as the representatives like to say, is *sui generis*.

We can uphold this dualism, the interpreters believe, without disposing a basic form of naturalism by expanding our notion of nature that makes it encompass both the space of natural scientific intelligibility and the space of reasons. Paul Redding has for example argued, inspired by Brandom (who mainly makes this case with respect to Hegel), that we find a lucid response to scientific naturalism in Kant’s and Hegel’s philosophy – even a latent formulation of what Price has called “subject

¹³³ De Caro (2022: 211).

¹³⁴ Strawson (1985), McDowell (1994), Brandom (2002, 2019), Allison (2004), Habermas (2005). Klaus Hartmann (1966, 1988) was one of the first to initiate a tradition of anti-metaphysical interpretations of Hegel. Robert Pippin (1989), Terry Pinkard (1996, 2002), Tom Rockmore (2005), and Redding (2007) have also been central to the development of this interpretative turn.

¹³⁵ For a thorough and critical account of this resurgence, see Gardner (2007) and Beiser (2007).

¹³⁶ Regarding Kant, it is interesting that none of the liberal naturalists engage in any systematic way with Kant’s understanding of organisms, which is for Kant a complex notion that stands at the intersection of mechanism and teleological autonomy. See Gambarotto & Nahas (2023).

¹³⁷ After the publication of *Mind and World*, McDowell admitted that the term “space of law” is inadequate since not all natural sciences are strictly law-governed, and that “natural-scientific intelligibility” is more accurate (Lindgaard 2008: 220).

naturalism”: a soft, pragmatist version of naturalism.¹³⁸ The overarching tenet of this approach is extract ideas from Kant and Hegel in order to develop a more inclusive kind of naturalism. The most clear example of this we find in McDowell’s version of liberal naturalism.

1.2.3. McDowell’s liberal naturalism

To conceptualize the distinction between the space of natural intelligibility and the space of reasons, McDowell writes the following in his *Mind and World*: “In a slogan, the space of reasons is the realm of freedom”.¹³⁹ On the other hand, the space of natural scientific intelligibility is occupied by causal and nomological relations, which the natural sciences aim to systematize. As he says, this space is occupied with “empirical description”.¹⁴⁰

Importantly, as he stresses in his posthumously published Introduction to the book, this distinction or dichotomy is not one between the “natural” and the “normative”, since the normative would then be outside of the natural, and we would commit ourselves to a non-naturalist kind of dualism. Taking into account what modern science has taught us, this is not, according to McDowell, a viable option. This also means that we should not understand this as a strong ontological distinction between two separate realms. Rather, it is a distinction between two modes of intelligibility. This comes in a version of what I, in Chapter 2, unfold as a Kant-inspired methodological dualism that downplays ontological commitments but maintains that we are justified in referring to reality from two different and irreducible standpoints or intelligible realms: the descriptive/natural scientific and normative standpoint.

McDowell’s analysis begins with the claim that the modern scientific revolution led to a “disenchantment” (Weber) of nature. Understanding the natural world through nomological and causal relations means robbing it of meaningful, conceptual, and normative relations that constitute the space of reasons. His diagnosis of this is the following: If we assume “nature” to be exhausted by this “modern” conception of nature as the realm of law, either the normative space of reasons is completely a-natural or it must be absorbed by the space of natural scientific intelligibility, which is what McDowell refers to as “bald naturalism” (scientism). Bald

¹³⁸ See especially Redding (2007). Brandom writes that naturalism is a suitable word for his Hegel-inspired pragmatism if naturalism means that we can “fully understand in broadly naturalistic terms practices of taking or treating each other as responsible and authoritative, practices of adopting normative attitudes” (2019: 264). But he never explains what “broadly naturalistic terms” means. With respect to Kant, Johannes Haag (2019) argues that Kant’s concept of nature is close to the one proposed by liberal naturalists. Allen Wood has also argued that Kant might fit the bill of liberal naturalism, or “at least a precursor of what now goes by that name” (Wood 2022: 45).

¹³⁹ McDowell (1994: 5).

¹⁴⁰ McDowell (1994: xiii).

naturalism is essentially the scientific naturalism that undertakes reductive or eliminativist inquires.¹⁴¹

One alternative to bald naturalism would be to accept the adequacy of the modern scientific conception but also stipulate an irreducible domain that is fully demarcated from this conception whereby normativity and mindedness are in a sense non-natural, “simply extra-natural”, as existing detached from empirical nature.¹⁴² McDowell refers to this strong kind of dualism as “rampant platonism”¹⁴³. His aim is to develop a framework that evades both bald naturalism and this kind of supernaturalism.

According to McDowell himself, what is needed in order to dissolve the problem is, in what he calls a “Kantian spirit”,¹⁴⁴ to reject the idea of disenchanted nature as an exhaustive account of nature. We ought, as he says, to somehow “rethink our conception of nature so as to make room for spontaneity”,¹⁴⁵ where such a “rethinking requires a different conception of actualizations of our nature”.¹⁴⁶ What this “liberal” naturalist conception seeks is,¹⁴⁷ in short, “a naturalism that makes room for meaning”.¹⁴⁸

We hereby receive the impression that McDowell intends to say something substantial about “nature” that contrasts with the scientific conception of nature. Nevertheless, this promised rethinking of nature remains, at most, highly sketchy. His conception of “second nature” is supposed to carry the weight of the argument (he barely says anything about “first nature”). What is second nature? To avoid the seesaw between bald naturalism and rampant platonism, we ought to accept what he refers to as the Aristotelian idea of our “second nature” as rational animals,¹⁴⁹ which apparently separates humans from “dumb animals”,¹⁵⁰ who only possess “first nature” by being fully determined by physical and “biological forces”. Second nature refers, supposedly, to a set of acquired abilities that humans can develop through the habitual purchase and exercise of thinking and acting; through the continuous inclusion into the space of reasons through societal upbringing; through *Bildung*.

¹⁴¹ As he writes elsewhere: “In its crudest form, a scientific naturalism is purportedly universal in scope or coverage. The claim is that absolutely all the things we can talk about – all objects, all properties and relations, all facts – are capturable by means of the conceptual apparatus that is characteristic of the natural sciences [...] the thesis [...] is ideologically restrictive” (Lindgaard 2008: 216).

¹⁴² McDowell (1994: 77, 88).

¹⁴³ McDowell (1994: 77).

¹⁴⁴ McDowell (2008: 94). However, McDowell thinks that Kant remains stuck in too strong a dualism that cannot be bridged – for example in the third antinomy – because he lacks “a pregnant notion of second nature” (97). Given McDowell’s quietist approach, as we shall see in Chapter 2, Kant’s dualism is closer to McDowell than he thinks.

¹⁴⁵ McDowell (1994: 77).

¹⁴⁶ McDowell (1994: 77).

¹⁴⁷ McDowell (2008: 95).

¹⁴⁸ McDowell (1994: 78).

¹⁴⁹ McDowell (1994: 78-84).

¹⁵⁰ Here McDowell’s implicit dualism steps forth. As he says, “dumb animals are natural beings and no more. Their being is entirely contained within nature” (1994: 70). That would indicate that non-dumb animals (humans) are more than natural, in virtue of “Kantian freedom” (1994: 182).

By introducing the space of human normativity as second nature, McDowell believes to have reached a model whereby nature understood as disenchanting nature is non-exhaustive. Through the ongoing social upbringing, our physical and biological traits become imbued with meaning and conceptual content. Introducing the idea of second nature therefore entails a more “relaxed”¹⁵¹ or even partially “reenchanting”¹⁵² conception of nature as “relaxed naturalism”¹⁵³ or “naturalized platonism”,¹⁵⁴ compared to a “fully enchanted” conception of nature which equals what he calls rampant platonism that lapses “into pre-scientific superstition”. According to McDowell, some “region of human life exemplifies free responsiveness to reasons”, and the phenomena in this region are “beyond the reach of natural-scientific understanding”.¹⁵⁵ But that does not mean that it is not a part of our nature; it is also our nature to use and change our ability to think and act through reasoning and justification. In this way, he says, we can “free” ourselves, from the dichotomies and problems related to bald naturalism and rampant Platonism. In that way, he thinks, we can “reconcile reason and nature”.¹⁵⁶

1.2.4. Metaphysical quietism

How is the irreducibility of the space of reasons and the conception of second nature justified? McDowell is explicit that we need not justify or explain how the logical space of reasons can occur in a physical world empty of reasons and meaning. All we need, we are told, is “to stress” how concepts and reasons unambiguously are “occurrences and states in our lives”.¹⁵⁷ It is striking that the word “world” is almost completely absent in a book called *Mind and World*. Considering the weight concepts like nature and world are supposed to play in McDowell’s liberal naturalist framework, they are surprisingly lax. McDowell’s naturalism does not stipulate a metaphysical answer to the question about how meaning, freedom and normativity can occur in a meaningless, law-governed, and non-normative world; how the two logical spaces are connected; how first nature and second nature are related and compatible. He does, as we have seen, occasionally plea for a “reconciliation” of the two spaces, and even introduces the idea of a partial “reenchantment” of nature. But the exact metaphysical import of such a reconciliation or reenchantment is never unfolded. He does not indicate, for example, that we ought to rethink “first nature” in order to make “second nature” possible; how first nature must be like in order for second nature to be possible.

The reason that we do not get any answers to these questions is that it is neither needed nor possible according to McDowell. At bottom, his view comes down to a

¹⁵¹ McDowell (1994: 89).

¹⁵² McDowell (1994: 85).

¹⁵³ McDowell (1994: 87).

¹⁵⁴ McDowell (1994: 89).

¹⁵⁵ Lindgaard (2008: 217).

¹⁵⁶ McDowell (1994: 86).

¹⁵⁷ McDowell (2008: 95).

form of Wittgensteinian “quietism”,¹⁵⁸ which entertains a “diagnostic spirit”¹⁵⁹ rather than a metaphysical or “constructive” one. This means that what he calls “constructive philosophy”¹⁶⁰ – e.g., first-order theories answering metaphysical questions about how the mind and world hang together, for example substantive dualism or reductive naturalism – should be replaced by an “exorcism” of the ideas that have occurred the problems of dualism in the first place. In one of his most Kantian paragraphs, he writes that there is no hope of answering metaphysical questions related to the fundamental problem of naturalism:

What I mean by “engaging in constructive philosophy” is attempting to *answer* philosophical questions of the sort I have here singled out: “How possible?” questions whose felt urgency derives from a frame of mind that, if explicitly thought through, would yield materials for an argument that what the questions are asked about is impossible [...] [T]here is no prospect of answering the question as it was putatively meant. So if I am right about the character of the philosophical anxieties I aim to deal with, there is no room for doubt that engaging in “constructive philosophy”, in this sense, is not the way to approach them. As I have put it, we need to exorcize the questions rather than set about answering them.¹⁶¹

We are not told that constructive philosophy can also be a valuable enterprise, but just one that McDowell does not engage in. Rather, constructive philosophy is fundamentally ill-founded, impossible. Instead of giving or intimating answers to theoretical problems, philosophy ought to exorcise them by pointing out the ways in which they deceive us. Such exorcism should do no more than point to certain immediate facts about human lives. In the case of naturalism, these immediate facts are that humans are both a part of a physical world in virtue of our biological nature *and* stand out (partially at least) from this world in virtue of giving and asking for reasons by applying a sort of freedom in the logical space of reasons. This is an obvious fact, we are told, about human lives that cannot be questioned.

This Wittgensteinian strategy of “pointing” ignores or undercuts questions about the constitution of and relation between the logical spaces: “[T]he response we should aim at being entitled to, if someone raises a question like “What constitutes the structure of the space of reasons?”, is something like a shrug of the shoulders”.¹⁶² A quietist, liberal naturalism needs no more than a “perfectly reasonable insistence” on the fact that giving and asking for reasons are patterns that “shape our lives”,¹⁶³ which is upheld by appeal to a basic “intuition”.¹⁶⁴

This strategy is shared by a range of self-declared liberal naturalists whose views are shaped by McDowell’s model to different degrees. In fact, Brian Leiter has

¹⁵⁸ McDowell (1994: 93).

¹⁵⁹ McDowell (2000: xi).

¹⁶⁰ McDowell (1994: 95).

¹⁶¹ McDowell (2000: xxiii-xxiv).

¹⁶² McDowell (1994: 178).

¹⁶³ McDowell (2008: 103).

¹⁶⁴ McDowell (1998: 421). This type of “argument” resembles, as we shall see in Chapter 2, Kant’s introduction of a “fact of reason” as a justification of the objective reality of freedom.

suggested that the separation between “Wittgensteinian quietism” and “scientific naturalism” is the main divide within the contemporary philosophical landscape.¹⁶⁵ Following MacArthur, what is common to the metaphysical quietist is that she attempts to deflate “location problems” by stipulating the “unreality of metaphysics”.¹⁶⁶ Naturalism should be, as MacArthur says, a “non-metaphysical program”.¹⁶⁷ In the words of Rorty, we should not be held “captive by the world-picture picture. We do not need a synoptic view of something called “the world”. We should stop trying for a unified picture, and for a “master vocabulary”.¹⁶⁸ The non-constructive approach, as MacArthur puts it, has “no ambition to formulate a general philosophical theory nor to provide a straight answer to a philosophical problem”.¹⁶⁹ Of course, the quietists must have some minimal ontological commitments in the sense that they assume the methodological principle that we should posit whatever it makes sense to posit, or what is indispensable to posit, in order to understand the broad array of phenomena we encounter, experience and talk about. But they are disinterested in accounting for the metaphysical relations between the different ontological commitments that appear indispensable. Neither do they have much interest in giving any substantial accounts of “nature”.

As indicated earlier, this metaphysical quietism is intimately related to the resurgence of Kant and Hegel. We shall see in the next chapter how that is so with respect to Kant, but the general approach, as Pippin says in his *Hegel’s Idealism*, is to understand and highlight Kant’s transcendental idealism as a decisive “break with the metaphysical tradition”.¹⁷⁰ What is especially at play in these interpretations is a translation of Hegel’s concept of *Geist* into the normative structures of human thought and action without any supernatural connotations.¹⁷¹ As Brandom likes to put it, what we find in Hegel is the idea that human beings are distinct from other beings in the (natural) world in virtue of being subject not merely to the laws of nature but also to intersubjectively governing norms that guide our actions and beliefs.

Following this rejection of bald naturalism, its insistence on the *sui generis* character of normativity, and its quietist approach to metaphysical questioning, we ought to ask what conception of naturalism or nature we are left with. What role should “nature” play in a satisfying account of ourselves as free, normative beings? In a critique of McDowell’s conception of second nature, Pippin has argued that we ought to exclude all talk of second nature, since referencing nature as such makes little sense from within the space of reasons. He suggests that we “are better off leaving

¹⁶⁵ Leiter (2006). The most prominent formulations of this metaphysical quietism with respect to the question of naturalism is found in Ramberg (2004), Price (2008, 2011), MacArthur (2008, 2015), and Rorty (2010).

¹⁶⁶ MacArthur (2008: 195).

¹⁶⁷ MacArthur (2015: 567). On the hard naturalist side of the spectrum, we find a similar anti-metaphysical plea in Maddy and Ney’s appeal to naturalism or physicalism as an attitude or methodological guide rather than a metaphysical thesis (Maddy 2001, 2007; Ney 2008).

¹⁶⁸ Rorty (2010: 58).

¹⁶⁹ MacArthur (2008: 196).

¹⁷⁰ Pippin (1989: 16).

¹⁷¹ On Hegel as a neo-pragmatist, see Westphal (2015). This is what Dina Emundts calls Hegel’s “anti-metaphysical impetus” (Emundts (2015: 629).

nature out of the picture altogether”, which entails a defense of what he calls “subjectivism”, what he takes to be the true core of the resurgence of Kant and Hegel.¹⁷² According to Pippin, we do not need to “reenchant” nature, as McDowell sometimes indicates, since our ability to reason and judge is “constituted” by our embeddedness in the social normative structures, not by anything external to them.¹⁷³ Accounting for and understanding autonomy and normativity requires us to “leave nature out of it and accept and work within a basic distinction between spirit and nature, *Geist* and *Natur*”. As Pippin says elsewhere, the “Hegelian approach” does not treat the distinction between *Geist* and *Natur* as being “based on any ontological fact of the matter”. Rather, it is itself

a normative and historical one, not an ontological one; it depends on a social norm we have collectively formulated over time and bound ourselves to and it is thereby also flexible, historically malleable (as in: whether parts of nature can be responded to normatively, as if they are acting intentionally (e.g., trees as also persons, oracles), or whether certain forms of conduct would be better responded to as natural events causally determined and causally manipulable (e.g., neurotic depression or some forms of criminal conduct)).¹⁷⁴

Pippin’s point is that the duality between the normative and non-normative (natural) is itself a normatively or “subjectively” established duality.¹⁷⁵ Following McDowell, the non-metaphysical move at play here is to say that these distinctions are “all images”, and that we should not be forced to “ask how a rational consideration can literally become part of nature”.¹⁷⁶ This excludes the validity of the question about how nature must be like for *Geist* to appear on the world-scene. In a somewhat deflationary reading, Pippin claims that Hegel “did not feel the force of this question”, the “how possible?”-question that asks: “[*W*]hat must nature be like for meaning in nature – conceptually informed sensibility and practical reasons having a grip, for example, but also purposive life, organic wholes – to be possible?”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Pippin (2002: 60).

¹⁷³ Although Pippin’s subjectivism has an anti-naturalist ring to it, he emphasizes its compatibility with the naturalist thesis that everything follows the laws of nature. This is because, according to Pippin, autonomy and normativity does not require agents to have some metaphysically unnatural power for self-determination but merely the ability to understand and take themselves as being able to respond to and act upon values and reasons that they deem authoritative; nothing “unnatural” is thereby invoked, he believes (Pippin 1999).

¹⁷⁴ Pippin (1999: 204).

¹⁷⁵ See also Pinkard (2004). Brandom formulates a similar subjectivist view: “Once concept use is on the scene, a distinction opens up between things that have *natures* and things that have *histories*” (2009: 26). He refers to this view as “nonnaturalism” (28). However, in Brandom (2019), his vocabulary has changed. There he refers to his Hegelian pragmatism as a “normative naturalism” that resembles Wittgenstein’s and Price’s metaphysically quietist kinds of naturalism (264, 558).

¹⁷⁶ Pippin (2002: 68).

¹⁷⁷ Pippin (2002: 60). Pippin does admit, though, that Hegel “kept flirting” with the (Schellingian) idea “that one might understand nature as “dormant” or implicit or “sleeping” *Geist*, as if nature had a *conatus*, striving to be *Geist*”. But he succumbed, as Pippin thinks, to his better side, as in the *Lectures on Fine Art*, where *Natur* is called simply “spiritless,” *geistlos*” (74). For a contrary reading that does not think that Hegel succumbed to his “better side”, see Berger (2020).

To sum up: The standard alternative to scientific naturalism consists in an anti-metaphysical, quietist strategy that either forsakes delivering a substantive account of nature (McDowell) or plainly leaves nature out of the picture altogether (Pippin). However, we should ask whether this constructive “how possible?” question can be glossed over that easily. There is a latent call for a “reconciliation” (McDowell even alludes to it several places) between the space of natural law and the space of reasons, between *Geist* and *Natur*, in the sense that something about the natural world (first nature) must be able to somehow explain the (appearance of the) world of mindedness (or second nature). And if scientific naturalism is deemed implausible, and there is some connection *Geist* and *Natur* – two premises liberal naturalists all seem to accept one way or another – it seems reasonable to ask whether we should rethink the concept of first or disenchanted nature as such; whether the how-possible question might in fact be needed? At least that seems reasonable if one is moved by W. Sellars’ ideal of “joining” the two images – the scientific and normative – into one synoptic vision of the human in the world. By underdetermining or leaving nature behind, the quietist also underdetermines or leaves behind such a possible cojoining.

2. Kant's Standpoint-Dualism

2.0. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that liberal naturalism is committed to metaphysical quietism. I also sketched how *LN* has found inspiration in Kant and Hegel's thoughts on the *sui generis character* of human mindedness, normativity, and freedom, which involves a substantial demarcation between *Geist* and *Natur*. In this chapter, I reconstruct Kant's view of the compatibility between *freedom* (and normativity) and *nature*. This will result in what I call the *Kantian response to the fundamental problem of naturalism*.

Following Henry Allison's influential Kant-interpretation, I argue that Kant's thinking exhibits a *normative dualism of freedom and nature*.¹⁷⁸ This dualism is committed to the metaphysical quietism encouraged by the liberal naturalist. As Allison writes about Kant's introduction of the *Ding an sich*: "In Wittgensteinian terms, Kant was not trying to say what is unsayable, but merely to define the boundaries of what can be said or asked".¹⁷⁹ Hence, it is indeed justified for the liberal naturalist to appropriate Kant as a precursor for her strategy in facing the fundamental problem of naturalism. Reconstructing the Kantian response builds a bridge to the rest of the dissertation, in which it is argued that Schelling provides a non-quietist, metaphysical answer to the compatibility question that transcends the Kantian strategy.

The chapter is structured as follows: By reconstructing Kant's so-called antinomy-theory as a type of quietism about metaphysical questions (2.1.), this chapter presents and analyses Kant's third antinomy about freedom and nature (2.2.). By linking the first and second *Critique*, I will reconstruct his solution to the fundamental compatibility question as an anti-metaphysical standpoint-theory or dualism of descriptions (2.3.). Also, I reconstruct how he "proves" – in a similar way to McDowell's "proof" of second nature – the objectivity of freedom through what he takes to be a brute fact (the "fact of reason") about human lives: that we are capable of moral reasoning (2.4.). To conclude, I sum up how Kant's position and strategy is akin to the one promoted by the quietist, liberal naturalist (2.5.).

¹⁷⁸ In particular Allison (1990 and 2004).

¹⁷⁹ Allison (2004: 73).

2.1. Kant's metaphysical quietism

2.1.1. The antinomies

For Kant and the German idealists following him, a fundamental trait connected to human thought is that humans tend to pose ultimate questions about how absolutely everything hangs together. Questions seeking complete descriptions of *the world as such*. In the *Critique of Pure Reason (KrV)*, Kant describes this as a “natural predisposition [Naturanlage]” towards metaphysics – e.g., in a theistic or materialistic shape – which will “always remain” with “nature of universal human reason”.¹⁸⁰ As he clarifies in those same passages, the aim of his critical philosophy is to diagnose and discipline this natural predisposition by investigating the “capacity and incapacity of reason for judging” metaphysically and determining the “limits” of our metaphysical drives.¹⁸¹

The investigation of the legitimacy of cosmo-metaphysical judgements is carried out in the chapter in *KrV* on the so-called *antinomy of pure reason*. This chapter's significance for Kant's overall philosophical aims becomes conclusive in a letter to Christian Garve where he writes that it was the antinomy of pure reason that “first aroused” him from his “dogmatic slumber”.¹⁸² The fundamental premise in Kant's account of the antinomies is the *principle of completeness (PC)*:

For every *existent* (object, event, etc., which Kant umbrellas under the term the “conditioned” in the antinomy-chapter) in the “world of sense [Sinnenwelt]”, it is presupposed that the “whole series [ganze Reihe]”, “sum total [Inbegriff]” or “absolute totality [absolute Totalität]” of conditions (= the unconditioned) for this existent is also given.¹⁸³

How should we understand this principle? A guiding ideal for our scientific activities is the following: For everything that is caused or exists as something that is not self-explanatory (e.g., certain mathematical axioms or basic laws of logic), we seek a cause, ground, or explanation for its existence in virtue of being reasoning and knowledge-seeking creatures. In other words, we are never completely satisfied with an explanation that leaves something unexplained.¹⁸⁴ But *PC* states something more. It states that there is a possible resting point for this explanation-hunt; that we can reach a point where nothing is left unexplained. Think of the desire within some

¹⁸⁰ *KrV*, B 21. Citations of Kant are from the *Cambridge Edition* and appear in the order of volume number and page number from the *Akademie Ausgabe (AA)*, *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische akademie der Wissenschaften (29. Vols. Berlin: de Gruyter) or the usual A/B pagination for the *Critique of Pure Reason*. All references to Kant are given in brackets. When I deviate from the translations of the Cambridge Edition, I add *modified translation* after the citation. Emphasis in the citations is Kant's own.

¹⁸¹ B 21-22. See Grier (2001) and Willaschek (2020) for elaborate studies on Kant's view on metaphysics as both a natural predisposition and an impossibility for human rational thinking.

¹⁸² 12: 258.

¹⁸³ *KrV*, A 408-20/B 435-48. See also *KrV*, A 308/B 365 and A 497/B 526.

¹⁸⁴ Kant deems this *condition-hunt* to be an “analytic” and “clear and undoubtedly certain” proposition, a “logical postulate of reason” (*KrV*, A 497-8/B 526), which amounts to what Willaschek (2020) has called the principles of *discursivity* and *iteration*.

sciences (e.g., theoretical physics) to search for a *theory of everything* that would not give rise to further questions. What Kant calls an antinomy, which is a “contradiction in the laws [...] of pure reason”,¹⁸⁵ arises if one assumes the validity of *PC* and attempts to determine the *world in an absolute sense*: the “absolute totality of the sum total of existing things”,¹⁸⁶ “the absolutely unconditioned totality of the synthesis of appearances”,¹⁸⁷ or the “absolute totality” of the series of conditions.¹⁸⁸

According to Kant, this generates four so-called cosmological antinomies that are all shaped by a set of contradictory cosmo-metaphysical propositions about the world, a thesis and antithesis. The antinomies display a conflict, since two mutually exclusive predicates (e.g., finity and infinity in time and space) are applied to the same presumed object (as schematized beneath).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ *KrV*, A 407/B 434.

¹⁸⁶ *KrV*, A 419/B 447.

¹⁸⁷ *KrV*, A 481/B 509.

¹⁸⁸ *KrV*, A 409/B 436. If nothing further is specified, “the world” henceforth refers to this.

¹⁸⁹ As I return to, Kant’s formulation of the propositions, especially T3 and AT3, are confusing at times, both in *KrV* and the *Prolegomena*. For example, he mentions causality in T3 by referring to a first, uncaused cause underlying the universe, but he does not mention causality in AT3; in there he only states that everything happens, in the empirical world, from “laws of nature”. I should also note that it seems reasonable, considering his general account of the antinomical positions and what he elsewhere says about laws of nature and causality, to conclude that AT3 entails an (illegitimate, on Kant’s account) *infinitist* view about the causal structure of the universe, not merely the view that every empirical (physical) event must have an empirical (physical) cause, which is precisely what defends in the *Transcendental Analytic* of *KrV*.

	Antinomy 1 (A1) <i>About absolute time and space</i>	Antinomy 2 (A2) <i>About absolute mereology</i>	Antinomy 3 (A3) <i>About absolute causality</i>	Antinomy 4 (A4) <i>About absolute modality</i>
Thesis	The world has a beginning in time, and in space it is also enclosed in boundaries. ¹⁹⁰ (T1)	Every composite substance in the world consists of simple parts, and nothing exists anywhere except the simple or what is composed of simples. ¹⁹¹ (T2)	Causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom in order to explain them. ¹⁹² (T3)	To the world there belongs something that, either as a part of it or as its cause, is an absolutely necessary being. ¹⁹³ (T4)
Antithesis	The world has no beginning and no bounds in space, but is infinite with regard to both time and space. ¹⁹⁴ (AT1)	No composite thing in the world consists of simple parts, and nowhere in it does there exist anything simple. ¹⁹⁵ (AT2)	There is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with laws of nature. ¹⁹⁶ (AT3)	There is no absolutely necessary being existing anywhere, either in the world or outside the world as its cause. ¹⁹⁷ (AT4)

All eight claims are cosmo-metaphysical propositions about absolutely everything (empirical), the “totality of conditions”, since they propose ultimate answers about the empirical world’s quantitative (space-time), mereological, causal and modal structure. That the propositions seemingly refer to something empirical, or at least depart from empirical cognition, is what distinguishes the cosmological idea from the ideas of the soul and God that Kant discusses in the chapter on the dialectic of pure reason.¹⁹⁸ More specifically, the antinomies are generated by what Kant calls a

¹⁹⁰ *KrV*, A 426/B 454.

¹⁹¹ *KrV*, A 434/B 462.

¹⁹² *KrV*, A 444/B 472.

¹⁹³ *KrV*, A 452/B 480.

¹⁹⁴ *KrV*, A 427/B 455.

¹⁹⁵ *KrV*, A 435/B 465.

¹⁹⁶ *KrV*, A 445/B 473.

¹⁹⁷ *KrV*, A 453/B 481.

¹⁹⁸ See *KrV*, A 408/B 434; A 420/B 447; A 578-579/B 506-507; 4: 338.

“*regressive*”¹⁹⁹ or “*empirical synthesis*”²⁰⁰ when we attempt to determine or explain the series of conditions (e.g., the causal series of a particular event). The antinomies arise when a theoretical leap is made in this regression from claims about particular conditions to an absolute claim about the totality of conditions. Such an absolute claim can, according to Kant, come in two different ways:

1. An unconditioned condition that completes the series (the theses, T1-T4, that all entail some sort of *metaphysical finitism* by positing an unconditioned absolute as a regress stopper)
2. An infinite number of conditions that form a totality (the antitheses, AT1-AT4, that all entail some sort of *metaphysical infinitism* by not positing a regress stopper)

As Kant frames it, the problem is that both the thesis and the antithesis in all the antinomies seem to have equally good arguments for their case. In the *Prolegomena*, he says that the “[...] thesis and antithesis can be established through equally evident, clear, and incontestable proofs [...] I will vouch for the correctness of all these proofs”.²⁰¹ I will not discuss the soundness of these so-called “proofs” or account for all the individual antinomies in detail (except for the third antinomy in chapter 2.2.), since I merely intent to extract Kant’s overall strategy.²⁰² And this strategy does not hinge on the concrete content of A1-A4 or whether they contain incontestable proofs, since Kant’s objective is to evaluate the legitimacy of any kind of absolute proposition about the (empirical) world.

2.1.2. Kant’s principle of objectivity

According to Kant, the entire antinomical conflict is based on false assumptions because all the propositions are asserted without “paying attention to whether and how we might achieve acquaintance [zur Kenntnis derselben gelangen können]” with what they purportedly refer to;²⁰³ because they deal “with information [Kundschaft] which no human being can ever get”.²⁰⁴

Kant shifts between calling truthbearers “judgements”²⁰⁵ and “cognitions”²⁰⁶. In *Reflexion* 2259 we are told: “truth and falsity do not lie in concepts, but in judgements [Urtheilen], namely as assertoric propositions [Sätzen]”.²⁰⁷ That does not entail that all judgements necessarily have a truth-value, but that judgements are what *can* be true or false. Kant proposes a *normativist* and *pluralist* account of the concepts

¹⁹⁹ *KrV*, A 411/B 438.

²⁰⁰ *KrV*, A 462/B 490.

²⁰¹ 4: 340.

²⁰² Although it should be noted that the “proofs” are in no way seamless. See for example Allison (1990: 11-25; 2004: 357-395) for a problematization.

²⁰³ *KrV*, A 498/B 526-527.

²⁰⁴ *KrV*, A 703/B 731.

²⁰⁵ *KrV*, A 294/B 350; 24: 527.

²⁰⁶ *KrV*, A 58/B 83.

²⁰⁷ 16: 288.

of truth and objectivity that makes them applicable across different domains of discourse (from judgements about molecules to moral affairs and music). He believes that a type of judgement is objective and truth-apt *iff* it contains *norms* (or conditions, criteria, or standards) of verification that are universally recognizable. This model of objectivity and truth raises suspicion towards all kinds of *absolutism* that assume one privileged or exclusive domain of (objective) discourse. For example, the scientific or eliminative type of naturalism, whose semantic-epistemological version asserts that only concepts and judgements that can be exhaustively explained in (or reduced to) a basic natural scientific vocabulary can be called truth-apt or objective.

It might be objected against this admittedly general sketch that Kant restricts (informative) truth and objectivity to empirical judgements or cognition. He does indeed restrict theoretical, scientific cognition to that of “empirical objects”, “appearances” or “objects of possible experience”, as well as to what can be derived from observations of those objects: non-observable, theoretical objects, such as “magnetic matter” (electrons or magnetic waves would perhaps fare as better examples today).²⁰⁸ As is well-known, Kant stipulates a principle of caution with respect to theoretical cognition, which implies a thoroughgoing censure of assertoric²⁰⁹ (theoretical), metaphysical judgements about an immortal soul, God, and the cosmos.²¹⁰ But it is imperative to clarify Kant’s reasoning behind this principle of caution. As he writes, judgements about an immortal soul, cosmos and God do not contain what he calls a “touchstone [Proberstein]”.²¹¹ That term signifies the possibility of judging the “correctness [Richtigkeit]”,²¹² “genuineness [Echtheit]”,²¹³ or “truth [Wahrheit]” and “content [Inhalt]”²¹⁴ of judgements. A touchstone should be understood as a standard or norm for verifying something’s truth, authenticity, or justified use. This implies that a sufficient account of the concept of “truth” that goes beyond the correspondence thesis (which Kant famously “presupposes”) requires something more, namely a specification of the concept’s correct use. For short: A universally agreeable norm or “principle of application [*Anwendungsgrundsatz*]”, as Kant himself calls it, through which we can “justify [rechtfertigen]” how the referent of a concept could be given.²¹⁵

A detailed analysis of Kant’s conception of truth deserves a separate study. Let me just note that Kant takes the correspondence thesis of truth to be a trivial

²⁰⁸ As he says, we can have (objective) empirical cognition of something if it is “connected with our perceptions in a possible experience” (*KrV*, A 225-226/B 273-274) or is “connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation)” (*KrV*, A 218/B 265). Hence, Kant was committed to some version of scientific realism.

²⁰⁹ “Assertoric judgments are those in which it is considered actual (true).” (*KrV*, A 74-75/B 100).

²¹⁰ See also *KrV*, A 470/B 498 and A 711/B 739, where he presents his critical philosophy as a call for “moderating our claims [Mäßigung in Ansprüchen]” (*KrV*, A 470/B 498) and as a “negative legislation”, which “under the name of a discipline erects, as it were, a system of caution and self-examination [Vorsicht und Selbstprüfung]” (*KrV*, A 711/B 739).

²¹¹ *KrV*, A vii-viii.

²¹² *KrV*, A 65/B 90; A 295-296/B 352.

²¹³ *KrV*, A 65/B 90.

²¹⁴ *KrV*, A 60/B 84.

²¹⁵ *KrV*, A 259-260/B 315.

description of what humans mean by saying “is true”, namely that something is true *iff* it represents its object. But the correspondence thesis is according to Kant not a sufficient or exhaustive account of *truth*; it does not provide any criteria or norms for separating truth from falsity in concrete judgements, and therefore no norms or criteria for saying under which circumstances such a correspondence could come about.²¹⁶ According to Kant, such norms or criteria are domain or context sensitive in the sense that they make up a set of context-specific, but universally available (for all rational beings), norms for claiming that a judgement is true or false within a specific discourse. For example, there is a set of universally acceptable arithmetical rules (norms) for evaluating the truth value of arithmetical statements, and those rules are not identical with the rules (norms) connected to empirical judgements. As he writes, there is a particular “criterion” for empirical truth, which is tied to what he calls the “formal conditions of empirical truth”.²¹⁷ And elsewhere he specifies what he calls a “mark of empirical truth”.²¹⁸

Based on this, we can call Kant a pluralist about truth in the following sense: There can be (and are) different criteria for verifying whether a judgement is true or false depending on the type of judgement in question. Kant rejects that there could be what he calls a “general” or “universal” criterion of truth – that is, an application criterion that is valid for all types of judgements (e.g., the Cartesian criterion of clarity and distinctness or the scientific criterion of natural scientific reducibility). Such a general criterion “would”, as he writes in *KrV*, “be that which was valid of all cognitions without any distinction among their objects”. But, as he continues,

it is clear that since with such a criterion one abstracts from all content of cognition (relation to its object), yet truth concerns precisely this content, it would be completely impossible and absurd to ask for a mark [Merkmale] of the truth of this content of cognition, and thus it is clear that a sufficient and yet at the same time general sign [Kennzeichen] of truth cannot possibly be provided. Since above we have called the content of a cognition its matter, one must therefore say that no general sign of the truth of the matter of cognition can be demanded, because it is self-contradictory.²¹⁹

Kant does assume that a judgement must be verifiable – not necessarily empirically – to be truth-apt. When Kant talks about “sense [Sinn]” and “significance

²¹⁶ See Cicovacki (1995) and Vanzo (2010) for discussions.

²¹⁷ *KrV*, A 191/B 236.

²¹⁸ *KrV*, A 451/B 479; A 651/B 679. Throughout *KrV*, Kant provides what he takes to be a necessary and sufficient set of conditions for empirical judgements. Among others: they cannot be about atemporal or non-spatial (at least non-extended in Euclidian space) objects but must be about objects that follow physical causal laws and can have interactions with other existing objects.

²¹⁹ *KrV*, A 58-59/B 83.

[Bedeutung]”, he means extension or reference.²²⁰ As Roche²²¹ and Kreis²²² have argued, Kant generally uses “Sinn” and “Bedeutung” synonymously. That is evident from a passage where he discusses concepts “without sense [Sinn], i.e., without significance [Bedeutung]”.²²³ If a concept or proposition has sense and significance, it does not necessarily *actually* refer to something, but it is about a *possible referent*; it has a *possible extension*; it does not totally outrun justification or verification.

How should we understand Kant’s concept of objectivity? His use of it (both objective ‘validity’ and ‘reality’) is not always very stringent. Generally, a concept or judgement has *objective validity* if what it refers to is *possible*, whereas it has *objective reality* if what it refers to is *real*. In *KrV*, Kant often only mentions objective validity and reality in relation to empirically related concepts and judgements. However, we ought not to confuse that with objectivity *per se*. For short, objectively valid judgements are truth-apt judgements.²²⁴ Hence, judgements are objectively valid if one can specify their norms of verification.²²⁵ The mode of specification depends on the type of concept or judgement. As we are told in *KpV*, a judgement or concept has objective validity (or reality) *iff* what it refers to contains positive determinations that are accessible for all rational beings, which makes it a possible (or real) object for the faculty of (empirical) cognition or a possible (or real) determining ground or principle of the faculty of desire/will.²²⁶

In A 90/B 123 in *KrV*, Kant writes that a concept would be “entirely empty [leer], nugatory [nichtig], and without significance [Bedeutung]” if there were no “rule” for how it could “correspond” to an object. Similarly, he states that a “concept” or “cognition” can only have “objective reality” (“be related to an object”), and hence have “significance and sense [Bedeutung und Sinn]”, if its reference (object) is “able to be given in some way”. Otherwise, as he continues, the “concepts are empty, and through them one has, to be sure, thought but not in fact cognized anything through this thinking, but rather merely played with representations”.²²⁷ This entails that concepts or judgements that purport to expand our cognitive household *and* outrun

²²⁰ I have chosen to translate “Bedeutung” as “significance” to retain linguistic continuity with Strawson’s “principle of significance”. A more accurate translation would perhaps be “reference” as Frege’s “Bedeutung” from his “Sinn und Bedeutung” is commonly translated, which is in fact not far from what Kant’s “Bedeutung” is meant to pick out.

²²¹ Roche (2010: 669).

²²² Kreis (2015: 93-95).

²²³ *KrV*, A 241/B 300.

²²⁴ See Prauss (1969), Hanna (2000) and Kreis (2015) for similar readings.

²²⁵ Based on Kant’s shifting ascription of objective validity (and sense and significance) to both concepts and judgements (or cognitions), we can reasonably assume that he proceeds from some version of the *principle of (semantic) compositionality*: The semantic value of a complex expression (for example a declarative sentence) is determined by the semantic value of the constituents of the complex expression. If a concept has no possible or actual reference (is non-objective, to use Kant’s terminology), a statement containing that concept has no reference (is non-objective or truth-aptless), whereas a statement containing an objectively valid concept is objectively valid on Kant’s account.

²²⁶ 5: 44; 5: 47-48; 5: 50; 5: 104-105.

²²⁷ *KrV*, A 155-156/B 194-195.

any possible justification must be trashed. We can call this Kant's *Principle of Objectivity*:

PO: A judgement can have no significance or objective validity (truth-value) without a universally recognizable norm for verifying it.

If there is no “rule of synthesis” or “touchstone” for applying a concept – that is, no norms or standards for verifying whether the concept can refer and thereby make judgements truth-apt – the concept is “entirely empty [leer], nugatory [nichtig], and without significance [Bedeutung]”.²²⁸ Such rules or norms, though, need not exclusively relate, to use Strawson's wording, concepts to “empirical or experiential conditions of their application”.²²⁹

2.1.3. Debunking the transcendental realist

Let us return to the antinomy-problem in light of *PO*. Although he does not explicitly present it that way, I believe we can reasonably extract three distinct solutions to the antinomical conflict from Kant's texts. His discussion of the antinomies is, unquestionably, cluttered at times, so let me clarify. It is hardly recognized in the literature, but Kant states different things about the antinomies depending on which of two distinct concepts of the “world” he employs: a transcendental realist or transcendental idealist world-concept. The world-concept at play in A1-4 is the transcendental realist's world-concept (henceforth: TRW), namely the concept of the world in an absolute sense: “the absolutely unconditioned totality of the synthesis of appearances”.²³⁰ When Kant talks about the “absolute”, or the world in an “absolute sense”, he refers to something that is “valid without any restriction”, as opposed to what is “restricted to conditions” and is “merely comparative, or valid in some particular respect”.²³¹ This leads us to his first and most substantial solution strategy:

2.1.3.1. The solution from non-verifiability

The first solution is directly derived from the anti-realist doctrine and pertains to all four antinomies. All the propositions in A1-A4 are (in principle) non-verifiable. In his solution, Kant describes transcendental idealism as the commitment to (at least) two claims:²³²

²²⁸ *KrV*, A 90/B 123.

²²⁹ Vanzo (2012: 109-110) has provided an overview of the different interpretations of the types of judgements Kant believes to lack truth-value. Some say analytical judgements, some say judgements about non-experiential objects, and others the so-called “Wahrnehmungsurtheile” (“judgements of perception”) from § 17-18 in the *Prolegomena*. On my view, judgements of perception and, more importantly for this chapter, cosmo-metaphysical judgements about the world as such, are two candidates. His view on the status of judgements about an immortal soul and God in *KpV* go beyond the scope here. As we shall see, non-empirical judgements are not *per se* truth-aptless, although his views on judgements about an immortal soul and God are complex and supersede my intentions in this chapter.

²³⁰ *KrV*, A 481/B 509.

²³¹ *KrV*, A 324-326/B 380-382.

²³² A491/B 519.

(1) The ideality of time and space, which means that time and space are forms of empirical intuition in which objects of possible experience occur.

(2) The distinction between appearances and things as they are in themselves, which means that we cannot theoretically cognize objects beyond possible experience, but only objects insofar as they are adapted to the conditions of our way of representing them.

This is where the proponents of both the thesis and the anti-thesis (in A1- 2) go wrong. They are all transcendental realists: “The realist, in the transcendental sense [...] makes *mere representations* into things in themselves”.²³³ Central to Kant’s solution is the thought that the world as a totality can never be given as an appearance, since appearances can only be determined step-by-step and never from some God-like point of view. Therefore, the world as a whole (either understood as a starting-point or as a totality of infinite conditions) can never gain “reality” or be an “object” (of possible experience).²³⁴ Both the thesis and the antithesis try to describe how the world is in itself, but there is nothing for the predicates (e.g., finite and infinite) to satisfy. This he refers to as a “transcendental subreption”, where an idea is ascribed objective reality.²³⁵ The concept of the “world” issues itself, in our rational cosmological theory-building, as a sensible object. But it can never be an object of possible experience. Kant therefore concludes that there is “no real *contradiction of reason*” since it is futile to ask how absolutely everything hangs together.²³⁶

This argument marks Kant’s *limitative dialectics*.²³⁷ The transcendental realist mistakes *appearances* with *things in themselves* and thus takes the cosmological ideas as constitutive of the objects themselves. But our desire for knowing how absolutely everything hangs together has nothing objective about it. As Kant states: “The critical solution [Kant’s own] [...] does not consider the question objectively at all, but instead asks about the foundations of the cognition in which it is grounded”.²³⁸ This marks Kant’s so-called *epistemological turn*: dialectics revolves around the limitation of our cognitive capacities; it consists, as Kant writes, in the “uncovering” of and “protection” against the contradictory framework that appears when we try to think how absolutely everything hangs together and thereby transcend possible experience.²³⁹ Kant also describes dialectics as the “*logic of illusion* [Schein]”.²⁴⁰

²³³ A 491/B 519.

²³⁴ A 489/B 517.

²³⁵ A 509/B 537.

²³⁶ A 740/B 768.

²³⁷ Kreis (2015: 31-150).

²³⁸ A 482-83/B 511.

²³⁹ A 297/B 354.

²⁴⁰ A 61/B 86; A 131/B 170; A 293/B 249.

Following my semantic reconstruction, we can also say that the propositions in A1-A4 are incompatible with *PO*.²⁴¹ According to Kant, it is impossible to verify any proposition involving TRW, because TRW is a concept that, by definition, is not “valid” relative to certain “conditions” or in “some particular respect” but is valid “without any restriction”. It is evoked from a God’s-eye-perspective. All proponents of T1-T4 and AT1-AT4 are *transcendental realists* who judge about a presumed object without “paying attention to whether and how we might achieve acquaintance with” it.²⁴² All sorts of ultimate questions about TRW – quantitative, mereological, causal-related and modal ones – are without sense and significance because there are no accessible norms for verifying propositions that determine something about absolute everything, since absolute everything cannot be “given in some way”.²⁴³ Therefore, as he says directly about TRW, this concept “must be entirely empty [ganz leer] and without significance [Bedeutung]”.²⁴⁴ A few pages earlier, he writes:

[O]ne can answer that the **question** itself is **nothing** [nichts], because no object for the question is given [...] Thus here is a case where the common saying holds, that no answer is an answer, namely that question about the constitution of this something, which cannot be thought through any determinate predicate because it is posited entirely outside the sphere of objects that can be given to us, is entirely nugatory and empty [gänzlich nichtig und leer sei].²⁴⁵

It does not even make sense (it is *nichtig*) to ask what predicates apply to TRW; every absolute, cosmological question is “nothing, because no object for the question is given”. Regarding A1, Kant writes: “the world does not exist at all (independently of the regressive series of my representations), it exists neither as **an in itself infinite whole** nor as **an in itself finite whole**”.²⁴⁶ It would not even be adequate to say that cosmo-metaphysical judgements, such as the thesis and anti-thesis in A1-2, are false. On the other hand, they are not even judgements capable of being false.²⁴⁷ Several passages in *KrV* support this anti-realist reading:

1. Concepts or propositions are “absolutely null and void [schlechterdings nichtig]” if they deal “with information [Kundschaft] which no human being can ever get”.²⁴⁸

²⁴¹ In Section 2.2-2.3., we shall see why this reading is compatible with his claim that the propositions in A3-A4 “can be true” (*KrV*, A 532/B 560).

²⁴² *KrV*, A 526-527/B 498-499.

²⁴³ *KrV*, A 155/B 194.

²⁴⁴ *KrV*, A 486/B 514, *modified translation*. See also *KrV*, A 490/ B 518.

²⁴⁵ *KrV*, A 479/B 507.

²⁴⁶ *KrV*, A 505/B 533.

²⁴⁷ For similar readings, see Walker (1983) and Kreis (2015: 86-109). As Walker writes, the statements in A1-2, on the transcendental realist conception of the world, “do not satisfy the conditions for verifiability” (1983: 157-158).

²⁴⁸ *KrV*, A 703/B 731.

2. “Transcendental illusion [...] is uncovered and its nullity [Nichtigkeit] is clearly seen into by transcendental criticism (e.g. the illusion in the proposition: “The world must have a beginning in time”).²⁴⁹
3. The “result in both cases [theses and anti-theses in A1-2] was something quite empty of sense (nonsense) [Sinnleeres (Nonsens)].²⁵⁰
4. “If two mutually opposed judgments presuppose an inadmissible condition, then despite their conflict (which is, however, not a real contradiction) both of them collapse, because the condition collapses under which alone either of them would be valid”.²⁵¹

2.1.3.2. The solution from logical impossibility

If I am correct that all the propositions in A1-A4 about TRW are truth-aptless, why does Kant go on to claim that both the thesis and antithesis in A1-2 are “false”? Does that not go against the anti-realist proposal? I believe we can extract two reasons (*solution 2* and *solution 3*) in the text for calling them false, which are both distinct from the reason he gives for calling them “nugatory”. The first reason is that TRW in A1-A2 is *self-contradictory* in virtue of being framed as both empirical and non-empirical.²⁵² For some reason, Kant is not very clear on this point in the *KrV*, but underlines it several times in the *Prolegomena* and in his *Price Essay on the Progress of Metaphysics* (published in 1804). In *KrV* he does claim, though, that in the first two antinomies each proposition “searches for the unconditioned among conditioned things”²⁵³ and calls TRW, at least in A1-A2, an “impossible concept”: “the affirmative as well as the negative part, taken in by transcendental illusion, have as their ground an impossible concept of the object, and then the rule holds that *non entis nulla sunt predicate*”.²⁵⁴

TRW is “pseudo-empirical”: it purports to be empirical, but it also purports to be something non-empirical. The transcendental realist thus commits the following *category mistake*: In TRW, the “world” is both thought of as intelligible (abstractly) and sensible (as something concrete and given). Any proposition containing the self-contradictory concept of a “sensible world in itself” is *necessarily false* just like any proposition containing the concept of a “square circle” is.²⁵⁵

We should compare this with Kant’s reflections in the *Amphiboly*-chapter in *KrV* on so-called *empty objects without concepts* (*nihil negativum*) or “non-entities [Undinge]”: “The object of a concept that contradicts itself is nothing because the concept is nothing, the impossible, like a rectilinear figure with two sides”.²⁵⁶ Such

²⁴⁹ *KrV*, A 297/B 353.

²⁵⁰ *KrV*, A 485/B 513.

²⁵¹ *KrV*, A 503/B 531.

²⁵² Allison (1990: 24; 2004: 360) and Grier (Grier 2001: 176) have also emphasized this point. As I argue in chapter 2.2., the same applies to the concept of the “world” in AT3 but not T3. I do not consider Kant’s treatment of A4 here. This goes against Abela’s interpretation that there is “nothing analytically contradictory in the mere concept of the world” (Abela 2002: 220).

²⁵³ *KrV*, A 621/B 649.

²⁵⁴ *KrV*, A792-793/B 820-821. See also *KrV*, A 486/B 514, A 740-741/B 768-769, A 792-793/B 820-821, 4: 341, 4: 342, and 20: 287-289.

²⁵⁵ See 4: 341.

²⁵⁶ *KrV*, A 290-292/B 347-349.

a “non-entity”, which “cancels itself out” as *logically impossible*, is different from what Kant calls an “empty concept without object” (*ens rationis*) – a “thought-entity [Gedankending] – which is not self-contradictory, but an “empty concept” that is not “counted among the possibilities” and hence is non-objective. Such a concept has no *real possibility*, and that is the basis of the *Solution from non-verifiability*.

On my reconstruction of Kant’s view, TRW is *impossible* in both senses: It is a non-verifiable thought-entity *and* a logically impossible thought. Hence, calling the propositions “false” in virtue of being logically impossible does not promote a semantic realist interpretation. His view is not that judgements whose norms of verification cannot in principle be specified have a truth-value; that there are verification-transcendent truths or falsities. The norm of verification in this case is simply that the judgement itself is logically impossible. Hence, the *Solution from logical impossibility* is compatible with *PO*.

2.1.3.3. The solution from the distinction between two world-concepts

Kant also gives a *second reason* for calling the propositions “false”, which however only applies to A1 and A2. From the standpoint of *transcendental realism*, we are dealing in each antinomy with a straightforward contradiction between opposing predicates applied to one and the same alleged object, but it turns out that judgements containing TRW are both “nugatory” (because verification-transcendent) and necessarily “false” (because self-contradictory). It often goes unnoticed that Kant introduces a legitimate concept of the world in a “corrected significance”. That is, in a *transcendental idealist significance*, where the world is defined as follows: “The All [All], in an empirical signification, is always only comparative”.²⁵⁷ In this sense, the world refers to the *indefinite sum* of what we can cognize (what is verifiable) in the regressive series of conditions.²⁵⁸ Let us call this the transcendental idealist’s world-concept (TIW).

If one reads the antinomical propositions as being about TRW, then they are *contradictories* (and we would think one of them should be true) since contradictory predicates are applied to one and the same concept. However, none of them are true, because the concept is “nugatory” (truth-aptless) and self-contradictory (making both false). But when invoking TIW, the propositions are not *contradictories*, but instead function like *contraries* (adopted from the square of opposition in Aristotle’s logic), which implies that they can be, and both indeed are, false. On the classical square of opposition, two propositions are contrary when they cannot both be true but can both, as opposed to contradictories, be false (e.g., “all planets are gas giants” and “no planets are gas giants”). He does not say that the propositions in the antinomies are contraries in this sense, but that they function similarly.²⁵⁹ As he writes, when one set of propositions are “contradictory opposites, then one assumes that the

²⁵⁷ KrV, A 483/B 511, modified translation.

²⁵⁸ This is also what Kant refers to as the world as “in indefinitum” (*KrV*, A 511-513/B 539-541), which is a “whole [...] given only through an empirical regress”. See also *KrV*, A 503-505/B 531-533 and 4: 342.

²⁵⁹ See 20: 291, 328.

world [...] is a thing in itself”.²⁶⁰ But if we “take away this presupposition” – because it invokes a verification-transcendent and self-contradictory concept – then “the contradictory conflict of the two assertions is transformed into a merely dialectical conflict”.²⁶¹ In such a dialectical conflict, both propositions can be false. Why? It is true that either the proposition that X (e.g., TIW) is infinite or its negation (not-infinite) must be true, since those two propositions exhibit what Kant calls an “analytical opposition”. However, if two predicates are mutually exclusive, but X (e.g., TIW) does not satisfy any of them, then both can be false. They exhibit a “dialectical opposition”. That is, TIW is neither finite or infinite.²⁶² The only legitimate (non-empty) concept of the “world” is TIW, the “comparative all”, but to apply any of the predicates (completely infinite, completely finite, completely divisible, completely indivisible) in A1-2 to TIW would be *false predication*. Hence, Kant’s *Solution from the distinction between two world-concepts* is compatible with *PO*.

2.2. The third antinomy – freedom and nature

Whereas Kant concludes that the propositions in A1-2 are “nugatory” (in virtue of being verification-transcendent) and “false” (in virtue of containing a self-contradictory concept and, when assuming TIW, predicating falsely), he argues that the propositions in A3-4 (the so-called *dynamical antinomies*) – all *can* be true, although only in revised versions.²⁶³

What is of interest here is the third antinomy, which is a dispute about the causal structure of the universe. The underlying trigger of the dispute is this: If we want a complete answer to why a particular event happens, we must answer *all* the questions about the causes of this event. It requires a total causal history. This entails the following question that stimulates the third antinomy: Is there a first (uncaused) cause of the universe or is there an infinite chain of (physical) causes? Kant formulates the thesis and anti-thesis in the following way:

T3: “Causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom in order to explain them”.²⁶⁴

AT3: “There is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with laws of nature”.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ *KrV*, A 503-505/B 531-533.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² See *KrV*, A 503/B 531.

²⁶³ *KrV*, A 532/B 560; A 562/B 590; 4: 343.

²⁶⁴ *KrV*, A 444/B 472.

²⁶⁵ *KrV*, A 445/B 473.

However, Kant's formulations of T3 and AT3 are somewhat misleading.²⁶⁶ T3 is explicitly about "causality" and asserts a first, uncaused cause underlying all physical events ("from which all the appearances of the world can be derived"). AT3, on the other hand, does not mention "causality", but rejects uncaused causes (freedom) and asserts that every physical event (only) happens in accordance with physical (natural causal) laws. Nevertheless, we can reasonably conclude that AT3, cosmologically speaking, is implicitly committed to the opposite claim of T3, namely that there is no first, uncaused cause underlying all physical events, and that the causal chain of physical events must therefore be *infinitely* long. Therefore, we can reformulate T3 and AT3 in the following way:

T3*: There is a first, uncaused (unconditioned) cause of the world.

AT3*: The world is causally made up of an infinite (total) chain of natural causes.

The "world" here refers to TRW, since both T3* and AT3* pose ultimate descriptions of the empirical world's causal constitution. Such descriptions are verification-transcendent since we are not justified in thwarting the empirical verification norm of confirming one condition (cause) at a time in the chain of conditions (causes) and refer to the (causal) chain in absolute terms – either in *finitist* or *infinitist* form. We have not ultimately answered why one event, X, happens if we have not answered all the questions about X's causes. But on Kant's view, it is impossible to answer all the questions about X's causes and arrive at a satisfactory answer that does not raise further questions. We can only affirm that the regressive chain of causal explanations according to the natural principle of causality goes on "in indefinitum" – not "in infinitum".²⁶⁷ Hence, just like all the propositions in A1-A2, AT3* does not satisfy *PO*. The same is the case for T3*. It is just as impossible to verify the ultimate answer to the cosmo-causal question that invokes a first, unconditioned cause of the world. Such a question, and hence any answer to it, is "absolutely null and void".²⁶⁸

Looking at the three solution strategies presented in chapter 2.1, we can say that the first (the propositions are truth-aptless in virtue of verification-transcendence) and partly the second (the propositions are necessarily false in virtue of positing a self-contradictory concept) apply to the third antinomy. The third solution strategy involving *predication* of TIW can also be said to be operative, but in the opposite way, since the predicates in A3* ("freedom" and "natural causality") can, according to Kant, be assigned to TIW.

²⁶⁶ The formulations are especially misleading because Kant occasionally introduces non-cosmological (transcendental idealist) versions of either T3 or AT3 when presenting them in their transcendental realist shapes. For example, he formulates T3 in the *Prolegomena* as follows: "There exist in the world causes through *freedom*" (4: 339), which is different from the cosmological claim that there is a first, uncaused cause of the world.

²⁶⁷ *KrV*, A 510-511-538-539.

²⁶⁸ *KrV*, A 703/B 731.

Why does the second strategy partly apply to the third antinomy? For the most part, Kant only ascribes self-contradictoriness to the concept of the world in the first and second antinomy. However, there are good reasons to claim that AT3* does assume a self-contradictory concept of the “world”, whereas T3* does not. T3* does not purport to describe the world in purely empirical or non-empirical (intelligible terms), but states that all the events of the physical world can be derived from a first, uncaused cause. That is not logically impossible (although it is verification-transcendent). On the other hand, AT3* does in fact consider the world as *both* purely sensible and intelligible – thereby assuming a self-contradictory concept – since it purports to give a purely empirical description of the causal structure of the universe and at the same time abstracts from such a description intelligibly by invoking an absolute (non-empirical) description of it by asserting an infinite (absolute) causal chain.

2.3. Kant’s standpoint-dualism

Why does Kant claim that the thesis and the anti-thesis in A3 “can both be true [beide wahr sein können]”?²⁶⁹ It is clearly not in what we could call their global, cosmological, transcendental realist sense. Although the third antinomy arises in the cosmo-metaphysical context, Kant’s intention behind claiming that both T3* and AT3* can be true in what he refers to as a “corrected significance”²⁷⁰ is to make a reasonable case for the idea that human beings can both be a part of the natural causal order and free beings.²⁷¹ That is, an attempt to answer the fundamental compatibility question. Whenever Kant claims that T3* can be true, it is in what we could call the *local* or *non-cosmological* significance that refers to human agency. We can refer to this as T3**.

Regarding AT3*, Kant stresses that the “correctness” of the natural principle of causality “will suffer no violation”.²⁷² That is, as he argues throughout the Transcendental Analytic of *KrV*, every physical event must have a physical cause. That is how AT3* should be understood in a “corrected significance”, namely in the *local* sense whereby every empirical (physical) event must have a preceding (physical) cause, which is itself always caused by another (physical) cause, and so on (*in indefinitum*). We can refer to this as A3**.

The question then remains, as he asks, “whether, despite this, in regard in regard to the very same effect that is determined by nature, freedom might not also take place, or is this entirely excluded through that inviolable rule?”,²⁷³ or whether “freedom and natural necessity in one and the same action contradict each other”?²⁷⁴ Kant’s strategy in the third antinomy in *KrV* is primarily negative. He does not

²⁶⁹ *KrV*, A 532/B 560; A 562/B 590; and 4: 343.

²⁷⁰ *KrV*, A 532/B 560.

²⁷¹ See *KrV*, A 448-451/B 476-479; A 463/B 491; A 481/B 509; A 533-534/B 561-562.

²⁷² *KrV*, A 535-537/B 563-567.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ *KrV*, A 557/B 585.

intent to “establish the *reality* [Wirklichkeit] of freedom”,²⁷⁵ but merely to leave a *conceptual space* for the concept of freedom, so as to leave room for a further positive treatment of it in *KpV*.²⁷⁶ How does he carve out this conceptual space in *KrV*? He invokes a *domain descriptive argument* by claiming that every event in the domain of empirical (physical) objects must happen according to natural causality. But this does not exclude that a non-empirical causality (freedom) can have effects in a non-empirical (non-physical) domain. This *conceivability argument* merely states that it is not logically impossible (because of the domain specificity) to allow for a condition (cause) of an empirical event that is not itself empirical. This means that one can imagine 1) an empirical event or object that is caused by another empirical event or object, and 2) an empirical event or object that is caused by a non-empirical cause – a free will. In short: To say that “X caused Y” does not imply that X and Y are necessarily of the same type.²⁷⁷ However, carving out a conceptual space for freedom does not make T3** truth-apt or objective; logical possibility does not entail real possibility.

Freedom is what Kant calls an *empirically* “empty concept”, since it, per definition, cannot have empirical “significance [Bedeutung]” or “reference [Beziehung]”²⁷⁸ and is “without truth and reference to an object”.²⁷⁹ Trivially, as he writes in the *Prolegomena*, ascribing freedom to human actions would be impossible if freedom were understood as objective in the same way as empirical concepts, since “the same would then be confirmed and rejected of one and the same object in the same sense”,²⁸⁰ namely that it both is and is not empirical. But this does mean that freedom is without sense and significance *per se*. As I argued earlier, Kant defends a pluralistic (although constrained) conception of truth and objectivity. According to the *Principle of Objectivity*, a concept or judgement has significance (objectivity) if there is a recognizable norm for verifying it. In relation to freedom, that requires a specification of such a norm; an “application criteria” of the concept that is non-identical to, for example, the ones for mathematical or empirical judgements.

Although Kant’s strategy in *KrV* is primarily negative, it does contain an important passage that lays the ground for his defense of the truth, not merely the truth-aptness, of T3**. In the B-Preface to *KrV*, he claims that we must be open to thinking some objects (that is, human actions) in a “twofold meaning [zweierlei Bedeutung]”. If the two propositions – that the “will is free” and that “it is simultaneously subject to natural necessity” – take the human subject “in just the same meaning”, an evident contradiction arises. But, as he writes, if the “critique has not erred in teaching” that some objects

²⁷⁵ *KrV*, A 558/B 586.

²⁷⁶ As he indicates in *KrV*, B xxi-xxii.

²⁷⁷ See *KrV*, A 528-532/B 556-560; A 528-529/B 556-557; 4: 343; 20: 292.

²⁷⁸ *KrV*, A 55-63/B 79-87; A 146/B 185; A 241/B 300; A 245/B 303.

²⁷⁹ *KrV*, A 489/B 517.

²⁸⁰ 4: 343.

should be taken in a **twofold meaning** [zweierlei Bedeutung], namely as appearance or as thing in itself [...] then just the same will is thought of in the appearance (in visible actions) as necessarily subject to the law of nature and to this extent not free, while yet on the other hand it is thought of as belonging to a thing in itself as not subject to that law, and hence free, without any contradiction hereby occurring.²⁸¹

It goes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail Kant's distinction between appearances and things (considered) in themselves. However, following Henry Allison,²⁸² I take there to be sound textual and philosophical reasons not to read Kant's distinction as an ontological distinction between two different ontological realms or objects.²⁸³ Rather, we are better off reading it as a distinction between different ways of considering or thinking about certain "objects" (namely actions and other "objects"). In several passages emphasizes that the twofold standpoint-distinction is suited for some objects, namely actions (primarily human ones), not all objects.²⁸⁴ This is an important detail often ignored by those who accuse Kant of the implausible claim that all kinds of objects (tables, tennis rackets and electrons) can be justifiably considered and judged about either as an appearance or as a thing in itself (whatever that would mean). Kant was not a normative dualist about all kinds of objects. He makes it clear several places that this standpoint-distinction is generally suited for analysing human actions.²⁸⁵ In the B-Preface to *KrV*, he refers to the possibility of considering the "same objects" (actions) from "two different sides" and says that some things can be "considered from this twofold standpoint".²⁸⁶ To stress this point, Kant famously invokes a distinction between an "*empirical*" and "*intelligible character*",²⁸⁷ which is meant to underline that human actions can reasonably be "considered [betrachten]" from "two sides [auf zwei Seiten]". Either it can be considered from an empirical (scientific) standpoint, for example through physiological observations, behavioral psychology or observations of neurological brain-activity, whereby we can explain any event (including human actions) completely through natural law and, in principle, "predict [it] with certainty".²⁸⁸ Or it can be considered from an intelligible (practical) standpoint, whereby the action is considered to be imputable and free.

Perhaps the clearest piece of evidence for the non-metaphysical reading is found in Kant's *Opus postumum*: "The difference between the concepts of a thing in itself and that of an appearance is not objective, but merely subjective. The thing in itself (*ens per se*) is not a different object, but another consideration [Beziehung] (*respectus*) in the imagination of the same object". The ability to consider an object in a certain

²⁸¹ *KrV*, B XXVII-XXVIII.

²⁸² Allison (1990, 2004).

²⁸³ This interpretative route was initiated by Prauss (1969, 1971). For an informative overview of the debate about Kant's thing in itself, see Schulting (2011).

²⁸⁴ 22: 26. See also *KrV*, A 546-547/B 574-575 and A 549-550/B 577-578.

²⁸⁵ See e.g., 4: 345.

²⁸⁶ *KrV*, B xviii-xix ff..

²⁸⁷ *KrV*, A 538-539/B 567.

²⁸⁸ *KrV*, A 550/B 578.

way Kant sometimes refers to as “reflection”.²⁸⁹ Hence, we can also understand “freedom” as a kind of reflection term. This act of reflection or consideration does not seem to contain any ontological commitments regarding experience transcendent objects. On the other hand, what Kant is after is that we can talk about some objects (mainly human actions) in non-empirical ways, and that we in fact must do so if we want to maintain a reasonable notion of ourselves as rational and imputable beings.

However, this reflexive operation of considering or thinking about certain objects in a twofold meaning does not grant a concept like freedom objective validity. In his *Price Essay*, Kant moves beyond the reflexive claim and writes that judgements can be true or objective from both standpoints, even though they seem mutually exclusive. Just like two subcontrary judgements in classical (Aristotelian) logic can both be true if the subject (the human action, say) is “taken in a different significance [Bedeutung]” or “sense [Sinn]”.²⁹⁰ He writes that the thesis and antithesis in the third antinomy

may both be true if [...] the subject of the opposing judgments is taken in a different significance [Bedeutung] in each; for example, the concept of cause, as *causa phenomenon* in the thesis: *All causality of phenomena in the world of sense is subject to the mechanism of Nature*, seems to stand in contradiction to the antithesis: *Some causality of these phenomena is not subject to this law*; but such contradiction is not necessarily to be met with there, since in the antithesis the subject can be taken in a different sense [Sinne] from that in the thesis – the same subject, that is, can be conceived [gedacht] as *causa noumenon*, and then both propositions may be true, and the same subject, *qua* thing-in-itself, be free from determination by natural necessity, which *qua* appearance, with respect to the same action, is not free.²⁹¹

Whenever Kant mentions that T3 and AT3 “may be true”, it is in the local or non-cosmological, corrected significance that describes specific actions (“the same subject” or “the same action”): T3** and AT3**. It is important to note that “sense” and “significance” here still means *possible extension or reference* – not intension. Otherwise, one could in principle think and ascribe objective validity to an object in an unrestricted number of senses (intensions). Instead, Kant argues that we are justified in regarding human actions as (also) being free if we can specify a set of norms or application criteria for the concept of freedom. Whether and how that is possible is what *KpV* revolves around, which I will sketch briefly in what follows. I do not aim to defend every element of Kant’s argument, but to outline its structure in order to extrapolate the kind of quietism his standpoint-argument entails.

²⁸⁹ E.g., A260-261/B316-317.

²⁹⁰ 20: 291, *modified translation*. A subcontrary set of propositions is two propositions where it is impossible for both to be false (e.g., if “some dinners are free” is false, then “some dinners are not free” must be true) and where both can be true (e.g., some nations are despotic” and “some nations are not despotic”).

²⁹¹ 20: 291-292, *modified translation*. See also *Prolegomena* (4: 344) and the *Price Essay* (20: 327-329), in which he writes that both T3 and AT3 can be true if “the series of conditions is regarded in one of two different ways” (20: 328).

2.4. Kant's "Fact of reason"

How does Kant argue that freedom is an objective concept? He provides a kind of transcendental argument that begins from the unmistakable assumption that we humans are imputable agents (what he refers to as a "Factum der Vernunft"):

1. Human beings are imputable (moral) agents
2. A necessary condition for this is that human beings can act from causality of freedom (that T3** is true)
3. Hence, human beings can act from causality of freedom

What is the "fact of reason"? The way Kant introduces and defends it is strikingly similar to the "justification" McDowell – and many other liberal naturalists – gives for the *sui generis* status of the logical space of reasons, or second nature, when McDowell points to it as an immediate ("intuitive", as he says) and unquestionable fact about human lives or nature (the difference here being that Kant talks specifically about *moral* reasoning). We should understand the "fact of reason" as the, according to Kant, irrefutable claim, authenticated through common moral judgement, that whenever human beings deliberate about what to do and why to do it, they can recognize an unconditional and obligatory reason to act (a moral reason) that is unmistakably distinct from agent-relative (happiness-based) reasons.²⁹²

The fact of reason is introduced at the epicenter of his attempt in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (*KpV*) to justify the 'objective validity' of morality, and it is primarily rendered as the assertion that human beings are 'conscious' of the moral law's categorical authority.²⁹³

It is important to note that consciousness of *ML* comes with a recognition of the *ML*'s authority or bindingness. To be conscious of *ML* does not mean merely to acknowledge another subject's recognition of the law's authority or to grasp some specific propositional content without affirming its validity. Rather, it means to realize that *ML* demands categorically how I ought to act. This is also clear from other passages where Kant explicitly talks about "cognition of bindingness",²⁹⁴ that we "cognize this law as binding",²⁹⁵ and that our attitude towards *ML* is one of "recognition [Anerkennung]".²⁹⁶ He does not refer to the consciousness of a subject that

²⁹² Throughout its reception history, disparaging commentators (beginning with Hegel and Schopenhauer) have denounced the introduction of this fact as a philosophical regress and embarrassment on Kant's side, since it exhibits tools that his critical philosophy had forsaken, as a "mystery" (Guyer 2000: 138) or "foot-stamping" (Guyer 2007: 462). See Willert (2023) for an overview.

²⁹³ Although Kant uses the notion 'Factum' 11 times in *KpV* and gives it multiple referents, I agree with Kleingeld that the passage in §7 is the "core passage" on the fact (Kleingeld 2010: 59).

²⁹⁴ 5:38, modified translation.

²⁹⁵ 5:47.

²⁹⁶ 5:79.

might say: “I am aware that some people assert the existence and bindingness of *ML*, but I am not one of those”. In the second *Remark* in §7, Kant writes:

The fact mentioned above is undeniable [unleugbar]. One need only dissect the judgment that people pass on the lawfulness of their actions in order to find that, whatever inclination may say to the contrary, their reason, incorruptible and self-constrained, always holds the maxim of the will in an action up to the pure will, that is, to itself inasmuch as it regards itself as a priori practical.²⁹⁷

What Kant gets at is this: When agents deliberate about how to act, they take themselves to be able to guide their action based on reasons. When asking why a certain action rather than another should to be carried out, Kant believes it to be an undeniable fact that the agent *can* become aware that some actions unconditionally ought to be done.²⁹⁸ We need nothing more than common moral judgements to verify that. He justifies the validity of *ML* by referring to the “undeniable”²⁹⁹ and “apodictically certain”³⁰⁰ fact that moral authority is present in the practical judgements and deliberations of all human beings; it is inscribed, as McDowell would say, in the (second) nature of human lives.

Few, if any, would deny that we can engage in moral deliberation and come to realize that some actions ‘ought’ to be done regardless of personal ends. This is what the gallows example, as well as many of the other examples Kant gives in *KpV*,³⁰¹ are meant to validate. In that sense, we could say that what Kant refers to as the fact of reason is a premise that anyone who enters the game of moral deliberation has always already acknowledged. He regularly refers to how the “most common understanding” can judge, without the help of a philosophical vocabular, “what form in a maxim makes it fit for a giving of universal law and what does not”,³⁰² and that *ML*, through the “voice of reason” that is so “distinct”, “irrepressible”, and “audible”, is recognized by the “most common human beings”.³⁰³ Elsewhere he refers to “the most common eye”, which “cannot fail to distinguish whether something belongs” to “morality and self-love”,³⁰⁴ talks about the distinction between empirical and moral principles as a “truth [...] so evident”,³⁰⁵ mentions that “the most common understanding” can, “without hesitation”, recognize what determines a moral action

²⁹⁷ 5:32, *modified translation*. See also 5:91. Already in the Canon of Pure Reason in the first *Critique*, Kant writes that he assumes “that there are really [wirklich] pure moral laws”, and that he “can legitimately presuppose [mit Recht voraussetzen] this proposition [*ML*] by appealing [berufe] [...] to the moral judgment of every human being [das sittliche Urteil eines jeden Menschen], if he will distinctly think such a law [deutlich denken will]” (A807/B835).

²⁹⁸ What he means is that the representation of *ML* is implicit or possible every time we draft maxims – it becomes explicit, for most people, when there is a conflict between our personal ends and what morality demands.

²⁹⁹ 5:32.

³⁰⁰ 5:47.

³⁰¹ See for example 5:25-26; 5:37; 5:44; 5:88-89; 5:155.

³⁰² 5:27.

³⁰³ 5:35.

³⁰⁴ 5:26.

³⁰⁵ 5:36.

and what does not,³⁰⁶ and says that “what *duty* is, is plain of itself to everyone”.³⁰⁷ As Kant knows, of course, hardly anyone explicitly recognize his formula of *ML*, but everyone can acknowledge, he stipulates, that one ought, in some situations, to act in a certain way regardless of personal ends. In the Doctrine of Method in *KpV*, he writes:

But if one asks: What, then, really is *pure* morality, by which as a touchstone one must test the moral content of every action? I must admit that only philosophers can make the decision of this question doubtful, for it is long since decided in common human reason, not indeed by abstract general formulae but by habitual use [durch den gewöhnlichen Gebrauch], like the difference between the right and the left hand.³⁰⁸

One is tempted to invoke McDowell’s conception of “second nature” and the social upbringing into the space of giving and asking for reasons as akin to Kant’s talk here of the “habitual use” of our practical reasoning.³⁰⁹ It is the moral philosopher’s job, Kant believes, to outline the underlying principles that common human reason always already acknowledges in its practical way about in the world. He concludes on this basis that the “justification” of *ML* – that is, the justification of the actuality of moral bindingness, not the explanation of how it is possible – can be carried out “very well and with sufficient certainty by a mere appeal to the judgment of common human understanding”.³¹⁰

Returning to the transcendental argument for freedom sketched above: According to Kant, the (brute) fact that humans are self-conceived moral agents, “proves” the objective reality of the concept of freedom and hence the truth of T3**. As he writes, the “reality” of freedom “is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason [*ML*] [...]”.³¹¹ Moreover, he states that the moral law gives “content”,³¹² “significance”,³¹³ and “objective and, though only practical, undoubted reality”³¹⁴ to the concept of freedom, and that the fact of reason “establishes” and “furnishes reality” to it.³¹⁵

We could say that it is warranted assertible from what Kant calls a “practical use [praktische Gebrauch]”, a “practical standpoint” or a “practical consideration [Beziehung]”, that we are free beings.³¹⁶ As Kant also makes clear several places in the first

³⁰⁶ 5:36.

³⁰⁷ 5:36.

³⁰⁸ 5:155.

³⁰⁹ As well as the “shrug of the shoulders” that McDowell refers to regarding constructive philosophical questions when Kant says that only philosophers can question what morality really is.

³¹⁰ 5: 91. For an argument for why this justification through an appeal to common moral judgment and examples is not inconsistent with what he says in the *Groundwork* about the impossibility of deriving moral principles from examples, see Willert (2023).

³¹¹ 5: 3.

³¹² 5: 6.

³¹³ 5: 50.

³¹⁴ 5: 49.

³¹⁵ 5: 6.

³¹⁶ See also: 4: 346-347.

Critique, the considerations of an intelligible character and rationality are connected to morality through the concept of an “*ought*”,³¹⁷ which expresses a kind of “necessity and a connection with grounds which does not occur anywhere else in the whole of nature”.³¹⁸ The “ought” has no “meaning [Bedeutung]” in relation to natural occurrences (notwithstanding whether it is issued as a hypothetical or categorical imperative).³¹⁹ If we abolish the idea of transcendental freedom, as he writes, “*moral* ideas and principles lose all validity”.³²⁰ Kant’s assumption is that if one denies that humans are free, one must also deny that we are rational creatures, capable of action from moral considerations. If one wants to maintain the latter, one is justified in claiming that we are free.

Kant is explicit that his arguments for the objectivity of *ML* and freedom are meant to refute the moral skepticist or nihilist who assumes that the only reasons for action are agent-relative (subjective) ones emanating from the higher-order principle of happiness (a kind of moral egotism). As he already remarks in the *Prolegomena*, the introduction and defense of the idea of morality and freedom serves “to negate the impudent assertions of materialism, naturalism, and fatalism”.³²¹

As already noted, Kant argues that a judgement (or concept) has objective validity (or reality) *iff* what it refers to contains positive determinations that are accessible for all rational beings, which makes it a possible (or real) object for the faculty of (empirical) cognition or a possible (or real) determining ground or principle of the faculty of desire/will.³²² Hence, a judgement can be called objective if it is possible to specify its truth criteria, or what Kant also calls “sources of cognition”, that is, the necessary conditions for ascribing a type of judgements cognitive significance or objective validity: To ascribe a concept or judgement “objective validity”, something “more” is required, but, this “more”, however, “need not be sought in theoretical sources of cognition [Erkenntnisquellen]; it may also lie in practical ones”.³²³

If the moral law is a possible (or real) determining ground of the will, which Kant believes is an evident fact of the practical lives of human beings, it has objective validity (or reality). And it is an analytic truth, Kant assumes, that an ‘ought’-representation comes with the possibility of acting upon it (*ought implies can*), since the moment an action is, in principle, impossible for me to carry out, it can no longer be required of me. That satisfies the defined criteria for objective reality, since the presence of an unconditional ought in our lives makes the moral law (and freedom) positively “specified [angegeben]”³²⁴ or “*determined* from a practical perspective”³²⁵ as a “practical concept” with “practical use”³²⁶ and a “real application [wirkliche

³¹⁷ A 547/B 575.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ A 548/B 576.

³²⁰ A 468/B 496.

³²¹ 4: 363.

³²² 5: 44; 5: 47-48; 5: 50; 5: 104-105.

³²³ *KrV*, B XXVI.

³²⁴ 5:56.

³²⁵ 5: 105.

³²⁶ 5: 6; 5: 135.

Anwendung]” because it is “exhibited [darstellen] *in concreto*” in the course of practical deliberation.³²⁷ We are warranted in asserting the truth of T3** from this practical “standpoint”³²⁸ or “perspective”.³²⁹ T3** turns out not only to be truth-apt (objectively valid), but true (objectively real).

2.5. Kant’s quietism

It is clear from Kant’s analysis of freedom that his model does not introduce an explanation of the possibility of freedom and normativity; that is, it does not contain an answer to the fundamental compatibility question; a constructive philosophical theory about how norms and free actions can occur in a (presumably) normless and unfree reality. Rather, his strategy is to derive the *possibility* of freedom and morality from their *actuality* and introduces the notion of two legitimized standpoints to account for this actuality.

As far as I read Kant, the compatibility question – which Kant mainly frames around the compatibility between freedom and nature – does not live up to his boundary-thesis of human cognition, what I earlier reconstructed as Kant’s metaphysical quietism (or anti-realism), since it deals “with information [Kundschaft] which no human being can ever get”.³³⁰ It is simply a question without any epistemic value. Kant’s strategy seems to be this: Most people assume that some actions simply *ought* (or *ought not*) to be done – helping a suffering child, say. That ‘oughts’ can have world-impact. One might go about ‘explaining’ the advent of this ‘ought-feature’ of the world in different ways. For example through neurobiology (ala. Patricia Churchland), some kind of deity (ala. certain Christian thinkers) or a special human feature (symbolic language, history, or the capability of general abstraction, say). If one rejects all those options, together with the eliminativist view that moral discourse is some kind of self-conceited illusion, one might alternatively become a *moral irreducibilist* and endorse the bruteness and non-explainability of moral discourse. Metaphorically speaking, such a position contends that morality is, for better or worse, a *gift* – and we can’t explain why it enters our lifeworld. Kant’s introduction of the “fact of reason” is meant to signify this explanatory impossibility or *quietism*.

This is why Kant refers to the fact of reason as an axiom or postulate: The claim that *ML* has objective reality (through our consciousness of it), is introduced as an undeniable yet improvable axiom or postulate that, similar to a mathematical axiom,³³¹ from which certain propositions can be derived (for example the claim about

³²⁷ 5: 56.

³²⁸ 4: 450; 4: 458.

³²⁹ 5: 105.

³³⁰ *KrV*, A 703/B 731.

³³¹ Of course, Kant acknowledges fundamental differences in the kind of axiom that *ML* is compared to mathematical postulates when it comes to its force: In contrast to mathematical axioms that are hypothetical, *ML* has categorical force (5:31).

the reality of freedom).³³² This also explains the pseudo-mathematical structure of §1-8 as well as several passages in *KpV* and other of Kant's works. For example, the Introduction of *KpV* gives some support to such a reading when Kant states that "in the present *Critique* we shall begin with principles [Hauptsätzen]".³³³ In 5:46 he explicitly calls *ML* "practical postulate" and says that it was necessary, in *KpV*, to begin "with pure practical laws and their reality [Wirklichkeit]", and elsewhere he says that *ML* functions as the "first data"³³⁴ of "science" (referring to a detailed classification of all human duties, which Kant attempts to unfold in *The Metaphysics of Morals*). Moreover, in the third *Critique* he calls the "supreme principle of all moral laws" a "postulate",³³⁵ and in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, he claims that practical laws, "like mathematical postulates, are improvable [unerweislich] and yet apodictic".³³⁶ Or, as it is unambiguously phrased in the *Jäsche-Logic*, the "reality" of the *moral law* "is an axiom".³³⁷

On this basis, we can say that Kant bites the bullet of bruteness. The fact of reason is indeed a brute (inexplicable) fact. We can merely confirm that we in fact register an unconditional 'ought' in our practical lives. To make a parallel, one could say that the attitude we have towards *ML* resembles the immediate need I can grasp, when reasoning about something, to give up one of my beliefs if I observe a contradiction among them; I realize that both cannot be true, and I realize that simply because it is so. Similarly, I can realize immediately, in certain practical situations, that I ought to act in a certain way, and I realize that simply because it is so. Moral authority is "undeniable", as Kant argues, in our cognitive and practical lives (only a moral skeptic or psychological egoist would say otherwise), but we have no means of explaining (or deducing) *why* or *how* that is the case. This might not satisfy the

³³² Against this interpretation, the attentive reader would object that Kant, in *The Critique of Pure Reason (KrV)*, claims that mathematics is grounded on "definitions, axioms, and demonstrations" and says that this method should not be "imitated by philosophy" (A726-727/B754-755). This contrast, though, between the axiomatic (mathematical) and the discursive (philosophical) method, is exclusively intended to establish that any philosophical account of the synthetic principles of our cognition of objects cannot proceed from definitions and axioms, since theoretical principles can only gain objective validity "indirectly through the relation of these concepts to something entirely contingent, namely possible experience" (A737/B765). Since a theoretical principle must be object-related, it cannot be ascribed objective validity through a mere stipulation. Hence, Kant does not exclude that the axiomatic method should not be imitated in practical philosophy, and it is exactly such an 'imitation' he attempts in *KpV*.

³³³ 5:16.

³³⁴ 5:91.

³³⁵ 5:470.

³³⁶ 6:225, *modified translation*. He uses "postulate" several places in his *The Metaphysics of Morals* in relation to the concepts of moral and right, e.g., 6:273. See also 8:349 and 8:381. See Willert (2023) for why axiomatic status of *ML* is different from what he calls the "postulates" (5:4) of God and immortality (he sometimes includes freedom, but it has a completely different epistemic status than the other two).

³³⁷ 9: 93. See also 6: 273. Kant follows a rather traditional view according to which an axiom, etymologically from the Greek *axiōma*, is something that 'commends itself as evident' from which a system of propositions can be deduced or derived. On Kant's conception of postulates and axioms, See Parsons (1992), Hintikka (1992), and Heis (2020).

moral skeptic, but so be it, Kant seems to believe, seeing as skepticism concerns “only the learned”.³³⁸

To sum up, we can understand Kant’s critical philosophy as a meta-theory about how justified or objective judgements can be relativized to a specific standpoint. In the words of Strawson’s (Kant-inspired) soft naturalism, the conflict between nature and normativity is thereby “resolved by what I called the relativizing move: relativizing the concept of reality to distinct, even opposed, but not strictly incompatible, standpoints or points of view”.³³⁹ Each standpoint, or domain of discourse, contains its own set of norms, on the basis of which they can be said to be justified and objective. This entails a pluralist standpoint-theory about objectivity and truth, which ‘saves’ freedom and refutes absolutist (physicalist, say) attempts to sanctify one domain of discourse as the only one that can say how *reality really is*. As Strawson puts it, we lack reason for saying that either standpoint “gives us the exclusively correct type of conception of the real nature of things”.³⁴⁰ The strong naturalist view, which Kant sometimes refers to as the “dogmatic empiricist”, makes a blameable “mistake of immodesty” by imperializing one kind of warranted position of assertion as having unrestricted scope; no standpoint can have an unrestricted scope.³⁴¹ The transcendental realist that Kant is really after is the metaphysical or reductive naturalist.

However, the objectivity of the standpoint of freedom and how it hangs together with the standpoint of natural science (theoretical reason, in Kant’s words) seems still to be hanging around. We are, Kant believes, warranted in ascribing morality and freedom to ourselves. However, this warrant is provided purely by what he calls the fact of reason, which functions that an inexplicable fact or axiom in his justification of human normativity. We find no real attempt in Kant’s writings to explain how freedom, value, and morality is metaphysically possible in a physical world of law-governed events. Kant’s quietist answer, it seems to me, is that this question is, if not meaningless, then irresolvable. As Allison has formulated it, in terms that connect Kant very closely to the diagnostic and quietist spirit of McDowell and other liberal naturalists, Kant’s standpoint-argument “functions therapeutically to disabuse us of any” metaphysical assumptions. As he says, this strategy targets reductive, metaphysical naturalism by preserving a “place for a meaningful conception of freedom” while avoiding “the assumption that there must be some context-independent truth or fact of the matter: Otherwise expressed, Kantian dualism is normative rather than ontological”.³⁴²

They key phrase here is that Kant avoids the assumption that there is some answer to the question about freedom and nature outside the context of either a practical or theoretical point of view. From the practical point of view, it makes little sense to deny that we are autonomous agents. From the theoretical (natural scientific) view,

³³⁸ 5:52.

³³⁹ Skepticism and Naturalism, 65.

³⁴⁰ Skepticism and Naturalism, 52-53.

³⁴¹ *KrV*, A 471/B 499.

³⁴² Allison (2004: 18).

it makes little sense to introduce a conception of ourselves as autonomous agents. There is, according to Kant, no God's-eye-perspective from which we can decide whether one of them trumps the other; whether the practical point of view, for example, can be reduced to other or eliminated altogether. All we can do, and that is the Kantian response to scientific naturalism, is to constrain or exercise our metaphysical drive to answer these God's-eye-perspective questions as well as to affirm and draw the consequences of what he takes to be immediate facts about human lives. Such as the fact that humans are normative and responsible creatures that give and ask for reasons, and that some of those reasons are moral reasons.

3. Systematic Beginnings

3.0. Introduction

In the previous chapter, it was argued that the Kantian response to scientific naturalism consists in a metaphysical quietism akin to the one proposed by liberal naturalism. A problem with this standpoint theory, or methodological dualism, is that it seemingly leaves the conceptual gap between the two standpoints unbridgeable.

In this chapter, I turn to Schelling, who already in his earliest writings – in particular his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*³⁴³ (1795) – indicates a model that attempts to bridge the gap. Schelling's strategy from early on, contrary to Kant, is explicitly metaphysical. He targets a systematic model of fusion that unites *Geist* and *Natur*, or the subjective and objective, in a synoptic vision of the world.

In Chapter 3.1., I draw up the background for Schelling's systematic vision by analyzing the Kantian themes and problems that he inherits. In Chapter 3.2., I reconstruct what he calls dogmatism as materialism (3.2.1.) and what he calls criticism as subjective idealism (3.2.1.). In Chapter 3.3., I analyze two of Schelling's texts – *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy*³⁴⁴ (3.3.1.) and the *Letters* (3.3.2.), I will argue that even the early Schelling, who is often wrongly seen as thoroughly Fichtean, outlines a model against one-sided systems (namely strict naturalism and subjective idealism) that points towards his future aims to construct a (neutral) monism.

3.1. A system of the world

The effects that Kant's philosophy had on Schelling's early philosophy can hardly be underestimated.³⁴⁵ As most of his contemporary companions, Schelling was a thorough and intrigued student of the antinomy-chapters of Kant's *KrV*, in particular the third antinomy.³⁴⁶ Like most of his contemporaries, Schelling was dissatisfied with what he took to be Kant's dualism between freedom and nature: If the subject is a part of nature that, on Kant's understanding, we can only know as deterministic, it seems impossible to explain how such a nature can give rise to a subject that supersedes determinism in the way it cognizes and acts in the world. Schelling's aim, which is already indicated in his early writings, is to translate Kant's dualism into a monist model uniting subject and nature. As he writes in *Of the I*, Kant's

³⁴³ Henceforth: *Letters*.

³⁴⁴ Henceforth: *Of the I*.

³⁴⁵ See e.g., Watkins (2014).

³⁴⁶ He refers to Kant's antinomies as "those ever-lasting monuments of victory over dogmatism and eternal propylaeum to the true philosophy" (SW, 1, 6, 7). On Schelling's indebtedness to Kant's reflections on the antinomies, see Iber (1994: 14) and Gabriel (2011).

philosophy lacks a “common principle” that can unite the theoretical and practical philosophy.³⁴⁷ In Kant’s system, the practical philosophy, because of his conception of nature as a mechanistic and causally closed system, becomes “open to attacks from the main building”.³⁴⁸ However, the “whole science” must be possible, Schelling postulates.³⁴⁹

Schelling thinks that Kant himself pointed towards how such a “whole science” could be constructed, namely in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790). Here Kant suggests that we *could* rethink our conception of nature as one that also produces self-organizing and purposeful agents (organisms). However, he never truly unfolds this model, since he believes it transcends our cognitive boundaries if it is taking to be *constitutive* (and not *regulative*).³⁵⁰ But Schelling’s excitement in his early years, which is setting the agenda for his future *Naturphilosophie*, about those paragraphs in the third *Critique* is unambiguous.³⁵¹ As he writes in *Of the I*:

Just as practical reason is compelled to unify the contrast between laws of freedom and laws of nature in a higher principle in which freedom itself is nature and nature freedom, so must theoretical reason in its *teleological* use come upon a higher principle in which finality and mechanism coincide, but which, on that very account, cannot be determinable as an object at all.³⁵²

Having studied Jacobi’s *Spinoza Letters* intensively,³⁵³ Schelling recognizes that Kant’s ideas in §76 in the third *Critique* resemble Spinoza’s monist idea of one substance (*deus sive natura*) uniting mind and nature, but with the important difference that Kant takes this to be a result of our reflective power of judgement, which we cannot dispense with, but which also cannot provide any objective cognition.

Like his contemporaries, Schelling aspired to develop a *system of philosophy* that could give a coherent account of the connection between mind and nature.³⁵⁴ According to Schelling, philosophy must essentially be a form of knowledge striving for universal scope. In a very different application, this is the same underlying ambition that we find in contemporary versions of *naturalized metaphysics*: They attempt to include all individuations within a general or cosmic scheme.

³⁴⁷ SW, 1, 1, 154 (1980a: 66).

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ I return to Kant’s thoughts on organisms in Chapter 4.2.

³⁵¹ As he writes: “Perhaps there have never been so many deep thoughts compressed into so few pages as in the critique of teleological judgment, § 76”. SW, 1, 1, 242 (1980a: 127).

³⁵² SW, 1, 1, 241-42 (1980a: 127). In the accompanying footnote, he describes “teleology” as the “connecting link” between freedom and nature.

³⁵³ See e.g., Sandkaulen-Bock (1990), Henrich (1991) and Frank (1997) for this connection, especially regarding how Schelling and his compatriots read the second edition (1789), with particular interest in the 7th *Appendix* (Henrich 1991: 207-210; Frank 1997: 36).

³⁵⁴ On the historical background and the concept of systematicity at play among the post-Kantian philosophers, see Beiser (1993) and Franks (2005).

In a passage from his *Stuttgart-Lectures* (1810), which applies across his different “phases”, Schelling reflects on what it would mean to develop such a system, what he calls a “system of the world”:

To what extent is a system ever possible? I would answer that long before man decided to create a system, there already existed one, that of the world [System der Welt]. Hence our proper task consists in discovering that system. [...] If the system that we wish to uncover shall indeed be the system of the world, (1) it must intrinsically rest on a principle that supports itself, a principle that consists in an through itself and that is reproduced in each part of the whole; (2) it must not exclude anything (e.g., nature), nor must it unilaterally subordinate or suppress anything; (3) furthermore it requires a method of development and progression to ensure that no essential link has been omitted.³⁵⁵

We don’t find many clearer metatheoretical statements than this one in Schelling’s authorship. These are the explanatory principles that he begins from. First, a philosophical system must be subject-independent, that is, it must have a realist and metaphysical core. Furthermore, such a “system of the world” must be *organic* in the sense that each part is connected to the whole, to everything else. This ensures that all parts and events are explainable within one and the same world without excluding any individual parts or types (a principle that is “reproduced in each part of the whole”). As he puts it a year before in the *Freedom Essay*, no “concept can be defined in isolation [...] only proof of its connection with the whole also confers on it final scientific completeness”.³⁵⁶ Furthermore, this metatheoretical scheme for a systematic philosophy opposes what he considers to be one-sided systems that, as he says, “subordinate or suppress” some aspects of the world. As he shall see, what he calls the subjective idealist subordinates nature, while the dogmatic materialist subordinates freedom and mindedness.

As Michelle Kosch has explained, Schelling’s systematicity requirement means that the different elements within a coherent system must somehow be “hierarchically ordered, with lower-level propositions deriving epistemic warrant from higher-level ones”.³⁵⁷ Departing from the question of the relation of mind and nature, this entails that certain higher-level or universal principles ought to explain specific individuations (or propositions) in one and the same world (or system). This is what I in Chapter 4 reconstruct as Schelling’s *Continuity Thesis*. This expresses Schelling’s underlying conviction that we can only grasp something specific if we are able to explain its occurrence within a coherent and continuous whole.

Following Kant’s discussion of the antinomies, Schelling often refers such a higher-order principle of the “system of the world” as the *absolute* or the *unconditioned*. Whereas Kant argues that that the transcendental realist attempt to determine something absolute from a God’s-eye-perspective necessarily fails due to our

³⁵⁵ SW, 1, 7, 421 (1994b: 198).

³⁵⁶ SW, 1, 7, 336 (2006: 9).

³⁵⁷ Kosch (2006): 68.

cognitive limitations, Schelling thinks that Kant's relativizing move does not satisfy a fundamental need for systematicity. That is, the need for unifying mind and nature in order to secure the unity, wholeness and closedness of the system. As he writes in the short text "Is a Philosophy of History Possible", the interest of reason "demands the greatest unity in the greatest manifoldness".³⁵⁸ According to Schelling, we cannot escape the need for introducing a conception of the *absolute* that unifies the individuated beings in the world (from rocks and blades of grass to moral agents). Considering the conclusion from Kant's third antinomy about freedom and nature, there must – Schelling urges – be something about the world as such that makes them not merely compatible, but substantially connected.

3.2. Dogmatism and criticism

In the aftermath of what was perceived as Kant's failure to unite nature and freedom, two models or potential systems of the absolute suggested themselves.

On the one hand, the *hard naturalist* ("Spinozist") solution sided, so to speak, with the *object* (or nature) by referring to subjectivity as an epiphenomenon, thereby bridging the gap by dissolving the subject in nature.

On the other hand, the *subjective idealist* solution, defended by Fichte, attempted to bridge the gap between subject and object, between freedom and nature, by claiming that the objective world (nature) is somehow the product of the activities of the subject.

These are the two models that Schelling, inspired by Fichte's terminology, treat extensively in his early philosophy under the names of *dogmatism* and *criticism*. In *Of the I*, he characterizes the "two extremes" as follows:

The two extremes are dogmatism and criticism. The principle of dogmatism is a not-I posited as antecedent to any I; the principle of criticism, an I posited as antecedent to all [that is] not-I and as exclusive of any not-I.³⁵⁹

According to the early Schelling, the paradigmatic example of dogmatism is Spinoza, and the paradigmatic example of criticism is Kant and Fichte. He often states that what marks out these two "extremes" is that each position attempts to determine the *absolute*. For the dogmatist, the absolute or the unconditioned is the not-I (nature); the I is a product of nature. For the criticist, the absolute or the unconditioned is the I (the subject); nature is a product of the I.³⁶⁰ Or, as Fichte phrased it, the dispute is whether the "independence of the I should be sacrificed by the independence of

³⁵⁸ SW, 1, 1, 468 (2021: 188).

³⁵⁹ SW, 1, 1, 171 (1980a: 77).

³⁶⁰ For systematic work on the concepts of dogmatism and criticism, see Beiser (2008) and Pluder (2013).

the things or the other way around”.³⁶¹ In other words, we are dealing with two types of reduction: Whereas dogmatism attempts to reduce the subject to, or explain the subject from, the laws of nature, criticism attempts to reduce nature to, or explain nature from, the activities of the subject.

3.2.1. Dogmatism as materialism

The discussion about naturalism or materialism that Schelling engages in mainly departs from a very specific point in the history of philosophy, namely the publication and discussion of Jacobi’s *Spinoza-Letters* (which triggered the so-called *Panteismus-Streit*). Briefly put, Spinoza (in his *Ethics*) – concerning his claim that persons or subjects are “modes” of the universe’s one substance – is portrayed by Jacobi as the arch-naturalist, arch-determinist, and arch-necessitarian through his strong commitment to *the principle of sufficient reason*. Arch-naturalist (and monist) in the sense he rejects the distinction between nature and anything distinct from nature. Nature is not a term of distinction. Arch-determinist since he, Jacobi and others believed, had a strictly mechanistic understanding of nature. Arch-necessitarian because Spinoza not only thinks that the actual physical laws of the world entail that everything happens of necessity, but that there is no possible world in which these laws would not obtain. Spinoza formulates his naturalism in the Preface to Part III of his *Ethics* like this:

[F]or Nature is always the same, that is, the laws and rules of Nature, according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are always and everywhere the same. So the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same, namely, through the universal laws and rules of Nature.³⁶²

The consequence of this is, according to Jacobi, that human freedom turns out to be nothing but an illusion.³⁶³ This is the metaphysical naturalist from Kant’s third antinomy, who makes nature’s “principle of causality” into an absolute principle: “There is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with laws of nature”.³⁶⁴ This version of Spinozism – be it a fair or unfair interpretation of Spinoza – is what Schelling in his early texts call *dogmatism*. As he says in *Of the I*, Spinoza’s system is the “perfect dogmatism”.³⁶⁵ In the *Letters*, he describes the underlying imperative of dogmatism as follows: “Annihilate yourself through absolute

³⁶¹ J. G. Fichte: *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (42 volumes, Erich Fuchs, Reinhard Lauth, Hans Jacobs, and Hans Gliwitzky (eds.), Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann, 1964-2012). GA, I, 4, 193.

³⁶² *Spinoza Opera* (edited by Carl Gebhardt, 5 volumes (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925, 1972 [volume 5, 1987]). G, 2, 138.

³⁶³ It is rather common to view Spinoza’s philosophy as naturalistic or physicalistic. See e.g., Donagan (1988); Garrett (2006).

³⁶⁴ *KrV*, A 445/B 473.

³⁶⁵ SW, 1, 1, 172 (1980a: 78).

causality! Be absolutely passive toward absolute causality”.³⁶⁶ The dogmatist understands the world exhaustively through the relations of cause and effect and attempts to integrate “facts” about consciousness and freedom as illusions, as products of ignorance about the real determining ground of these “facts”. As the young Hegel, following Schelling, writes in his *Differenzschrift* from 1801: “Dogmatism in its pure form is materialism”.³⁶⁷ Or Fichte, who in his *Wissenschaftslehre* from 1794-95 refers to the “material Spinozism, which is a dogmatic realism”.³⁶⁸

Dogmatism takes the absolute to be the world as it is without subjects. Dogmatism is therefore also another expression for what Kant refers to as *transcendental realism*: The attempt to determine the world without paying attention to human subjectivity; without “paying attention to whether and how we might achieve acquaintance with” it. The dogmatist does not ask about the foundations of her cognition. She takes up the standpoint-independent (God’s-eye-like) perspective.³⁶⁹

3.2.2. Criticism as subjective idealism

What Schelling calls *criticism* departs from the transcendental insights provided by Kant and followed through by Fichte. In the *Letters*, Schelling says that criticism proceeds from the “*cognitive faculty* [Erkenntnißvermögen] itself”, and that “the object is knowable only under *the condition of the subject*, under the condition that the subject come out from its own sphere and engage in a synthesis”.³⁷⁰ This is a reconstruction of Kant’s view. In the Transcendental Analytic of the first Critique, Kant explicitly argues that “nature”, or the “laws of nature”, are produced by the understanding: “[T]he understanding is itself the source of the laws of nature and thus of the formal unity of nature”.³⁷¹ And elsewhere, that the understanding is “prescribing” the laws “to nature”.³⁷² The laws of nature are thereby explained through the structures of subjectivity. The criticist always considers the “subjective conditions” under which we can arrive at justified concepts and claims. In that sense, criticism builds on the remnants of Descartes in that it takes philosophy to be exclusively concerned, as its starting point at least, with the structure of subjectivity.

Fichte takes up Kant’s transcendental framework and radicalizes it. It is, I believe, mainly Fichte’s version of criticism that Schelling reflects on, and challenges (implicitly), in his early texts. Fichte takes the minded subject to be self-constituting as well as being the basic condition for any proposition (e.g., propositions about the natural world). The *I* is the first and absolute principle. This means that philosophy must always begin with analyzing the structure of subjectivity in order to account for anything, in contrast to beginning from the structure of the non-subjective

³⁶⁶ SW 1, 1, 316 (1980b: 179). See also SW, 1, 1, 334: “[My] destiny is the utmost limited passivity”.

³⁶⁷ Hegel (1977: 126).

³⁶⁸ GA, 1, 2, 310.

³⁶⁹ See Gabriel (2015), who compares the dogmatic standpoint with Meillassoux’ notion of the ancestral: the world as it is prior to thinking agents. See also Gabriel (2020).

³⁷⁰ SW 1, 1, 296.

³⁷¹ A127.

³⁷² B159. See also A125.

(nature) in order to account for subjectivity. As Fichte says, the criticist is therefore “immanent, because it posits everything in the I; dogmatism is transcendent because it goes beyond the I”.³⁷³ Put differently, the I is always already implied as accompanying and grounding any mental act.

This is Fichte’s solution to the unification-problem left by Kant. His central proposition is that the first and unifying principle must be (unconditioned) *freedom* or the *active, self-positing I* (or self-consciousness) – hence the primacy of practical philosophy in his system. The I is unconditioned, its being does not depend on anything but its own activity. This also means that the I cannot be understood as a “thing” or “substance” (like Descartes) because it is per definition something active, something positing, in that it posits its own being. This is Fichte’s first-person or phenomenological thesis: We must begin with the (brute) assertion of subjective freedom and spontaneity of the *I* in order to account for anything else, including our specific conditions of experience, our normative agency, other subjects, and the appearance of the non-I (nature). The dogmatic materialist is therefore, according to Fichte, self-refuting: Every activity, also theoretical activity like the one carried out by the dogmatist, must assume a free subject to begin with. This is why Fichte repeats that Spinoza could not be convinced of his own philosophy, he could only have thought it.

This reductive model entails that nature (the “not-I” in Fichte’s terms), or how nature appears to us at least, depends on the I’s activities, on the subjective conditions that begin with the I’s self-positing activity. In a sense, the (natural) world appears as a medium through which the I comes to know its own structure and autonomy.³⁷⁴ Since Fichte understands nature in mechanistic terms, it is impossible for the absolute I to be derived from nature, since nature as mechanism cannot posit itself as subject.³⁷⁵ The I posits, the not-I is being posited; the I is active and spontaneous, the not-I is mere passivity; the I is cognizing and self-cognizing, the not-I is being cognized; the I is unconditioned and independent; the not-I is conditioned and dependent. On Fichte’s view, similar to what Pippin argues, the opposition between the subjective and the objective, between the I and nature, is in itself a result of a subjective operation. Fichte’s model is therefore thoroughly anti-naturalist: Nature does not exhaust what there is. Quite the opposite, it is a term of distinction, and a term totally dependent upon the free subject’s activities.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ GA, 1, 2, 279.

³⁷⁴ Of course, Fichte must admit that there are external conditions or limits for the subject, e.g., other subjects and natural things. This dimension Fichte refers to as *Anstoß*, which causes the subject to limit its own activities.

³⁷⁵ Fichte seems to acknowledge that what follows from this is that the gulf between nature and freedom becomes unbridgeable, and the emergence of the subject can only be explained through a “leap [Sprung]” or “wonder [Wunder]” (GA, IV, 1).

³⁷⁶ See e.g., Beiser (2003: 133).

3.3. Towards a reconciliation

Fichte thinks there are two, and only two, possible starting points that can constitute a first principle for philosophy: the self or freedom (criticism or idealism) and things or nature (dogmatism or realism). He believes 1) that the two are irreconcilable, and 2) that the (subjective) idealist model is superior to the dogmatist model, because only idealism can safeguard a meaningful conception of human freedom.

Even in what has commonly been referred to as his “Fichtean” phase in his early writings, Schelling disagrees with Fichte’s conclusion. As I will argue in what follows, I believe we find substantial evidence in two of his central texts during his early authorship – *Of the I* and the *Letters* – that he believes there must be a possible reconciliation of dogmatism and criticism. Schelling does not, like Fichte, refer to the absolute first and unifying principle as an *I* but rather as “substance”, “identity”, and “being”.³⁷⁷

3.3.1. *Of the I*

The first indicator that Schelling (partially) departs from Fichte in *Of the I* is that the text begins, as Dalia Nassar has pointed out, with a strong *realist* assumption about the aim of philosophy. Referencing Jacobi, Schelling states that the aim of philosophy is “to uncover and reveal existence [Dasein]”.³⁷⁸ This aim is dealt with through an analysis in §1-8 of how a first principle as something unconditioned must look like, which draws on Kant’s reasoning from *KrV* about dialectics, conditioning relations, and the antinomical structures of (“natural”) human thinking.³⁷⁹ Against the skeptical charge that there we cannot specify a universal principle that can unify our individuated types of knowledge, that a philosophical system that creates the “greatest unity in the greatest manifold” is impossible,³⁸⁰ Schelling writes:

Knowledge which I can reach only through other knowledge is *conditional*. The chain of our knowledge goes from one conditional [piece of] knowledge to another. Either the whole has no stability, or one must be able to believe that this can go on ad infinitum, or else that there must be at some ultimate point on which the whole depends. The latter, however, in regard

³⁷⁷ I therefore follow the arguments by Frank (1985), Sandkaulen-Bock (1990), Grün (1993a), Snow (1996), and, in particular, Nassar’s more recent arguments for the case that Schelling’s earliest works are “more Spinozist than Fichtean, in spite of their use of Fichtean terminology” (Nassar 2013: 159). Although Beiser acknowledges a tendency toward a departure from Fichte, especially in the *Letters*, he argues that there is “no doubt that he is on the side of criticism” in his early writings (Beiser 2008: 472). For classical “Fichtean” readings, which were begun by Fichte himself (GA 3, 2, 294), see e.g., Tilliette (1970: 115), Görland (1973: 7), Iber (1994: 115). There definitely are passages and personal letters strongly indicating that Schelling is on Fichte’s “side”. E.g., when he says in *Of the I* that the “beginning and end of all philosophy is *freedom!*” (SW, 1, 1, 177 (1980a: 82)).

³⁷⁸ SW, 1, 1, 157 (1970: 67).

³⁷⁹ For an excellent piece on the similarities and differences between Kant and Schelling’s thoughts on the conditioned and unconditioned, see Watkins (2014).

³⁸⁰ See Franks (2005) for a study on historical background of this systematicity requirement.

to the principle of its being, must be the direct opposite of all that falls in the sphere of the conditional, that is, it must be not only unconditional but altogether *unconditionable*.³⁸¹

Hence, if there is a unifying principle, it must not *depend* on anything specific and determinable. Rather, it must be absolutely topic-neutral and universal (apply to every individuated being or piece of knowledge). This is what Kant means by saying that the absolute (which for him is an impossibility from an epistemic perspective) is something that is “valid without any restriction”, as opposed to what is “restricted to conditions” and “valid in some particular respect”.³⁸²

Drawing on the meaning of being “conditioned” (“bedingt”, literally: “thinged”) as something always standing in a dependence relation to something else in a chain of reciprocal determinacy (we can understand X as $\neg Y$, etc.),³⁸³ he then goes on to argue (§2) that the unconditioned or absolute can neither be an object nor a subject since both will always be conditioned by something else; the object by a subject, the subject by an object. They are both only meaningful or valid in “some particular respect”. As he writes:

I call subject that which is determinable only by contrast with but also in relation to a previously posited object. Object is that which is determinable only in contrast with but also in relation to a subject.³⁸⁴

This entails that both dogmatism and criticism are flawed as theories about the unconditioned. From this, he concludes in §3 that the unconditioned must instead be what he calls an absolute I. In §4-6 he unfolds more detailed the different possible systems (what he calls perfect and imperfect dogmatism and criticism). In §7, he deduces what he refers to as the Urform of the I, and the first and highest principle, which is “identity”, and explains in §8 how this this Urform can only be captured through what he calls “intellectual intuition”.

Considering his evaluation of dogmatism, it is worth noting Schelling’s respect for Spinoza’s model. Although he seeks to “annul [...] the very foundations of Spinoza’s system”, he does not want, contrary to many of his contemporaries, to treat him “as a dead dog” and states that Spinoza’s system is “worthy of high esteem, because of its bold consequences” and that he is a “great thinker whose speculations take great flights, and who risks everything, either to achieve complete truth in all its greatness, or no truth at all”.³⁸⁵ That is, Schelling praises Spinoza’s metaphysical ambitions:

It was Spinoza who had already conceived of that archconcept of substantiality in its utmost purity. He recognized that originally something had to be the basis for all existence, a pure,

³⁸¹ SW, 1, 1, 163-164 (1980a: 72).

³⁸² *KrV*, A 324-326/B 380-382.

³⁸³ SW, 1, 1, 166 (1980a: 74).

³⁸⁴ SW, 1, 1, 165 (1980a: 73).

³⁸⁵ SW, 1, 1, 152 (1980a: 64).

immutable archbeing [Ursein], a basis for everything that comes about and passes away, something that had to exist by itself, in which and through which everything in existence had to attain the unity of existence.³⁸⁶

Spinoza's metaphysics, his concept of "substantiality" and the "basis for all existence", is "the most consistent system of dogmatism" in that it "sees the unconditional in the absolute not-I", in thinghood.³⁸⁷ However, following Fichte, Schelling argues that dogmatism "contradicts itself".³⁸⁸ The simple argument is that the idea of an *unconditional thing* is contradictory; it proposes "a thing that is not a thing".³⁸⁹ A thing, or object, will always be determined by its conditioning relations, and hence it cannot be unconditioned. Secondly, Schelling proposes a meta-theoretical argument against dogmatism: "[I]f the principle of all philosophy were a not-I, then one would have to renounce philosophy altogether".³⁹⁰ Schelling's point is that we cannot as much as begin to perform metaphysical reflections without having already assumed ourselves as free theory agents. Hence, the dogmatist refutes herself in her pronouncement of materialism.

Although the terminology resembles Fichte's subjective idealism, Schelling's view in *Of the I* goes beyond it. Looking back upon his text in his preface to the first volume of his writings from 1809, he recognizes as much, although he does acknowledge that it has a preliminary form: It shows idealism in its "most youthful guise [...] At least the I is still taken everywhere as absolute or as identity of the subjective and objective and not as subjective. I."³⁹¹ Schelling's reasoning against subjective idealism in *Of the I* is this: The subject – either as consciousness or self-consciousness – is a relational term (just like the object): Since the subject is thinkable only in regard to an object, it cannot "contain the unconditional because both are conditioned reciprocally [...] [O]ne cannot say that the subject alone determines the object because the subject is conceivable only in relationship to the object."³⁹²

If the I or the subject is understood through self-conscious activity, it must be an empirical I since self-consciousness literally means being an object to oneself, and the criteria for the unconditional is that it cannot become a thing. Fichte's I implies determination and difference, since it necessarily enters into a subject-object relation. Schelling believes that the I proposed by Fichte must be opposed to a not-I, and hence it is conditioned. Therefore, it does not qualify as being unconditioned. Once it "occurs in consciousness", the I is no longer "absolute".³⁹³ As the condition of consciousness as such, the absolute cannot become an object of consciousness. Making the subject absolute fails as much as making the object absolute:

³⁸⁶ SW, 1, 1, 194 (1980a: 83).

³⁸⁷ SW, 1, 1, 184 (1980a: 87).

³⁸⁸ SW, 1, 1, 174 (1980a: 77).

³⁸⁹ SW, 1, 1, 174 (1980a: 77).

³⁹⁰ SW, 1, 1, 208 (1980a: 104-105).

³⁹¹ 2006: 3.

³⁹² SW, 1, 1, 165-166 (1980a: 74).

³⁹³ SW, 1, 1, 180 (1980a: 84).

Any system that takes its start from the subject, that is, from the I which is thinkable only in respect to an object, and that is supposed to be neither dogmatism nor criticism," is like dogmatism in that it contradicts itself in its own principle.³⁹⁴

From all of this, Schelling concludes that the unconditioned or the absolute must be sought in something that transcends the subject or consciousness and unifies the subject and object (nature); it must be something that is neither purely subjective in a reflexive sense nor purely objective. As he writes: "I am! My I contains a being which precedes all thinking and imagining".³⁹⁵ As Manfred Frank has noted, Schelling's point here is that the "absolute is not conditioned by *human* knowledge".³⁹⁶ This is why Schelling refers to it as "absolute substance (of the I)" and "absolute power",³⁹⁷ or elsewhere as pure "being"³⁹⁸. In a crucial passage towards the end of the text, referencing §76 in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, he refers, as we have seen already, to the need for a "higher principle" that can unify the subjective and objective, that can unify the "contrast between laws of freedom and laws of nature".³⁹⁹

What he calls pure "being", "pure identity",⁴⁰⁰ and "absolute oneness"⁴⁰¹ and "original ground [Urgrund] of all reality"⁴⁰² is supposed to pick out this "higher principle". Some interpreters go as far as to suggest that what Schelling calls the absolute I is therefore nothing but a "placeholder" for Spinoza's one substance.⁴⁰³ That is true, I think, to the extent that Spinoza's conception of substance as *causa sui*, as something that is in and through itself and does not require the concept of another thing, closely resembles what Schelling takes the absolute – from a purely hypothetical, conceptual level – to mean. The "last ground for all reality" must be "thinkable only through itself".⁴⁰⁴ If there is an absolute, it can be neither purely subjective or objective, but somehow neutral between the two and makes subject-object relationality possibility as such.

In *Of the I*, Schelling has not developed conception of how to represent and justify such a neutral absolute. He does refer to it as freedom at times, but that seems merely to be a conceptual consequence of it being rendered as *unconditionable*. In fact, since it precedes specific subject-object relations and makes them possible, it cannot be represented in propositional language, it cannot "proved objectively",⁴⁰⁵ since language, for Schelling (like for Kant), is defined as a network of dependence relations. As he writes, the absolute cannot be "mediated", and hence cannot fall

³⁹⁴ SW, 1, 1, 172 (1980a: 78).

³⁹⁵ SW, I, 1, 167 (1980a: 75). See also SW, 1, 1, 193.

³⁹⁶ Frank (2018: 3).

³⁹⁷ SW, 1, 1, 195 (1980a: 95).

³⁹⁸ SW, 1, 1, 202, 221 (1980a: 100, 113).

³⁹⁹ SW, 1, 1, 241-42 (1980a: 127).

⁴⁰⁰ SW, 1, 1, 216 (1980a: 110).

⁴⁰¹ SW, 1, 1, 183 (1980a: 86).

⁴⁰² SW, 1, 1, 162 (1980a: 71).

⁴⁰³ See e.g., Frank & Kurz (1975: 10). Nassar argues that it "approximates" Spinoza's substance (Nassar 2014: 123-124).

⁴⁰⁴ SW, 1, 1, 163 (1980a: 72).

⁴⁰⁵ SW, 1, 1, 167 (1980a: 75).

into the “domain of demonstrable concepts”.⁴⁰⁶ Therefore, he assumes, it can only be determined or represented through something that “grasps no object at all”. This is what he refers to in *Of the I* as “intellectual *intuition* [intellektuale *Anschauung*]”.⁴⁰⁷

The “intellectual intuition” is not introduced as a mysterious, supersensible mode of representation but as a methodological term underlining the theoretical difficulty at hand: Determining something that vanishes as soon as it receives a positive determination in propositional language. This means that both the “absolute” and the way to “grasp” it is something that, at least in *Of the I*, seems to be a merely theoretical posit or assumption for Schelling. As Nassar writes, it is something that “must be assumed” when drawing the consequences of the structures of our thinking:

After all, for the discursive mind, knowledge is based on conditions; an unconditioned, therefore, is beyond its grasp. This means that another, nondiscursive capacity, which would be able to grasp or at least posit an unconditioned, *must be assumed*.⁴⁰⁸

Although it is introduced as a necessary although indemonstrable posit, we can say something about the function of this “intuition”: It is supposed to grasp the greatest unity in the greatest manifoldness. That is, the intellectual intuition is the philosopher’s method that looks beyond the particularity of specific individuations in the world and attempts to construct a topic-neutral and universal language that unifies these particular individuations.⁴⁰⁹

3.3.2. The *Letters*

In the *Letters*, Schelling develops the insinuated model presented in *Of the I* more explicitly. That the *Letters* play a crucial role for the development of Schelling’s more mature thinking is undoubtable. Referring back to the *Letters* in his preface to the first volume of his writings from 1809, he writes that the idea of the “disappearance of all oppositions of conflicting principles in the absolute, are the clear seeds of later and more positive views”.⁴¹⁰ While there is still terminological grounds for calling *Of the I* a (partly) Fichtean work in the sense that the absolute is still referred to as an absolute I, that is a less clear option in the *Letters*.⁴¹¹

In the *Letters* the philosophical problem is formulated slightly different compared to *Of the I*. The problem Schelling explores is, with reference to Spinoza, what he calls the “riddle of the world, the question of how the absolute could come out of itself and oppose to itself a world?”.⁴¹² The problem is a problem about constitution or emergence of individuated “things”: How does the dual world of subjectivity and

⁴⁰⁶ SW, 1, 1, 184 (1980a: 87).

⁴⁰⁷ SW, 1, 1, 181 (1980a: 85).

⁴⁰⁸ Nassar (2013: 6).

⁴⁰⁹ See e.g., Nassar (2014: 125).

⁴¹⁰ Schelling (2006: 3). In a letter to Fichte from October 3rd, 1801, he describes the *Letters* as the “first, raw and undeveloped sentiment that the truth might lie higher than idealism could go” (Vater & Wood 2012: 63).

⁴¹¹ For Hölderlin’s influence on Schelling’s views in the *Letters*, see Beiser (2008).

⁴¹² SW, 1, 1, 310 (1980b: 173-174).

objectivity come about? How does the world come to observe itself from within? How does the (immanent) differentiation between observer and observed appear in the first place?⁴¹³ These questions echo, as we shall see in Chapter 4, the fundamental premises of the *Naturphilosophie*.

In the *Letters*, Schelling states that criticism and dogmatism are equally valid models to approach this problem on both theoretical and practical grounds (although he does seem to favor the basic elements of criticism in the end): “Either of the two absolutely opposed systems, dogmatism and criticism, is just as possible as the other”.⁴¹⁴ However, each is only one part of the truth. Schelling foreshadows his later ideas about the “identity” or “unity” of *Geist* and *Natur* when he states that idealism and realism, or criticism and dogmatism,⁴¹⁵ are equal or “identical” from the standpoint of the absolute.⁴¹⁶ While both standpoints have their distinctive characteristics in opposition to each other, that opposition dissolves from an absolute (neutral, philosophical) perspective; both “must unite in the absolute, that is, must cease as opposite systems”.⁴¹⁷ In a longer passage, he makes the equalness and necessary co-existence of the two systems – which goes completely against Fichte’s assumption about them being incompatible – very explicit:

As for myself, I believe that there is a system of dogmatism as well as a system of criticism; I even believe that, in this very criticism, I have found the solution of the riddle as to why these two systems should necessarily exist side by side, why there must be two systems directly opposed to each other as long as there are any finite beings, and why no man can convince himself of any system except pragmatically [praktisch], that is, by realizing either system in himself.⁴¹⁸

Interestingly, Schelling not only thinks that both models are somehow equally justified from a theoretical level; he also believes, completely contrary to Fichte, that there are “practical” or moral reasons for both in the sense of providing a guide for how to act: Whereas criticism requires the subject to assert herself and form the world through her actions, dogmatism requires that subject becomes passive, that it learns to conform to the world. Mirroring the conflict in the opposition between freedom and necessity, Schelling writes that “these two principles must be *united* in the absolute [...]. Absolute freedom and absolute necessity are identical”.⁴¹⁹

However, toward the end of the text, Schelling seems to opt for criticism (if having to choose between them) due to the fatalist consequences of pure dogmatism and the sense of autonomy provided by criticism. For example, he says that dogmatism, because it annihilates the subject if it is a consistent dogmatism, cannot explain

⁴¹³ On this, see Gabriel (2011: 98).

⁴¹⁴ SW 1, 1, 307 (1980b: 173).

⁴¹⁵ They are synonymous (SW, 1, 1, 303).

⁴¹⁶ SW, 1, 1, 330-31 (1980b: 189).

⁴¹⁷ SW, 1, 1, 330 (1980b: 188).

⁴¹⁸ SW, 1, 1, 306 (1980b: 171-72).

⁴¹⁹ SW, 1,1, 330-331 (1980b: 189).

our moral aspirations to change the world, the feeling of freedom that accompanies our actions and struggles. There is no idea of “self-assertion [Selbstmacht]” in dogmatism.⁴²⁰ However, we must be careful with Schelling’s terminology here. The “criticism” that he opts for in the end is, as he makes clear in the Ninth Letter, in no way subjective idealism, since that is, in its form, equal to one-sided dogmatism. As he says, objective realism (dogmatism) is just as one-sided as subjective idealism, whereas what he calls “subjective realism” and “objective idealism” are expressions that denote a unity between the two.⁴²¹ Hence, the criticism that he proposes is what he will later refer to as “Ideal-Realism”.⁴²²

Schelling begins to realize in the *Letters* that the objective world mirrors the subjective world, and that Fichte has a too narrow focus on the subjective side.⁴²³ By positing an “absolute subject”,⁴²⁴ criticism posits “all in the subject” and thus denies “all of the object”.⁴²⁵ However, this ideal of absolute subjectivity will eventually end up in “utopianism” if it does not acknowledge its own limits:

In widening the limits of my world, I narrow those of the objective world. If my world as mine no longer had any limits, then all objective causality as such would be annihilated for me (by mine). I should be absolute. However, criticism would deteriorate into Utopianism if it should represent this ultimate goal as attainable at all [...] In criticism, my vocation is to strive for immutable selfhood, unconditional freedom, unlimited activity.⁴²⁶

3.3.2.1. Excursus: Tragic reconciliation

In the ninth and tenth letter, Schelling’s meta-philosophical aim is clear: criticism and dogmatism must “cease as opposite systems” and “unite in the absolute”.⁴²⁷ In other words: A systematic philosophy, which he does not unfold neither in *Of the I* and the *Letters*, must incorporate the insights of 1) criticism’s emphasis on the subject’s independence from nature with 2) dogmatism’s emphasis on nature’s independence from the subject.

Towards the end of the text, in the tenth letter, Schelling exemplifies this meta-philosophical aim with an aesthetic form of representation.⁴²⁸ In the Greek tragedy, he argues, we find a form of representation whereby the thesis and the anti-thesis

⁴²⁰ SW, 1, 1, 284 (1980b: 157).

⁴²¹ SW, 1, 1, 330 (1980b: 188).

⁴²² Therefore, I disagree with Norris who says that Schelling, in the *Letters*, is “flirting with a kind of subjectivism he ultimately wishes to avoid” (Norris 2022: 87). He very explicitly distances himself from (pure) subjectivism.

⁴²³ Nassar has noted that Fichte was aware that Schelling departed from his own views in the *Letters* (Nassar 2010: 305). As Bonsiepen has shown, this harmonizes quite well with the public reception of the text: Prominent figures like Reinhold, J. F. Herbart and F. J. Forberg saw the *Letters* as a fall back into pure dogmatism (Bonsiepen 1997: 163).

⁴²⁴ SW, 1, 1, 298 (1980b: 166).

⁴²⁵ SW, 1, 1, 335 (1980b: 192).

⁴²⁶ SW, 1, 1, 336 (1980b: 192).

⁴²⁷ SW, 1, 1, 330 (1980b: 188).

⁴²⁸ Thereby he points towards his (romantic) ideas from the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), where he in the final part describes art as the “organon” of philosophy, which can represent in an objective (materialized) form what philosophy can only do with concepts. For Schelling, art has a quasi-philosophical form; it can foster, in a materialized way, philosophical truths.

from Kant's third antinomy are united, whereby the opposition between freedom and necessity (which is a concrete instantiation of the general opposition between subject and nature) ceases.⁴²⁹ Here is the entire passage:

Many a time the question has been asked how Greek reason could bear the contradictions of Greek tragedy. A mortal, destined by fate to become malefactor and himself fighting against this fate, is nevertheless appallingly punished for the crime, although it was the deed of destiny! The ground of this contradiction, that which made the contradiction bearable, lay deeper than one would seek it. It lay in the contest between human freedom and the power of the objective world in which the mortal must succumb necessarily if that power is absolutely superior, if it is fate. And yet he must be punished for succumbing because he did not succumb without a struggle. That the malefactor who succumbed under the power of fate was punished, this tragic fact was the recognition of human freedom; it was the honor due to freedom. Greek tragedy honored human freedom, letting its hero fight against the superior power of fate. In order not to go beyond the limits of art, the tragedy had to let him succumb. Nevertheless, in order to make restitution for this humiliation of human freedom extorted by art, it had to let him atone even for the crime committed by fate. As long as he is still free, he holds out against the power of destiny [...] It was a sublime thought, to suffer punishment willingly even for an inevitable crime, and so to prove one's freedom by the very loss of this freedom, and to go down with a declaration of free will.⁴³⁰

Philosophizing not so much about it, but more through it, Schelling believes the Greek tragedy can help to reconcile the apparent opposition between human freedom and nature. What fascinates Schelling about the *topos* of the Greek tragedy – what makes the tragic hero a “symbol for all history”,⁴³¹ as he later writes – is its fusion of autonomy and heteronomy: Even though the actions of the tragic hero as such are determined by external factors (heteronomy), he makes the actions his own and thereby becomes imputable for them (autonomy) – which is the “recognition of freedom”. In the case of Oedipus, which is Schelling's main reference, he even punishes himself by stabbing his own eyes out after having tried to flee the oracle's forecast about his destiny (and these acts of fleeing are exactly the ones executing his fate). In the very acts of 1) opposing or trying to escape the conditions of the “objective world”, the “absolutely superior power” (*actual* freedom), and 2) taking the responsibility for those actions that were to happen by necessity anyway (*symbolic* freedom), the subject affirms its freedom and responsibility, thereby proving “freedom by the very loss of this freedom”. The tragic subject is therefore a point of

⁴²⁹ As Scheier (1996) has argued, one cannot read the “tragical dialectic” of the *Letters* without Kant's third antinomy (81). On the understanding and use of Greek Tragedy in German philosophy around 1800, see Hühn & Schwab (2011) and Billings (2014). On Schelling in particular, see Szondi's classic *An Essay on the Tragic* (2002).

⁴³⁰ SW 1, 1, 336-37 (1980b: 192-93). Schelling unfolds this analysis in his lectures on *Philosophy of Art* given in Jena and Würzburg between 1802 and 1805. There, he uses the term “absolute indifference” to denote the point of equilibrium between freedom and necessity in the tragic hero (SW, I, 5, 696-697).

⁴³¹ SW, 1, 5, 468.

equilibrium between necessity and freedom. The necessity is not directly external but more internal: it only takes place when the subject freely intervenes and attempts to struggle against the forecast. This is, according to Schelling, a “symbol of all history”, the main protagonist of history, in that the human is a being occupying a constant *zone of indeterminacy* between being conditioned and unconditioned, limited and unlimited, passive and active, autonomous and heteronomous (I return to this in Chapter 5 about Schelling’s philosophical anthropology).⁴³²

This tragic structure – this equilibrium between freedom and necessity – fits neither dogmatism nor criticism. Dogmatism sides with heteronomy, criticism with autonomy. Whereas the dogmatist would argue that such self-perceived freedom is nothing but an illusion since the subject is at bottom “absolute passivity” (the dogmatic would merely succumb to fate without any struggle, hence the tragical collision can never appear), the criticist’s assumption of “immutable selfhood, unconditional freedom, unlimited activity” cannot imagine a world wherein the subject in principle cannot actively change the course of events; wherein the subject is thrown into a process that either neither triggers nor controls;⁴³³ wherein the subject is limited and cannot negate its externality.⁴³⁴

In the tragic, both the subjective and the objective are “victorious”: The destiny is, so to speak, materially victorious (everything that should happen happens). But the tragic subject is also victorious by affirming his freedom and normativity (no Gods tell him to stab out his own eyes). In this sense, the tragic hero becomes the point of the *contradiction* between freedom and necessity and the *resolution* of this contradiction.

The unfolding “contradiction” in the tragedy is why the subject is imputable while being determined to act as she does. It seems to oppose a fundamental relation between autonomy and responsibility: I can only be responsible for actions where I could have done otherwise. The point of the tragic is that although the outcome is unavoidable, the subject sidesteps this fact and has the power within herself to perceive and officially announce the course of events as a result of her actions in her struggle against fate; to “suffer punishment willingly even for an inevitable crime”, as he says in the *Letters*. Although the world appears, as Högbe calls it, to be a “cold home”,⁴³⁵ as a place where we can only feel alienated from the rest of the world, the subject can turn this nihilistic situation into her own by domesticating its hostility and meaninglessness; by positing her autonomy; by internalizing the guilt and intentionally carrying the weight of something that goes beyond her control. Therefore, Julian Young’s reading of the *Letters* and Schelling’s conception of tragedy, according to which Schelling ends up as “a Spinozist [...] as a materialist”, is

⁴³² For a similar reading, see Ostaric (2020) and Billings (2014: 76, 128).

⁴³³ Schelling’s appropriation of the tragic theme is a direct critique of Fichte’s conception of unlimited freedom (Hühn & Schwab 2011: 8).

⁴³⁴ As Christoph Menke has pointed out, the (fully) autonomous subject makes the tragical collision impossible by resolving all pre-given conditions into something self-positing (Menke 2004: 204, 220).

⁴³⁵ Högbe (2009: 40). See also Billings (2014: 95).

completely unfounded.⁴³⁶ As Schelling says in the *Letters*, the Greek tragedy has “honored human freedom”. By carrying what Schelling his later lectures on the Greek tragedy calls “guiltless guilt”, the subject has not succumbed to the objective world.⁴³⁷ This aspect of self-determination stems from a shift of perspective: The subject could blame the external factors, the meaninglessness of fate, but chooses instead to make it into something (partly) self-positing through what we could call a *symbolic act of internalization*.

3.4. Pointing towards a *Naturphilosophie*

I have argued in this chapter that Schelling in his earliest writings delivers sketches for a model of how to reconcile *Geist* and *Natur*. As he writes in the *Letters*, pointing towards his future efforts, he believes that “there is a system of dogmatism as well as a system of criticism” and that these two systems “should necessarily exist side by side”.⁴³⁸ Although he does not attempt to do this in his early writings, this means that we can, according to Schelling, explain subjectivity through nature (a naturalism)⁴³⁹ and explain how subjectivity is structured regardless of its natural background (a philosophical anthropology).

Whereas one-sided criticism (idealism) is exclusively concerned with self-determination and with accounting for the subjective conditions for cognition and action from within the subjective (potentially making the subject “world-less” and thereby disregarding an obvious fact of our existence: that our subjectivity belongs to this world⁴⁴⁰), one-sided dogmatism (realism) is exclusively concerned with the world as it is without the self-determination and subjective conditions for cognition and action (“nature”). Both positions ignore central facts about the world. I follow Gabriel when he writes that one-sided idealism must necessarily ignore “the very genealogy of autonomous agents”, because for the one-sided idealist, it does not even make “sense to ask how they could so much as arise from a pre-subjective, non-intentional layer”.⁴⁴¹

For Schelling, idealism cannot stand alone as it is in principle incapable of asking about its own ontological conditions. On the other hand, dogmatism ignores that fact that although autonomy has a genealogy, the world contains subjective points of view; it contains “minds” that cognize and act from within. Dogmatism cannot

⁴³⁶ Young (2013: 93). Kottman’s subjectivist, Fichtean reading, whereby he understands Schelling’s tragic subject as “unbounded activity”, is similarly unfounded (2012: 447).

⁴³⁷ SW 1, 5, 350.

⁴³⁸ SW, 1, 1, 306 (1980b: 171-72).

⁴³⁹ In *Of the I*, he hints towards this future task a couple of times: “It would be interesting to devise a consistent system of dogmatism. Maybe that will yet be done” (SW, 1, 1, 186 (1980a: 89)).

⁴⁴⁰ As Schelling writes later in his *System* from 1804, the subjective idealist can only view the natural world as if it “didn’t also belong to the world” (SW, 1, 6, 144).

⁴⁴¹ Gabriel (2014: 78). As he continues, we can draw a distinction between *autonomy* and *autochthony*: “Although reason, intentionality, or generally the subjective is autonomous in a relevant sense, this does not entail that it is autochthonous, a form of metaphysical self constitution out of nothing” (78-79).

explain how the world (or nature), through human cognition, doubles itself from within. The dogmatic materialist empties the world of the subjective.

Hence, we can conclude that Schelling's central motivation is to avoid every kind of *reductionism*. Against both extremes, Schelling's goes for a middle ground. This requires a conception of reality at large – a conception of the *absolute* – that is compatible with the fact that subjectivity exists and that does not turn subjectivity into something completely self-grounding. Gabriel has summed it up nicely:

Subjects exist among other things, and the very fact that they did not always exist, that they evolved in one way or another (through natural selection first, and then through history), has to be accounted for without thereby either ontologically reducing subjects to their material preconditions or eliminating them by theorizing them away, as it were. If subjects exist among other things, the *epistemological* priority we might grant to intentionality does not amount to *ontological* priority without further ado.⁴⁴²

According to Schelling, Fichte mistakes the epistemological primacy of the human mind with its ontological primacy. The double desideratum of carrying out both a realism and an idealism is what Schelling sets out to achieve in the following years by constructing both “systems”: His *Naturphilosophie* on the one side (which I investigate in Chapter 4) and his *philosophy of mindedness* on the other (which I investigate in Chapter 5). In Chapter 6, we shall see how he attempts to unite idealism and realism into a coherent or neutral system.

Regarding the *Naturphilosophie*, we already see in *Of the I* and the *Letters* how Schelling points towards it.⁴⁴³ In *Of the I*, referring to §76 in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* about teleology, he mentions, as we have seen, the need to “unify the contrast between laws of freedom and laws of nature in a higher principle in which freedom itself is nature and nature freedom”.⁴⁴⁴ How Schelling attempts to conceptualize nature in order show how “freedom itself is nature and nature freedom”, is the theme of the following chapter.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*: 80.

⁴⁴³ See Nassar (2013: 186) for a similar argument.

⁴⁴⁴ SW, 1, 1, 241-42 (1980a: 127).

4. Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*

4.0. Introduction

In the last chapter, I argued that Schelling already in his earliest works sketches a set of methodological principles in order to eschew any sort of dualism of mind and nature. In the following years, culminating in his *First Outline* (1799) and *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800),⁴⁴⁵ Schelling aspires to develop both systems, the dogmatic and the criticist, in the shape of a *Naturphilosophie* and a *philosophy of mindedness*. The two systems are supposed to be developed in a “parallel” manner, as he says in the *1800 System*, in the sense that it is not only possible but also necessary – if we want a complete “system of the world” – to explain 1) the ideal (the subjective) through the real (nature) in, I will argue, a *naturalist* vein, and 2) to explain how human mindedness exhibits structures that are irreducible its natural grounds. The aim of this chapter is to outline the motivation and content of the first part, Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*.

4.1. Context and the interpretative landscape

The historical background conditions for Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* form a complex set of philosophical and natural scientific acumens.⁴⁴⁶ First of all, Schelling was on all fronts opposed to what he often refers to as pure or mechanical materialism.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁵ Henceforth: *1800 System*.

⁴⁴⁶ Among the philosophers that have been taken as central influences on Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* are Plato (Klings 1994; Franz 1996), Spinoza (Grün 1993), Leibniz (Rudolphi 2001), Kant (Nassar 2021; Garcia 2022), Herder (Durner 1991), Hölderlin (Frank 1985; Beiser 2008: 476-78), and Goethe (Nassar 2010).

Among the more (natural) scientific influences, the development of so-called vital materialism in France with figures like Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis, Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, Pierre Gassendi, Julien Offray de La Mettrie, Denis Diderot, and Paul Thiry d'Holbach was important. Some of the central ideas of the French vital materialists, as Zammito (2018) has shown, were infused in the German context through figures like Herder, Kilmeyer, Blumenbach, Goethe, and, to some degree, Kant in the third *Critique* and his *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaften*. Although some of the French materialists flirt with what would today qualify as a form of reductive materialism – especially D'Holbach and Diderot, whose works Schelling cites negatively – they also sought to develop a unified conception of the natural world that could integrate life and purposefulness without reducing it to matter or mechanistic principles. This integrative concept of nature mirrors, as we shall see, Schelling's. For studies on the development of the life sciences and non-mechanical conceptions of nature between 1750 and 1800, in particular in a German context, see Bach (2001), Zammito (2018), Gambarotto (2018), and Steigerwald (2019).

⁴⁴⁷ In his *Stuttgart-Lectures*, he refers to the “most debased or French Materialism” and mentions D'Holbach's *Système de la nature* as a representative of this. As he writes, this kind of

The three main works of the *Naturphilosophie* in which he attempts to debunk the mechanic materialist conception of nature are usually said to be *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur als Einleitung in das Studium dieser Wissenschaft* (1797),⁴⁴⁸ *Von der Weltseele* (1798),⁴⁴⁹ and *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (1799).⁴⁵⁰ Although we find the seeds, as we have seen, for a *Naturphilosophie* before these works,⁴⁵¹ it is not until 1796-1797 that Schelling begins to study the findings of natural science in detail and begins to incorporate nature as a (or *the*) central concept in his philosophy.⁴⁵² However, Schelling arguably – as many commentators have stressed in recent years – continues to develop his *Naturphilosophie*, and its function within his overall philosophical system, all the way until his *Freedom Essay* (1809), his *Stuttgart-Lectures* (1810), and his different *Weltalter*-drafts (1811-1815).⁴⁵³ I agree with this view, but with the caveat that the *Naturphilosophie* at no time in Schelling's development is his exclusive topic of concern or should be understood as

materialism assumes a “lifeless substance” which is “fragmented into atoms, into a dust of particles whose efficacy resides solely in their figure (something external and not a original quality); and this conception purported to explain not only nature but also the existence and the mechanism of the spirit – *Système de la nature*, that is, the most debased or French materialism” (SW, 1, 7, 744-45 (1994b: 215). The understanding of nature that underlies this form of reductive materialism is traceable to Hobbes, Locke, Boyle, Descartes, and, perhaps, Spinoza. It assumes, in short, that everything that exists is material individuals, that every material individual is composed of basic atoms that move in void space, and that these individuals can be exhaustively explained through basic properties such as size, motion and shape, thereby satisfying the desire to mathematize the natural world through calculability and measurement. This entails that all the activities of matter can be reduced to mechanical or external laws of space and motion. This is for example the view defended by George-Louis Le Sage, whom Schelling references and criticizes the most in his *Ideas*.

⁴⁴⁸ Henceforth: *Ideas*.

⁴⁴⁹ Henceforth: *World Soul*.

⁴⁵⁰ Henceforth: *First Outline*.

⁴⁵¹ See Nassar (2016), where she argues that Schelling's incorporation of nature is neither “new nor arbitrary” (129). Since the appearance of Schelling's manuscript on Plato's *Timaeus* (1794), where he considers Plato and Kant's conceptions of matter, the concept of teleology, and the cosmological unity of mind and matter, the thesis about a continuity in the authorship has received even more strength. See e.g., Krings (1994), Baum (2000), Grant (2006), Snow (2023).

⁴⁵² Scholars trace the interest back to the pietistic environment in which he grew up (Matthews 2014; Frank 2018) and to his time in Tübingen prior to him reading Fichte's work (Schmied-Kowarzik 1996; 67; Baum 2000), but most agree that his stay in Leipzig from 1796-97, where he attained a broad knowledge of the recent natural scientific, medical and mathematical theories, was crucial for the specific development of the *Naturphilosophie*. For a historical overview, see HKA – *Ergänzungsband zu Werle Band 5 bis 9: Wissenschaftshistorischer Bericht zu Schellings Naturphilosophischen Schriften 1797-1800*, with texts by Manfred Durner (on chemistry), Francesco Moiso (on magnetism, electricity, and galvanism), and Jörg Jantzen (on physiological, organic theories)

⁴⁵³ Some think that the *Naturphilosophie* continues until 1802 (Meyer 1985), some until 1806 (Zammito 2022), some that it plays a key role in his “philosophy of identity” (Grant 2006; Beiser 2008) and that he never “remains a constant focus of his philosophical trajectory from beginning to end” (Grant 2014). See also Schwenzfeuer (2012a); Whistler (2016), Whistler & Tritten (2017). This is supported by that fact this his manifesto for his system of identity, the *Presentation of my System of Philosophy* (1801), was published in the *Journal of Speculative Physics*. Furthermore, two thirds of the lectures *System of Philosophy in General and the Philosophy of Nature in Particular* (1804), containing the most detailed version of his philosophy of identity, are about *Naturphilosophie*. Furthermore, the *Freedom Essay* contains central insights from and on *Naturphilosophie*, and he wrote his last work on the subject in 1844. For an overview, see Schmied-Kowarzik (1996) and Bonsiepen (1997).

representing his total system of philosophy; that would be a wrong, and too naturalistic, reading.⁴⁵⁴ Rather, the *Naturphilosophie* has a very particular, and very important, function within his overall attempt at unifying mind and nature into a coherent world-system.

To take one example of a text from before his more official publications on *Naturphilosophie*: In his *Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge* (1797) – regardless of its unambiguous sympathies towards a more one-sided idealism whereby the subject structures or even “produces” nature⁴⁵⁵ – Schelling refers enthusiastically to the progress made within the natural sciences and praises those people with “genuine philosophical spirit” who make “discoveries in science”, and that these sciences “soon will be followed by a sound philosophy”. Furthermore, as he continues, only “a mind that is altogether inspired by an interest in science will be called upon to collate these discoveries”.⁴⁵⁶ He even talks about a “gradated chain of organization” and “life”,⁴⁵⁷ a “gradual succession of organisms”, and how the “transition from an inanimate to an animate nature clearly reveals a productive force that only gradually develops toward complete freedom”.⁴⁵⁸ In one of the most telling passages in the text, he even ascribes a basic cognitive architecture to non-human animals through “conceptuality and intuition”:

The animal, too, though enclosed in a permanent stupor, is not devoid of conceptuality and intuition. However, what the animal (and the human being approximating it) lacks is the freely differentiating and relating consciousness [or], quite simply, judgment, which is the exclusive domain of rational beings.⁴⁵⁹

This gradualist idea is, as we shall see, central to his mature *Naturphilosophie* and his general attempt to unify the explanatory gap between mind and nature, as it underlines a continuity (conceptuality and distinctness) and distinctness (judgement and rationality) between human and non-human nature.

As Nassar has pointed out, his two first explicit works on *Naturphilosophie* – the *Ideas* and the *World Soul* – are still, to a certain degree at least, caught up in a transcendental idealist framework that focuses on the subjective conditions for how nature appears to us at all (that is, they are mainly *epistemological*),⁴⁶⁰ although they do contain elements that explicitly break with that framework. This paints a somewhat complex picture of when Schelling’s proper *Naturphilosophie* makes its first

⁴⁵⁴ Grant (2006) tends towards such a reading.

⁴⁵⁵ SW, 1, 1, 387. The text is certainly written from within a transcendental framework. Schelling makes the following “Fichtean” argument: Since 1) we can only either explain matter or nature from the mind or the mind from nature, and 2) we cannot – due to our cognitive set-up – understand matter as it is in itself, 3) we must explain matter from the mind. The *Ideas* also contains strong idealistic tendencies. See e.g., SW, 1, 2, 11; SW, 1, 2, 37.

⁴⁵⁶ SW, 1, 1, 348.

⁴⁵⁷ SW, 1, 1, 388.

⁴⁵⁸ SW, 1, 1, 387.

⁴⁵⁹ SW, 1, 1, 393.

⁴⁶⁰ Nassar (2013). Bonsiepen (1997) and Beiser (2008) have made similar points.

appearance.⁴⁶¹ We do not find this “proper” expression, I believe, until his *First Outline* (1799) – especially in the posthumously published *Introduction* – in which nature is presented as autonomous (self-determining) and autarch (self-legislating). Here, as we shall see, his most naturalistic assumptions – and his ideas about the status of *Naturphilosophie* in his overall systematic efforts – come to the fore,⁴⁶² and this claim continues in his following texts on *Naturphilosophie*, namely his *General Deduction of the Dynamic Process*⁴⁶³ (1800) and *On the True Concept of Philosophy and the Correct Way of Solving its Problems*⁴⁶⁴ (1801).

Because of the complexity and sketchy form of presentation inherent to the *Naturphilosophie*, the reception of it – what it actually is, how it functions within Schelling’s general project, whether and how it can somehow be said to “succeed”, whether and how it spiked any important philosophical or scientific routes historically, and whether and how it is of any value to contemporary concerns – has divided commentators in several corners. However, it has become fairly popular in recent years to view Schelling’s philosophy, at least his *Naturphilosophie*, as naturalist in some way. The “fundamental program”, as one commentator has said, of the *Naturphilosophie* is “to explain life and the mind on a naturalistic yet nonmechanistic foundation”.⁴⁶⁵ That is, the *Naturphilosophie* should be understood as the systematic attempt at explaining how nature ought to be structured so as to make possible human mindedness and freedom. If that is true, then we should consider the *Naturphilosophie* as nothing less than a “fundamental restructuring of the meaning and methodology of idealism”.⁴⁶⁶ However, how to understand this naturalism and how far it stretches – especially whether it should be recalibrated as a “philosophy of life”⁴⁶⁷ that takes Schelling’s view of organisms, and the idea of nature as such as organic, to be the central part of the *Naturphilosophie* or whether we should place our focus elsewhere – has split opinion internally among the naturalist interpreters.⁴⁶⁸

However, there are also those who take the *Naturphilosophie* as such, following the basic aims of the *Ideas*, to work within a subjectivist or idealistic framework.⁴⁶⁹ According to these (non-naturalistic) readings, that come in very different shapes, Schelling conceives “nature in an idealistic way”.⁴⁷⁰ On this interpretation, as Nassar says, the *Naturphilosophie* is an “expansion of Fichtean ideas onto the whole of nature”.⁴⁷¹ Others understand the *Naturphilosophie* as an “explication of an all-

⁴⁶¹ On this, see Nassar (2010, 2014, 2016).

⁴⁶² That does not mean, though, that his previous texts do not contain important insights for understanding the *Naturphilosophie*, especially his *Introduction* to the *Ideas*.

⁴⁶³ Henceforth: *General Deduction*.

⁴⁶⁴ Henceforth: *On the True Concept*.

⁴⁶⁵ Beiser (2008: 508).

⁴⁶⁶ Nassar (2013: 187).

⁴⁶⁷ Steigerwald (2019: 11).

⁴⁶⁸ See Grant (2006: 9-10) for an overview of this division.

⁴⁶⁹ This is particularly evident among those who understands Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* as nothing but a “logical” construction of nature’s development. Such or similar readings can be found in Haym (1870), von Engelhardt (1981), Krings (1985), Kimmerle (1985), Mutschler (1990), Bonsepien (1997), (2001), Berger (2020), Bowman (2020).

⁴⁷⁰ Jähnig (1989: 222).

⁴⁷¹ Nassar (2014: 114).

encompassing, absolute subjectivity”;⁴⁷² as an attempt to show how nature’s “various phenomena can be regressively chased back into the ego as their only possible source”;⁴⁷³ the focus of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* is not the “subject-independent, appearing nature, but rather only the subject”;⁴⁷⁴ nature is a “derivative” of “the transcendental subject or the I from the *Wissenschaftslehre*”.⁴⁷⁵ As I attempt to show in this chapter, neither of these idealist (non-naturalist) readings quite fit the bill.

The standard criticism of the *Naturphilosophie* concerns its method. It is claimed that Schelling makes metaphysical or speculative assumptions about the structure of nature in complete detachment from both transcendental conditions of subjectivity as well as experience and empirical data. This criticism is not new. Although many historians of science agree that Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* had a direct and indirect impact on scientific discoveries and developments of scientific paradigms in the 19th and 20th century⁴⁷⁶ – perhaps in particular medicine and biology between 1800 and 1830⁴⁷⁷ – it received stark criticism from its birth. For example, Justus von Liebig spoke about Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* as the “insane sister of philosophy”, and described it as the “pestilence and the black death of the century”.⁴⁷⁸ Some contemporary historians of science and philosophy have likewise claimed that it was a “strange and nearly impenetrable offshoot of the Romantic movement”,⁴⁷⁹ and that it “has been, and can be, safely ignored”⁴⁸⁰ as a contribution to philosophical and scientific debates. One historic reason for this was the growing tendency towards mechanistic materialism and positivism – exemplified with Helmholtz, who also scorned Schelling for his a priori methodology and supposed disregard for empirical facts (which is, as we shall see, not quite true) – within philosophy and the natural sciences during the 19th century.⁴⁸¹

These readings seem to undermine how aspects of the *Naturphilosophie* – e.g., the idea of a fundamental and dynamic polarity in nature, the idea of viewing nature as an interconnected and organic system, or its criticism of pure empiricism – was useful as heuristic principles for scientists like H. C. Ørsted (electromagnetism),⁴⁸² J. W. Ritter (electrochemistry and ultraviolet light) and Alexander von Humboldt (e.g., geography) in the immediate aftermath of the inauguration of the

⁴⁷² Durner (1991: 74).

⁴⁷³ Richards (2002: 113). This is a bit of a surprising statement, since the rest of Richards’ book leans towards a naturalist, non-idealist interpretation.

⁴⁷⁴ Pluder (2013: 42).

⁴⁷⁵ Leinkauf (2015: 9).

⁴⁷⁶ See e.g., Esposito (1977: 11).

⁴⁷⁷ See e.g., Mendelsohn (1964, 1965).

⁴⁷⁸ Liebig (1874: 24). Other early critics included Schleiden, DuBous-Reymond, Helmholtz, Virchow, Berzelius, Gauss, von Mohl, and Wöhler. See Heuser-Keßler (1986), (Küppers 1992), and Rudolphi (2001).

⁴⁷⁹ Lenoir (1978: 57).

⁴⁸⁰ Gower (1973: 320).

⁴⁸¹ For an overview, see Stone (2015).

⁴⁸² See e.g., Stauffer (1957).

Naturphilosophie.⁴⁸³ It has also been argued, which I return to, that Schelling's (combined with Goethe's) ideas about self-organization, metamorphosis and organic agency foreshadowed many aspects of biological theories in the nineteenth and twentieth century,⁴⁸⁴ perhaps even elements of Darwin's theory of evolution.⁴⁸⁵

Although some find it unfounded and too anachronistic,⁴⁸⁶ Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* has experienced somewhat of a "renaissance"⁴⁸⁷ because many have begun to see its relevance for a set of contemporary scientific, philosophical and political issues.⁴⁸⁸ Some like to point out that Schelling's metaphysical approach to nature highlights how a priori or metaphysical assumptions (e.g., about nature as a unified system) are indispensable for scientific and empirical inquiry as such in the sense that pure empiricism is neither desirable nor attainable; that the *Naturphilosophie* can, in some respects, function as a heuristic guide for scientific activities;⁴⁸⁹ that it can be used as critical tool against modern paradigms of mechanical science and the celebration of technological innovation (and human dominance over nature) flowing from that;⁴⁹⁰ that parts of Schelling's conceptions of self-organization and the holistic and organic systematicity of natural systems⁴⁹¹ are directly relevant for certain scientific movements and projects in recent times,⁴⁹² in particular general systems theory⁴⁹³ and modern theories of non-linearity, complexity and the self-organization and dissipation of physical systems (like Prigogine) as well as ideas of *autopoiesis* within biological systems (like Varela and Maturana)⁴⁹⁴ and the conception of nature and natural beings as gradually evolving.⁴⁹⁵ In the rest of this chapter, we shall see that many of these "actualizations" have some legitimacy.

⁴⁸³ See e.g., Heuser-Keßler (1986, 1992, 2011), Snow (1996), and Stone (2015). Kuhn has even argued that the *Naturphilosophie* might be seen as an appropriate philosophical background for the discovery of energy conservation (1959: 323).

⁴⁸⁴ Kirchhoff (1994: 103).

⁴⁸⁵ In particular Richards (2002, 2017). However, it was already suggested by E. Schertel (1912) in his paper "Schelling und der Entwicklungsgedanke".

⁴⁸⁶ E.g., Gloy (2012).

⁴⁸⁷ Rudolphi (2001: 11).

⁴⁸⁸ E.g., Peterson (2004) and Schwab (2022).

⁴⁸⁹ Mutschler (1990: 18), Küppers (1992: 11-13), Snow (1996), Rudolphi (2001: 13). Rudolphi even goes as far as to say that it is directly relevant for contemporary particle physics (16, 187-194). See also Treder (1984), Förster (1984: 178), Kimmerle (1985), Kirchhoff (1994: 94-95), and Zimmerman (1998). For a critical approach, see Gower (1973).

⁴⁹⁰ Heuser-Keßler (1986), Kirchhoff (1994: 60). I return to this in the Conclusion of the thesis.

⁴⁹¹ Esposito (1977: 239, 243), Heuser-Keßler (1986).

⁴⁹² E.g., Engelhardt (1981).

⁴⁹³ Esposito (1977: 10, 98).

⁴⁹⁴ In particular Heuser-Keßler (1986). She goes so far as saying that the parallels are "obvious" (12), and that we haven't had the (scientific) tools and insights before now to properly understand the meanings of Schelling's theory (13). Even Bonsiepen, who is rather skeptical towards Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, implies that Schelling points towards insights from molecular biology (1997: 288).

⁴⁹⁵ Hartkopf (1984: 113, 124), Richards (2002, 2017), and Gabriel (2015).

4.2. The systematic role of the *Naturphilosophie*

In his introductions to *First Outline* and *The System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling explains what the tasks of *Naturphilosophie* and transcendental philosophy are respectively and how they relate. Schelling's underlying motivation is this: We cannot understand nature as completely dependent on or derived from human subjectivity (or consciousness, or mindedness); nature is not merely an organ for self-consciousness or only determinable through the structures of subjectivity. This is *Schelling's realist assumption*, which he presents in the Introduction to the *First Outline* through the idea of nature being autonomous, autarch and unconditioned. As he writes, there is "no place in this science for idealistic methods of explanation", whose modes of explanation are "meaningless for physics (and for our science which occupies the same standpoint)".⁴⁹⁶ However, neither can human mindedness be understood as completely reducible to nature. There really are normative and cognitive (human) agents that are distinct from the rest of nature in the way they theorize and act, and the structure of this kind of agency is not (completely) explicable through natural processes and laws. This is *Schelling's idealist assumption*.

We ought not to consider nature and mind as standing in sharp contrast or opposition to each other. This is Schelling's *monist or holistic assumption*. As he writes in *On the True Concept*: "For I do not admit two different worlds, but without reservation only one and the same, inclusive of everything, even what in ordinary consciousness is opposed as nature and spirit".⁴⁹⁷ The idea seems to be that mindedness must emerge from nature but that it is only through mindedness that nature can come to recognize itself as nature; to bring the objective, natural world from which it emerges into thought. In that sense, nature and mindedness only make sense from this isomorphic structure or knot.⁴⁹⁸ Therefore, as Schelling writes in the *Ideas*, the "system of nature is at the same time the system of our spirit".⁴⁹⁹ As Walter Schulz has written:

[N]ature and spirit are not to be understood as two separated static realms; rather they are the two intertwined stages and epochs of one single world development. The world is in its essence history, and in the first instance natural history and then history of spirit.⁵⁰⁰

Schelling's aim is to skeleton the structure of this knot.⁵⁰¹ Around 1800, he believes this knot can be enlightened through what we can call a dual perspective. In the *First*

⁴⁹⁶ SW, 1, 3, 273 (2004: 194).

⁴⁹⁷ SW, 1, 4, 102 (2020: 61).

⁴⁹⁸ Sturma (2000: 225) and Schülein (2022: 164) use the word "isomorphic" to describe this structure.

⁴⁹⁹ SW, 1, 2, 39.

⁵⁰⁰ Schulz (1975a: 13).

⁵⁰¹ Although I am sympathetic to Steigerwald's focus on Schelling's conception of the "asystasy" of reason, that is, the inconsistency of reason, I don't think she is correct in saying that Schelling thought we should "repress and [...] deny the conflicts and contradictions of our conceptions, and to unite all in a coherent system" (Steigerwald 2017: 292). To unite all in a coherent system of mind and nature is exactly what Schelling attempts.

Outline, he describes transcendental philosophy as the “tendency [...] to bring back everywhere the real to the ideal [...] a mode of explanation whereby the real itself is transported in to the ideal world”.⁵⁰² On the other hand, as he continues, *Naturphilosophie* begins with the thought that

*the ideal must arise out of the real and admit of explanation from it [...] Now if it is the task of transcendental philosophy to subordinate the real to the ideal, it is, on the other hand, the task of the philosophy of nature to explain the ideal by the real. The two sciences are therefore but one science, differentiated only in the opposite orientation of their tasks. Moreover, as the two directions are not only equally possible, but equally necessary, the same necessity attaches to both in the system of knowledge.*⁵⁰³

The same structure of equal possibility and necessity – and the claim that both sciences should be a part of the same general system or science – is repeated again in *1800 System*.⁵⁰⁴ Here, he calls them “two basic sciences”⁵⁰⁵ that are “mutually necessary”.⁵⁰⁶ Either, as he writes, “the objective” or “nature” is made “primary, and the question is: how a subjective is annexed to it?”,⁵⁰⁷ or the “subjective is made primary”.⁵⁰⁸ Summing up, he writes:

To make the *objective* primary, and to derive the subjective from that, is, as has just been shown, the problem of *nature-philosophy*. If, then, there is a *transcendental philosophy*, there remains to it only the opposite direction, that of *proceeding from the subjective, as primary and absolute, and having the objective arise from this*. Thus nature-philosophy and transcendental philosophy have divided into the two directions possible to philosophy, and if *all* philosophy must go about *either* to make an intelligence out of nature, *or* a nature out of intelligence, then transcendental philosophy, which has the latter task, is thus *the other necessary basic science of philosophy*.⁵⁰⁹

The two basic sciences, who are “opposed to each other in principle and direction” but still “mutually seek and supplement each other”, are meant to constitute “the

⁵⁰² SW, 1, 3, 272 (2004: 193-194).

⁵⁰³ SW, 1, 3, 272-273 (2004: 194).

⁵⁰⁴ Schelling partly frames the two models through an epistemological language: Human knowledge consists in the “coincidence [Übereinstimmung]” (SW, 1, 3, 340) between subject and object, and to explain how this correspondence comes about, we must first separate the two elements. And from thereon, he argues, we can either begin from the object (nature) or the subject. In that sense, the explanation of how mind nature hang together is equally an epistemological question: How does knowledge-beings or observers appear in the world? The *1800 System* gives an account of the development of the I through a sequence of restrictions and conditions where nature is one of these sequences. In short, the philosophy of subjectivity, or the transcendental philosophy, deals with epistemology, ethics and the philosophy of history.

⁵⁰⁵ SW, 1, 3, 340 (1978: 6).

⁵⁰⁶ SW, 1, 3, 342 (1978: 7).

⁵⁰⁷ SW, 1, 3, 340 (1978: 5). As he writes immediately after, this means that this is a question for “natural science”, which moves “from nature to intelligence”.

⁵⁰⁸ SW, 1, 3, 342 (1978: 6).

⁵⁰⁹ SW, 1, 3, 342 (1978: 7).

entire system of philosophy”.⁵¹⁰ Schelling’s method is to say that the *Naturphilosophie* provides a bottom-up-explanation of the emergence of human mindedness whereas the transcendental philosophy provides a top-down-explanation of how humans can act in and cognize the world.⁵¹¹ However, this “parallelism of nature with intelligence”, as he calls the possibility and necessity of both sciences (“neither is adequate by itself”), also means that neither can be reduced to the other. And for this reason, they “must forever be opposed to one another, and can never merge into one”.⁵¹²

What we are presented with here, is also Schelling’s *realist* or *independence assumption*: in 1799 and 1800 Schelling conceives nature, and *Naturphilosophie*, as independent from transcendental philosophy. As he writes in the *First Outline*, nature is “unconditioned”: it is not conditioned by the transcendental subject’s structures. Nature is “autonomous” and “autarch”:

Since Nature gives itself its sphere of activity, no foreign power can interfere with it; all of its laws are immanent, or *Nature is its own legislator* (autonomy of Nature) [...] Whatever happens in Nature must also be explained from the active and motive principles which lie in it, or *Nature suffices for itself* (autarchy of Nature) [...] They are both contained in the proposition: *Nature has unconditioned reality*, a proposition which is precisely the principle of a philosophy of nature.⁵¹³

Nature’s autonomy signals that nature is independent: its activities and laws are not formed by a subject. Nature’s autarchy signals that nature is immanent: whatever takes place in nature must also be explainable from the principles and forces of nature. This is how we should understand it when Schelling says that the principles of nature are *a priori*: nature’s laws and principles are before or prior to our experience of them. The rejoinder to Fichte (and Kant) is that it is not the human mind that legislates nature; rather, it is (unconsciously, as he likes to say) self-legislating and self-causing. E.g., mechanical and organic laws and regularities are sourced in the activities of nature, and nature comes to know this fact through us (consciously).

How does the *Naturphilosophie* and transcendental philosophy hang together? I think there are two ways of reading the final dictum that they can never be “merged into one” in the context of his later ideas of the relation between idealism and realism. Either Schelling completely abandons the idea that they cannot be merged into one in later writings, since that is exactly what he seems to attempt in his system of identity, although without dissolving either’s independence (as we shall see in Chapter 6). Or what Schelling means is that they cannot be merged into one science in the sense that one is not reducible to the other. A reason for opting for the latter

⁵¹⁰ SW, 1, 3, 342 (1978: 8).

⁵¹¹ In Schelling’s novel *Clara, or, On Nature’s Connection to the Spirit World*, the Doctor, who represents the *Naturphilosophie*, uses these expressions himself: “Nicht von oben herab, sondern von unten hinauf, ist mein Wahlspruch” (SW, 1, 9, 21).

⁵¹² SW, 1, 3, 331 (1978: 2).

⁵¹³ SW, 1, 3, 81 (2004: 17).

option is that Schelling in the *1800 System* explicitly talks about “the entire system of philosophy”, about an “ultimate ground of harmony” of the two sciences, and that they can be merged into “an absolute identity”,⁵¹⁴ which echoes his later efforts in his system of identity.

4.1.1. Six interpretative models

Schelling’s thinking around 1800 can be summed up as different attempts to delineate this relation, or unity, between idealism and realism, or between mind and nature. In lieu of the ongoing correspondence between Schelling and Fichte in the years, Philipp Schwab has suggested that we can extract nothing less than six different models for thinking about this relation during these years of Schelling’s thinking (1797-1800) that are internally both compatible and incompatible with each other. The six models – that roughly correspond to their historical delivery – are *subordination*, *analogy*, *complementary opposition*, *parallelism*, *continuity*, and *priority*. Let me briefly sketch all six:

The Subordination Model is chiefly found in the *Ideas* (as well as in *Treatise Explicatory*, although that is not a work on *Naturphilosophie*) and partly in the *World Soul*. This model is molded in Kant and Fichte’s transcendental frameworks. This means that a proper *Naturphilosophie*, or understanding of nature, must proceed by explaining nature through a (phenomenological) description of self-consciousness and a transcendental investigation of the necessary conditions for cognizing nature in the first place. On this model, following Fichte, if one wants to speak about nature, one first has to speak about self-consciousness and the subjective conditions for cognition. This is the model that Schelling mocks in the Introduction to his *First Outline*: For transcendental philosophy, nature “is nothing more than the organ of self-consciousness and everything in Nature is necessary merely because it is only through the medium of such a Nature that self-consciousness can take place”.⁵¹⁵

The Analogy Model is found in the *First Outline*. As Schwab writes, “Schelling uses determinations from transcendental philosophy in order to illustrate what philosophy of nature actually is”, which means that the “original principles in nature [...] have to be thought of in analogy to the I in transcendental philosophy”.⁵¹⁶ The construction of the *Naturphilosophie* thereby proceeds from the same terminology, and the structures of nature are thereby said to resemble or be analogous to the structure of the I (such as “productivity” and being “unconditioned”). As Schwab underlines, however, a version of this model is also that both idealism and realism are analogous to each other, and in that sense *Naturphilosophie* is not subordinate to transcendental philosophy.

According to the Complementary Opposition Model, as we seem to find it in the introductions to his *First Outline* and *1800 System*, both models are equally possible and necessary and ought to be separated. Neither is, on this model, more “primary”

⁵¹⁴ SW, 1, 3, 333.

⁵¹⁵ 2004: 194.

⁵¹⁶ Schwab (2022: 131).

than the other. Both constitute the overall system of philosophy. As Schwab writes, both “sciences form a crosswise double movement in opposite direction, a chiasmus”.⁵¹⁷

The Parallelism Model (found in the *1800 System*) concerns the “inner structure of the two sciences”.⁵¹⁸ What Schelling means by “parallel” seems to be that the development of nature and the development of the subject are somehow corresponding in the sense that sensation, for example, corresponds structurally to the status or developmental step of electricity in nature. We can understand the assumption that both sciences “cannot be merged into one” as meaning that the sciences must remain different in their content but not in their structure.

The Continuity Model presents the two sciences in a “successive continuity”,⁵¹⁹ which is present in the *First Outline* and in the *1800 System*. As Schelling writes in the latter, his aim is to present “all parts of philosophy in One continuity, and the whole of philosophy as what it is, namely, as a progressive history of self-consciousness”.⁵²⁰ This is supposed to mean that there is a continuum at play and that *Naturphilosophie* precedes transcendental philosophy in that continuum.⁵²¹ As he writes in *On the True Concept*, nature is “One unbroken series, which proceeds from the simplest in nature to the highest and most complex”.⁵²²

The final model, the Priority Model, contains some strong naturalist implications. As Whistler & Berger have pointed out, Schelling begins to somehow prioritize nature, or *Naturphilosophie*, because it “attends to what is, metaphysically speaking, more fundamental”⁵²³ or “basic in reality”.⁵²⁴ Transcendental idealism is, justifiably, occupied exclusively with accounting for the structures of the mind and human agency, the “highest and most complex” in nature. However, these structures are ontologically derivative. According to Schwab, this model “amounts to an outright annihilation of the autonomy of subjectivity, presenting it as a mere illusion”.⁵²⁵ The first place where we find this model is in section 63 of Schelling’s *General Deduction*, published after the *1800 System*. Schelling explains how *Naturphilosophie* provides a “physical explanation of idealism”, which is overlooked by the transcendental philosopher because she only considers reality from the “highest potency”, namely the I, and it is only the “physicist” that can discover this “deception [Täuschung]”.⁵²⁶ He ends this section with the (strong) naturalist exclamation: “Come hither to physics, and discover the truth!”⁵²⁷ As he continues, we *can*, when we have reached this point in (natural) history, go both ways: from the real to the

⁵¹⁷ Schwab (2022: 133).

⁵¹⁸ Schwab (2022: 134).

⁵¹⁹ Schwab (2022: 135).

⁵²⁰ Schwab (2022: 135).

⁵²¹ See also Schulz (1957: XXII).

⁵²² 2020: 52.

⁵²³ Berger & Whistler (2020: 9).

⁵²⁴ Berger & Whistler (2020: 10).

⁵²⁵ Schwab (2022: 137).

⁵²⁶ SW, 1, 4, 76.

⁵²⁷ SW, 1, 4, 76.

ideal, and from the ideal to the real. But, he says, “the true direction, for anyone to whom knowledge means everything, is the one which nature herself has taken”.⁵²⁸ In *On the True Concept*, Schelling reaffirms this model. Here, the subject or the I is presented as the highest potency of nature, the last stage of natural organization. As he says, there is an “idealism of nature and an idealism of the I. For me, the former is original, *the latter* is derived”.⁵²⁹ As Schwab concludes, this model “displays the disastrous consequences which Schelling’s idea of an autonomous philosophy of nature has for the cornerstone of the early Idealist grounding project, that is, the formerly self-sufficient I”.⁵³⁰

As I will argue in the course of this chapter, I do not believe that Schwab does justice to the priority model. Ontological priority need not mean “annihilation of the autonomy of subjectivity”. What it means is that, as he says in *On the True Concept*, that *Naturphilosophie* “without doubt” has “priority” because it “lets the standpoint of idealism itself first come into being”.⁵³¹ However, idealism “will remain; it will only be derived from first principles, and in its first beginnings from nature itself, which until now appeared to be in the starkest contradiction with it”.⁵³² At no point does Schelling award exclusive priority or primacy to the *Naturphilosophie* in any reductionist sense that would entail an “out-right annihilation of the autonomy of subjectivity”.

4.2. Schelling’s naturalism

4.2.1. Nature waking up

Nature thinks; it becomes aware of itself through our awareness of it.⁵³³ This is the main point of departure for Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*.⁵³⁴ Through us, nature begins to ask, interpret, and understand itself – to open its eyes. As Hoguebe has put it, we can therefore say that the world has an “auto-epistemic structure”,⁵³⁵ in that the “history of the universe is also the history of its self-cognition”.⁵³⁶ Assuming the monistic thesis that there is only *one* world, or *one* nature, epistemology can therefore

⁵²⁸ SW, 1, 4, 77-78.

⁵²⁹ 2020: 48.

⁵³⁰ Schwab (2022: 138). In a similar fashion, Schülein (2022: 173) says that according to Schelling’s model in *On the True Concept*, our “spiritual activities are in fact nothing but natural forces”. This *nothing but* is simply, I believe, too strong a rendering of what Schelling is after. I return to this at the end of the chapter.

⁵³¹ 2020: 54.

⁵³² 2020: 51.

⁵³³ As Nagel says in a tone that resembles Schelling’s to such a degree that it cannot be a coincidence: “Each of our lives is a part of the lengthy process of the universe gradually waking up and becoming aware of itself” (Nagel 2012: 85). He also references Schelling at one point (17). See e.g., Schelling (2004: 132).

⁵³⁴ See e.g., his *1800 System*, SW, 1, 3, 341 (1978: 6), where he talks about humans as “the last and highest order of reflection”, whereby nature becomes “an object to herself”.

⁵³⁵ Hoguebe (1989: 52).

⁵³⁶ Hoguebe (1989: 52-53).

be said to entail cosmology or metaphysics: How must nature be like for cognitive agents to emerge within it?

Another way to describe this auto-epistemic structure of nature is to say that nature, at some point in its history, doubles itself in an observer and observed, in subject and object. How does nature come to this point of self-differentiation? Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is not just posing the question about how nature is structured. It also asks about the conditions for this question.⁵³⁷ How must a nature be thought in which a subject can separate itself from it? And in which freedom and normativity is not made into a complete other-worldly mystery? The basic motivation behind the *Naturphilosophie* can thus be called transcendental: Given the fact that human mindedness exists, what are the (natural) conditions for this? For Schelling, answering this question is necessary in order to avoid both reductive materialism and Kantian dualism (or quietism). His model forces us, as we shall see, into reordering some of the most basic conceptions of nature that we have inherited from (parts of) modern science through a stark criticism of mechanistic and reductionistic worldviews. Instead, Schelling proposes a sort of "re-enchantment" of nature: We cannot but understand ourselves as free *and* natural beings (and understand organisms as self-organizing *and* natural beings), and therefore nature must exhibit, or contain the possibility of exhibiting, these features before the human came to the scene. Non-human nature must mirror, at a basic or lower level, the same higher-order structures exhibited by human beings. Such an expansive conception of nature, Schelling believes, does not only have explanatory advantages, but also practical ones: It can help us reunite and feel at home with the rest of the natural world. Nature does not, on this understanding, limit human agency. Rather, it *enables* it.

In the Introduction to his *Ideas*, Schelling describes the auto-epistemic structure of nature, whereby nature wakes up in human beings, as a doubling or separation process. We go from what he calls a "state of nature" to a state of (philosophical) reflection in the sense of thinking about the grounds of possibility for us to conceive ourselves as separated from the rest of nature; on the grounds of nature's self-doubling. He writes:

How a world outside us, how a Nature and with it experience, is possible – these are questions for which we have *philosophy* to thank; or rather, *with* these questions philosophy came to be. Prior to them mankind had lived in a (philosophical) state of nature. At that time man was still at one with himself and the world about him [...] As soon as man sets himself in opposition to the external world (how he does so we shall consider later), the first step to philosophy has been taken. With that separation, reflection first begins; he separates from now on what Nature had always united.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁷ See Wieland (1975), Hogebe (1989, 23), Grant (2013a, 2013b), and Gabriel (2015).

⁵³⁸ SW, 1, 2, 12-13.

The condition of possibility for philosophy as such is a divorce of humankind from nature;⁵³⁹ only through that separation, as he writes, was philosophy made “necessary”.⁵⁴⁰ He stresses several times that this process of separation is related to “freedom”; that is, human beings are free to ponder their separateness from nature. Philosophy is therefore, in this basic sense, the first form of freedom, or at least the feeling of freedom. The “first philosopher”, Schelling writes, was the one who “attended to the fact that he could distinguish himself from external things, and therefore with his ideas from the objects”.⁵⁴¹ A philosophy of nature can only come about as long as we presuppose this “original” separation of a “theoretical” subject setting itself in contrast to the natural world. Hence, we can say that what Schelling is laying out is the necessary conditions for doing philosophy as such.

However, Schelling’s Introduction to the *Ideas* is also a call for action: If we remain within this contrast, only one-sided idealism (or transcendental philosophy) is an option. And as soon as I “separate myself, and with me everything ideal, from Nature”, and remains in that state (as the one-sided idealist does), then nature will appear as a “dead object, and I cease to comprehend how a life outside me can be possible”.⁵⁴² We become *alienated* from nature. Schelling then goes on to say how we must escape this stark separation between subject and object that appears when nature wakes up in us and becomes aware of itself in its act of self-doubling. The (one-sided) idealist stays within the sphere of reflection – with its “endless dichotomizing” and “dismembering activities”⁵⁴³ – that keeps human mindedness in separation from nature.

This state of “mere reflection”, we are now told, is the “spiritual sickness in mankind”. We can understand this in both a normative (practical) and theoretical sense. Normative in the sense that the (modern) human being, by contrasting itself with nature, has a tendency to consider nature as a “dead object” that can and should merely be used for our human purposes. That Schelling believes that this can be the devastating result of remaining in the (strong) scission between mind and nature becomes clear in his polemic against Fichte’s view of nature in his *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine* from 1806. As Wolfgang Wieland has phrased it, cancelling the separation between the human and nature is also a “political and social ideal”.⁵⁴⁴ I return to this practical aspect in the Conclusion.

We can also extract a theoretical call for action in the sense that remaining in this state of absolute separation will never be able to answer the question about how nature must be like for it to self-double through our awareness of it; what the ontological (natural) conditions for human mindedness and freedom are; what the ontogenesis is for doing philosophy. This process of abstraction is only possible, as

⁵³⁹ SW, 1, 2, 14.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² SW, 1, 2, 47.

⁵⁴³ SW, 1, 2, 14-15.

⁵⁴⁴ Wieland (1975: 262).

Schelling says, through “freedom” itself, after the “original” split has been made. This is Schelling’s practical and theoretical call for reuniting humans and nature so that humans can feel *at home in nature*.⁵⁴⁵

To do this, we need to make ourselves, as Schelling says, “identical with Nature”. When doing that, we can become able to “understand what a living nature is as well as I understand my own life; I apprehend how this universal life of Nature reveals itself in manifold forms, in progressive developments, in gradual approximations to freedom”.⁵⁴⁶ What we need to do, in other words, in order to do philosophize about nature as such is to abstract from our separateness from the rest of nature by returning to the “philosophical state of nature”. In this act of abstraction, we must regard “reflection as such merely as a means” and only assign it “negative value”.

However, it is important to note that here, in the Introduction to the *Ideas*, this act of making ourselves “identical with nature”, and thereby investigating its organized developments towards its self-doubling in the human being, is deferred into the future. It is a call for (future) programmatic action.⁵⁴⁷ But if freedom, or the separation from or loss of nature, is what makes philosophy as such possible, how can we philosophize about nature? How can we perform this process of identification or unification with nature? How can we put “ourselves in the place of nature”?⁵⁴⁸

This is a methodological question that Schelling attempts to answer in his later texts on *Naturphilosophie*, especially in order to counter the Fichtean objection against the possibility of considering nature as autonomous (from the subject) and thereby the possibility of a proper (non-subordinated) philosophy of nature. According to Fichte, there can only be one proper science, namely transcendental philosophy, since even the distinction between the subjective and the objective, between mind and nature, is a subjective construction from within the transcendental framework (like Pippin’s subjectivism from Chapter 1). As he writes in a letter to Schelling, we cannot start from “being”, only our “seeing”; everything we know about nature is always already filtered through our subjective conditions of experience, and therefore we cannot become “identical” with nature in an act that transcends those some conditions.⁵⁴⁹

As Schwab has noted, Schelling does not give a clear response to Fichte’s methodological worries before 1800-1801, mainly in *On the True Concept*.⁵⁵⁰ Schelling argues that in order to do *Naturphilosophie*, one must perform a “depotentiating” act of “abstraction”⁵⁵¹ from the (idealist) subject and into nature, since as “long as I maintain myself in this potency [...] I can behold nothing objective other than in

⁵⁴⁵ See e.g., Lawrence (1989) and Fisher (2017).

⁵⁴⁶ SW, 1, 2, 47.

⁵⁴⁷ As earlier pointed out, the *Ideas* is still written somewhat in the remnants of Fichte’s idealism. This can explain why Schelling here refers to the return to nature as a future task.

⁵⁴⁸ SW, 1, 4, 530.

⁵⁴⁹ Letter to Schelling from 1801 (Vater & Wood 2012: 56). See also Fichte, GA, 2, 5, 413.

⁵⁵⁰ Schwab (2022: 123) calls this “a major issue in Schelling’s philosophy of nature”. However, this is only a major issue if Schelling would never give a response to it, which he does from 1800.

⁵⁵¹ Schelling (2020: 49).

the moment of its entry into consciousness [...] the highest potency”.⁵⁵² Transcendental idealism proceeds exclusively from this highest potency. *Naturphilosophie* proceeds exclusively from the lowest potencies.

In order to bridge the separation mentioned in the Introduction to the *Ideas* – to “reestablish” the connection with nature, using reflection “merely as a means” to “unite once more, through freedom what was originally [...] united” – we must perform an act of abstraction from the conscious I, “exempt from all subjective and practical interference”.⁵⁵³ We can also see it as a *decentering* of the subject. This type of philosophical or scientific action is a kind of metaphysical or transcendental realism that investigates the world from a *view from nowhere* (in Nagel’s sense), with little or no subjective interference on the way the investigation is carried out.⁵⁵⁴ A Fichtean would argue that if we make this sort of abstraction, in a complete way, we do not end up with nature but with sheer nothingness. Schelling would agree that it is impossible to make a total abstraction; there will always be a minimal set of subjective, cognitive conditions, just like the act of abstraction is itself an act of the subject in the highest potency. However, the aim of the *Naturphilosophie* is to abstract as much as possible from these conditions.

What a *Naturphilosophie* must do, in order to overcome the self-alienation of nature, is to delineate what is immanent in nature and precedes human (self)consciousness; in a sense, the *Naturphilosoph* must not merely philosophize *about* nature but *as* nature. To “apprehend”, as he says in the Introduction to the *Ideas*, how “this universal life of Nature reveals itself in manifold forms, in progressive developments”, we must immerse ourselves in the world instead of separating ourselves from it; we must immerse ourselves in the non-conscious. This process of abstraction is, in a sense, the process of a part of nature that begins to realize and reflect upon it being a part of nature. As Whistler says: “Schelling ‘abstracts’ in order to philosophise about stones”.⁵⁵⁵

4.2.2. A form of naturalism

Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* proceeds from the naturalist idea that human mindedness is an integral part of nature’s history and that we can enquire into its pre-history. Human freedom and self-consciousness are the provisional culmination of the development of nature. As he already writes in his *Treatise Explicatory*: “The external world lies open before us in order that we may rediscover the history of our own spirit”.⁵⁵⁶ The question then is: How must nature be like for human mindedness to emerge within it? As Schelling writes in his *Weltalter*-draft from 1815: “[T]he events

⁵⁵² Schelling (2020: 49).

⁵⁵³ Schelling (2020: 50). As Whistler has noted, there is an irony here, since Schelling makes use of the method of abstraction to distance himself from Fichte, although abstraction had been central to Fichte’s methodology. While abstraction for Fichte takes the subject away from the world, it brings it towards the world for Schelling (Whistler 2016b).

⁵⁵⁴ On Schelling’s method of abstraction, see Frank (2013), Whistler (2014, 2016b, 2021).

⁵⁵⁵ Whistler (2016: b).

⁵⁵⁶ SW, I, I, 383 (1994a: 90).

of human life, from the deepest to their highest consummation, must accord with the events of life in general”.⁵⁵⁷

To approach the question about the ontological conditions for human mindedness is to do *Naturphilosophie*. And here we must become naturalistic. We must, as he writes in the Introduction to the *Ideas*, turn philosophy into a “doctrine of nature about our minds [Naturlehre unseres Geistes]”.⁵⁵⁸ Every existing thing, including human mindedness, freedom and normativity, whose “conditions simply cannot be given in nature, must be absolutely impossible”.⁵⁵⁹ In a passage from the Introduction to the *First Outline*, we find the clearest example of Schelling’s commitment to some form of naturalism. After having described *Naturphilosophie* as the opposite of transcendental philosophy in that it posits nature as “the self-existent” and can therefore be called a “Spinozism of physics” in viewing nature as its own cause and legislator, he writes:

The first maxim of all true natural science, to explain everything by the forces of Nature, is therefore accepted in its widest extent in our science, and even extended to that region at the limit of which all interpretation of Nature has until now been accustomed to stop short: for example, to those organic phenomena which seem to presuppose an analogy with reason. For, granted that there really is something which presupposes such analogy in the actions of animals, nothing further would follow on the principle of realism than that what we call “reason” is a mere play of higher and necessarily unknown natural forces.⁵⁶⁰

We should bear two things in mind about Schelling’s proposal of an explanatory naturalism (“everything can be explained by natural forces”): First, Schelling is here still presenting *Naturphilosophie* as a partial perspective on the world, as one of the two basic sciences. Hence, to “explain everything by the forces of Nature” means that everything *can* be explained thusly, not that everything exclusively *must*. We can call this Schelling’s *thesis of local naturalism*.⁵⁶¹ Secondly, Schelling here takes up the problem of teleological, living systems from Kant and stipulates, based on the thesis of local naturalism, that we cannot stop short at living systems: either by postulating a vital (non-natural) force or follow the Kantian route of excluding both the possibility of a mechanical explanation (there will never be a “Newton for a blade of grass”) and the possibility of constitutive (or objective) judgements about purposefulness and self-organization in natural organisms. Third, following this point about Kant, Schelling does not claim – as Beiser seems to think⁵⁶² – that human reason is nothing but a “mere” play of natural forces. That would amount to a reductive kind of naturalism. The sentence “what we call “reason”” – which follows his reference to organisms and animals – is supposed to mean: “What we call “reason” when talking

⁵⁵⁷ SW, 1, 8, 207 (2000: 3).

⁵⁵⁸ SW, I, 2, 39.

⁵⁵⁹ SW 1, 3, 571. See also *Weltalter*, SW, 1, 8, 205 (2000: xxxix).

⁵⁶⁰ 2004: 195.

⁵⁶¹ On this sort of explanatory naturalism, see Alderwick (2021: 39-40).

⁵⁶² Beiser (2008: 273-274).

about animal action”. What he then says is that when we analogously ascribe “reason” to animal action, this “reason” is neither non-natural (as the vitalist says) nor something that we can merely ascribe to them heuristically (as Kant says). Rather, it means that to explain something “by the forces of nature” need not be reduced to mechanistic explanation; purposefulness and self-organization, Schelling thinks, can also be given an intrinsic explanation within nature. This intrinsic naturalist route of explaining the phenomena that seem most “un-natural”, in particular organisms and human mindedness, is what Schelling sets out to explore.

In the following I will extract and unfold four interconnected theses at the base of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* that are all meant to explain the possibility and actuality of organisms and human mindedness:

1. We must not think of nature as a system of mechanical reduction but as an interconnected and organic whole (holism thesis)
2. We must not think nature in terms of things and substances but in terms of processes and dynamism (process thesis)
3. We must think of organisms as autonomous and teleological agents (teleological thesis)
4. We must not think nature as static but as a continuous and gradated system (continuity thesis)

4.3. The four theses in the *Naturphilosophie*

4.3.1. Schelling’s Holism Thesis

Schelling opposes a universal mechanical (or atomistic or reductive materialist) view of nature that proceeds from the “fundamentalist” supposition of discrete and more or less static building blocks (atoms or substances) and then assumes that everything else (e.g., organisms or minds) can be derived therefrom or is reducible thereto.⁵⁶³ Schelling often simply refers to this view as “materialism”.⁵⁶⁴ As an alternative, he

⁵⁶³ Schelling’s criticism of mechanism is found in different places during his authorship, but it is particularly explicit in the *Ideas*. On Schelling’s criticism of mechanistic physics and philosophy, see Küppers (1992), Beiser (2008), Nassar (2021), Alderwick (2021).

⁵⁶⁴ SW 1, VI, 93; SW 1, 10, 107. In the *Propaedeutics*, he writes that materialism “subordinates the ideal under the real” (SW, 1, 6, 93), and that the “natural” way of doing so is through “identity”, here meaning *sameness*, like contemporary mind-brain identity theories. It is in this text-draft that we find his clearest account of what we would today call the mind-body(brain)-problem. Elsewhere, he also refers to materialism as “naturalism” (which “conceives the unity of I and nature” in a purely empirical manner (SW 1, 5, 122), or “pure [bloßer] naturalism“, which does not “essentially distinguish“ between what is “moral and physical“ (SW 1, 5, 181). In his early

proposes a holistic view of nature as thoroughly dynamic, complex, and interconnected. In particular, from surveying the natural scientific findings at his time and from studying Kant's *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaften*, he believes that all processes and individuals in nature are constituted by a polar and dynamical opposition of forces (attraction and repulsion in matter, but he applies the structure across all natural levels that is manifested differently depending on the level of complexity).⁵⁶⁵

Schelling does not deny that much of inorganic nature can be understood through mechanical principles, but he rejects that all of nature must be understood in that way. It would be outright absurd to deny that physicists are justified in looking for mechanical patterns through linear chains of cause and effect. However, the philosopher, Schelling thinks, must ask about the sources of these patterns and chains and how they relate to other parts of nature.

He highlights a set of problems with the universalist view of nature as a mechanistic or machine-like system. One problem is that it cannot account for the self-doubling of nature whereby nature becomes aware of itself through us. The mechanical assumption that everything is determined by external causes cannot account for the fact that some creatures in fact are independent of external things through their mere ability to theorize about them. As he writes in the *Ideas*:

[S]uppose I am myself a mere piece of mechanism. But what is caught up in mere mechanism cannot step out of the mechanism and ask: How has all this become possible? [...] That I am capable of posing this question is proof enough that I am, as such, independent of external things; for how otherwise could I have asked how these things themselves are possible for me, in my consciousness?⁵⁶⁶

A view of nature that cannot give an account for beings that think about nature is at the very least incomplete.

A second problem with the mechanistic view, which Schelling was not the only one to point out, is that its limitation of causation to efficient and external causation cannot account for the self-organized and purposeful character of organisms (I return to this), just like it has been shown that many chemical phenomena are inexplicable from the mechanist perspective.⁵⁶⁷ In short: Mechanical reductivism has a hard time explaining the apparent complexity of different levels of organization in nature.

A third problem is that the mechanical view presupposes what it is meant to prove or explain, namely the possibility as such of motion and matter, or of the relation of

writings, as he have seen, he refers to it as “dogmatism”. Other terms he uses are “crude [grobe] realism” (SW 1, 5, 196) or pure “empiricism” (SW I, 1, 419).

⁵⁶⁵ SW, I, 2, 96.

⁵⁶⁶ SW, 1, 2, 17-18.

⁵⁶⁷ SW, I, 2, 40.

cause and effect.⁵⁶⁸ Schelling believes that the fundamental problem to be asked is the source of the very existence of matter and its laws of motion.⁵⁶⁹

We can sum up Schelling's general worry about the mechanistic view as its reductive attempt to reduce higher levels in nature to lower levels, thereby neglecting the (relative) independence of higher levels. According to Schelling, as we shall see, nature exhibits a levelled structure of organization, where each level's individuals have specific features as well as features shared with individuals at other levels. Furthermore, the mechanical reductionist understands the world as build from blocks that can interfere with each other through laws of motion. This isolationist view loses sight of the interconnectedness of natural phenomena, for example how higher-level beings can affect lower-level beings. Reality is essentially *relational*, and the reductionist seems unable to account for that.⁵⁷⁰ All phenomena should be treated structurally, emphasizing relations instead of essences or substances. To understand a natural phenomenon, we cannot simply isolate and analyze its properties. According to Schelling, we must also analyze the whole context in which a particular phenomenon is immersed in order to give a complete account of it, just like the context is determined by the individuals.⁵⁷¹ Single products in nature can only be understood through its role in relation to other objects, processes and their development. Just think of waves in an ocean or a whirlpool. Something has the properties it has (partly) due to its relations with its environment; we cannot consider something independently of its context.

This amounts to Schelling's *Holist Thesis*: Nature is an interconnected and open system of unity and disunity (individuality).⁵⁷² The natural world contains a "universal interdependency",⁵⁷³ where the "whole", in contrast to the mechanical perspective, "precedes that of the parts".⁵⁷⁴ According to the mechanical view, the whole is nothing but the sum of the parts. On Schelling's view, each "individual is an expression of whole of nature" and rests on it being a "gradated series".⁵⁷⁵ As he writes in the *Ideas*: "Nature has admitted nothing, in her entire economy, which could exist on its own and independently of the interconnection of things".⁵⁷⁶

The natural world is not neatly divided in (completely) separate ontological domains, but an interconnected whole where all the domains cut across each other and make the whole function, like the organs in an organism. That is why Schelling often

⁵⁶⁸ SW, 1, 2, 40.

⁵⁶⁹ E.g., SW, 1, 2, 40-41, 205. See also *First Outline* (2004: 158), where he refers to this as the "highest problem". As Jähnig has argued, this resembles a shift in the development of modern chemistry and physics, which no longer mere ask about the compositions and structures of natural phenomena but asks how they have come to be (Jähnig 1989: 225).

⁵⁷⁰ See Steigerwald (2019: 282). This understanding of fundamental relationality is not foreign to contemporary science, e.g., fundamental physics. As Carlo Rovelli has put it, physics is "not about how individual entities are by themselves. It is about how entities manifest themselves to one another. It is about relations" (Rovelli 2021: 32).

⁵⁷¹ SW, I, 2, 54.

⁵⁷² SW, 1, 2, 64.

⁵⁷³ 2004: 226.

⁵⁷⁴ 1880: 147.

⁵⁷⁵ 2004: 228.

⁵⁷⁶ SW, 1, 2, 111 (1988: 87).

refers to the system of nature as “organic”. As he writes, nature is a system where all things “mutually bear and support each other”:

[F]or the very reason that Nature is a system, there must be a necessary connection, in some principle embracing the whole of Nature, for everything that happens or comes to pass in it. Insight into this internal necessity of all natural phenomena becomes, of course, still more complete, as soon as we reflect that there is no real system which is not, at the same time, an organic whole. For if, in an organic whole, all things mutually bear and support each other, then this organization must have existed as a whole previous to its parts; the whole could not have arisen from the parts, but the parts must have arisen out of the whole.⁵⁷⁷

Hence, individual beings can only arise as a result of, or are only intelligible in light of, their relations to the rest of nature. Nature consists of a common structure that manifests itself in different ways on different levels of nature. Or, to use Alexander von Humboldt’s Schelling-inspired term, nature is a “cosmos”, that is, a unified web of dynamic parts. Schelling thinks that this model, compared to Kant’s, can help guarantee that nature is not disjointed. He believes this unified picture of nature requires one or more common principles that cut across and is manifested differently in various modes across all the levels of nature, from the anorganic to the organic. As he writes in the *World Soul*, because the “world is an organization” and we have the “idea of nature as a whole”, we must seek a “common principle” that “fluctuates between inorganic and organic nature”. Or, as he writes in the Introduction to the *First Outline*: “The most universal problem of speculative physics may now be expressed thus: to reduce the construction of organic and inorganic products to a common expression”.⁵⁷⁸ What Schelling takes that common expression to be, we shall see in the next section.

4.3.2. Schelling’s Process Thesis

The “common principle” cutting across and unifying nature’s different levels is nature’s *processual, non-substantial character*.⁵⁷⁹ The world is, through and through, dynamic. The method behind Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* is to generalize certain features that we experience (e.g., in biological systems) in order to provide a structural account of the fundamental features of the natural world that strikes across different domains or levels in nature. The idea of nature as such as dynamic or processual is exactly the result of such a method of generalization.

The fundamental thesis is that the world is not made up of things or substances or particles or atoms but of processes. As Schelling writes in the *First Outline*, there is no “absolute resting” in nature:

⁵⁷⁷ 2004: 198.

⁵⁷⁸ 2004: 217.

⁵⁷⁹ For other intimations towards a process philosophical reading of Schelling, see Gare (2002, 2011), Högrefe (2006: 286), Vater (2015), Grant (2020), Corriero (2020), Höfele (2021).

Since Nature must in reality be thought as engaged in infinite evolution, the permanence, the resting of the products of Nature (the organic ones, for instance), is not to be viewed as an absolute resting, but only as an evolution proceeding with infinitely small rapidity or with infinite tardiness [...] The evolution of nature.⁵⁸⁰

First, it should be noted that “evolution” merely signifies “development” and not (necessarily at least) a preconception of Darwinian evolution.⁵⁸¹ Change and development is basic to the natural world. Among other things, Leibniz’ criticism of Descartes’ conception of material substance and his system of active “monads” manifesting themselves in different organizational shapes was undoubtedly an inspiration for Schelling’s view. Schelling’s view is without a doubt a forerunner for contemporary process ontologies,⁵⁸² whereby processes are more fundamental than things or substances. Or, and that would be the more modest claims, most elements of the world can be understood best in processual terms.

Schelling applies different terms for this universal, processual aspect. For example, in the *True Statement*, he says that the main difference between his *Naturphilosophie* and the mechanical view is that he “regards nature dynamically”, that he assumes a “dynamic living nature”.⁵⁸³ And in the *Freedom Essay*, he famously claims that the problem with Spinoza’s system is that he thinks about the world in terms of “things”, in the “abstract concept of beings in the world”, which means that his view is “entirely deterministic” and ends with a “mechanistic view of nature”.⁵⁸⁴ In the *Weltalter*-draft from 1815, he says that the “general state of nature” cannot be “stable or static but is rather only a state of eternal becoming, of continuing unfolding”.⁵⁸⁵ And in his short text *Vorrede zu einer philosophischen Schrift des Herrn Victor Cousin* (1834), he says that the “concept of process was the real progress of the new philosophy”.⁵⁸⁶

However, it is in the *First Outline* that we find the base for his process ontological view of nature. A famous distinction he draws there is two ways of conceiving nature, *natura naturata* (nature as product) and *natura naturans* (nature as productivity). As he writes:

As long as we only know the totality of objects as the sum total of all being, this totality is a mere *world*, that is, a mere product for us [...] Insofar as we regard the totality of objects not merely as a product, but at the same time necessarily as productive, it becomes *Nature* for us, and this *identity of the product and the productivity*, and this alone, is implied by the idea of Nature, even in the ordinary use of language. *Nature* as a mere *product* (*natura naturata*) we

⁵⁸⁰ 2004: 204.

⁵⁸¹ See Rajan (2017).

⁵⁸² E.g., Seibt (1990, 2000, 2016, 2017), Rescher (1996), Dupré & Nicholson (2018).

⁵⁸³ SW, 7, 103 (2018: 91).

⁵⁸⁴ SW, 1, 7, 349 (2006: 20).

⁵⁸⁵ 2000: 60.

⁵⁸⁶ SW, 1, 10, 221.

call Nature as *object* (with this alone all empiricism deals). *Nature as productivity* (*natura naturans*) we call *Nature as subject* (with this alone all theory deals).⁵⁸⁷

Nature is hence not the “sum total” of all its objects or products. It is not the composite of its parts or elements. Rather, nature is that which constitutes the parts. The individual domains of “products” are what the special sciences deal with. “Productivity” is the philosopher’s posited term that picks out what is present in all of the special domains and what is the condition of the product’s possibility.⁵⁸⁸ He describes this duality in a number of ways: activity/persistence, subjectivity/objectivity, the free/the fixed. To some extent, all natural phenomena are relatively stable or fixed in the sense that we can investigate their special properties (they are objective). Hence, Schelling is aligned with contemporary process philosophers in that he does not deny that there are somewhat stable and fixed aspects of reality. He is not denying that “things” exists or that conceptualizing aspects of the natural world as “things” cannot be illuminating. He is saying that “empiricism” deals with “its object in *being*”, whereas philosophy (“theory”) deals with “its object in *becoming*”.⁵⁸⁹

At the same time, all natural phenomena, so Schelling argues, exhibit a principle of productivity or activity (animals reproduce and build, chemicals react, plants photosynthesize, volcanos erupt etc.). Non-organic phenomena like rocks are also productive. However, in contrast to organisms, they are productive in the non-autonomous sense of being a part of a system of interconnected productivity.

Nothing in nature is either pure product or pure productivity; all phenomena exhibit both characteristics. Hence, Schelling thinks, an inherent opposition is present in nature. As he writes: “*In Nature, neither pure productivity nor pure product can ever exist*”.⁵⁹⁰ This means that “productivity” should not be understood as a totally unobservable (e.g., vitalist) posit. Productivity must be determinate, that is, manifest itself in a specific natural product. Because nature is a universal oscillation between products and productivity, nature is in a constant state of becoming and development. The aspects of persistence, the products, are nothing but a regular occurrence or behavior of the constant interaction of processes. This is the principle of what Whitehead would later call “actual occasion”.

Later in the *First Outline* he will say that “everything in Nature [...] is conceived continually *in becoming*”;⁵⁹¹ that we must attend to the “dynamic organization of the whole universe” and the “dynamical process of nature”; that nature keeps transforming itself like an “ever-changing Proteus”;⁵⁹² that nature “as a whole must be conceived in constant formation and everything must engage in that universal process of formation”;⁵⁹³ that no “*material in Nature is primitive*”;⁵⁹⁴ that no “substance is

⁵⁸⁷ 2004: 202.

⁵⁸⁸ See Fisher (2020).

⁵⁸⁹ 2004: 201.

⁵⁹⁰ 2004: 213.

⁵⁹¹ 2004: 28.

⁵⁹² 2004: 113.

⁵⁹³ 2004: 28.

⁵⁹⁴ 2004: 28.

primitive”;⁵⁹⁵ that no “*material in nature is simple*”;⁵⁹⁶ that every apparent static substance is “the *residuum* of the universal process of formation”;⁵⁹⁷ that if anything is simple, it is “actants” (hence why he calls it “dynamical atomism”⁵⁹⁸); that natural phenomena are gripped in “*infinite metamorphosis*”;⁵⁹⁹ we must “*deny all permanence in Nature*”.⁶⁰⁰ As an illustration of this, he gives the example of a whirlpool (other examples could be laser beams or tornadoes):

[A] stream flows in a straight line forward as long as it encounters no resistance. Where there is resistance – a whirlpool forms. Every original product of nature is such a whirlpool, every organism. The whirlpool is not something immobilized, it is rather something constantly transforming – but reproduced anew at each moment. Thus no product in nature is *fixed*, but it is reproduced at each instant through the force of nature entire.⁶⁰¹

Natural beings are not static substances, but processes that are restricted to a specific domain of activity. The whirlpool exemplifies that each natural product is inherently active, dynamic and has a constant potential for development and change. As two contemporary process biologists have put it: “What we identify as things are no more than transient patterns of stability in the surrounding flux, temporary eddies in the continuous flow of process”.⁶⁰²

With the idea of nature as fundamentally dynamic and processual, Schelling attempts to decipher the inner motor of nature’s development and point to a trait that applies, in different ways, all the way from nature’s lower levels (like matter) to higher-level (like human freedom). We must, in other words, start to think nature and its specific manifestations in its historical, developmental aspect. Schelling is less interested in what things *are* than in what they *do* and how they *come about*. To think of reality only in terms of “things” or “substances” is what Johanna Seibt has called the “myth of substance”.⁶⁰³

On Schelling’s dynamic model, this processual character only makes sense if we assume a basic opposition of forces in nature.⁶⁰⁴ For there to be semi-permanent products to investigate in the special sciences, there must be something that limits or inhibits the basic productivity of nature, otherwise it would dissipate at infinite speed.⁶⁰⁵ The productive force is centrifugal (expansive), the other is centripetal (contractive). As the example with the whirlpool illustrates, a river only form eddies if it meets resistance in its flow. In other words: Schelling’s process philosophy of nature

⁵⁹⁵ 2004: 29.

⁵⁹⁶ 2004: 29.

⁵⁹⁷ 2004: 31.

⁵⁹⁸ 2004: 208.

⁵⁹⁹ 2004: 213.

⁶⁰⁰ 2004: 17.

⁶⁰¹ 2004: 18.

⁶⁰² Dupré & Nicholson (2018: 13).

⁶⁰³ Seibt (1996).

⁶⁰⁴ Schelling models this on Kant’s understanding of attractive and repulsive forces in his *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaften*. See Nassar (2021), Garcia (2022).

⁶⁰⁵ 2004: 18-19.

is energeticist. A basic principle of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is therefore polarity or "universal duplicity".⁶⁰⁶ Inspired by the scientific studies at his time of electricity, magnetism, and gravity, Schelling claims that natural phenomena and their development are constituted by the interplay of opposing forces that cannot be conceived in isolation from each other. For example, he claims in the *World Soul* that the "organizing principle" of nature can be traced back to a positive and negative force,⁶⁰⁷ which is also referred to as "the first principle of a philosophical doctrine of nature";⁶⁰⁸ the "polarity of a universal world-law".⁶⁰⁹ Or, as he writes in the *First Outline*, the "condition of the inorganic (as well as of the organic) product, is duality".⁶¹⁰ This model, related to the idea of causation within electromagnetism, substitutes the mechanical concept of causation of efficient or linear cause-and-effect-relations with one of reciprocal action (*Wechselwirkung*) between powers or forces (*Kräfte*); opposed powers as well as their dynamic interaction are fundamental aspects of nature.⁶¹¹ This results in a system of nature that is not causally *chained* but *webbed*.

This principle of duplicity and process creates, as we shall see later, the development of more and more complex and gradated stages or levels in nature. The levels of nature thereby form a hierarchy of processes that are maintained and stabilized through forces of opposition at different stages in the history and organization of nature. Nature can thus be understood as the interaction of physical, organic, social, and human cognitive processes across different levels of dynamic levels of organization. Whereas a substance ontology will have a hard time avoiding reductionism of some sort – we can infer properties of things at one level to things at another (e.g., from particles to molecules to organisms) – Schelling's process ontology does not view the world as a hierarchy of things, but as a dynamic hierarchy of processes that does not work with a fixed set of boundaries and properties. Instead, there is a constant stream of development in the natural world which entails that things are not fixed as a certain thing at any level (the most extreme form of this unfixed nature is visible in the freedom of human beings, as we shall see in Chapter 5). Combined with the holistic assumption that the whole is more than the sum of the parts and the relational assumption that each process is influenced by and influences their environment – which creates a complex set of interchanging causalities and dependencies across lower and higher levels – reductionism begins to make less sense.

4.3.3. Schelling's Teleological Thesis

The concept of an *organism* plays an indispensable role for Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* that, similar to that of process, cuts across different levels of nature as a general

⁶⁰⁶ 2004: 89.

⁶⁰⁷ SW, I, 2, 381.

⁶⁰⁸ SW, I, 2, 459.

⁶⁰⁹ SW, I, 2, 489. Later, in the *Weltalter*, he will refer to this polarity as "systole and diastole" (2000: 90).

⁶¹⁰ 2004: 231.

⁶¹¹ For a systematic exposition of Schelling's concept of powers that also relates it to contemporary power ontologies, see Alderwick (2021).

structure-concept. In the organism, he writes in the *First Outline*, everything is “reciprocal”,⁶¹² and everything is “cause and effect”.⁶¹³ Already in his *Treatise Explicatory*, he proposes a conception of an organism that stays with him the following years: “Each organism constitutes a *unified world*”.⁶¹⁴

Schelling agrees with materialism to the degree that everything in nature must be explainable from natural laws. It is, as he says in the *World Soul*, an “old illusion that organization and life cannot be explained from natural principles”.⁶¹⁵ But he also agrees with the dualist who says that many features of the world (e.g., living systems and human mindedness) cannot be explained from a mechanically reductive point of view. The underlying idea of Schelling’s theory of the organism – both as a specific concept applying to certain beings at a particular structural level in nature and as a generic concept striking across different domains – is to avoid the horns of the dilemma of materialism and dualism.

Let us first look at Schelling’s understanding of concrete, living organism (fungi, plants, animals etc.), which contains a micro-version of his macro-theory of the relation of mind and nature: The naturalness *and* irreducibility of mindedness. Around the 18th century, processes like organic growth, reproduction, and self-maintenance in the biological world had a problematic status. Why do some parts of nature exhibit features that do not fit with our paradigm of (modern) scientific explanation through mechanics and linear cause-and-effect relations? How does a tree, as Kant writes in §64 in the *Critique of Judgement*, aid in generating other trees, and thereby aid in species reproduction? How do the single parts of a tree (stem, leaves etc.) preserve and interact with each other mutually?

Schelling’s aim was first and foremost to show that Kant’s conception of teleology – i.e., of purposeful and self-organizing agents being able themselves to be cause and effect of their actions – as a *sui generis* concept is not merely a subjectively valid or regulative principle but can be rendered as an objective, constitutive principle that describes an intrinsic feature of the natural world. According to Kant, teleology is something we must necessarily suppose in our philosophical and natural scientific understandings of the world in order to 1) have a grasp of the unity or totality of the natural world as a system, and 2) of specific (living) systems inhabiting that world. However, although we have to assume it, the concept of teleology has no real explanatory power; it is merely a heuristic guide for our cognitively limited (discursive) minds.⁶¹⁶

Although Kant hinted towards a “daring adventure of reason” in the third *Critique* that would envision the evolutionary origin of teleological agency and the transformation of organisms through a naturalist point of view, he quickly banished this idea due to lack of evidence and cognitive accessibility. This is exactly the adventure Schelling began with his *Naturphilosophie*. First of all, he believed that

⁶¹² 2004: 52.

⁶¹³ 2004: 52, 56.

⁶¹⁴ SW, 1, 1, 387 (1994a: 93).

⁶¹⁵ SW, 1, 2, 348.

⁶¹⁶ See Allison (1992), Ginsborg (2001), Breitenbach (2006).

Kant's "solution" contradicts a fundamental aspect of our reason: to obtain a unified picture of the world that can integrate the world's different kinds of manifestations without inferring any strong disunities and discontinuities. As he already writes in his short text "Is a Philosophy of History Possible?" (1798), we are

driven to this conclusion by, on the one hand, the interest of reason, which demands the greatest unity in the greatest manifoldness, and, on the other, the observation of common properties among various creatures belonging to different types.⁶¹⁷

Schelling believes that Kant's model contradicts our basic epistemic attitude towards living organisms: We can only know or understand them insofar as we do not see them as mechanical objects, but as something that is self-active by sustaining and reproducing itself in constant feedback with its environment. From an explanatory point of view, it would be absurd, Schelling thinks, to assume a disunity in nature in the sense of 1) nature has created observers of nature that in principle cannot know about nature's inner workings, and in the sense that 2) everything is, at bottom, mechanical, but there are just some things that we cannot, due to our cognitive limitations, explain in that way. In that sense, Schelling can be said to be more of an idealist than Kant, an objective or absolute idealist, if we take that to mean that there is nothing that we in principle cannot comprehend or understand, there is nothing that is completely inexplicable and meaningless.⁶¹⁸

Neither does Schelling accept reductive materialism or vitalism. Whereas reductive materialism attempts to reduce organic phenomena to the inorganic, the vitalist posits immaterial entities or forces that evade naturalist explanation. Rather, an organism must be understood in terms of its specific type of organization (at this particular level in nature) regarding its dynamic and active coordination of its organs.

In the *First Outline*, Schelling attempts to formulate a middle ground between the *reductive materialist* and the *vitalist*: "[T]hey are *both* true at once, or rather the true system is a third derived from both".⁶¹⁹ In that sense, Schelling's strategy is strikingly similar to the organicist movement (Whitehead, among others) in the early 20th century who rejected 1) mechanists who held that biological processes are "nothing over and above" their physical and chemical elements and are fundamentally machine-like,⁶²⁰ and 2) neovitalists such as Henri Bergson who assumed non-material forces to explain biological phenomena. Like Schelling, Whitehead and the other organicists sought a middle ground.⁶²¹

What does Schelling's middle ground look like? In the *First Outline*, those two positions are described as "physiological materialism" and "physiological immaterialism".⁶²² The principle of physiological materialism is that every organism is

⁶¹⁷ 2021: 188.

⁶¹⁸ Hogrebe (2006: 317).

⁶¹⁹ 2004: 62.

⁶²⁰ Loeb (1912).

⁶²¹ See Nicholson and Gawne (2015).

⁶²² We find a similar framing and criticism in the *World Soul*.

“*determined through its receptivity*”, which means that organic activity is “through and through dependent upon the influence of external (material) causes”, and every organism therefore acts “completely and entirely according to laws of matter”, i.e., “chemical laws of matter”, hence life is a “chemical process”.⁶²³ The reductive materialist might claim that the complexity of organisms is higher than that of chemical substances, but they are still exhaustively explicable through the laws and principles of inorganic matter.⁶²⁴ The current version of what Schelling depicts here would be the tendency among biologists and philosophers to understand (organic) teleology exclusively as a biological function determined by a history of (mechanical) natural selection.

The principle of “physiological immaterialism” is that the “*receptivity of the organism is conditioned through its activity*”.⁶²⁵ Since such an activity cannot be reduced to a material one, but must be based in an “*immaterial*” principle, which is rightly called *vital force*.⁶²⁶ The vitalist proceeds from the assumption that there is something special about organisms compared to the rest of nature and therefrom jumps to the conclusion that an immaterial principle that cannot be explained through laws of nature must operate in organisms.

Schelling’s solution is to say that organisms are indeed special processes or entities in the natural world, which necessitates distinct conceptual frameworks compared to the studies of inorganic matter. But we do not need to postulate supernatural principles to account for that. What we need is a framework of continuity and pluralism that does not make the emergence of the organic realm from the inorganic realm into a complete mystery (continuity) while at the same time guaranteeing a distinct and exclusive vocabulary for talking about the organic realm compared to other sciences.⁶²⁷

Schelling’s way of framing the pluralist and distinctness aspect is to highlight how organisms interact with their environment through a constant and dynamic process of activity and receptivity. Inspired by the studies of life at his time, Schelling suggests that organic beings are defined, to different degrees, by different but related activities or abilities whereby an organism can interact with its environment: 1) sensibility (and excitability), whereby the organism can sense its environment, 2) irritability, whereby an organism can receive and respond to external stimuli from its environment, and 3) the formative drive, whereby the organism can reproduce and

⁶²³ 2004: 57.

⁶²⁴ Johann Christian Reil and Christoph Girtanner are two materialists that Schelling often refers to. Especially Reil’s *Von der Lebenskraft* (1795).

⁶²⁵ 2004: 60. This was for example promoted in Joachim Brandis’ *Versuch über die Lebenskraft* (1795).

⁶²⁶ 2004: 61.

⁶²⁷ In that sense, Kabeshkin (2017) is right to point out the similarities between Schelling’s framework and the pluralist framework of John Dupré. This type of pluralism becomes very visible in Schelling’s *Lectures on the Method of Academic Study*. As he says in his lecture on “Medicine and Organic Nature”, we cannot explain life “by merely carrying over and applying one branch of natural science to another. Each is absolute in itself, no one is deducible from another, and all can be truly one only when in each for itself the particular is comprehended in the general and from an absolute conformity to law” (1881: 2).

maintain itself. As we shall see later, Schelling constructs a gradation or conception of ascent from one life form to another based on different and changing proportions of these primary activities or abilities inherent in organic beings.

Thereby, Schelling integrates what he finds valuable from the materialist point of view (that organisms are dependent upon the influence of external, material causes) and the vitalist point of view (that organisms are self-determining). This is why he highlights that the type of freedom exercised by non-human organisms is one of unconscious lawful productivity or activity. In the *World Soul*, he writes that nature is free *and* necessary in the organism.⁶²⁸ According to Schelling, biological processes such as organic growth and self-maintenance can only be achieved through the organism's opposition to and struggle against an external, material world. The organism distinguishes between an inner and an outer world (hence, the organism is the first step out of the philosophical "state of nature" towards the "first philosopher" described in the Introduction to the *Ideas*). As he says in the *First Outline*: "[E]very organization only is an organization insofar as it is turned toward two worlds at once. Every organization is a *dyad*".⁶²⁹

In comparison, dead "matter has no external world – it is absolute identical and homogeneous with the whole whose part it is".⁶³⁰ As he writes in the *World Soul*, the real "essence of life" is the "free play of forces, which is continuously maintained through some external influence".⁶³¹ Schelling believes that this distinct kind of free play, these "multiple causes working together",⁶³² results from the special type of organization that is visible in different depending on the type of organism, namely the proportion or interaction between many different organs within one and the same system (the leaves and the stem are necessary functions of the tree as a unified organism) and the organism's ability to distinguish between inner and outer worlds. The organism self-encloses, it separates itself from its outside. However, without any dynamic interaction with its environment, an organism would not be able to maintain and reproduce itself. The organism exists in virtue of this polar way of being: "It indeed sounds paradoxical, but is no less true, that through the influences which are contrary to life, life is sustained".⁶³³

Schelling's conclusion is that the key features of an organism are the following:

1) the idea of an interconnection between the whole and the parts, thereby pointing towards contemporary accounts of living systems as self-organizing where each function of the system contributes to its own and the system's maintenance, e.g., the heart's function of pumping blood maintains the body and the heart,⁶³⁴ and

⁶²⁸ SW, 1, 2, 527.

⁶²⁹ 2004: 108.

⁶³⁰ 2004: 112.

⁶³¹ SW, 1, 2, 566.

⁶³² SW, 1, 2, 566.

⁶³³ 2004: 62.

⁶³⁴ Maturana & Varela (1980), Schlosser (1998), McLaughlin (2001), and Moreno & Mossio (2015).

2) the distinction between inner and outer, or the autonomous and the heterogenous: the “simultaneity of activity and receptivity constitutes life”.⁶³⁵ This includes that organisms have a fundamental openness towards their environment. In the words of contemporary biologists that mirror Schelling’s, organic agency is the “capacity of an organism to bias its repertoire in response to what its conditions afford for attaining its goals”.⁶³⁶

Those two features are not sensible from within lower level, inorganic sciences, hence there must be an independent science for the study of life (which wasn’t the case at Schelling’s time).⁶³⁷ Schelling’s way of summing up these two features is to say that in the organism everything is “reciprocal”, and that each organism “constitutes a unified world”. It is important to note that when Schelling describes nature as such as “organic”, for example in the *World Soul*, it is in the first sense of a whole-part-interaction, not in the second sense of interweaving between autonomy and an environment, since nature as such does not have an “outside”. Schelling does not claim that *nature as such* is a uniform, teleological agent.⁶³⁸

Although contemporary biology for a long time has focused on evolution and genes, there has been a recent revival of discussions of organic agency and living organization among philosophers of science and biologists, especially in the context of systems biology and ecology, that are attuned to Schelling’s understanding of organisms.⁶³⁹ But we already saw it earlier, in the 1970’s and 80’s, in terms of theories of autopoiesis, complexity and self-organization that determine purposeful systems as systems that are able to organize and maintain themselves in different ways (depending on their complexity levels) under certain conditions and in the face of external perturbations.

Like Schelling, many of these approaches proceed from the idea that to account for autonomy within nature, we must posit abstract or non-material principles of organization from which we can derive the autonomous behaviors that characterize organisms; that organisms are holistic systems, and that these holistic systems themselves interact within other holistic systems; that understanding organisms’ interconnectedness and relations with their environment is necessary to understand their properties and development; that organisms are both autonomous and heterogenous systems; that the relation between the organism and the environment is always precarious. As the systems biologist Koutroufinis has put it about the structure of autopoiesis, organic selves make themselves an “important distinction which constitutes the organism – it determines its own boundaries which necessarily defines its own physical surroundings or non-self”.⁶⁴⁰ Like Schelling says about dead matter, this

⁶³⁵ 2004: 65.

⁶³⁶ Fulda (2017). See also Walsh (2015).

⁶³⁷ See Kabeshin (2017).

⁶³⁸ Schwenzfeuer (2012a: 104) points out that it is therefore wrong to refer to Schelling’s conception of nature as a living organism. However, it is only partly wrong considering the two basic traits Schelling ascribes to an organism.

⁶³⁹ See Heuser-Keßler (1986), Michelini (2020), and Gambarotto & Nahas (2023).

⁶⁴⁰ Koutroufinis (2014: 9).

type of boundary determination between a self and a non-self is inconceivable from the mechanical materialist perspective. Life comes “into existence”, as he writes, by “a tearing-away from” its external nature. As he biologist Sonya Sultan has phrased it, the “environment extends into the organism, and the organism into its environment, in ways that obscure the boundary between them and lead to biologically intimate, causally multidirectional interactions”.⁶⁴¹ Hence, with Schelling we can say that what is special about the organic world is individualization or autonomy.

The idea of an *Umwelt* as fundamental to an organism was also elaborated by the German philosopher Hans Jonas. In *The Phenomenon of Life*, he argued that in order to understand the individuality of biological organisms and how they are not assimilated by other systems, they must be understood as (partly) self-determining. As Schelling says: “In order that it not *be* assimilated, it must *assimilate*; in order that it not *be* organized, it must *organize*”.⁶⁴² Organic systems exhibit, as both Jonas, Schelling, and the advocates of autopoiesis would say, a certain degree of freedom or autonomy, an “inner *principle of movement*”,⁶⁴³ but a freedom of a restricted kind. They are living agents capable of performing a certain level of control over themselves as a whole and their external environments and other agents.

4.3.4. Schelling’s Continuity Thesis

How do we explain how the kind of organization and autonomy exhibited by organisms can co-exist with or emerge from a world of inorganic matter? In *On the Relation of the Ideal and the Real in Nature*, he opens the text by saying that the “most obscure thing, yes, obscurity itself according to some, is matter”, and it is “precisely this unknown root out of which arises all the forms and living appearances of nature. Without knowledge of it, physics is without a scientific basis”.⁶⁴⁴

Schelling proposes that we must posit a structural isomorphism or continuity across levels in nature, which entails what we can call Schelling’s *Continuity or Gradualism Thesis*. In the “idea of becoming, we think the idea of gradualness”.⁶⁴⁵ This amounts to the claim that natural processes evolve through certain degrees of complexity and strength.⁶⁴⁶ As he writes in the Introduction to the *First Outline*, to construct “a dynamically graduated scale in Nature” is the “real subject of the fundamental problem of the whole system”.⁶⁴⁷ He does not only think that we must think of a “natural life” as a “series of stages to the mental”,⁶⁴⁸ as he writes in the *Weltalter*, but also a gradation of organization from the inorganic to the organic: “Just as there

⁶⁴¹ Sultan (2015: 215). See also Sultan et al. (2021).

⁶⁴² 2004: 54

⁶⁴³ SW, 1, 1, 388 (1994a: 93).

⁶⁴⁴ SW, 1, 2, 359 (2021: 59).

⁶⁴⁵ 2004: 204, 141.

⁶⁴⁶ Gloy (2012).

⁶⁴⁷ 2004: 2015.

⁶⁴⁸ SW 1, 8, 260. Elsewhere, he writes that “natural life is the echelon toward spiritual life” (2000: 43).

exists a gradated chain of organization, there also exists a gradated chain of life”.⁶⁴⁹ In nature, there is no strong distinction of *kind*, only *degree*.

This sequence or gradation of different forms of complexity starts from the most simple form, namely matter, proceeds to minerals, plants, and animals in the organic realm, and “concludes” in the, as far as we know, most complex form of life, namely the human life form (and, for Schelling, its “peak”: the transcendental philosopher and the artistic genius).

Schelling’s approach to the question of continuity and discontinuity in nature resembles Thomas Nagel’s. In his *Mind and Cosmos* (2012), talking about the possibility of the emergence human organisms, he writes:

It is trivially true that if there are organisms capable of reason, the possibility of such organisms must have been there from the beginning. But if we believe in a natural order, then something about the world that eventually gave rise to rational beings must explain this possibility. Moreover, to explain not merely the possibility but the actuality of rational beings, the world must have properties that make their appearance not a complete accident: in some way the likelihood must have been latent in the nature of things.⁶⁵⁰

Schelling agrees with Nagel that we cannot understand nature as a coherent system if the existence of organisms is explained in terms of strong (inexplicable) emergence. Rather, there must be a continuity of differentiation in nature, whereby the advent of organisms and human agency does not turn into a complete mystery in relation to the rest of nature’s composition. In the *Ideas*, he writes that

nothing which *comes to be* in Nature *comes to be* by a leap [Sprung]; all *becoming* occurs in a continuous sequence [stetigen Folge]. But it by no means follows from this that everything which exists is for that reason continuously connected – that there should also be no leap between what *exists*. From everything that is, therefore, nothing has *become* without steady progression, a steady transition from one state to another. But now, since it *is*, it stands between its own boundaries as a thing of a particular kind, which distinguishes itself from other by sharp determinations.⁶⁵¹

Although nature is divided in different levels of organization and existence – which are the units that “cut nature at its joints”⁶⁵² – the coming into being of these different levels must take place on a continuum if we want to guarantee a fundamental

⁶⁴⁹ SW, 1, 1, 388. Gabriel has suggested the following reading: “If it were to be rewritten under contemporary conditions, it would contain a history of the universe from the Big Bang to merely geological times, to the emergence of complicated chemistry and the emergence of life, to the evolution of creatures sufficiently sophisticated to be aware of how their awareness fits into nature” (Gabriel 2015: 95).

⁶⁵⁰ Nagel (2012: 86). Isabelle Stengers understands the requirement for a sufficient materialism or naturalism in the same way, namely that it demands “that we understand nature in such a way that there would be no absurdity in affirming that it produced us” (2011: 368).

⁶⁵¹ SW, 1, 2, 171.

⁶⁵² Wimsatt (1976: 237).

unity or monism about the natural world and its laws and components; organisms can't be in absolute distinction from the rest of nature. Schelling's underlying motivation of this idea, against strong emergence, is the *principle of sufficient reason* (or *ex nihilo nihil fit*): There are no brute facts, everything has a reason or ground for its existence. Since organisms, we can assume, are not *other-worldly* but composed of the same forces and elements as the rest of the universe, this has radical and extensive consequences for how we think of the natural order as such.

Whether this has certain panpsychist or neutral monist implications, will be unfolded in more detail in Chapter 6. For now, what we shall focus on is that Schelling believes this continuity criteria to entail that we need to account for inorganic matter in terms that do not make organic beings completely impossible or mysterious; how we can avoid positing an explicable "leap" in nature to account for living agency; how life comes to be in a "continuous sequence" in relation to what precedes it; and how we can understand this continuity without reducing everything to the same, as Schelling proposes in the citation above by saying that there can be no "leaps" in the becoming of natural beings, but that there *can* be "leaps" (or qualitative differences) between the various levels of nature (what "exists" with its "own boundaries"). This means that the *Naturphilosophie* should explicate how the anorganic is active and structured in such a way as to raise itself immanently to higher degrees of organization and activity (in biological and anthropological life-forms) without reducing the latter to the former.

In the Introduction to the *First Outline*, this is what Schelling hints at by referring to nature's "unconscious productivity".⁶⁵³ Schelling believes that all physical systems (including inorganic ones) must be considered to have the ability to organize and potentially self-organize, although inorganic systems are what we could call *epistemically blind*. They contain what we can call concept or structure plans; they are structured by principles that cannot be reduced to those material manifestations that can be explored mechanically. As he writes in the *Ideas*, every organization is "grounded in a concept".⁶⁵⁴ Also inorganic nature is structured according to certain basic, dynamic relations that cut across different levels of nature. In the *Stuttgart-Lectures* he describes this view as a "higher materialism", which he compares with but distinguishes from "hylozoism":

Thus it would be easy to consider Hylozoism entirely identical with the philosophy of nature. However, the difference consists in the fact that Hylozoism postulates a *primordial* life in matter, whereas we do not. By contrast, we claim that matter contains life not *in actu* but only *in potentia*, not explicitly but implicitly.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵³ 2004: 194.

⁶⁵⁴ SW, I, 2, 41.

⁶⁵⁵ SW, 1, 7, 444 (1994b: 215). In his *1804 System*, he likewise writes that inorganic nature is "potentially organic" (SW, 1, 6, 380).

Even in other passages where he describes inorganic matter as living or exhibiting minded structures, Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* does not consist of the claim that matter is minded, intentional, or living in any regular sense of those terms. But he thinks that we must assume that matter (blindly or unconsciously) organizes itself in a series of wholes or systems (e.g., planetary systems, mechanical unities, chemical relations between things and, "finally", organisms). We cannot in any regular sense of the term say that purely inorganic systems are self-organizing in a willing or purposeful way; that they are aware of the activity. As he says in the cited passage, it only contains life as a potentiality or implicitly, which is, he believes, a necessary assumption in order not to make organic (including human) life separate from nature and thereby mysterious.

Early on, already in his *Ideas*, he claims that we must understand inorganic nature as not merely subject to mechanical laws, but also as "organized" in order to account for the possibility of the self-organized character of organic nature.⁶⁵⁶ This claim supersedes Kant, who made a strong distinction between organized (plants and animals) and non-organized beings (sand, rocks, crystals etc.).⁶⁵⁷ In what way can we say that inorganic nature is "organized"? As Nassar has suggested, Schelling argues that they "exhibit a coherent structure of internal differentiation". This means that – in a completely different mode than organisms – inorganic nature consists of parts or powers that are differentiated and oppose each other, and this feature guarantees its "continued subsistence". Nature's subsistence and development is thus upheld by creative and opposing energies. On Schelling's dynamical model of matter (inorganic nature), matter must be understood through a basic opposition or polarity of forces. Inspired by the scientific studies at his time of electricity, magnetism, and gravity, Schelling claims that also inorganic nature and its development is constituted by the interplay of opposing forces that cannot be conceived in isolation from each other. For example, he claims in the *World Soul* that the "organizing principle" of nature can be traced back to a positive and negative force,⁶⁵⁸ which is also referred to as "the first principle of a philosophical doctrine of nature";⁶⁵⁹ the "polarity of a universal world-law".⁶⁶⁰ This model, related to the idea of causation within electromagnetism, substitutes the mechanical concept of causation of efficient or linear cause-and-effect-relations with one of reciprocal action (*Wechselwirkung*) between powers or forces (*Kräfte*); opposed powers as well as their dynamic interaction are fundamental aspects of nature, and therefore nature is fundamentally organized and dynamic.

This opposition of forces is what makes the different parts work together and develop and maintain the whole. As Nassar writes:

⁶⁵⁶ SW, 1, 2, 46.

⁶⁵⁷ See Nassar (2021) and Schülein (2022).

⁶⁵⁸ SW 1, 2, 381.

⁶⁵⁹ SW 1, 2, 459.

⁶⁶⁰ SW, 1, 2, 489.

Ultimately what this shows is that matter is inseparable from its forces in much the same way that a living human body is inseparable from its vital organs. The forces, in turn, are again like the parts of a living body: they cannot exist or function outside of the whole. Matter is therefore a whole which can exist only through its parts, and whose parts, in turn, only exist in and through the whole and their relation to one another.⁶⁶¹

Schelling's conclusion from this is that organic and inorganic nature is not differentiated because the one is organized and the other purely mechanical. Rather, they differentiate in the way they are organized. Hence, we can say that not only organisms but also their (external, material) environments are organized. This does not entail that the higher-levels (e.g., organisms) can be reduced in any meaningful sense to the lower levels (e.g., neuro-chemistry); what it means is that less organized or complex levels like chemical systems that arise from the dynamic interactions of forces and matter are organized in a way that contains structural seeds for the kind of self-organization that has later arisen in organisms. As Schelling says in the *Universal Deduction*, his *Naturphilosophie* investigates "the *universal* principles of all natural production".⁶⁶²

Beginning from the *First Outline* and its Introduction, Schelling uses the technical concept "potency [Potenz]" – borrowed from mathematics⁶⁶³ – to describe the differences between levels of organization. The word potency is in a sense domain or level neutral and can be rendered as structure plans. Potencies are, as Whistler & Berger have highlighted, signified by being abstract (abstracted from particular things), universal (they apply to all nature), holistically relational (potencies are connected to each other across levels), and differentiating (each potency has different characteristics).⁶⁶⁴ Thus, Schelling will for example say that irritability is the higher "potency" of magnetism. Each level is characterized not so much by it being a certain type of "thing" or "substance", but instead of being certain type of potency that in its becoming has integrated certain elements from the previous potency in a new context but still exhibits the same fundamental polarity between forces. A higher level is thus more "potent", has more power, than the lower levels, but it depends on, or is grounded in, the lower potencies (no matter, no organic life, etc.). Hence, Schelling tries to conceptualize a relation of grounding or entailment on the one hand and difference and independence on the other. This applies, for Schelling, on a general and more specific level. For example, the level or realm of human mindedness (*Geist*) is a higher potency than the realm of (non-human) "nature". However, more specifically, there are different levels within both nature and the human realm with different determinations. In the realm of nature, he will distinguish between the potencies of gravity, light, and organic life (which are themselves divided in different potencies). In the realm of human mindedness, he will, somewhat arbitrarily,

⁶⁶¹ Nassar (2021: 230).

⁶⁶² SW, 1, 4, 4.

⁶⁶³ For a thorough account of Schelling's adoption and development of his use of the term, see Whistler & Berger (2020: 94-116). See also Gerlach (2020) for a historical study.

⁶⁶⁴ Whistler & Berger (2020: 108-109).

distinguish between cognition, action (the social), and art (with the same recursive structure as in non-human nature).

In the *First Outline*, Schelling attempts to organize his account of inorganic and organic processes on the basis of a “general schematic” of the sequence of stages.⁶⁶⁵ Although the specific scientific content is the result of the scientific state around 1800, Schelling attempts to structure this schema according to the commonalities between organic processes (formative drive, irritability, sensibility) and inorganic processes (chemical process, electrical process, magnetism).⁶⁶⁶ The general concept or schema, which Schelling takes to be the dynamic concept of polarity, is instantiated at each sequence from basic polarity from magnetism to the complex manifestations in the organic world (e.g., the biological sexes). Schelling believes that we can construct nature as such as a series of concrete manifestations of more and more complex and organized unities of polarities.

In that sense, Schelling’s fundamental aim is similar to that of General Systems Theory that developed during the 20th century: to delineate structural isomorphisms between different ontological and scientific domains based on sets of generic properties while emphasizing the independence and hierarchy between the domains. This is why Schelling, for example in the *First Outline*, describes a set of structural analogies between organic and inorganic nature, for example between light and the formative drive, which are both the result of opposing and dynamic forces of nature but on different levels of organization.

4.3.4.1. Degrees of agency

Natural life is a “series of stages to the mental”,⁶⁶⁷ as Schelling writes in the *Weltalter*. The continuity or gradualness in nature does not merely structure the transformation from inorganic to the organic, but also from the organic to human life in all its different aspects. As he writes in his *1804 System*, both “Geist” and “Gemüth” have their “root in nature”.⁶⁶⁸ He continues by saying that the “human being from the beginning of its emergence is first a polyp”.⁶⁶⁹ The structure of human mindedness and agency, although more complex and hence exhibiting distinct features and capabilities, is isomorph to (or a more complex realization of) the structures of non-human organic life – an idea that has persisted and developed in the 19th and 20th century with thinkers like Pierce, Whitehead, Plessner, Merleau-Ponty, and Hans Jonas.

We can call this Schelling’s *anti-exceptionalist thesis*: Human beings have *come to be* via nature’s dynamical spectrum like everything else. Although human’s do have distinct ways of being (as we shall see in Chapter 5), these ways do not set them apart from nature. This bottom up-model that seeks to give a genetic story of (human) subjectivity is distinct from both reductive naturalism (right-wing Sellarsianism),

⁶⁶⁵ 2004: 9.

⁶⁶⁶ 2004: 9.

⁶⁶⁷ SW 1, 8, 260.

⁶⁶⁸ SW, 1, 6, 470.

⁶⁶⁹ SW, 1, 6, 417. See also *First Outline* (2004: 43).

that takes human agency as reducible to mechanistic explanations (such as natural selection), and quietist naturalism (left-wing Sellarsianism), that bifurcates human agency (*Geist*) from the rest of the natural world and declines the meaningfulness of what Kant called the “daring adventure of reason”: To propose a (“re-enchanted”) conception of nature at large that can account for the unity of different types of natural beings. The Schellingian model can thus be said to consist in a recalibration of the scientific image by allowing for it to contain the seeds of human agency, in particular through the idea of non-human organisms as intrinsically autonomous and purposeful agents. Schelling articulates a continuity but not identity between life and human mindedness and agency.

As we saw in the previous section, organisms exhibit a higher form of complexity and (self)organization compared to inorganic processes in that they have, or create, an inner and outer world. Thereby, Schelling believes that organisms have a certain openness towards their environments, a restricted kind of freedom through their teleological behavior. The sequence of stages in the biological world is a sequence of stages of different types and more complex forms autonomy, all the way from the lowest types of organisms to the human organism and its mental capacities. We are dealing with a “gradated chain of life”.⁶⁷⁰ Or, as he writes in the *Weltalter*, “natural life is the echelon toward the spiritual life”.⁶⁷¹

Although Schelling takes a set of concepts as coming in degrees in nature – e.g., in animals we have a certain stage of “consciousness”,⁶⁷² “perception”,⁶⁷³ and “conceptuality and intuition”⁶⁷⁴ – he is most explicit about the concept of freedom. As Sebastian Schwenzfeuer has argued, the “key concept” in Schelling’s concept of nature is freedom.⁶⁷⁵ Freedom is not merely the quintessence of human subjectivity for Schelling but “ontologically founded” in that it also characterizes non-human nature.⁶⁷⁶ As we saw in Chapter 2, Kant believes (human) freedom is secluded from the natural world since he assumes, by and large, a mechanical conception of nature.

⁶⁷⁰ SW, 1, 1, 388. For a contemporary gradualist understanding of life and consciousness, see Godfrey-Smith (2020).

⁶⁷¹ 2000: 43.

⁶⁷² 1, 10, 388.

⁶⁷³ 1984: 255.

⁶⁷⁴ SW, 1, 1 393. However, he makes it very clear in the *First Outline* that animals don’t have “reason”. The reason for this is that he there proposes a very strong and limited concept of reason: “It is not as if we do not see the animal accomplish by instinct in its narrower sphere even more than that which we accomplish through reason in our broader sphere – but this is because reason is absolutely *one*, because it does not admit of degrees, and because it is the *absolute itself*” (2004: 132). In the *1804 System*, he is a bit more open to ascribing reason to animals (SW, 1, 6, 462-63).

⁶⁷⁵ Schwenzfeuer (2012a: 10).

⁶⁷⁶ Schwenzfeuer (2012a: 265). Whether Schelling thought it would make sense to regard inorganic matter as “free” or “autonomous”, which Alderwick (2021: 105) and Schülein (2022) have suggested, I am not so sure, since he is sometimes very explicit that freedom or free activity requires the ability to distinguish between and inner and outer world. Schülein (2022: 164) has argued that matter is free in the sense of being self-constituting, and that human self-constitution can be “reduced” to matter’s self-constitution. I disagree with the terms “freedom” and “reduction”, since Schelling clearly does not think that structural similarities (like the one between a tree’s autonomy and a human’s) require a reductive account. His continuity thesis does allow that there are “leaps” between different ways of existing, as he writes in the *Ideas*, which entails an anti-reductionism.

Hence, he must invoke a dualism of standpoints or descriptions and justify the standpoint of freedom via an unargued for axiom: the fact of reason (or consciousness of the moral law). On the contrary, Schelling's strategy is to understand freedom as an integral part of the natural world, first of all exhibited in a human-like form in the organic world. Freedom comes in degrees or levels.⁶⁷⁷ Maximization of autonomy is for Schelling a principle of the evolution of nature.⁶⁷⁸ In the *Weltalter*, he writes: "[T]he person is a nature regardless of freedom, nay, precisely because of it".⁶⁷⁹ On Schelling's view, there is no contradiction between being free and being natural. In the *Darstellung des Naturprocesses* (1843), he writes that in organic nature the "blind principle" in the inorganic world or matter has "grasped itself and is in freedom",⁶⁸⁰ and that there is a "moment" in nature where a "subject" sees itself "in freedom against the object", namely the moment of the "emergence of the organic nature".⁶⁸¹ About animals and their "free movement", he writes that we see "a principle" whereby it "cannot merely move [...] but that it can and cannot move",⁶⁸² the animal is "self-empowered", although "only in a certain way and partially".⁶⁸³

Like Kant, Schelling asks: How can we justify the claim that we are free beings? His answer is that it is only possible if non-human nature already foreshadows human agency through a certain degree of autonomy. The Kantian would object that such a project is unpromising, if not impossible, because human freedom appears so distinct in kind that any prefiguration in nature of it is unlikely to detect, in particular under the assumption that the natural world works under deterministic laws of necessity. She would say that we are better off assuming a gulf between two perspectives from which we can justifiably approach the world, namely a theoretical (natural scientific) and practical (normative), and that this is all we can and need to achieve. Schelling would respond that such an approach, due to its bifurcation and lack of explanatory bridging between the two poles, does not satisfy a fundamental requirement of human reason (which Kant would advocate himself), namely that our cognitions should be systematically unified and ordered. Furthermore, Schelling would answer that the Kantian objection does not take all the natural scientific evidence into account, namely that we can observe different forms of prefiguration of human freedom in nature in organic agency, for example in the difference in autonomy of movement from plants to animals. This has several echoes in contemporary (pluralist or gradualist) conceptions of the hierarchy of autonomy in organic agents, for example going from certain single cellular forms to multicellular.⁶⁸⁴ Hence, Schelling

⁶⁷⁷ See e.g., Alderwick (2021: 105). Schelling therefore has more in common with Dennett than one would think, who has also advocated that freedom comes in degrees throughout the natural world (2003). However, Schelling wouldn't be too praiseworthy of Dennett's Darwinian framework whereby organisms' freedom or autonomy are, in fact, to be understood as mechanical robots or functions.

⁶⁷⁸ Heuser-Keßler (1990: 51).

⁶⁷⁹ 2000: xxxv.

⁶⁸⁰ SW, 1, 10, 375.

⁶⁸¹ SW, 1, 10, 366.

⁶⁸² SW, 1, 10, 385.

⁶⁸³ SW, 1, 10, 388.

⁶⁸⁴ See e.g., Okrent (2018).

invites us to reconsider the human exceptionalism often associated with the concept of freedom, although he is fully explicit about the distinct type of freedom associated with human (as we shall see in the next chapter).

Is Schelling's gradualism a kind of emergence theory? Several commentators have hinted towards that.⁶⁸⁵ I have cited a passage from the *Ideas*, where Schelling says that nothing in nature “comes to be by a leap [Sprung]”; that all “becoming occurs in a continuous sequence [stetigen Folge]”; and that nothing has “become without steady progression, a steady transition from one state to another”. Hence, we can initially say that Schelling is opposed to what is often referred to as *strong emergence*: The idea, originally formulated by C. D. Broad, C. Lloyd Morgan, and Samuel Alexander, is that the world contains non-physical brute facts that cannot be explained by, deduced by or be reduced to lower, more fundamental facts.⁶⁸⁶ The strong emergentist argues that some systems with high degrees of organization or complexity exhibit certain novel features that cannot be predicted or understood exhaustively through the lower levels, even by an ideal epistemic agent (hence, it is an ontological claim, not a claim about our epistemic limitations). Although the strong emergentist admits that the novel properties or facts somehow depend on the lower-level properties or facts, she claims that they cannot be reduced thereto. Hence, as Alexander wrote, we should adopt an attitude of “natural piety” towards such facts.⁶⁸⁷

Schelling's view is aligned with the strong emergentist when it comes to accepting that nature is divided in certain autonomous levels of organization that are irreducible to each other. In the citation from the *Ideas* about the lack of leaps in nature, he likewise says that there can be leaps between “what exists”, and that distinct levels of organization can have their own “boundaries” (ontological and epistemological, say), and thereby “distinguishes itself from other by sharp determinations”. In that sense, Schelling is a non-reductive pluralist about ontological *sui generis* domains of nature. The world of chemistry differs (epistemologically and ontologically) from the world of physics, and the world of biology differs (epistemologically and ontologically) from the world of chemistry. For example, as we have seen, organisms cannot be reduced to chemical matter, although they depend on it. He would therefore also agree with the dialectic between autonomy and dependence proposed by the strong emergentist. However, he would not accept that the emergence of novel domains is inexplicable, that we should adopt an attitude of natural piety towards them. Although *weak emergence* is sometimes more compatible with strong physicalism or naturalism (and reductionism), Schelling's model is probably closer to this.⁶⁸⁸ The weak emergentist claims that the novel facts or properties are unexpected but can be deduced or understood from the initial, lower-level facts.⁶⁸⁹ There is no inexplicable leap at play on this conception, only systems or facts that follow from but are different from the lower-level systems or facts. However, Schelling's model also deviates

⁶⁸⁵ E.g., Sturma (2002, 2019), Zimmermann (1998: 125, 127, 134), and Gare (2011).

⁶⁸⁶ See Chapter 1.

⁶⁸⁷ Alexander 1921: 410.

⁶⁸⁸ Blamauer (2012: 14) has also suggested this.

⁶⁸⁹ Chalmers (2006).

from weak emergence. As Chalmers writes, emergent properties are for the weak emergentist “properties that are more easily understood in their own right than in terms of properties at a lower level”.⁶⁹⁰ But that means that it is a matter of an *ease of understanding*, not a matter of explanatory impossibility.

Schelling would deny that we *can in principle* give an exhaustive account of a higher-level phenomenon and its distinct functions (like organisms) through a lower level (chemical matter, say). We cannot fully understand the distinct qualities, what Schelling calls the *existence*, of a particular phenomenon from a lower level. However, we can give an exhaustive account of the *becoming* of the higher-level phenomena. In an interesting recent paper, Schülein has argued that Schelling’s naturalism (based on what Schwab calls the Priority Model) is best understood as a “*reductive materialist account* of freedom which conceives spiritual self-constitution as a manifestation of natural self-constitution”.⁶⁹¹ I don’t think, however, that “reduction” is an appropriate word for the kind of structural isomorphy and type of emergence Schelling hints at. We can make sense of Schelling’s idea in the basic reductionist terminology of “bringing back” human agency (step by step) in the natural world. However, if reduction means that x is reduced to y if x is *nothing over and above* y, then Schelling is an anti-reductionist. Schülein is aware of this terminological flexibility, hence he sometimes uses “reduction”, sometimes not: “Schelling’s General Deduction suggests that spirit can be fully explained as a higher form of self-constructing matter and thus completely retraced back – if not reduced – to a material, natural reality”.⁶⁹² However, the wording is important again to fully appreciate Schelling’s model. What does it mean that mind can be “*fully explained*” by and be “*completely retraced*” through its pre-history? If to fully explain x means that we have outlined and understood all the distinct qualities of a particular phenomenon exhaustively, then this goes against Schelling’s view. But if it means that we can (and should) give a complete account of the way in which a particular phenomenon (or natural type) has *come about*, then it seems valid to ascribe to Schelling the *completeness ideal*. For example, organisms exhibit features that are distinct from but structurally similar to its lower levels. Hence, Schelling’s understanding of emergence is more a kind of what we could call *immanent* or *isomorphic emergence*: The emergence of organic agents is not a totally inexplicable accident considering its structural isomorphism with the lower level (in terms of organization as a basic form), but it is neither reducible to those levels; it “distinguishes itself from other by sharp determinations”.

4.4. Logical or real genesis?

Schelling’s understanding of life forms as gradually evolving has sparked interest in whether Schelling’s theory can, in one way or another, be seen as a forerunner of

⁶⁹⁰ Chalmers (2006: 251).

⁶⁹¹ Schülein (2022: 164).

⁶⁹² Schülein (2022: 167).

Darwin's theory of evolution.⁶⁹³ It should first be noted that Darwin himself was very aware that his theory had been anticipated on many fronts before him, among other places in Germany, where he referenced both Alexander von Humboldt and Goethe.⁶⁹⁴ Some think that Schelling's conception of dynamic evolution and gradualism should be counted among those figures. For example, it has been claimed that there are "clear parallels",⁶⁹⁵ "seeds",⁶⁹⁶ or an "analogous structure"⁶⁹⁷ between Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and later conceptions of evolution. However, others have argued in various ways that there are close to no similarities or seeds. Mainly because Schelling does not have a conception of a temporalized or "real genesis" of life-forms, but merely a "logo-genesis", a metaphysical, conceptual approach to life secluded from experience and empirical data.⁶⁹⁸ For example, Engelhardt writes that Schelling was no "forerunner of Darwin", since he only provided a "a metaphysical ordering of plants and animals".⁶⁹⁹

This debate concerns a deeper question about Schelling's idea of the relation between theory (or *Naturphilosophie*, speculative physics) and experience, which I will touch upon in this section. While I see no good reason to claim that Schelling was a direct or indirect forerunner of Darwin's specific ideas about natural evolution, I find it equally unconvincing to claim that he proposed a theory about the dynamical development at a macro and micro level that absolutely departs from the basic idea of a real, historical genesis of different life-forms (organic and anthropological). Contrary to what has for some reason been proposed from many angles, Schelling was no rampant, metaphysical opponent of the value of empirical data in theory-constructions. In fact, he was quite the opposite.

⁶⁹³ Förster (1974), Hartkopf (1984), Heckmann (1985), Richards (2002, 2017), Fritzman & Gibson (2012), Gabriel (2015), Rajan (2017). Kuno Fischer was probably the first, though. To his friend Ernst Haeckel, who had said that no one before Darwin and Lamarck had seriously considered an origin of species, he referred to a passage from the *World Soul* and said that Schelling was the "first to enunciate with complete clarity and from a philosophical standpoint the principle of organic development that is fundamental to the Darwinism of today" (1872: 448). The passage Fischer refers to is the one where Schelling, against Kant, says that it is an "old illusion that organization and life cannot be explained from natural principles". Also, in his *Lectures on Modern Idealism*, Josiah Royce described Schelling as a "halfway evolutionist" (Royce 1934: 113). There is no doubt in general that Darwin did not promote the idea of transmutation by himself, and that Schelling (and Goethe) prefigured many of those ideas. What Darwin did do, though, was to provide a scientific, empirical argument for the "mechanical" (natural selection) nature of evolution. Schelling's position was in no way identical to Darwin's.

⁶⁹⁴ See Richards (2017).

⁶⁹⁵ Hartkopf (1984: 113).

⁶⁹⁶ Förster (1974: 176).

⁶⁹⁷ Heckmann (1985: 315). Heckmann has probably provided the most detailed account of the affinities between Schelling and modern evolutionary theory. He suggests a heuristical thesis of complementarity between *Naturphilosophie* and evolutionary theory (316). This complementarity has three parts: 1) They both want to explain how intelligence arises from nature – they have the same object domain and target, 2) they have a similar development structure (matter – life – mind), 3) evolution means increased "complexity" for both (315).

⁶⁹⁸ Mayr (1982: 387-389), Engelhardt (1981, 1985), Krings (1985), Bowler (1988), Mutschler (1990), Bonsiepen (1997), Oeser (2010), Berger (2020).

⁶⁹⁹ Engelhardt (1981: 312-313).

By the looks of it, Schelling seems to have had some conception of a natural historical evolution whereby nature develops in a series of steps towards higher and more complex degrees of organization; some conception of large-scale changes across different levels of organization that gradually create complex new features. As we have seen, he considers nature as in constant process and dynamic formation: a “*dynamically graduated scale in Nature*”, as a “gradated chain of life”, where natural life is seen as a “series of stages to the mental” or to “self-consciousness”, where human mindedness has its “root in nature” because the human being begins as “a polyp”. In the *First Outline* he describes the “continuity” of biological forms as expressing the inner affinity of all organisms, as “common descendants of one and the same stock”.⁷⁰⁰ What should we make of this?

It is widely agreed that around 1800 in England, France and Germany, we can detect several attempts to formulate the seeds of a general theory of species transformation or a historically progressive history of nature’s developments.⁷⁰¹ It should first be noted that the term “evolution” as used by Darwin (but first Haeckel, who promoted the theory of evolution in Germany) signals the development of biological species through random mutations, non-goal-directed processes, probabilistic laws and natural selection leading to novel transformations across and within species (often assumed best to be understood from within a mechanistic perspective). This is not Schelling’s intended meaning of the term. Schelling inherits but changes the term from its contemporaneous use in the context of debates about embryology (how does an egg-cell develop into an organism?), where some argued for a pre-determined development (preformationism), which contrasted the idea of epigenesis, designating the development as novel and unprecedented (resembling strong emergence). Hence, Schelling uses evolution as synonymous to *development* (“*Entwicklung*”), where the Latin infinite “*evolvere*” signifies to “disclose” or “unfold” something. This conception was meant to align with his dynamical, process philosophical point of view. Although clearly not aligned with the Darwinian assumption of mechanical development from chance, probabilistic laws, and a causal account of adaptation, he rejects the classical idea of a fixed *scala naturae*.

It becomes clear from the *First Outline* that Schelling was well versed in the debates about epigenesis, preformation, and metamorphosis. As Richards and Nassar have argued,⁷⁰² Schelling especially adopted Goethe’s understanding of fundamental types of organisms (“archetypes” or basic form-structures, e.g., different animal structures such as vertebrata and mollusca) and his concept of metamorphosis (signifying “transformation [*Verwandlung*] of forms, as Schelling says⁷⁰³). The combination of basic structural forms of organisms and the principle of metamorphosis led, on Schelling (and Goethe’s) account, the gradual change within the world of

⁷⁰⁰ 2004: 50.

⁷⁰¹ Zammito (2018), Richards (2002).

⁷⁰² Richards (2002), Nassar (2010).

⁷⁰³ SW, 1, 6, 299.

life whereby the archetypes become instantiated on different levels.⁷⁰⁴ As Goethe suggested, referring to fossil fuels as well as concrete data on the transformations of insects and plants, there was indeed species transformation. As Richards has suggested, Schelling must have had some sort of temporalization in mind regarding his term evolution, since Schelling clearly underlines that the ideal forms, or archetypes, are empirically or materially realized, which requires temporalization.⁷⁰⁵

Many argue the opposite. For example, Erhard Oeser writes that Schelling's theory of evolution should be understood exclusively as an "a priori theory" that "can never be the object of an empirical experience" or be "described in direct observation or be replicated experimentally".⁷⁰⁶ Similarly, Whistler & Berger claim that Schelling, like Hegel, conceived the process of natural evolution as an "atemporal, ontological development" and as an "atemporal emergence of the higher potencies from the lower".⁷⁰⁷ Berger has equally argued that there is a "logic of emergence" at play, but that it is "entirely detached from any philosophical consideration of the historical emergence of natural or spiritual forms".⁷⁰⁸ Although the idea of conceiving nature as a temporalized, historical system is "implicit" in many of his early writings on *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling does not, Berger argues, have "temporal or historical generation in mind when describing the becoming of nature". Rather, when Schelling describes the "relationship between the various stages of nature in genetic terminology, he remains committed to the atemporal character of nature's self-potentiating process". As Krings has formulated it, Schelling proposed a "logical genesis", not a "real genesis".⁷⁰⁹ The idea is supposedly that of an engineer's construction,

⁷⁰⁴ As Nassar writes: "For Schelling, as it was for Goethe, there was no difference between the ideas of metamorphosis and evolution. The terms meant for them the capacities for growth and generation – production and reproduction – of the particular organism and the species with the implication that the organism is simultaneously participating in a larger natural evolution" (2010: 316-317).

⁷⁰⁵ See Richards (2002: 145, 298, 518). There are indeed passages suggesting that Schelling did not consider the option of gradual, temporal species change a real possibility. For example, he writes in the *First Outline* "Several naturalists seem to have harboured the hope of being able to represent the source of all organization as a successive and gradual development of one and the same original organization. This hope, in our view has vanished. The belief that the different organizations are really formed through a gradual development out of one another is a misunderstanding of an idea that really lies in reason" (2:62–3). This is one of the passages that Engelhardt and others hold onto when arguing that Schelling had no concept of a real genesis, only a logical genesis. However, as Richards has argued (2002: 300-303), it is most likely a very specific type of idea of gradual development that he criticizes and believes "has vanished", namely Erasmus Darwin's, Charles' grandfather, who proposed the idea that all organic features are mechanically derived. It does not entail that Schelling was opposed to species change in the empirical world.

⁷⁰⁶ Oeser (2010: 206-207).

⁷⁰⁷ Whistler & Berger (2020: 115, 156). They do, however, modify that slightly by saying that Schelling might have had an empirical, temporal idea in mind (156).

⁷⁰⁸ Like Whistler & Berger, Berger here modifies that view slightly by saying that the "significance of natural history for the philosophy of nature fundamentally distinguishes Schellingianism from Hegelianism: whereas Hegel is adamantly opposed to the idea that natural-historical events might be of ontological significance, Schelling – in different ways throughout his career – provides us with a number of reasons to think that the philosophy of nature should indeed attend to nature's history" (Berger 2020). As he also says, Schelling's earlier *Naturphilosophie* is "full of passages that imply that the history of nature may indeed be philosophically significant", but he refuses to conclude that "nature's system of stages is historically graduated".

⁷⁰⁹ Krings (1985: 115).

which does not describe a real bridge. Likewise, as Krings⁷¹⁰ writes, the philosopher's construction of natural development does not describe "the real natural history of matter".⁷¹⁰ Although these readings are correct in pointing out that Schelling invokes what we could call non-material structure plans or principles in order to describe the different, gradual levels of organization visible in (historical) nature, they are problematic in two ways:

- 1) They tend towards a strong rationalist reading of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* whereby the different natural forms have emerged by (conceptual) necessity and whereby nature has an overall teleological structure towards grasping itself in thought through theoretical agents like us.
- 2) They misunderstand Schelling's concept of "construction" of nature and do not do justice to his appeal to not only the usefulness but the necessity of empirical and historical data for *Naturphilosophie*.

4.4.1. Anthropic principles

In his reading of Schelling's understanding of natural history, Berger suggests the following reading: On Schelling's account, nature is "entirely rational", which "extends to each and every natural-historical production". All phenomena in nature are "rationally necessitated by nature itself, as opposed to being generated by some contingent, natural-historical process".⁷¹¹ This form of global rationalism has a more recent echo in the cosmological concept of so-called anthropic principles and fine-tuning.⁷¹² The anthropic principle proceeds from the idea that the laws of the universe are compatible with there being life and observers (or "knowers") of the universe. This compatibility is a necessity: If life were impossible in the universe, no form of life would be there to observe it from within. What Berger seems to ascribe to Schelling is a strong version of this principle, namely the idea that the universe is (rationally) compelled to produce conscious life-forms and knowers. For example, he writes that everything in nature, including minds theorizing about nature from within, are "conceived as necessary features of a rationally ordered cosmos".⁷¹³ A contemporary representative of this view is Thomas Nagel, who in his *Mind and Cosmos* intimated that there is something necessary (or "non-accidental", as he says) about the emergence of human intelligibility.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹⁰ Krings (1985: 116).

⁷¹¹ Berger (2020). As he continues, "nature's general stages (or forms) and its particular, individuated entities are conceived as necessary features of a rationally ordered cosmos. Note that it does not follow from this that we should attempt to deduce the existence of a particular being from sheer thought. The point is, rather, that the historical emergence of particular beings is always determined by a kind of rational necessity at the heart of nature – and never by chance". See also Kimmerle (1985: 256), Vater (2013: 14).

⁷¹² Ellis (2017).

⁷¹³ Berger (2020). Norris (2022: 208) also has a strong rationalist reading. See also Sturma (2019) for a reading in that direction.

⁷¹⁴ Nagel (2012: 7). I should note that Nagel's text is not a rigorous, theoretical proposal, and that his premises are therefore at times articulated rather vaguely. At one place, for example, he seems

On the contrary, the weak version of the anthropic principle, which Hoguebe has ascribed to Schelling,⁷¹⁵ does not claim that nature or the universe has produced intelligent knowers out of necessity, but that it must necessarily be compatible with the fact that knowers can exist (since they do). I agree with Hoguebe and Gabriel that there is little evidence to suggest that Schelling has something like a strong anthropic principle in mind.⁷¹⁶ Schelling is not particularly interested in the idea that humans are the highest or final product of the natural world. Rather, he was interested in conceptualizing the conditions of possibility for intelligence to appear. Although Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* contains several passages suggesting this focus rather than a macro-teleological one, this aspect becomes particularly clear in his later philosophy. At one point, he even says that the "real alteration of the human being = original accident [Urzufall]".⁷¹⁷ Schelling merely seems committed to the view that the universe is latently 'minded' or potentially intelligible, in the sense that something about it must be able to explain how beings like us could appear in it. And it is the task of *Naturphilosophie* to envision the structural principles in nature that makes it possible for intelligent creatures to arise. The strong rationalist reading of Schelling therefore seems ill-fated.

4.4.2. The reciprocity of theory and experience

What is the methodological status of *Naturphilosophie* in relation to the empirical sciences? In the *Ideas*, he writes:

[M]y purpose is not to *apply* philosophy to natural science. I can think of no more pitiful, workaday occupation than such an application of abstract principles to an already existing empirical science. My object, rather, is first to allow natural science itself to *arise* philosophically, and my philosophy is itself nothing else than natural science. It is true that chemistry teaches us to *read* the *letters*, physics the *syllables*, mathematics *nature*; but it ought not to be forgotten that it remains for philosophy to *interpret* [auszulegen] what is read.⁷¹⁸

Naturphilosophie is here presented as a hermeneutic practice, perhaps even a philosophy as science as we have come to know it today, that interprets and orders the insights from the different natural sciences into a coherent and principled whole. Such a practice can function as a heuristic for science in the sense of interpreting

less committed to the idea that human mindedness is some sort of metaphysically, necessary happening: "A satisfying explanation would show that the realization of these possibilities was not vanishingly improbable, but a significant likelihood given the laws of nature and the composition of the universe" (Nagel 2012: 32). Immediately after, though, he manages to comprise the vagueness in one sentence by describing the advent of consciousness, reason and so on as an "unsurprising if not inevitable consequence of the order that governs the natural world from within" (ibid.).

⁷¹⁵ Hoguebe (1989: 52). See also Gabriel (2015).

⁷¹⁶ See also Schmied-Kowarzik (1996: 30, 168).

⁷¹⁷ SW 2, 2, X. See also SW, 1, 1, 464; SW, 2, 2, 158; SW, 2, 3, 294).

⁷¹⁸ SW, 1, 2, 6 (1988: 5).

results from different sciences and suggest structural analogies and commonalities across them to guide further inquiry.⁷¹⁹

Schelling explicitly warns against applying “abstract principles to an already existing empirical science”. That is, he warns against constructing a priori principles and then apply them in the sense of seeing or testing how the domain of the special science operates according to those principles. Hence, *Naturphilosophie* is defined as something that comes *after* science, and therefore it can be said to be strongly dependent on the natural sciences for its existence as such. Philosophy is, according to Schelling here, not supposed to compete but to supplement science. To “interpret what is read” can of course contain a critical or guiding function in the sense of pointing out, as he calls it in the *Ideas*, “lazy natural philosophy”.⁷²⁰ As Nassar says, it should “serve as an epistemic guard and corrective to scientific theorizing and practice”.⁷²¹ But it has no authority to delineate principles prior to scientific results.

It has been normal to read Schelling in the completely opposite way. For example, Gower has said that Schelling “certainly believed that it was possible to discover truths about nature by metaphysical methods”. Now, those who read Schelling’s idea of nature’s gradual evolution as a “logical genesis” typically recognize that Schelling had some respect for the practice of natural science. But they tend to suppress that when they interpret Schelling’s concept of a “construction” or “creation” of nature from the point of view of *Naturphilosophie*. With the comparison with a construction engineer, Kring’s (who introduced the concept of a “logical genesis”) seems to imply that the *Naturphilosophie* is making a drawing of nature in his mind first before he visits the empirical world; that nature’s structures are constructed or thought out from an arm-chair; that nature develops in a logical, that is, in a necessary and deductive manner and that the philosopher can describe this manner. Nothing is further from Schelling’s actual view. In the Introduction to *First Outline*, he lays out his principle of empiricism:

The assertion that natural science must be able to deduce all its principles *a priori* is in a sense understood to mean that natural science must dispense with all experience, and, without any intervention of experience, be able to spin all its principles out of itself; an affirmation so absurd that the very objections to it deserve pity. *Not only do we know this or that through experience, but we originally know nothing at all except through experience, and by means of experience, and in this sense the whole of our knowledge consists of the judgments of experience.*⁷²²

Hence, a deductive, a priori philosophy of nature is absurd; all our knowledge begins from experience. Empirical data must always guide and support our philosophical and systematic attempts at delineating the structural isomorphisms between

⁷¹⁹ See Gower (1973: 320), Fisher (2020: 65)

⁷²⁰ SW, 1, 2, 129 (1988: 101).

⁷²¹ Nassar (2021: 213).

⁷²² 2004: 198.

different domains and how the single domains relate to the whole. Likewise, the task of understanding nature's dynamic development requires empirical data, which again seems to suggest that when Schelling takes about the evolution of nature, he is not merely talking about "logical genesis". Elsewhere, he describes how the dual principle of product and productivity that maintains nature in "continual activity" must

be brought to an empirical test; for, *inasmuch as all the phenomena of Nature cannot be deduced from this hypothesis as long as there is in the whole system of Nature a single phenomenon which is not necessary according to that principle, or which contradicts it, the hypothesis is thereby at once shown to be false, and from that moment ceases to have validity as a hypothesis.*⁷²³

And elsewhere again, after having said that *Naturphilosophie* does not "deal with the hypothetical" but only with the "evident", he talks about certain "intermediate links" between natural types or phenomena. The task of experimental research, he says, is to "find out these links". The task of the *Naturphilosophie* ("speculative physics") is to "show the need of these intermediate links".⁷²⁴ In that sense, *Naturphilosophie* can only set up its own task of finding these intermediate links (or structural affinities) between natural phenomena when there is something to be linked – it must assume a real genesis between different natural phenomena in order to set up this task of structurally linking them at all. He continues by saying that since "every new discovery" in science "throws us" (that is, philosophers of nature) back "upon a new ignorance, an while one knot is being loosed a new one is being tied, it is conceivable that the complete discovery of all the intermediate links in the chain of Nature, and therefore also our science itself, is an infinite task".⁷²⁵ Hence, the philosopher of nature is in a constant relation of dependence on new discoveries within science.

This does not mean that "theory", as he often calls it, is in a constant role of passivity. Having interpreted sets of empirical information, the philosopher of nature constructs generalizations and assumptions from that information that can and will guide future experimental research. That is why Schelling believes there is a strong reciprocal relation between theory and experience.⁷²⁶ As he expresses it, science or theory (*Naturphilosophie*) is the soul, experience the body.⁷²⁷ Or, as he writes about the construction of natural scientific experiments: "Every experiment is a question put to Nature, to which it is compelled to give a reply. But every question contains an implicit *a priori* judgment; every experiment that is an experiment, is a prophecy".⁷²⁸ We do not have a completely filter-free look upon the world when we

⁷²³ 2004: 197.

⁷²⁴ 2004: 199.

⁷²⁵ 2004: 199.

⁷²⁶ Durner (1985: 15, 30).

⁷²⁷ 2004: 201.

⁷²⁸ 2004: 197. As he says in his *Lectures on the Method of Academic Study*, both theory and experience are "equal in importance [...] Every science demands for its objective existence an exoteric side; so there must be such a side in the science of nature or in philosophy, through which

investigate it; we will always have a set of implicit judgements, expectations, and interests that form the way we experience the world. Data is co-produced by the practitioner. With an analogy to Kant's dictum, we can say that science without metaphysical assumptions is blind; metaphysics without natural science is empty.

The double task of the *Naturphilosophie* in relation to science becomes to integrate new scientific insights as well as inspire and guide empirical research programs. For example, in the *Ideas* Schelling does not merely stipulate beforehand that a polarity of opposed forces exist in order then to deduce how the inorganic world must be structured if that were true. Rather, he begins from empirical results (e.g., magnetism and electricity) and argues that in order to understand these phenomena, we must postulate certain polar forces in nature. But they should only be adopted as long as they give as a more coherent picture of the different levels of nature and their interconnectedness.⁷²⁹ That is why he says that a priori and a posteriori knowledge can complement each other. A priori knowledge is for Schelling knowledge of how a natural phenomenon or kind fits into the system of nature as a whole, whereas a piece of a posteriori knowledge is empirical, singular knowledge about the existence and concrete properties of a phenomenon. Both are necessary to understand a phenomenon properly. The role of the a priori is not to speculate about principles of nature, but to systematize and order single phenomena in the system of nature.⁷³⁰

This is what it means when Schelling says that philosopher of nature "constructs" nature, or better: reconstruct.⁷³¹ Nature is a self-generating system (it is autonomous and autarch). As he writes in *On the True Concept*, we must consider nature in its "self-construction".⁷³² Aided by empirical findings, it is the philosopher's task to assemble this self-generation in a holistic way that connects and integrates nature's different parts; that depicts universal structures in the concrete parts.

4.5. Conclusion: What kind of naturalism?

Is Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* a form of naturalism? And if so, what kind? It has become more common to dub Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, or his philosophy a such, naturalism.⁷³³ For example, commentators now write that Schelling proposes a

it may be a construction of nature" (1880: 150). Or, in the *Miscellen*: The person who "has no correct theory, cannot possibly have the correct experience, and vice versa" (SW, 1, 4, 532).

⁷²⁹ Schmied-Kowarzik (1996: 91, 98, 99).

⁷³⁰ It is not without reason that Alexander von Humboldt in a letter to Schelling described the "revolution" that Schelling had produced in natural science as "the most beautiful episode of these rash times", and made it clear that *Naturphilosophie* "cannot harm the progress of the empirical sciences. On the contrary, it traces a discovery back to its principles and simultaneously provides the foundation for new discoveries" (Fuhrmans, *Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph. Briefe und Dokumente*, 3: 181). In his *Ideen einer Geographie der Pflanzen* (1807) and his *Kosmos* (1845-58) he made this opinion public.

⁷³¹ Schmied-Kowarzik (1996: 76). To construct something, as he says in his *Lectures on Art*, is to "determine its position in the universe" (SW, 1, 5: 373).

⁷³² 2020: 57.

⁷³³ At one place, in his *Denkmal der Schrift von den göttlichen Dingen*, he calls himself a naturalist (SW, 1, 8, 67).

“naturalized epistemology” whereby nature “does not just include consciousness, but makes it possible”;⁷³⁴ a naturalism whereby freedom and agency “arise from nature and are thus fully natural”, which entails an “embedded conception of freedom and agency”;⁷³⁵ a naturalism whereby “everything that happens acts of necessity according to the laws of nature”.⁷³⁶ Dieter Sturma has for many years suggested that Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* gives us a “naturalist derivation of subjectivity”,⁷³⁷ and that it provides a model for a more “integrative” form of non-reductive naturalism that might entail some “panpsychist” elements”.⁷³⁸ Recently, Ben Woodard has similarly argued that Schelling proposes a “transcendental (or non-eliminative) naturalism”,⁷³⁹ which “admits non-physical or process-based ontological (or perhaps more accurately meontological) powers into nature”.⁷⁴⁰ But unlike Sturma, he denies that this expanded form of naturalism amounts to “panpsychism”.⁷⁴¹

On the other hand, Benjamin Norris has argued that many of these naturalist readings, by making the *Naturphilosophie* into Schelling’s central (or only) aim, “universalizes something Schelling intended to be more localized”.⁷⁴² Norris believes that Schelling is closer to the liberal naturalists than the naturalist readings suggest: “[L]ike Brandom and others influenced by Sellar’s distinction between the natural and the normative [...] Schelling comes to conclude that nature alone is insufficient when trying to account for the essence of human freedom”.⁷⁴³

Iain Hamilton Grant has been the arch-proponent of the naturalist reading in recent times, setting the tone for a series of interpretations in the Anglophone world.⁷⁴⁴ Although he is not always fully clear in the implications of the terminology, Grant suggests that Schelling’s philosophy is “entirely naturalistic” by making a “naturalization of the transcendental” (or of “ideality”).⁷⁴⁵ However, it should not be understood, Grant believes, as “scientific reductionism”. What does naturalization mean here? It can either mean 1) that x is naturalized when it is shown that its conditions of possibility are entirely “natural”, or 2) that x is naturalized when it is shown that x is *nothing over and above* its natural conditions of possibility. Grant seems to advocate the latter. However, he seems to make the additional point that

⁷³⁴ Snow (2023). See also Beiser (2008: 511).

⁷³⁵ Alderwick (2021: 40).

⁷³⁶ Beiser (2008: 524).

⁷³⁷ Dieter Sturma: “The Nature of Subjectivity” (2000: 221).

⁷³⁸ Sturma (2002: 162, 170). See also Sturma (2000, 2020).

⁷³⁹ Woodard (2018: 27),

⁷⁴⁰ Woodard (2019:192).

⁷⁴¹ Woodard (2019: 200). Other examples of naturalist readings are Cerny (1984: 129, 132); Küppers (1992: 119, 132); Gardner (2017); Ameriks (2012); Michael Vater (2013); Kosch (2006); Whistler (2016a, 2021).

⁷⁴² Norris (2022: 6). For a similar reading, see Bowman (2020). Bowman even claims that the “natural realm” is not “sufficient unto itself” (117), and hence it makes no sense to dub him a naturalist. She suggests a strong idealist reading whereby Schelling gives “absolute prioritization” to the “teleological, the normative, and the self-consciously intellectual, in terms of metaphysics as well as methodology” (118). Bowman thereby seems to ignore the independence thesis from the *First Outline* and the Priority Model from the following texts on *Naturphilosophie*.

⁷⁴³ Norris (2022: 200).

⁷⁴⁴ Whistler (2016a), Whistler & Tritten (2017), Alderwick (2021); Woodard (2021).

⁷⁴⁵ Grant (2006: 54, 119).

Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is not merely a central part of his thinking, but *the* most central in the sense that it (ontologically) conditions and influences all other philosophical inquiries. As Tritten and Whistler have described Grant's naturalist reading (which they adhere to), *Naturphilosophie* is not a "regional" framework but something that "itself encompasses all other philosophical domains [...] in which ideas, moral values, freedom and even God are to be understood from the point of view of nature", amounting to a "naturalization of all forms of thought".⁷⁴⁶ This is the strongest naturalist reading of Schelling there is. I believe, as we shall see in the next chapter, that it is too strong. Schelling does not think that human freedom, ideas and values can or should be understood *exclusively* from "the point of view of nature", that is, from the point of view of its natural, genealogical pre-conditions.⁷⁴⁷

As I argued in Chapter 1, generic naturalism amounts to the claim that *everything is natural*. As I've shown, Schelling proposes an explanatory kind of naturalism ("everything can be explained by natural forces"). As I've argued, this means that everything *can* be explained through natural science, not that everything *exclusively should*. I called this Schelling's *thesis of (local) explanatory naturalism*.⁷⁴⁸

An important aspect of Schelling's naturalism is this: His focus on naturalistic explanation always attends towards how singular products in the world *come to be*; on the development and emergence of natural products. His naturalism is less interested in descriptions of the singular products and their independent qualities (although singular descriptions are necessary to account for the development from one level to the next). What I have called Schelling's gradualist or continuity thesis entails a kind of naturalism in the sense that everything that exists can legitimately be said to be a part of nature. That both the "mental and physical", as Beiser writes, are "parts or aspects of the natural world as a whole".⁷⁴⁹ This is clearly not a version of hard materialism. As Schelling says himself, "blind materialism" is nothing but an "abstraction".⁷⁵⁰ It is an abstraction because it organizes its world from basic, substantial entities that everything else can be reduced to, and thereby it must "disappear

⁷⁴⁶ Whistler & Tritten (2017: 2).

⁷⁴⁷ We find another strong naturalist reading in Whistler (2016a). Kosch says that Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is "aimed at what we would now call a physicalist explanation of mental phenomena" (2006: 73). Since physicalism often assumes a "fundamentalist" thesis about basic building blocks in nature (which Schelling rejects), and since it often comes with a reductionism that gives special priority to physical science, it would not be very accurate to call him an early physicalist.

⁷⁴⁸ Beiser (2008: 598) distinguishes between two forms of naturalism. Weak naturalism, as he calls it, claims that the "subjective, mental, or conscious is explicable according to laws of nature". Strong naturalism, in his sense, adds that not only these three aspects can be explained naturalistically, but that also "everything ideal, normative, and formal is explicable according to laws of nature". According to Beiser, Schelling (and the other German idealists) accepted the weak version and rejected the strong. That is a somewhat inaccurate characterization, depending on the meaning of "explicable". In terms of explaining the emergence of the "ideal, normative and formal", Schelling's explanatory naturalism entails that this is indeed possible. But in terms of giving an exhaustive explanation (or understanding) of these phenomena, the genealogical naturalism is not sufficient.

⁷⁴⁹ Beiser (2008: 511).

⁷⁵⁰ SW, 1, 5, 204.

as soon as we recognize the universal unity” of different levels of organization.⁷⁵¹ Schelling’s naturalism claims that everything that exists has its root in nature and evolves in different degrees of complexity. In the emergence of novel processes and beings, nature makes no “leaps”. The conditions of every level exist on the previous level of the graded series of the inorganic and the organic on a structural level. As he says in the *Weltalter* (1815), it “hardly demands any proof that the same creative forces that lie in nature are in the being of the spiritual world”.⁷⁵² As we have seen, Schelling thereby subverts Kant’s and Fichte’s idealist conceptions of nature and awards the *Naturphilosophie* a certain (ontological) priority compared to transcendental philosophy. Therefore, what Schwab has called the Continuity and Priority Models (see Chapter 4.1.) of the relation between mind and nature seem to be the most accurate descriptions of how Schelling conceives of the systematic role of *Naturphilosophie*.

However, the Priority Model does not imply, as Schwab seems to suggest, an eliminative naturalism (nor a naturalism of identity), an “annihilation” of the autonomy of the subject. Each new level in nature – all the way from inorganic matter to the transcendental philosopher – exhibits structurally similar patterns to its previous level in terms of organization but has a clear boundary towards other levels (there are “leaps” in terms of existence, as Schelling says). Whether it entails reductionism depends on what one means by the term. In a sense, the particular type of organization exhibited by organisms can be “brought back to” its lower levels. But if one means by reducing x to y that x is *nothing over and above* y, then Schelling’s naturalism is clearly anti-reductionist (as we shall also see in the next chapter, focusing on human agency).⁷⁵³ Neither would it make much sense to talk of Schelling’s position in terms of supervenience, since it entails an asymmetric relation, which gives primacy to the more “fundamental” relata, the lower level. We might be best off, for now, with dubbing Schelling’s naturalism a kind of emergence theory – what I called *immanent emergence*. This means, as Ben Woodard has recently put it, that nature for Schelling signifies “the open series of nested physical systems. Nature is thus not some local part of the universe”.⁷⁵⁴

Schelling’s bottom-up account of freedom and mindedness provides a template for a form of naturalism that falls into neither hard nor liberal naturalism. While hard naturalism reduces organic agency and human mindedness to mechanism, (Kantian) liberal naturalism bifurcates non-human nature and human agency while annulling the possibility (and need) of bridging them through a rethinking of “nature” that can challenge the hard naturalist’s grip of that concept. Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, with all its speculative adventures and historically determined knowledge of the natural world, contains a model that could satisfy the inclinations of both hard and liberal naturalism, namely an account of agency that attempts to be both

⁷⁵¹ SW, 1, 5, 204.

⁷⁵² SW, 1, 8, 287 (2000: 64).

⁷⁵³ See e.g., SW, 1, 6, 77, where he mocks that type of reduction.

⁷⁵⁴ Woodard (2018: 21).

scientifically accountable and non-eliminative (or non-reductive). As Rouse has argued,⁷⁵⁵ to claim that those inclinations are incompatible are grounded in a unnuanced idea of what the scientific image can or should be able to contain. Instead, we should unfetter our conception of what a justified scientific explanation is. The scientific image should be molded on concrete science, which is pluralistically constructed and open-minded because the natural world contains plural forms and because it is open to what is unknown. This is in complete alignment, as we have seen, with Schelling's understanding of the reciprocal dynamic between (a priori theory and (a posteriori) experience, between *Naturphilosophie* and empirical science. As he writes to his reader of the *Naturphilosophie* in the Foreword to the *First Outline*: "Thus, I ask but one thing: that the reader remember, in levelling a judgment, that all of the facts are not yet in".⁷⁵⁶

Whistler has summarized Schelling's kind of naturalism in an apt way:

Naturphilosophie as Schelling conceives it has two pertinent characteristics: (a) it provides an exhaustive account of the basic stuff of reality in terms of natural processes; (b) it nevertheless refuses merely to reduce value and meaning to this "basic stuff"; instead, they retain strict autonomy.⁷⁵⁷

The "strict autonomy" that Whistler refers to is pertinent when it comes to understanding the status of human mindedness and normativity. Schelling thinks, as we have seen, that the human being is also a natural being natural life is a "series of stages to the mental" (from "polyp to man"). I have called this Schelling's *anti-exceptionalist thesis*: Human beings have *come to be* via nature's dynamical spectrum like everything else. However, Schelling also stresses that something radically novel appears in the course of nature's history, at some indefinite point during the development of our species, when nature's auto-epistemic structure emerges through our awareness and attempt at understanding it. As we have seen from the Introduction to his *Ideas*, Schelling describes this structure as a radical change from being in a "(philosophical) state of nature" to a state of *separation* from the external, natural world through a (minimal) reflection on how to understand this separation; through a minimal attendance "to the fact that he could distinguish himself from external things". As he writes in *1800 System*, the human is a "part torn away from the living whole".⁷⁵⁸ Schelling is very explicit that this relates to a certain kind of freedom.⁷⁵⁹ As he writes in the *Ideas*, I am free (in a restricted sense) the moment "I raise myself above the interconnection of things and ask how this interconnection itself has become possible".⁷⁶⁰ This freedom is not identical to the freedom manifested by other organisms, who also distinguish between an inner and outer world, who are also

⁷⁵⁵ Rouse (2015).

⁷⁵⁶ 2004: 3.

⁷⁵⁷ Whistler (2016a: 94).

⁷⁵⁸ SW, 1, 6, 417.

⁷⁵⁹ See Schmied-Kowarzik (1996: 30-31).

⁷⁶⁰ SW, 1, 2, 17.

separated from the external world. The difference is, Schelling believes, that the human being is that part of nature that reflects upon this aspect of self-doubling and uses symbolic language to materialize this reflection.⁷⁶¹ As Naomi Fisher says, human oppose themselves “not just to what is external to the human organism, but to all of nature”.⁷⁶² As Schelling says in *Treatise Explicatory*, what separates humans from other animals is not our ability to intuit and generate concepts (perhaps animals are restricted to generating first-order representations), but our ability to “judge”, which is “the exclusive domain of rational beings”.⁷⁶³ Human beings begin, through language, to ask questions and judge about the external world. Hence, the ability to judge can be said to be a necessary part of our separation from the world, which we then attempt unite with again through making true judgements.

We could call this kind of freedom (to judge) *metaphysical freedom*.⁷⁶⁴ The ability, or need, to construct ideas about how we, as local and individualized points in the universe, blend in with the rest of the world. This is why Schelling often talks about human beings as standing at the “threshold of nature”;⁷⁶⁵ that humans are the “departure point of a new process” at the “limit of nature [Grenze der Natur]”, and that the natural world turns to a “new beginning” with a “new world”: “This new world is the minded world, the world of minds, or the ideal side of the universe”.⁷⁶⁶ With the human being, a new evolution begins that depends on the natural evolution that preceded it: a cultural revolution (or human history).⁷⁶⁷

Thus, Schelling’s naturalism incorporates the idea that there is a distinct type of human agency that cannot be reduced to another of agency (such as biological agency aimed a maintenance and reproduction) or inanimate matter. Hence, the human life-form (*Geist*), as we shall explore in the next chapter under the heading of a *philosophical anthropology*, exhibits a continuity and discontinuity with the rest of the natural world.

⁷⁶¹ Schelling follows Hölderlin in understanding “judgement” as “original fission [Ur-Teilung]” between subject and object.

⁷⁶² Fisher (2020: 62). Fisher argues that the step from other organisms to the human comes through “consciousness”. Consciousness is, she claims, what begins the separation between subject and object (see also Schmied-Kowarzik (1996: 30-32) for a similar reading). I disagree, since she does not do justice to Schelling’s understanding of organisms, who also exhibit this structure of subject and object, or inner and outer. As we have seen, Schelling does ascribe a certain kind of consciousness – alongside sensation, perception, conceptuality, and intuition. Therefore, if it is consciousness that separates human freedom from other sorts of freedom, it must be a particular kind of consciousness. Perhaps, we could say, a consciousness that reaches out to the whole (and judges about the whole).

⁷⁶³ SW, 1, 1, 393.

⁷⁶⁴ See SW, 1, 1, 388.

⁷⁶⁵ SW, 7, 446 (1994b: 216).

⁷⁶⁶ SW, 1, 10, 390.

⁷⁶⁷ Heuser-Keßler (1990: 54), Schmied-Kowarzik (1996: 170).

5. Schelling's Philosophical Anthropology

5.0. Introduction

In the last chapter, I argued that Schelling's concept of nature is a "re-enchanting" one. Nature, on this conception, does not rule out the possibility of human agency but *enables* it. I suggested that Schelling proposes a gradualist and anti-exceptionalist conception of freedom (and other concepts, e.g., consciousness). This entails a kind of naturalism. But it does not entail a strong naturalism in the sense proposed, or at least indicated, by some commentators (Grant and Whistler). According to Schelling, Whistler writes, non-human conditions "fully determine and describe" human-related phenomena (like value and meaning-creation), and the "autonomy" of these phenomena can only be maintained "phenomenally".⁷⁶⁸ But that would, in principle, make Schelling's view no different from reductive illusionist like Frankish and Dennett who claim that features like human consciousness and freedom are perhaps useful, or necessary, assumptions for making our way about in the social world, but they do not pick out any objective features in the world; it is nothing but a trick performed by brain hardware that causes phenomenological sense of being conscious and free. But such a reading would go against Schelling's entire aim with his *Naturphilosophie*: to draw out the ontological conditions of possibility for the existence of human mindedness and freedom.

This chapter is about Schelling's non-reductive account of human mindedness (human *Geist*). The combination of the gradualist *and* non-reductive aspects are encapsulated by a distinction Schelling makes in the *Freedom Essay*, although not very articulate, between *Geist as such* and *human Geist*. He says that *Geist* (and "freedom") as such is also "in play [*im Spiel*]" in non-human nature, but that it takes a certain form with the emergence of the human. This specific form, which is intimately bound up with the conception of human freedom and hence (in Schelling's view) morality, is what he investigates in the *Freedom Essay*. The concept of *Geist as such* indicates that non-human nature, just like human nature, manifests a certain self-positing or self-organizing structure.⁷⁶⁹ As Michelle Kosch has argued, Schelling's

⁷⁶⁸ Whistler (2016a: 106). Whistler's focus is on "symbols" and "meaning", but he also mentions normative, value-laden phenomena.

⁷⁶⁹ Schelling ties the concept of *Geist* with the concept of an organism as a "productive power" that produces in a regular and organizing way according to a plan, where human self-consciousness is the highest level of this power. See Frank (2018: 28).

view is fundamentally a “compatibilist one”,⁷⁷⁰ but a compatibilism between dead, mechanical nature and human freedom and mindedness. This compatibilism does not mean that the structure manifested by human beings is identical or reducible to the structures of non-human nature. As what he in the *Weltalter* calls a “higher degree of freedom”,⁷⁷¹ human mindedness is irreducible.

But what is human mindedness? Like other organisms, we separate ourselves from the world. But compared to other organisms, Schelling argues, 1) we affirm ourselves in relation to a conception of the whole (we are *metaphysical beings*), and 2) our degree of freedom in relation to our natural conditions and environment more intense, which involves the conception of moral responsibility. It is the “character of humanity”, as he writes in the *Ideas*, to attempt to “raise” themselves above their natural conditions.⁷⁷² Or, as he says in the *Stuttgart-Lectures*, humans are “in the midst of, and simultaneously above, nature”.⁷⁷³ Humans have, as Adorno would also say, a *transcending nature*: “What transcends nature is nature that has become aware of itself”.⁷⁷⁴ A fundamental concept in this regard is what Schelling calls “self-affirmation [*Selbstbejahung*]”.⁷⁷⁵ This is the basic activity whereby a human subject is shaped by affirming itself in relation to a whole. As Kosch formulates it: “[C]onscious, human willing always has in view the totality of the cosmos and its place there”.⁷⁷⁶ Free, human beings are, for Schelling, *metaphysical beings*, in the very

⁷⁷⁰ Kosch (2006: 77). Kosch argues that there is a fundamental change in Schelling’s thinking between the *1800 System* and the *Freedom Essay*. In the latter, as she rightly argues, Schelling introduces a libertarian notion of freedom that assumes alternate possibilities or choice as fundamental to (human) freedom. She then argues that this contrasts the early compatibilism because Schelling in the *1800 System* conceives of human freedom as “development in accordance with one’s own rational nature”, just like all other natural beings (77). Because humans, like other natural beings, are “self-governing systems which cause themselves to develop in accordance with dynamically conceived essences”, we can talk about causal ultimacy but not about alternate possibilities in Schelling’s early conception: The only difference between human beings and other natural beings is a “higher degree of self-consciousness and reflection in my pursuit of my natural ends”; our “natural ends” are just different from everything else through their content, not their structure (77). I agree with Kosch that Schelling introduces a libertarian notion of freedom in the *Freedom Essay*. But I disagree that there is a fundamental change in his views. As I argued in Chapter 4, Schelling’s view of teleological agency (beings having “natural ends”) does not necessarily rule out that agents can have a certain openness to their environment, a certain autonomy, and that this openness becomes increasingly vast in the case of human agency. Already early on, contrary to what Kosch argues, Schelling is explicit that human beings are open-ended and historical beings because they are unpredictable and do not have an essence that they are supposed to realize as their natural ends. For example, in the short text “Is a Philosophy of History Possible?”, he writes: “The history of a human being, however, is not predetermined; human beings can and should create their own history” (2021: 189). Because Schelling is still committed to the Continuity Thesis in the *Freedom Essay*, I see no basis for claiming that he, because he introduces a notion of alternate possibilities (which, I believe, he also had earlier), introduces an incompatibilist conception of freedom. There is no incompatibilism between Schelling’s concept of human freedom and non-human freedom, they are just different degrees of freedom, which yields different types. For example, the self-organizing character of mycelium does not involve “norms”.

⁷⁷¹ SW, 1, 8, 287-88 (2000: 65).

⁷⁷² SW, 1, 2, 218. See Sturma (1995: 158).

⁷⁷³ SW, 7, 458 (1994b: 225).

⁷⁷⁴ Adorno (1996: 155). For a symbiotic reading of Schelling and Adorno, see Bowie (2014).

⁷⁷⁵ SW 7, 350.

⁷⁷⁶ Kosch (2014: 156).

particular sense whereby they can apprehend their own situation in relation to a conception of reality at large, and capable of acting on the basis of this apprehension.

To understand Schelling's idea of a transcending nature, we should in particular look to his later works, especially the *Freedom Essay* (1809) and his *Stuttgart-Lectures* (1810). Here we find the clearest exposition of human mindedness and its ontological conditions; of Schelling's gradualism *and* non-reductionism. As he states himself in the Preface to the *Freedom Essay*, he presents here for the first time his "concept of the ideal part of philosophy with complete determinateness".⁷⁷⁷ As he states himself in the text, his aim is to outline the "principle of idealism".⁷⁷⁸ This does not mean that he did not attempt to construct the "ideal part" earlier. As we shall see in this chapter, the model he proposes is already implied in the *Letters* (1795). In his *1800 System*, which was pronounced as the idealist counterpart to the *Naturphilosophie* in his parallel system of realism and idealism ("parallelism of nature with intelligence"), we find a similar pattern. Before turning to my reconstruction of the *Freedom Essay*, let me sketch some central aspects of the *1800 System*.

What the text especially offers is the gradualist or genetic aspect of human mindedness. As Schelling writes, what he calls "intelligence", another word for the organized and gradually evolving character of human mindedness, is, like non-human nature, an

endless endeavor towards self-organization [*Bestreben sich zu organisiren*]. Thus everything in the entire system of the intelligence will also strive towards organization [...] Hence a graduated sequence of organization will also be necessary [...] Organization in general is therefore nothing else but a diminished and as it were condensed picture of the universe.⁷⁷⁹

In light of his *Naturphilosophie*, human mindedness and human freedom is not threatened by nature, but rather enabled. At some point in nature's history, it begins to 'open its eyes' and think about itself. This is where the transcendental philosophy can take off. Schelling's *1800 System* is in a sense an attempt to comprise and genealogize all Kant's three Critiques in one book: From an account of the development of the necessary, subjective conditions for objective cognition of the natural world (Critique of Pure Reason) to an account of the emergence of the moral and practical aspects of human life (Critique of Practical Reason) and, finally, an account of aesthetics and teleological agency in nature (Critique of Judgement). Schelling's transcendental philosophy is an attempt to give a genetic account of what happens from the moment nature opens its eyes in the human and up to now; an attempt to retrace the subject's "transcendental past", as he writes, and outline the cognitive maturity, its limitations and abilities, at each stage of its development.

Beginning from the human mind itself – which Schelling, following Fichte, calls "self-consciousness" and assumes as the first principle in a structural account of the

⁷⁷⁷ 2006: 4.

⁷⁷⁸ 2006: 21.

⁷⁷⁹ SW, 1, 3, 491-92.

human mind – the idea of the *1800 System* is to outline the complex and genetic character of how the human mind understands and interacts with the natural world and other human minds from the perspective of the human mind, the “highest potency”. Whereas the *Naturphilosophie* provides a bottom-up-account of the relation between mind and nature, the transcendental philosophy provides a top-down account by making the subjective “primary” and “having the objective arise from this”.⁷⁸⁰ As Pinkard has put it, Schelling’s idea is to show how human consciousness “introduces a rupture” between “itself and nature in our taking a normative stance toward natural events”,⁷⁸¹ in the sense of opening up the space of understanding and giving and asking for reasons. The aim is essentially to account for the “higher” levels in nature (the human levels) and make the transition from a *theoretical* account of how the natural world must be organized for human mindedness to be possible to an account of the *practical* aspects of the human life-form: ethics, politics, and art.

Like non-human nature, the “ideal” must also be understood as a dynamic process, like a “diminished and as it were condensed picture of the universe”. In the *1800 System*, Schelling expresses this by saying that the I – unconsciously – expresses itself, through its “endless endeavor towards self-organization”, in different potencies or determinations, which amounts to what he calls the “history of self-consciousness” (thereby foreshadowing *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Mind*).⁷⁸² As he says, transcendental philosophy is “nothing else but a constant raising of the self to a higher power [...] the whole history of intelligence”.⁷⁸³ This also means that the self that Schelling describes in the *1800 System* is not a transparent, Cartesian self. Rather, he attempts to formulate a systematic account of the self that underlines how the human mind is driven by forces that are not fully transparent to it; human mindedness does not begin as a self-determining subject, but develops into one with practical goals and interactions, thereby stressing a radical finitude ingrained in human agency. This theme echoes, as we shall see, the central ideas of Schelling’s *Freedom Essay*.

5.1. Philosophical anthropology

5.1.1. The idea of philosophical anthropology

Theunissen noted that in the *Freedom Essay* we find Schelling’s “antropologischer Ansatz”.⁷⁸⁴ What does Schelling’s philosophical anthropology look like? From a methodological point of view, we could describe it in a two-fold manner:

⁷⁸⁰ SW, 1, 3, 342 (1978: 7).

⁷⁸¹ Pinkard (2002: 184).

⁷⁸² SW, 1, 3, 330 (1978: 2). See Bowie (2021).

⁷⁸³ SW, 1, 3, 450.

⁷⁸⁴ Theunissen (1965). On Schelling’s use of the word “anthropology” and the possibility of making an anthropological science, see Halfwassen (1999), Hennigfeld (2002), van Zantwijk (2002), Ziche (2011). One of the only places where Schelling explicitly mentions “anthropology”, namely

1) an attempt to delineate, in general terms, the structural features that distinguish human beings from other existents. In Schelling's view, a success criterion for such an attempt is for it to be resistant against physicalist reduction without giving up the thought that the human is also a natural being.⁷⁸⁵

2) the meta-philosophical observation that the human attempt as such of any delimitation is itself an answer to the fundamental question of what the human being is. That is, the attempt to answer what the human being is and how it blends in with the rest of what exists is in itself the activity that 'answers' the fundamental question of philosophical anthropology. Human beings are metaphysical (Schelling) and self-interpreting (Taylor) animals. What the human is, on this account, is thus nothing but the historically unfolding and indeterminate set of answers – and the actions springing from those answers – to the question about what the human being is.

To be sure, this is a *formal*, not a *contentual* definition of the human. The problem with thinking that we have, or can have, a well-defined object of study to be investigated and demarcated directly is, as Thomas Schwartz Wentzer has put it with reference to Schelling, that the human subject is not any kind of "familiar, pure and transparent entity intimately at hand"; rather, it "stubbornly remains alien, opaque and obscure".⁷⁸⁶ And, not least, the human being is, on Schelling's account, ever-changing, subject to a constitutive lability and fragility. Viewing the human being as a *zone of indeterminacy*, as a constitutive world-openness, is the point of departure for constructing any philosophical anthropology.

5.1.2. Freedom and systematicity

As Hennigfeld has noted, Schelling's "anthropologischer Ansatz" is impossible to separate neatly from his *Naturphilosophie* and general ontological commitments.⁷⁸⁷

in his *Würzburger System der gesamten Philosophie und der Naturphilosophie insbesondere* (1804), he also refers to "anthroposophy [Anthroposophie]" as a science that does not yet exist, but should investigate the "whole construction of the human organism", not as in "physiology" but as a "human organism". (SW I, 6, 488).

⁷⁸⁵ In this broad sense, most philosophical work at least contains a strain of philosophical anthropology. The "discipline" is directly traceable to German and French thinkers in the 20th century such as Scheler, Cassirer, Gehlen and Plessner, Hans Jonas, Martin Buber, Merleau-Ponty and others, and it is indirectly traceable – among others – to Schelling, Kierkegaard, Feuerbach and Marx. For a comparison between Schelling and Marx's anthropology, see Zeltner (1954: 213). Halfwassen (1999) has shown how Schelling anticipates the philosophical anthropology of Scheler and Plessner, namely through the concepts of "world-openness" and "excentricity". For a comparison between Schelling and Jonas, see Lundsryd (2016) and Michelini (2020).

⁷⁸⁶ Wentzer (2017: 350). Or, as the late Schelling puts it himself in *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*: "Thus far from man and his endeavors making the world comprehensible, it is man himself that is the most incomprehensible" (2007: 94). This is why, as van Zantwijk has argued, that Schelling hesitated about the idea of making anthropology into a proper science with a clear and determinable object of study (van Zantwijk 2002: 116). The comparison with Plessner is striking. At one point, Plessner calls the human being the *homo absconditus* (the unfathomable human) (1983: 353).

⁷⁸⁷ Hennigfeld (2002: 22).

We can only understand why the human is a world-open being if we understand the ways in which it is interconnected with the rest of nature, with the world towards which it is open. In the *Freedom Essay*, Schelling's philosophical anthropology is unfolded through an analysis of "human freedom" or "personality".

Hennigfeld's point becomes clear in the first paragraph of the text when Schelling refers to how the concept of "individual freedom" must be connected with "the whole of a scientific worldview" and that it "surely" must be "connected in some way with the world as a whole (regardless of whether it be thought in a realist or idealist manner)". Schelling goes on to argue for this necessary connection between freedom and the "world as a whole" through a phenomenological observation. He refers to the "fact of freedom [die Tatsache der Freiheit]" as a "feeling [Gefühl]" that is "imprinted [eingepägt] in every individual".⁷⁸⁸ This feeling does not refer to some mental, psychological process, but as, Peter Dews phrases it, a "basic – perhaps the basic – form of self-consciousness", and this is justified since "facts", as he continues, are "not among the kinds of things which human beings are normally said to 'feel'".⁷⁸⁹ Schelling's point, which resembles contemporary "arguments" for free will, is this: That we have some sort of causal ultimacy or control behind our actions and beliefs is so deeply entrenched in our self-conceptions and daily lives that it seems impossible for it to be wrong. It seems epistemically basic.⁷⁹⁰

What is Schelling's point with this? I take it that he offers a (phenomenological) indispensability argument. But not for the existence of anything (e.g., moral responsibility), but for the necessity of investigating what the ontological conditions of the world must be like in order for this "undeniable" feeling of freedom to exist. Schelling does not use the "fact of freedom" as an explanatory axiom like Kant uses the "fact of reason" (moral consciousness), as I showed in Chapter 2, in his argument for the objectivity of freedom. Even if it turns out to be a mere illusion (as Frankish and Dennett would argue), we still have to account for the existence of this feeling of freedom. This is why Schelling believes that the concept of freedom must be treated in a systematic way, that this feeling of freedom must somehow be connected with "the whole of a scientific worldview". As he writes, "proof" of this connection "confers on it final scientific completeness".⁷⁹¹ The shoulder-shrugging of the liberal (quietist) naturalist, when asked about the incompatibility between freedom and determinism, is clearly not an option for Schelling. If the quietist holds that freedom is only a valid concept, or looks real, from within the practical standpoint, the hard naturalists like Dennett and Ladyman will most likely agree and say that this standpoint might have a useful function within a human-social perspective but that it has nothing to do with how the world is. Both positions would, Schelling thinks, make our concept of freedom vulnerable to skepticism.⁷⁹²

⁷⁸⁸ SW 1, 7, 336 (2006: 9).

⁷⁸⁹ Dews (2017: 158).

⁷⁹⁰ See e.g., Swinburne (2013).

⁷⁹¹ SW, 1, 7, 336 (2006: 10).

⁷⁹² See e.g., SW I, 7, 338 (2006: 10-11).

The concept of human freedom that Schelling has in mind is a libertarian one, combining aspects of causal ultimacy and alternate possibilities.⁷⁹³ Hence, human freedom is, on Schelling's view, incompatible with any sort of global determinism. However, since every "scientific worldview", Schelling believes, must have a monistic character, either human freedom is an illusion or global determinism is false. He makes it clear in the *Freedom Essay* that the specific "scientific worldview" that is incompatible with human freedom is Spinoza's determinism (or necessitarianism).⁷⁹⁴

However, Schelling does not accept Jacobi's objection that Spinoza's worldview, or metaphysical "system", is the only possible system. Schelling argues that the only system that can make sense of the "fact" of freedom is the system of continuity that he has proposed with his *Naturphilosophie*, whereby the natural world is not conceived as "things" (attributes or modes of one substance), as he accuses Spinoza of. Spinoza's view, according to which also the "will" is treated as a "thing", leads to an "entirely deterministic" and "mechanistic view of nature". Rather, this "worldview" must be replaced, as he writes, with a "dynamic notion of nature".⁷⁹⁵ Freedom is not merely some local and strongly emergent brute phenomena reserved only for the human species. Rather, in the broad sense of self-organization, it is a structural concept that antecedes the specific form of human freedom. Human freedom is nothing but a "higher degree of freedom".⁷⁹⁶ That is why, I take it, he reverts Fichte's assumption about the I and says that not "only is I-hood all, but also the reverse, that all is I-hood",⁷⁹⁷ and later states that "freedom, spirit and self-will [Freiheit, Geist und Eigenwille]" is already "in play [im Spiel]" in non-human, organic nature.⁷⁹⁸ Non-human nature exhibits, he says, a "sort of freedom [Art der Freiheit]".⁷⁹⁹ I-hood, freedom and self-will do not refer, as Ameriks puts it, to "ordinary finite and psychological phenomena", but to more general principles that are manifested as a "self-positing structure" that does not, necessarily, involve any explicit awareness or self-consciousness that we associate with individual human subjects. The *Naturphilosophie* has, as he says in the Preface to the *Freedom Essay*, "torn out" the "root of opposition" between "nature and spirit [Geist]" because it has rejected that "nature is utterly without reason and thought". Through the *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling believes he can avoid the dualism of standpoints effected by Kant's third antinomy as well as its deterministic sister. However, the structure, or potency, of the "higher form" of freedom specific to humans is not identical or reducible to its lower forms.

⁷⁹³ See e.g., Jacobs (1995: 129-130), (Kosch 2006: 91), and Buchheim (2012: 210).

⁷⁹⁴ Or "fatalism", as Schelling calls it (SW, 1, 7, 338 (2006: 11)). On Spinoza's necessitarianism, see Garrett (1991).

⁷⁹⁵ SW, 1, 7, 349 (2006: 20).

⁷⁹⁶ SW, 1, 8, 287-88 (2000: 65).

⁷⁹⁷ SW 1 7, 351 (2006: 22).

⁷⁹⁸ SW, 7, 376 (2006: 43).

⁷⁹⁹ *ibid.*

5.2. The human subject as decentered and centered

5.2.1. Schellings' notion of pre-reflexive freedom

Schelling's model of incorporating human freedom into a systematic worldview begins from the naturalist or anti-exceptionalist assumption that human beings are "creaturely [*creatürlich*]" and "emerge from the ground [*aus dem Grunde entspringt*]"⁸⁰⁰ Schelling's stance can be phrased like this: There is a whole set of non-individual conditions or contexts that must be in place for each of us to be what we call a "person" that does and believes certain things. Physical, biological, social, historical, and so on. This is what Schelling refers to as the "ground [Grund]" (thus, it should be taken in plural as "grounds". Schelling's concept of ground is not to be understood causally or reductively, but as "fundament, support [Unterlage], foundation [Grundlage], basis", as he puts it in a letter to Georgii from 1810, responding to misinterpretations of his concept.⁸⁰¹ That is, Schelling has a certain *dependency relation* in mind: We are dependent on certain contexts in order to act. Firstly, in order to emerge as such (genealogical dependency). Secondly, in order to have some (external) context to engage with (environmental dependency).

In line with his continuity thesis from the *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling argues that all types of activity (including human actions, which is what is referred to in the full title of the *Freedom Essay* as the "objects [Gegenstände]" related to the essence of human freedom) share some basic universal structures. In the *Freedom Essay*, he presents this idea by saying that everything springs from a dynamic relation between two different principles (that are in "all things",⁸⁰² as he says), which he generally refers to as the particular and the universal, sometimes calling them wills, and at other times "self-will [Eigenwille]"⁸⁰³ and "understanding".⁸⁰⁴ Each "being", he says, that has "emerged in nature",⁸⁰⁵ is structured in a certain way according to these two principles. Michelle Kosch has given a nice account of this 'dualism' by relating it to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*:

Schelling begins with an account of the constitution of things (including persons) in terms of two fundamental principles – a 'real' principle (which Schelling also calls the principle of the ground), and an 'ideal' principle (which Schelling also calls the principle of the understanding, or the intellectual principle). Schelling portrays these two principles in terms of various oppositions in the course of the essay, the most important among them being gravity/light; chaos/order; nonunderstanding/understanding; and creaturely self-will/universal will. The most enlightening opposition, oddly enough, turns out to be the first, which Schelling takes from his philosophy of nature. The gravity/light opposition is one of contraction versus expansion, and it is in light of this opposition that the other pairs of opposed terms are best

⁸⁰⁰ SW 1, 7, 363

⁸⁰¹ F.W.J. Schelling to Georgii, July 18th, 1810, Plitt II, 221.

⁸⁰² SW 1, 7, 363.

⁸⁰³ SW 1, 7, 358.

⁸⁰⁴ SW 1, 7, 357.

⁸⁰⁵ SW 1, 7, 362.

understood. The principle of contraction is one that separates things off from one another, allowing them to exist as distinct individuals. The principle of expansion brings these distinct individuals into connection with one another.⁸⁰⁶

Since the human life form is a certain manifestation of life, we can only make sense of it through this general structure of two opposed principles. The “particular” stands for any individual being or subject, any “determinate existence [Bestimmten Daseyn]”, that is distinct from its settings and can enter into relations of some sort with these settings (thereby having the same function as the subject-position in the predicative judgement ‘S is P’). It is a particular subject with a certain “distinctness [Bestimmtheit]”,⁸⁰⁷ which is “separated [geschieden]”⁸⁰⁸ from the world-whole, which simply means a being that always stands in a relation to a world of things that is qualitatively different from itself. Schelling also refers to this individual, determinate existence as a “selfhood or I-hood [Selbstheit und Ichheit]”.⁸⁰⁹ This account of an “individual” is a repetition of Schelling’s account of the structure of organisms: they are defined by having an inner and outer world.⁸¹⁰

What he means by the “universal” or the “understanding” is more complex. The universal is, trivially, the non-individual. I believe the concept is meant to highlight – when abstracting from the type of subject in question e.g., humans (individuals or specified sets), insects or plants – at least the two following, interrelated aspects:

(1) whatever goes beyond the individual (the surrounding world of human and human actions and processes) and brings the individuals together in a “whole”.

(2) something that is shared by more than one individual (think of the distinction between *particulars* and *universals* in the metaphysical sense: particulars are singular instances; universals are what particulars can share).

The universal is the natural and social environment in which we are always already situated.⁸¹¹ If we focus on human agency, the “particular” aspect is our “creaturely” or “natural” side. Schelling also sometimes calls it “irrational” or “real” side of humans. As he writes in the Stuttgart-Lectures, the “understanding” – referring to our participation in the space of reasons – is “grounded in the “irrational [Verstandslos]”. Hence, the “foundation [Basis] of the human spirit” is the “irrational”.⁸¹²

⁸⁰⁶ Kosch (2006: 98). And she continues in a footnote: “The claim that there must be some two basic principles (united in a synthesis of some kind) rests on a staple of Schelling’s philosophy of nature: only in (synthesized) opposition is there life” (Kosch 2006: 98).

⁸⁰⁷ SW, 1, 7, 376.

⁸⁰⁸ SW, 1, 7, 365.

⁸⁰⁹ SW, 1, 7, 376.

⁸¹⁰ I think Kosch is wrong to equate the particular with “a sort of egoism”. The “particular” need not, as we shall see, necessarily entail a sort of egoism. Only if it does not subordinate itself to, or at least respects, its surroundings (Kosch 2006: 99).

⁸¹¹ See Buchheim (2012).

⁸¹² SW, 1, 7, 465 (1994b: 229).

This is not a plea for some sort of “irrationalism” if that means that rationality and madness are totally undifferentiated. Schelling is pointing to the fact that humans, as creaturely, have a set of natural conditions and unconscious tendencies that they share with the rest of nature (or, at least, other organisms), such as self-maintenance. Schelling believes that the “irrational”, our self-hood, is a fundamental component of human agency. As he writes, to be an “actual, living, and active” subject, humans must have a non-rational “drive”.⁸¹³ Drives, as Paul Ziche has pointed out, is related to “activity” that is, somehow, “beyond rational control”, that sets motion into the world.⁸¹⁴ Not only non-human activities but also human activities are organized through unconscious energies or drives.⁸¹⁵ That is, energies that the subject is not completely or directly aware about but which forces, or helps in forcing, the subject into action. This is what Sturma has referred to as Schelling’s notion of “pre-reflexivity” or “pre-reflective freedom”,⁸¹⁶ which is not the “limit of autonomy” but rather its “constitutive ground”.⁸¹⁷ Here we find Schelling’s (naturalistic) critique of Fichte: the ground of human agency and self-consciousness is not self-imposed, we are not completely self-grounding. Self-determination requires self-limitation (genealogical dependency) and self-externalization (environmental dependency).⁸¹⁸ In a certain way, we are *decentralized* subjects.

5.2.2. Schelling’s non-reductionism about human agency

Although humans “emerge from the ground”, we are also able to reflect upon, partially detach ourselves from and impact our (internal and external) conditions. We are not fully emersed in the ground but can stand out from it in various ways. Just like other animals, according to Schelling, but to a more extreme degree. This is, in its core, what amounts to Schelling’s non-reductionism regarding human agency: Dependence/heteronomy does not exclude independence/autonomy. Here is one of the key passages from the *Freedom Essay*:

But dependence [Abhängigkeit] does not abolish independence [Selbständigkeit], it does not even abolish [aufheben] freedom. Dependence does not determine its being and says only that

⁸¹³ SW, 1, 7, 470 (1994b: 233). Gabriel seems to exclude this part of Schelling’s idea of the irrational by reserving it to the “history of humanity within which reason was forged”, thereby not including it as an aspect of human existence, merely of its becoming (2015: 100).

⁸¹⁴ Ziche (2022).

⁸¹⁵ See also Högrefe (1989: 117-18). Freud refers, with good reason, to Schelling in his text “The Uncanny” (1919). For a “Freudian” reading of Schelling’s view on the human psychic economy, see Baumgartner (1987), Žižek (1997), Ffytche (2012).

⁸¹⁶ See Sturma (1995, 1996, 2019). Although I agree with Sturma’s rendering in general, he sometimes overdoes this aspect of unconscious pre-reflexivity. For example, he states that the “essential determination” of self-consciousness “occurs beyond itself” (Sturma 2019: 13). Depending on what to understand by “essential”, it seems to me that he ignores the central aspect of Schelling’s analysis of evil. What Schelling seeks to achieve with his concept of evil is exactly that evil actions cannot be reduced to biological or pre-reflexive drives but are deliberate acts whereby an individual uses his or her rationality to suppress and disturb other individuals and his or her environment for egotistic reasons.

⁸¹⁷ Sturma (1995: 162-63).

⁸¹⁸ See Sturma (1995, 1996), and Buchheim (2012).

the dependent, whatever it also may be, can be a consequence [Folge] only of that of which it is a dependent; dependence does not say what the dependent is or is not. Every organic individual exists, as something that has become, only through another [Jedes organische Individuum ist als ein Gewordenes nur durch ein anderes], and in this respect is dependent according to its becoming but by no means according to its Being [Seyn]. It is not inconsistent, says Leibniz, that he who is God is at the same time begotten or vice versa; just as little is it a contradiction that he who is the son of a man is also himself a man. On the contrary, it would be far more contradictory, if the dependent or consequent were not independent. That would be a dependency without a dependent, a consequence without a consequent (consequencia absque consequente) and, thus, no real consequence [wirkliche Folge], that is, the whole concept would abolish itself. The same is valid for the containment [Begriffensein] of one thing within another. An individual body part, like the eye, is only possible within the whole of an organism; nonetheless, it has its own life for itself [ein Leben für sich], indeed, its own kind of freedom, which it obviously proves through the disease of which it is capable. Were that which is contained in another not itself alive, then there would be containment without something being contained [eine Begriffenheit ohne Begriffenes], that is, nothing would be contained.⁸¹⁹

Notice the resemblance between being “dependent according to its becoming but by no means according to its being” and the citation from the *Ideas* quoted in Chapter 4. There Schelling says that nothing “in Nature *comes to be* by a leap [Sprung]”, only through a “continuous sequence [stetigen Folge]”. But this does not entail that there is “no leap between what *exists*”. What exists can have “its own boundaries as a thing of a particular kind, which distinguishes itself from other by sharp determinations”.⁸²⁰ To say that human beings are the result of, or emerge from, a complex process of natural evolution (it is “ein Gewordenes”), does not mean that human beings are identical or can be reduced to those preceding processes or properties in the “continuous sequence”. In that sense, Schelling affirms Hilary Putnam’s (or Aristotle’s) conceptual pluralism: reality consists of different forms that each require different conceptual and causal analyses.

When he says that “dependence does not say what the dependent is or is not” this means that a description of the natural conditions for a human being will always be an underdetermined description of what the human being is. We can call this Schelling’s *Autonomy Thesis*. As Alderwick has aptly put it:

The ground is not the cause of the consequent in the sense that it fully determines the latter, it rather constitutes the conditions of the latter’s possibility; rather than determining all aspects of its being, it simply defines the parameters within which the consequent is able to creatively actualize itself [...] For Schelling, this relationship whereby consequents are not

⁸¹⁹ SW 1, 7, 346 (2006: 17-18).

⁸²⁰ SW, 2, 171.

fully determined by their grounds is what establishes the possibility for variety and freedom to exist in the natural world.⁸²¹

To affirm two *relata* (for example a dependent and what it depends upon) where the one explains, causes, or grounds the other, and then claim that these two *relata* are *identical* or that the one can be *reduced* to the other, is according to Schelling a thoughtless category mistake.⁸²² What is consequent of something else can, trivially, not be instantiated without this other. But a “real consequence”, as the concept implies, is also something numerically non-identical to what it is a consequent of. If the consequent were nothing for itself, it would not be a consequence, but merely the same as what it was supposed to be dependent on, and thus the “whole concept would abolish itself”. To escape this contradiction, one has to abandon the premise that we in fact talking about two *relata*, that is, two separate, although related, entities. It is outright senseless to affirm a dependence relation between two distinct entities and thereafter say that the dependent entity is not something for itself.

What Schelling points to here is one of the fundamental category errors of all attempts to ‘naturalize’ a field or concept in a reductive spirit: If you want to affirm the identity between two different entities, you assert that there is no difference between them, that there are not even two *relata*. The identity theorists must say that there is *one* thing, not *two*. The identity theorist about free will essentially claims that free will is nothing over and above certain neurological workings. It is not the claim that the brain *produces* (or grounds or constitutes) certain mental states because that would mean that there are two things. For Schelling, that is clearly a confused approach. For example, the “fact of freedom”, the undeniable feeling of freedom (that Patricia Churchland also has), is for all likelihood different in *kind* from inanimate matter or neurons firing in your brain (although the former is, for all we know, triggered by the latter, and is thus dependent in its “becoming”, as Schelling writes). Either you accept the mistake of this approach and come up with a different account of what the consequent or dependent entity is, or you make a radical rejection of there being anything in the first place to give an account of, which is, according to Schelling, a non-starter, due to our phenomenological experience of, among other things, freedom.

I shall return to Schelling’s understanding of identity judgements in Chapter 6. But for now, we should note the following: When he sometimes says that “mind is nature” – or that the “soul is the body”, or that “freedom and necessity are one” – *identity* means something very particular (and something very important: his ponderings on judgements and identity are essential in the first 10-15 pages of the text

⁸²¹ Alderwick (2021: 155-156).

⁸²² At one point, he calls this “pure [bloßer] naturalism“, which does not “essentially distinguish“ between what is “moral and physical“ (SW, 1, 5, 181), or “conceives the unity of I and nature” in a purely empirical manner (SW, 1, 5, 122).

and at the end of the text).⁸²³ If it is understood according to contemporary physicalists, it would mean, as he writes, that the “essence of the moral world is also the essence of nature”, or that “free things are nothing but forces of nature, coil springs [Springfeder], which, like any other, are subject to mechanism”, or that “the soul is material, air, ether, never, fluid, and the like”. The identity theorist takes “identity” to mean “sameness [Einerleiheit]” in the sense of Leibniz’ Law of identity, identity theorists seem to assume that two objects (or states), A and B, are identical when any property of A must also be a property of B. This is, according to Schelling, an example of a “dialectical immaturity” that does not express the “real meaning of the law of identity” or the “copula in judgement”. The law of identity, which Schelling renders as judgements of predication (‘S is P’), differentiates “subject and predicate as what precedes and what follows (*antecedens et consequens*)”.⁸²⁴ The example he gives is “this body is blue”. According to the “immature” understanding of identity, this would mean that the body is necessarily blue. Instead, we should think of this judgement, Schelling suggests, as saying: “[T]he same thing which is this body is also blue, although not in the same respect”.⁸²⁵ As he writes in *Denkmal der Schrift von den göttlichen Dingen*, clarifying (for Jacobi) why his *Naturphilosophie* is not a form of reductive materialism, the “human is a physical being insofar as this does not mean that it is only that”.⁸²⁶ What he seems to suggest is that the meaning of a judgement of predication is the following: “S is P” means that there is something, X, which is both S and P, and can be considered either as S or P (or both at the same time). Whether this entails that Schelling is committed to a double-aspect-view or a neutral monism regarding mind and nature, I will return to in the next chapter.

As noted earlier, some commentators read Schelling’s naturalism in a strong sense. Whistler writes that non-human conditions “fully determine and describe” human-related phenomena like value and meaning-creation, which Schelling “includes [...] within his naturalistic worldview”. The autonomy of these (human-related) phenomena is, according to Whistler, only upheld from a phenomenological perspective. As he says, “sense is naturalized genetically, but irreducible to nature phenomenally”.⁸²⁷ But that does not square with Schelling’s entire project of giving an ontological account (through his *Naturphilosophie*) of the possibility of autonomy, for example the autonomy of human freedom. If one told the eliminative illusionist that the advent of freedom or consciousness is naturalistically explainable but irreducible *for us*, they would most likely say: “exactly!”. The phenomenal quality is the exact trick that our brain spins on us.

⁸²³ Schelling feels the need to clarify his use of “identity” because his system of identity (1801-1804) was accused of denying individuality and freedom. As he says in the *Freedom Essay*: if “it seems at first glance as if freedom [...] had perished in identity here, then one can say that this appearance is only the result of an imperfect and empty notion of the law of identity” (SW, 1, 7, 345 (2006: 17)).

⁸²⁴ See Gabriel (2014), Alderwick (2015), and Whistler (2016a).

⁸²⁵ SW, 1, 7, 341 (2006: 13).

⁸²⁶ SW, 1, 8, 27.

⁸²⁷ Whistler (2016a: 106).

5.3. Moral subjects: Between good and evil

Like all other beings, human beings are structured according to the principles of the particular and the universal. In what way is human agency then distinct? Schelling claims that *human* freedom is different from the freedom of other natural beings, e.g., organisms, in that the relation between the particular and the universal is not a “necessary but a free bond”. Contrary to the plant or the animal, he claims, we can, or must, decide ourselves how to enact the relation between our particular self-interest and the non-individual that goes beyond ourselves, but is the basis for our particularity, whether it is other individual people, societal arrangements, or biochemical natural systems. Hence, human beings enact a level of freedom where our particular individuality is not determined by our autonomous ability to react according to our environment in ways that merely maintains our biological needs of maintenance and survival (like he thinks animals are). And this degree of autonomy is what entails, Schelling believes, that humans are morally responsible beings. In one of his existentialist outbursts, he writes that that human beings are placed

on that summit [Gipfel] where he has in himself the source of self-movement [Selbstbewegungsquelle] toward good or evil [...] the bond of principles in him is not a necessary but rather a free one. Man stands on the threshold [Scheidpunkt]; whatever he chooses, it will be his act: but he cannot remain undecided [kann nicht in der Unentschiedenheit bleiben].⁸²⁸

What Schelling calls good and evil have their *locus* in the relation between the two principles or wills. The “possibility of good and evil”, he says, arises when the two principles of the particular and the universal are “severable”.⁸²⁹ That is, when the relation is not fixed, but open.⁸³⁰ What Schelling calls the good comes about when these two principles are not opposed. For example, when I am concerned and see myself as responsible for more than my own particular needs and desires, or when I make an individual contribution to a scientific research field. Evil arises, on the other hand, when there is a dissonance between the particular and the universal. For example, when I consciously sidestep basic moral codes, or when I consciously ignore scientific evidence and aim to spread misinformation.

⁸²⁸ SW, 1, 7, 374 (2006: 41). See Kosch for a comparison with Kierkegaard’s notion of anxiety (2006: 97, 100). See Hennigfeld & Stewart (2003) for a series of studies on Schelling and Kierkegaard.

⁸²⁹ SW 1, 7, 364 (2006: 33).

⁸³⁰ For this reason, Gabriel’s reading of Schelling’s concept of ‘evil’, which assumes that people are *necessarily* evil, not just potentially, seems questionable (Gabriel 2006). According to Gabriel, the instantiation of evil is a necessary condition for being self-consciousness and free: “To be free means to be evil [...] world-beings necessarily try to dominate the world. There is no free individual who is not evil” (32-33). On this reading, what Schelling calls ‘self-affirmation’ is equal to evil. But Schelling’s claim seems to be more intuitive and less pessimistic: to be free means to be capable of evil actions.

The possibility of this constant process of separation and binding together is what Schelling calls “personality [Persönlichkeit]” or (human) “spirit”.⁸³¹ A “person” is thus a being capable of negotiating the relation between its particular existence and the universally shared space. The plant’s response to its environmental situation is free and creative in the sense that it is organizing itself (as cause and effect of its own actions) in different and developing ways to its environment according to a principle of self-maintenance; it is not completely pre-determined by its essence. But it *must* do so in order to stay alive, hence the bond of principles in the organisms is fixed. The open-endedness of human agency, on the other hand, implies that the human is a *zone of indeterminacy*; it can choose not to respond to the requirements of its environment. Humans have, as Kosch points out, not merely causal ultimacy (as the plant also does), but alternate possibilities.

This goes against any essentialist or substantialist conceptions of human mindedness and proceeds from the process ontological viewpoint that Schelling already proposes in his *Naturphilosophie*: The human self has an undecided openness towards the world, a constitutive lability and fragility that is continuously in the making. We are essentially historically beings: We decide and create our own past and future. In that sense, Schelling’s conception of human agency is anti-humanist (or anti-essentialist) in the Marxist sense and existentialist in the Sartrean: Existence precedes essence. The essence of human agency is so vague and indeterminate (*decide and act!* is all it contains) that everything about the human agent becomes her responsibility. Our essence is our own responsibility.

Even though we might often act beyond rational control, we are normative creatures capable of taking responsibility for even those actions that seem non-deliberate. Human freedom is thus a kind of self-appropriation. I might not be able to be fully responsible for the situatedness and context that I find myself in. But I can appropriate it, personalize it, take it upon myself, make it my responsibility. Although our actions are not necessarily delivered with full intent, we can take responsibility for them, own them. This echoes Schelling’s analysis of the dialectic of tragic hero, as we saw in Chapter 3: Self-appropriating our actions although they are, to a smaller or larger degree, out of our hands.⁸³²

Schelling’s concept of moral responsibility (good and evil) comes down to the relation between dependence and independence, between the relation

of the whole to the individual [des Ganzen zum Einzelnen] [...] The positive is always the whole or unity; that which opposes this is severing of the whole [das ihm Entgegenstehende ist Zertrennung], disharmony, ataxia of forces.⁸³³

⁸³¹ SW, 1, 7, 364 (2006: 32)

⁸³² Even though she is necessitated to act in certain ways, the tragic subject can still take upon herself the responsibility for her actions. However, in the *Letters*, Schelling has not yet developed his *Naturphilosophie*, and hence nature (or the ‘objective’) is conceived in deterministic terms, which entails that the subject is not *actually* free, only *symbolically*, through a shift of perspective. With the *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling develops a conception of nature whereby such *actual* incompatibility is no longer the case.

⁸³³ SW 1, 7, 370 (2006: 38).

What we depend on and share is the “universal”. Evil consists in an inversion of the proper relation of the universal and the particular, whereby the individual, empirical self seeks to exploit or dominate the universal. Schelling writes that the evil agent

strives to reverse [umzukehren] the relation of the principles [...] to use the spirit that it obtained only for the sake of the centrum outside the centrum and against creatures; from this results collapse [Zerrüttung] within the will itself and outside it.⁸³⁴

For Schelling, the relation of universal and particular is best exemplified by something like organisms and their life. For example, the life of a body depends upon the co-operating mechanisms of the body’s individual organs. Employing the metaphors of centre and periphery, which he uses time and time again in the *Freedom Essay*, Schelling compares evil to a disease where an organ, which ought to play a particular, subordinate role within the general functioning of the organism, strives for centrality, for dominance, and thereby brings the body as a whole into a state of pain and disorder.

This inversion is a moral choice. Human life, as Peter Dews formulates it, is according to Schelling an “endless series of minor and major moral emergencies”.⁸³⁵ We must decide for good and evil in the sense that we must decide how to enact the relation between our particular self-interest and the non-individual that goes beyond the ourselves, but is the basis for our particularity, whether it is other people, societal arrangements, or bio-chemical natural systems.

Schelling believes that this conception of human freedom, as the capacity for good and evil, improves upon prior idealist theories of action and freedom (Kant’s and Fichte’s). On his view, such theories, especially Fichte’s, are not suited for the supposition that evil actions are free in the same sense as good actions. The reason is that such theories presuppose that freedom, autonomy and morally good actions (that is, actions determined by the moral law) are reciprocal concepts in the following sense: a will that can act upon the formal principle of morality is free and autonomous, and the principle of morality is the fundamental principle that governs a free will. This implies that evil actions, in one way or another, must be grounded in something non-autonomous (= heteronomous). Therefore, Schelling argues, neither Kant nor Fichte solved the “most profound difficulties [die tiefsten Schwierigkeiten]”⁸³⁶ surrounding the concept of freedom.

First of all, Schelling’s theory is on all fronts opposed to the *classical idea* of evil running from Plotinus and Augustin to Leibniz and probably also Hegel, namely the idea that evil amounts to, as Schelling himself says, “something merely passive, to limitation [Einschränkung], lack [Mangel], deprivation [Baraubung], concepts

⁸³⁴ SW 1, 7, 365 (2006: 34).

⁸³⁵ Dews (2017: 167).

⁸³⁶ SW 1, 7, 352 (2006: 23).

that are in complete conflict [völlig Widerstreiten] with the actual nature of evil”.⁸³⁷ One fairly intuitive rejection of this idea is, as he stresses, that we attribute evil to humans more than anything else:

The simple reflection that only man, the most complete of all visible creatures, is capable of evil, shows already that the ground of evil [der Grund des Bösen] could not in any way lie in lack or deprivation. The devil, according to the Christian point of view, was not the most limited creature, but rather the least limited one. Imperfection in the general metaphysical sense is not the common character of evil, since evil often shows itself united with an excellence of individual forces, which far more rarely accompanies the good. The ground of evil must lie, therefore, not only in something generally positive but rather in that which is most positive [der höchsten Positiven] in what nature contains.⁸³⁸

The soundness of this argument stems from taking seriously what we actually mean by and how we use the concept of evil. Why do we attribute evil to Adolf Hitler, but not the killing beasts of the savanna? Because evil is not identical to biological inclinations and lack of reflexivity, but requires something else, say a certain pre-designed and intention or incentive of the action in question that is not fully sensually determined.⁸³⁹ Hitler was not forced to commit mass-murder, the beast on the savanna is.

Schelling accepts, and even praises Kant and Fichte, however, for having shown that a proper theory of freedom must include what he calls a formal or idealistic type of freedom, namely freedom understood as autonomy or self-determination, which “consists”, as he says, “in the mere rule of the intelligent principle over the sensual desires and inclinations”.⁸⁴⁰ But, as already noted, theories that assume reciprocity thesis between freedom and morality cannot account for why evil actions are free, or at least free in the same sense as good actions. Schelling relates such views to what he polemically calls ‘philantropism’ of human nature, which is pushed to “the brink of denying evil”.⁸⁴¹ He refers to Fichte’s idea of evil as a certain kind of or “lethargy [Trägheit]” of reason, or what Fichte himself called a “non-use [Nichtgebrauch]” of freedom. Schelling writes that according to such a ‘philantropist’ view,

the sole ground of evil lies in sensuality or animality [...] accordingly, it is understandable that there is no freedom for evil [...] For the weakness or ineffectualness of the principle of understanding can indeed be a ground for the lack of good and virtuous actions, yet it cannot be a ground of positively evil ones and those adverse to virtue. But, on the supposition that sensuality or a passive attitude to external impressions may bring forth evil actions with a sort of necessity, then man himself would surely only be passive in these actions; that is, evil viewed

⁸³⁷ SW 1, 7, 368 (2006: 36).

⁸³⁸ SW1, 7, 368-369 (2006: 36-37).

⁸³⁹ As Schelling points out, referencing Franz Baader, humans are therefore always *below* or *above* other animals (SW, 1, 7, 373 (2006: 40).

⁸⁴⁰ SW1, 7, 37 (2006: 17).

⁸⁴¹ SW, 1, 7, 371 (2006: 39).

in relation to his own actions, thus subjectively, would have no meaning [Bedeutung]; and since that which follows from a determination of nature also cannot be objectively evil, evil would have no meaning at all. That it is said, however, that the rational principle is inactive in evil, is in itself also no reason [Grund]. For why does the rational principle then not exercise its power? If it wants to be inactive, the ground of evil lies in this volition [Willen] and not in sensuality. Or if it cannot overcome the resisting power of sensuality in any way, then here is merely weakness and inadequacy but nowhere evil.⁸⁴²

Evil actions would become senseless on the classical idea (which includes Fichte's view), since if they were not actions of freedom, they would not be *my* actions at all. If evil actions were identical to passive, sensual desires (say triggered exclusively and necessarily by certain functions in the cerebrum), then I could not view myself as responsible for such an action (it would "subjectively" have "no meaning"); I would not even be able to view myself as an imputable agent. Schelling therefore concludes that if evil actions are to have any meaning, if the concept of 'evil' is not to abolish itself, such actions must instead be regarded as actions springing, as he says, from a "misuse [Mißbrauch] of freedom",⁸⁴³ not from a 'non-use'. All other conceptions of evil, he declares, "leave the understanding and ethical [sittliche] consciousness equally unsatisfied",⁸⁴⁴ which means:

- 1) it would be a meaningless concept (not satisfying the understanding), and
- 2) we would not be able to make negative moral judgements (not satisfying the ethical consciousness)⁸⁴⁵

It is important to note, however, that Kant's theory of evil, as he presents it in *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, undeniably contains a theoretical improvement compared to the classical idea of evil. Kant introduces evil as a "propensity [*Hang*]" in human beings that is 'radical' (something reaching to the root, although being contingent to human nature). The essential aspect of Kant's account is his assertion that evil can be a positive guide for action. He does not identify our physical inclinations and desires with evil, mainly because, as Schelling also believes, they are not in themselves subject to moral judgment. Some sort of choice must be involved in order to account for blameworthiness. Central for his account is the distinction between 'Wille' ('will' in the sense of practical reason acting according to universal principles) and 'Willkür' ('power of choice' in the sense of freely choosing

⁸⁴² SW 1, 7, 371-372 (2006: 39).

⁸⁴³ SW, 1, 7, 366 (2006: 34).

⁸⁴⁴ SW, 1, 7, 367 (2006: 35).

⁸⁴⁵ Sturma has argued that, according to Schelling, responsibility does not rely on the individual's deliberation and decision-making because our freedom is pre-reflexive. As he says, being "able to do otherwise" does not "affect responsibility" (2019: 14). But this reading seems incompatible with Schelling's critique of the classical idea of evil: the reason that humans, and not mice or stones, are held (morally) accountable for their actions are because their essence is self-determined, even though much of our essence and many of our self-conceptions have not come about through completely reflexive deliberation.

to act on a subjective principle). Evil actions are determined by freedom in the latter sense.

The difference between Kant and Schelling is thus the following: Schelling does not affirm the reciprocity thesis between morality, and therefore he can safely assert that *good and evil actions are free in the same sense*, without patching up the philosophical problem of evil by introducing different types of freedom or will. Schelling claims that not only can reason itself become a tool for evil actions, but that this does not even make us less free. This is why he claims, famously, that “Idealism provides on the one hand merely the most general, and on the other a merely formal concept of evil. But the real and vital concept is that freedom is a capacity for good and evil”.⁸⁴⁶

We can now see why, according to Schelling, the classical theories of evil are wrong. Evil is, according to Schelling, deeply embedded in the structure of human agency. It is not some contingent fact, but a necessary possibility when it comes to the way in which human beings organize their way around in and conceive reality. The possibility of evil only arises, he claims, in creatures that are determined by this structural relation between dependency and independency. That explains why, as he says, we (almost) exclusively attribute evil to human beings, and not pigeons, proteins and planets. The ensued concept of evil is a concept of an extreme type of self-conscious egocentrism or radical normative derailment, Evil can, he says,

always only arise in the innermost will of our own heart and is never accomplished without our own act [eigne That] [...] aroused selfhood is not evil in itself but only to the extent that it has completely torn itself away [losgerissen] from its opposite, the light or the universal will.⁸⁴⁷

The crucial point for Schelling is that the evil does not stem from some contingent set of inclinations, but is a rational and free act. We can choose to let our selfhood strive for power and dominance. This is why he writes that evil can be accompanied by a certain enthusiasm or “spiritedness [Begeisterung] of evil” (SW VII, 372). Reason can, for Schelling, escalate into a poisonous kind of megalomania, a self-perception of universal dominance and power, a spirited sense of playing God on Earth, consciously sidestepping everything but personal gain and interests. As he formulates it:

⁸⁴⁶ SW, 1, 7, 352 (2006: 23). The formal concept of freedom (freedom as autonomy) is not sufficient, according to Schelling, since it assumes the reciprocity thesis. Of course, Schelling acknowledges a distinction between different types of freedom (e.g., formal and real freedom) and will (e.g., the particular and universal will). But not in the same way as Kant, since what is crucial for Schelling is that good and evil actions are not to be located in different types of freedom or will.

⁸⁴⁷ SW, 1, 7, 399-400 (2006: 63).

The general possibility of evil consists, as shown, in the fact that man, instead of making his selfhood into the basis, the instrument [Organ], can strive to elevate it into the ruling and total will [um Herrschenden und zum Allwillen zu erheben] and, conversely, to make the spiritual within himself into a means.⁸⁴⁸

Politically speaking, this is of course most clearly expressed by different kinds of totalitarianism that reduce people (or other animals) to repressed tools. Regarding making the ‘spiritual’ into a ‘means’, just think about the act of *planning* concentration camps, which captures Schelling’s point quite accurately.⁸⁴⁹ Evil is, as he says, the “longing” for gaining “control over the condition” [die Bedingung in seine Gewalt bekommen]⁸⁵⁰ and “to rule [herrschen] over all things [...] From this arises the hunger of selfishness [der Hunger der Selbstsucht] which [...] renounces the whole and unity”.⁸⁵¹

When looking at the level of human societies, evil is, according to Schelling, not so much the uncontrolled madness that breaks forth from time to time and disrupts the safe and decent order of society. Evil, on Schelling’s account, is more present in the sly or shrewd refusal of changing our attitudes in order to restore balances. On a more local scale regarding social inequality, for example. On a more global scale between our human wants and the non-human natural systems on which we depend. According to Schelling (and Kant), human beings can develop an evil *Gesinnung* because they integrate the propensity to evil in daily life through deceptive messages and injunctions. Schelling claims that “through false imagining and cognition [...] the human spirit opens itself to the spirit of lies and falsehood [Lüge und Falschheit]”.⁸⁵²

The underlying idea is that reason is not as innocent and blissful as types of ‘modern’ thinking want to assert. Our freedom can be, or is being, misused. It might be unpleasant to accept that a rational subject can perform evil actions based on conscious reasons for rule-following; it is much easier to wave the philanthropic flag and conclude that evil is a weakness of reason in the Fichteian sense. That is the view behind Hannah Arendt’s idea of the *banality of evil*, where a person like Adolf Eichmann is reduced to a guy with a weak capacity for reflection (remember that Fichte refers to evil as a “lethargy [Trägheit]” of reason). Schelling insists that evil is something quite different, and more terrifying. It is the silent spreading and acceptance of false and destructive information, and the actions springing therefrom, which only

⁸⁴⁸ SW, 1, 7, 389 (54).

⁸⁴⁹ Sturma has said that a human being can “never bring the conditions of its life under its power [in seine Gewalt bringen]”, but that this is what we strive to do so through evil (Sturma 1996: 442). I suggest that we understand the “bringing our conditions under our power” gradually. To do it in any complete sense is, obviously impossible. But what we can refer to as evil actions during history is exactly actions that have, to a certain degree, managed to control or take power over their context or conditions (e.g., social or natural conditions). State totalitarianism and the climate catastrophe are two clear examples.

⁸⁵⁰ SW 1, 7, 399 (2006: 62).

⁸⁵¹ SW 1, 7, 390 (2006: 55).

⁸⁵² SW1, 7, 391 (2006: 56).

aims towards nurturing particular interests (either taken individually or collectively) without any universal vision, care and responsibility. As Schelling says, intellectual “weakness” can indeed “be a ground for the lack of good and virtuous actions, yet it cannot be a ground of positively evil ones [...]”.⁸⁵³

Evil, in Schelling’s sense, is in some way what Quassim Cassam, in his *Vices of the Mind*, has referred to as intellectual vice in the shape of arrogance, imperviousness to evidence and lack of epistemic humility, which does not respect scientific knowledge or the need for rational discourse and mutual inspiration, and even aims towards destroying this. As Auweele puts it about Schelling’s conception of evil: “Schelling equally understands the allure of evil to depend upon the working of a false imagination that paints morally questionable behaviour as morally good”.⁸⁵⁴ The crucial aspect is, for Schelling, that the freely chosen ‘evil’ reversal of the principles of universality and particularity is one whereby the universal is meant to serve as an instrument for the particular. When my particular self-interests are masked as something everyone ought to accept and follow.

The morally good or authentic life, according to Schelling, is when I align my individuality with something that is external to myself. When I view myself, and my own interests, as supervenient on the interests of my environment (social or natural, say). Schelling does not, as Kosch has suggested, give up the entire project of giving a philosophical ethics of telling us “what we ought to do and why”.⁸⁵⁵ It is true that we do not find a normative ethics in the shape of a guidebook for moral action. But that would be much to ask from someone who proposes a *situation ethics*, an ethics that depends on the concrete context in which the subject is immersed. But we do find an account of the good as something that, in general, is oriented towards self-limitation, towards openness towards and integration in larger structures beyond the individual subject.

⁸⁵³ SW, 1, 7, 371 (2006: 39).

⁸⁵⁴ Auweele (2019: 248).

⁸⁵⁵ Kosch (2006: 101).

6. Schelling's Identity Theory of Mind and Nature

6.0. Introduction: Schelling's monism

Schelling's idea of a "system of the world" (sketched in Chapter 3) tells us that a coherent system must be one 1) where the becoming of individuals (rocks, grass blades, human institutions) should be immanently understandable, that is, understandable from principles or laws within one and the same world, and 2) *organic* in the sense that every individual in the world is a part of a whole without being denied its individuality (or autonomy).⁸⁵⁶ We could also sum this up as Schelling's Monist Thesis, Continuity Thesis, Mental Realism Thesis, and Autonomy Thesis:

Monist Thesis: There is only one world.

Continuity Thesis: Nothing within this one world comes from nothing (*ex nihilo nihil fit*).

Mental Realism Thesis: Against the eliminative naturalist, Schelling holds that minds exist.

Autonomy Thesis: Every individuated being in this world has a determinate and independent status in relation to the whole.

Regarding the Monist Continuity Thesis, he writes in *On the True Concept* that there is an "absolute continuity" and "unbroken series" in nature, which "proceeds from the simplest in nature to the highest and most complex" (for Schelling: the artist and her artwork). Or, as he says in his *Lectures on the Academic Study*, all beings are products, as he says, of the "same creative energy, in accordance with the same laws, and consequently in the Universe itself there is not duality".⁸⁵⁷ The continuity or constancy thesis claims, in line with what conservation laws in physics tell us, that no radically new kind of stuff, matter or energy can appear in the world. With the human mind, no new substance was added to the world. Pre-existing nature, or matter,

⁸⁵⁶ As he writes in the *Stuttgart-Lectures* about the "organic unity of all things": "Every organism possesses unity without, however, enabling us to conceive of its parts as being one and the same [...] the stomach, for example, obviously does not have the function of the brain, etc." (SW, 1, 7, 421 (1994b: 198).

⁸⁵⁷ 1880: 145. See also the *Weltalter* where he talks about the same "creative forces" (SW, 1, 8, 287 (2000: 64)).

takes on different forms, different potencies, during its history – from stars and galaxies to organic beings and moral and self-conscious human agents. Like Schelling says, it is the same “creative energy” that manifests itself in different forms “in accordance with the same laws”. This energy can develop into human minded energies. New, emergent forms come from new combinations and increased structure complexities, not from the introduction of radically new basic forms.

Against one-sided materialism and one-sided idealism, Schelling attempts to construct a system whereby human mindedness is neither made into a mystery nor made into something completely self-grounding. As says in one of his *Erlangen-Lectures* (1821-1825) titled *On the Nature of Philosophy as a Science*: “So long as the materialist does not acknowledge the legitimacy of the intellectualist, or the idealist the legitimacy of the realist, the system kat' exochen [par excellence] is inconceivable”.⁸⁵⁸ In the *Freedom Essay*, he calls this middle-ground model a “mutual saturation [Wechseldurchdringung] of Idealism and Realism”. And in another declaration from the same text, he writes: “Idealism is the soul of philosophy; realism is the body; only both together can constitute a living whole”.⁸⁵⁹ In order to make sense of the existence of human mindedness we need to assume 1) that human mindedness is not strongly emergent, since that would not, Schelling thinks, be to make sense of it, and 2) that pre-human nature must at least contain the ontological conditions of possibility for human and other organic life-forms to exist.

These conditions of possibility are what he outlines in his *Naturphilosophie*. His continuity thesis says that organisms, including human organisms, are composed of the same fundamental forces and elements as the rest of the natural world. As argued in Chapter 4, Schelling think we are, for systematic reasons, bound to understand the structure and composition of inorganic matter in a way that does not make organic beings completely impossible or mysterious (there or no “leaps” in nature). This has radical consequences. It does not entail, as I argued, that Schelling endorses a strong anthropic whereby there is some necessary, macro-teleological path towards human mindedness. What he says is that the non-human universe is necessarily compatible with human mindedness. Otherwise, human mindedness wouldn't exist. This is what he means when, as we have seen, he says that life and mindedness should in no way be considered “*in actu*” or “explicitly” in inorganic matter, only “*in potentia*” or “implicitly”.⁸⁶⁰

When Schelling talks about rational structures (Geist, freedom, I-hood, immature intelligence, self-organization, etc.) in non-human nature,⁸⁶¹ about the “unity of the dynamic” (nature) with the “spiritual”,⁸⁶² he does not talk about an intentional mega-subject. Nor does he ascribe intentionality or anything like human

⁸⁵⁸ SW, 1, 9, 211.

⁸⁵⁹ SW, 1, 7, 356 (2006: 26).

⁸⁶⁰ SW, 1, 7, 444 (1994b: 215).

⁸⁶¹ The *Naturphilosophie* has, as he says in the Preface to the *Freedom Essay*, “torn out” the “root of opposition” between “nature and spirit [Geist]” because it has rejected that “nature is utterly without reason and thought”.

⁸⁶² SW, 1, 7, 350 (2006: 21).

mindedness to bits and pieces of inorganic matter. That would be an unargued for anthropomorphism, which Schelling criticizes, like Kant and other contemporaries, under the name of hylozoism. He means that although inorganic nature is epistemically and consciously *blind*, it manifests certain structure plans in its material interactions and activities. In the Introduction to the First Outline, this is what Schelling calls nature's "unconscious productivity" and "dynamic" structure, whereby each natural being or system is fundamentally active and relational. As Hogebe has phrased it, the productivity of nature and the productivity of Geist have the same "deep structure [Tiefenstruktur]".⁸⁶³

Although Schelling's specific ideas of the structure of matter are a result of the science around 1800, the template that the physical world exhibits some universal structure (productivity/energy and relationality) across the levels of the physical world is far from archaic. For example, theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli has argued, based on current knowledge from physics and quantum mechanics, that "relationalism" is most likely true, which entails that "the reality of physical systems manifests itself to other physical systems"; that the physical world, on a basic level, consists of more or less complex systems that "interact with one another and affect one another".⁸⁶⁴ But this structural similarity does not mean, as Schelling writes in his *Propaedeutics* (1804) regarding the problems of dualism, that different systems are the same: "I encourage you to take note of this provision: it is not a question whether matter and mind [Materie und Geist] are different at all, but whether they are so different that they are two completely and absolute different substances".⁸⁶⁵

Since nature exhibits *mind-structures* and human mindedness, qua natural being, exhibits *nature-structures*, mind and nature are, for Schelling, in some way indistinguishable. The real and the ideal (nature and mind) is "mutually saturated". No existing being is *purely* real (natural) or *purely* (minded). This is why Schelling calls it "Real-Idealism".⁸⁶⁶ The hyphen indicates unity as well as difference.

What are we to make of this strategy? Some have suggested that Schelling's "Real-Idealism" precipitates different theories within contemporary philosophy of mind. Some say it precipitates what is often referred to as "neutral monism"⁸⁶⁷ or "anomalous monism".⁸⁶⁸ Others (or sometimes the same people) indicate that Schelling

⁸⁶³ Hogebe (2006: 280). As Schülein has argued, Schelling draws on the structural analogy between self-positing and self-constructing: "We can understand both as forms of *self-constitution*. If there is self-constitution in nature, we can find the central feature of spirit in material nature as well [...] [S]piritual self-constitution is a higher-order manifestation of material self-constitution [...] From this perspective, we could describe the structure of self-constitution as an independent principle that manifests in two different phenomenal registers: nature and spirit" (Schülein 2022: 169-170).

⁸⁶⁴ Rovelli (2021: 34).

⁸⁶⁵ SW, 1, 6, 88.

⁸⁶⁶ Or "Ideal-Realismus". See e.g., SW 1, 3, 386; SW, 1, 4, 89; SW 1, 10, 107.

⁸⁶⁷ In particular Frank (2018) and Gabriel (2020).

⁸⁶⁸ Frank (2018) and Gabriel (2020). Frank reports about a meeting with Donald Davidson where Davidson read a passage from Schelling's system of identity lying on Frank's working desk and said: "But that's the gist of my anomalous monism" (223). This should not be a huge surprise, since Davidson referred to himself as defending a dual-aspect theory similar to that of Spinoza (1999: 63-64).

proposes a dual-aspect-theory. And others again make the case that it contains a type of panpsychism.⁸⁶⁹ There is some truth to all of these suggestions. But if Schelling proposes, for example, a type of panpsychism, it is of a different sort than what often goes by that name. Schelling does not, like most contemporary philosophers working within philosophy of mind, proceed from consciousness (or qualia) as the sole lasting problem to be made sense of (as if everything else has been naturalized exhaustively). If Schelling posits something mind-like as metaphysically fundamental, it is not what panpsychists call consciousness (proto-consciousness).

In the rest of this chapter, I will present the ways in which it could make sense to read Schelling as a panpsychist (6.1.) or neutral monist (6.2.) respectively. Although I believe there is a common core to the argument, Schelling changes his views and formulations slightly between 1) his presentation of the *Naturphilosophie* and transcendental philosophy in the *First Outline* (1799) and the *System of Transcendental Philosophy* (1800) as two equal and parallel sciences, 2) his “system of identity” as presented, in particular, in *Presentation* (1801) and the *1804 System*,⁸⁷⁰ and, 3) the *Freedom Essay* (1809), the *Stuttgart-Lectures* (1810) and his *Weltalter* (1811-1815).⁸⁷¹ I will conclude that the evidence favours a neutral monist reading.

⁸⁶⁹ E.g., Whistler (2013: 97) and Kosch (2006: 79). Beiser suggests three possible readings: 1) double-aspect, 2) hylozistic, and 3) platonic, where the platonic comes close to a form of neutral monism. While 1 and 3 seem to be realistic options, the hylozistic interpretation is not.

⁸⁷⁰ In the *Presentation*, Schelling begins the text by stating that he has not deviated from his previous course with two sciences. Whether that is completely accurate is debatable. For example, in the *First Outline* and the *1800 System* he talks about *Naturphilosophie* and transcendental philosophy as two equal and different sciences that can never be “merged into one”. A charitable reading would be that what he deems impossible is that they cannot be merged into one in the sense that neither can be subsumed under the other. The less charitable (and perhaps more accurate) reading would be that Schelling at that time could not conceive how to formulate a principle that could unite the two sciences into one.

⁸⁷¹ Schelling only uses the word “Identitätssystem” once, namely in the *Presentation* (SW, 4, 113), and later regretted that this term stuck (SW, 10, 107). Other texts that are often associated with his system of identity are *Bruno* (1802), *Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy* (1802), *Lectures on the Method of the Academic Study* (1803). Some think that his philosophy in all these works are a continuation of his *Naturphilosophie* (Mutschler 1990: 14; Grant 2006: 4; Beiser 2008: 490; Schwenzfeuer 2012a: 7). There are many good reasons for such a continuity reading. First, a historical reason is that Schelling republished his *Ideas* (1803) and *On the World Soul* (1806) during this period and saw them as central to the “system of identity”, just like he published his major works of his “system of identity” in the *Journal and New Journal for Speculative Physics* (1800-1802), and his *1804 System* is mainly devoted to outlining his *Naturphilosophie*. In short: Schelling doesn’t leave the *Naturphilosophie* behind, and some of his most important works on *Naturphilosophie* are written in the period of his so-called “identity philosophy”. Furthermore, it seems clear that Schelling believed that the groundwork for “system of identity” was made through the idea stemming from the *Naturphilosophie* that all beings, including humans, exhibit ideal and real structures. Regarding the question of how far the system of identity stretches, Schelling is clearly occupied in the *Freedom Essay*, the *Stuttgart-Lectures*, and the *Weltalter* with the same questions from the “system of identity”, namely the question of outlining a theory about the “mutual saturation of the idealism and realism”. I disagree therefore with Bowie (1993), Snow (1996), Kosch (2006), Beiser (2008), and Whistler (2013), who limit his “system of identity” to be somewhere between 1800 and 1804 or 1805.

6.1. Schelling's panpsychism

Many parts of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, as well as his system of identity, indicates a sort of panpsychism. For example, in his *System der gesamten Philosophie und der Naturphilosophie insbesondere* (1804) he writes: "Everything in the universe is souled [beseelt], or: There is nothing in the universe that is merely body [Leib] and not as such also and immediately soul [Seele]".⁸⁷² According to the *1804 System*, nothing is purely mental or purely physical. Several commentators have referred to this as a "form of panpsychism (and panphysicalism)".⁸⁷³

As Peter Godfrey-Smith has argued, in line with Schelling's general framework, to think that there is a "gap" between the physical and the mind results from "thinking in crude ways about the physical" that "remain too close to a mechanistic picture".⁸⁷⁴ Panpsychism is the attempt to think in less crude ways about the physical. In short, panpsychism claims that the *mind* or *mentality* is ubiquitous and fundamental in nature. Variations are distinguished in terms of what mind or the mental is supposed to pick out, e.g., consciousness, thinking, intentionality, autonomy. The motivation from all variations springs from what its proponents⁸⁷⁵ deem as insufficient theories to account for the existence of minds: physicalist reductionism and strong emergentism (and dualism). Physicalist reductionism gives a unified picture of the world with the cost of eliminating the mind. Like Schelling, panpsychists argue against strong emergence. Thomas Nagel's classical argument⁸⁷⁶ proceeds along the same lines as Schelling's Continuity Thesis: Organisms, including human organisms, are complex physical systems that are composed of the same stuff and forces like everything else in the universe. Secondly, Nagel assumes, like Schelling, that mindedness is a real quality of living organisms (mental realism). Third, like Schelling, Nagel argues, against strong emergence, that the properties of a mental living organisms are not (ontologically or epistemologically) inexplicable but can be derived from the properties of its parts; no being or system displays features that are not grounded in the features or of their parts or base. The last and crucial part of the argument is that the minded qualities of a living organisms cannot be derived from what we usually understand as "physical" parts, what Godfrey-Smith would refer to as the "crude" understanding of the physical. Therefore, we must assume that "mental" (or "non-physical") properties involved at a fundamental level in nature that

⁸⁷² SW, I, 6, 217.

⁸⁷³ E.g., Whistler (2013: 97). See also Hayner (1967: 206), Sturma (2002: 170), Kosch (2006: 79), Fritzman & Gibson (2012: 108), Blamauer (2012: 1), Grafe (2017: 60).

⁸⁷⁴ Godfrey-Smith (2019: 16). Although Godfrey-Smith thinks panpsychism is a "step too far", he agrees with some of the "critical discussions of physicalism that accompany this work. The category of "the physical," as it functions as a resource in the explanation of the mental, is not very well-defined". See Stoljar (2001) for a critical discussion of what "physical" means.

⁸⁷⁵ E.g., Strawson (2006), Goff (2017).

⁸⁷⁶ Nagel (1979: 181–95). William James already made a similar argument: "If evolution is to work smoothly, consciousness in some shape must have been present at the very origin of things" (James 1890: 152).

imply the existence of minded organisms.⁸⁷⁷ This is the genetic argument for panpsychism.

The emergentist assumes that at some point in the history of the Earth, or the universe, no organisms with minded qualities existed. At some point in the evolutionary history, the first minded creature suddenly emerged brutally. Minds emerged, and continue to emerge, from that which is un-minded. Panpsychist think that's a miracle, and that there must be a better explanation. If minds exist, and minds can't emerge from the un-minded, then they must have been there in some form all along. That does not mean, as Schelling says against hylozoism, that life or mind is in *actu* in something like geological formations, as if they could enjoy a conscious life anthropomorphically conceived. Inanimate things are not "individuals" in the sense organic individuals are, but they exhibit structures that are isomorphic to what we attribute to "higher" levels in nature, namely organizational and relational traits. Therefore, Schelling says that matter is mind *in potentia*, implicit mind. Consider the following passage from Collin McGinn in his book on philosophy and physics:

[T]he big bang contained all the materials for generating the universe from then on. New particles came to be in the first few moments, and new forces too, but everything had to be implicit in the initial super-hot plasma: everything that followed had to be a form of what was there at the start [...] But if so, then consciousness must be somehow implicit in the big bang too: it must be a working out of the matter/energy there at that instant, like planets and organisms. Consciousness must be a new form of the stuff that was present in the first moments of the universe – one of the modes of which matter is capable.⁸⁷⁸

As we have seen, Schelling does plea for some sort of emergence, but not strong emergence. I have called it *immanent* emergence: The emergence of organic agents with minds is not a totally inexplicable accident considering its structural isomorphism with the lower level (in terms of organization as a basic form), but it is neither reducible to those levels.⁸⁷⁹ The evolutionary smoothness suggested does not entail similarity; similarity is not transient. The type of "minded" organization in non-organic matter is significantly different from what we see in mammals. Schelling would not say, like contemporary panpsychists, that emergent "macro-level" mental properties are of the same kind as the "micro-level" mental properties that they emerge from.⁸⁸⁰

⁸⁷⁷ Panpsychism is being explored at the level of neuroscience, in particular through Tononi and Koch's Integrated Information Theory (e.g, Tononi & Koch 2015).

⁸⁷⁸ McGinn (2011: 181).

⁸⁷⁹ Whistler and Berger have suggested to account for this in terms of a "grounding relationship between the more basic structures of nature and its more complex structures" (2020: 103). This seems to be an accurate way of putting it, especially considering his conception of "grounding" in the *Freedom Essay* as something that is a condition of possibility for something else but does not exhaust it.

⁸⁸⁰ E.g., Rosenberg (2004).

6.2. Schelling's neutral monism

In the so-called “system of identity” (e.g., in the *Presentation* and the *1804 System*) and the three texts from his so-called ‘middle-period’ – the *Freedom Essay*, the *Stuttgart-Lectures* and the *Weltalter* – Schelling elaborates on how to understand the panpsychist elements that issued from his *Naturphilosophie*. In the *Weltalter*, Schelling introduces the idea of “intermediate concepts”:

It is not difficult to observe that the main weakness of all modern philosophy lies in the lack of an intermediate concept and hence, such that, for instance, everything that does not have being is nothing, and everything that is not spiritual in the highest sense is material in the crudest sense, and everything that is not morally free is mechanical, and everything that is not intelligent is uncomprehending. But the intermediate concepts are precisely the most important concepts, nay, the only concepts that actually explain anything, in all of science.⁸⁸¹

What Schelling points to here is that his gradualism and developmental view (for example of freedom) can function as an intermedial mediator that unites rather than separates the world in different, isolated domains (the mechanical vs. the moral world, the intelligent and the unintelligent). Everything comes in degrees (or potencies as he likes to say): Freedom as such is not identical to human freedom, intelligence as such is not identical to human intelligence. Instead, Schelling proposes a model whereby everything is both real (physical, material) and ideal (self-organizing, self-positing) properties. Manfred Frank and Markus Gabriel, among others,⁸⁸² have attempted to make sense Schelling's proposal in terms of a variant of neutral monism: Nothing is purely physical or purely minded.⁸⁸³ Instead, physical features and minded features are aspects of one and the same “thing” or “domain” that unites both and is, as he writes in the *Freedom Essay*, “neutral toward both”. As Gabriel has formulated it, Schelling's solution to the “placement problem” amounts to a shift: instead of “finding a place for mind in *nature*, we locate a place for both in a domain that is neutral with respect to both of them”.⁸⁸⁴

Neutral monism says that there is something about reality – certain laws or properties or principles – that explains both its physical and its mental character. That ‘something’ is supposedly *neutral* between them. Hence, the neutral monist asserts that neither ‘mental’ nor ‘physical’ phenomena are the most basic aspects of reality. She assumes instead that the basic constituents of reality are ‘neutral’ between the

⁸⁸¹ SW, 1, 8, 286 (2000: 64).

⁸⁸² Frank (2014 & 2018: 224, 266-67), Gabriel (2015, 2021).

⁸⁸³ Neutral monism has been on the philosophical scene for a long time. One could argue that Spinoza's substance-monism as well as Leibniz' theory of monads are archetypes. It was not until around the beginning of the 20th century, though, that the position began to receive some systematic pedigree – especially in the work of Ernst Mach, William James and Bertrand Russell, who all thought of it as a solution to the mind-body-problem. Other thinkers from that period are also worth mentioning, such as Gustav Fechner and Joseph Petzoldt, and the idea was also adopted by Erwin Schrödinger, Herbert Feigl, possibly Dewey, and many others. See Stubenberg for an overview (2016). For an account of the dialectic of arguments that motivates many people to explore neutral monism of some sort, see Chalmers (2015).

⁸⁸⁴ Gabriel (2020: 141).

two. As Russell put it about this topic-neutral approach: “What I wish to do [...] is to restate the relations of mind and brain in terms not implying the existence of either”.⁸⁸⁵ The idea is not to deny the existence of the, somehow derived or dependent, non-neutral phenomena of the mental and physical. This generic model can come in many particular shapes, depending on what one takes to be the relevant neutral types, for example: events (Russell),⁸⁸⁶ information (Chalmers),⁸⁸⁷ or substance (Spinoza).

Like the panpsychist, the neutral monist construes her view from the following premises: If we assume 1) that strong emergence is untenable, 2) that the “mental” cannot be reduced to what we currently understand as physical facts, and 3) that humans are composed of the same elements as the rest of the universe, then 4) it is tempting to conclude that everything is constituted from something that is not merely “physical”.

But what does it mean for something to be neutral? Following Stubenberg,⁸⁸⁸ we can distinguish between at least three conceptions:

- (1) *The Both View*: Something is neutral just in case it is intrinsically both mental and physical.
- (2) *The Neither View*: Something is neutral just in case it is intrinsically neither mental nor physical.
- (3) *The Constituent View*: Something is neutral just in case it is a constituent of both physical and mental processes.

(1) and (2) are defined by their intrinsic nature while (3) is defined by its relation to something else, namely how it constitutes the physical and the mental (as we shall see, Schelling indicates all three views). Most traditional types of neutral monism have been based on (2). But recently, Thomas Nagel has proposed a version of (1): The neutrality consists in being non-biased towards both the mental and the physical.⁸⁸⁹ Nagel’s version, just like all other versions of neutral monism, is generally characterized by a speculative relish, shaped by a fundamental perplexity and skepticism towards other candidates within the philosophy of mind – both reductive materialism, reductive idealism, strong emergence views, and dualism. Nagel proceeds from the assumption that current physical theory – on which physicalists rely – is incapable of describing the subjective character of consciousness and other mental processes. But we still have to include the mind in the same universe as anything else. We have all reason to assume that the relation between the mental and the physical is intimate; that mental events cannot take place without some physical events taking place in the brain. How do we explain this intimate relation if

⁸⁸⁵ Russell (1956: 145).

⁸⁸⁶ Russell 1927.

⁸⁸⁷ Chalmers (1996).

⁸⁸⁸ Stubenberg (2016).

⁸⁸⁹ Although Strawson prefers to call his view panpsychist, or “real physicalism”, he seems to adhere to the Both-View. E.g., Strawson (1994: 55-59).

reductionism and strong emergence is untenable? In his *Mind and Cosmos* (2012), Nagel asserts that “the weight of the evidence favors some form of neutral monism over the traditional alternatives of materialism, idealism, and dualism”.⁸⁹⁰ Neutral monism is understood as the view, as he writes, that “the constituents of the universe have properties that explain not only its physical but its mental character”.⁸⁹¹ Borrowing a concept from Tom Sorrell, Nagel proposes that these basic constituents of the universe are “transphysical and transmental”.⁸⁹²

What evidence is Nagel referring to? Strong emergence cannot, he argues, explain why subjectivity should occur in some combinations of matter and not others. Therefore, we are bound to think of the relation between mind and nature, or mind and brain, in terms of something more fundamental about the natural order. Since we, and other organisms, are complex combinations of the same stuff as the rest of the universe, this has universal consequences: A proper “integrated theory of reality” must account for these facts, which will “alter our conception of the universe as radically as anything has to date”.⁸⁹³ Everything, he argues, must be constituted from basic elements that are both physical and non-physical. Our current understanding of the “physical” is, on Nagel’s (and Schelling’s) account, insufficient to account for the fact that minds exist. What is required in the long run is a conception of the “physical” that does not eliminate or mystify minds. To believe that our current understanding of the “physical” is exhaustive in terms of describing what there is seems, as Nagel says, “myopic”:

Philosophy is infected by a broader tendency of intellectual life: scientism. Scientism [...] puts one type of human understanding in charge of the universe and what can be said about it. At its most myopic it assumes that everything there is must be understandable by the employment of scientific theories like those we have developed to date – physics and evolutionary biology are the current paradigms – as if the present age were not just another in the series. Precisely because of their dominance, these attitudes are ripe for attack [...] Too much time is wasted because of the assumption that methods already in existence will solve problems for which they were not designed; too many hypotheses and systems of thought in philosophy are based on the bizarre view that we, at this point in history, are in possession of the basic forms of understanding needed to comprehend absolutely everything.

⁸⁹⁰ Nagel (2012: 5).

⁸⁹¹ Nagel (2012: 56).

⁸⁹² Nagel (2012: 57). Nagel goes on to describe his view as identical to panpsychism: “Everything, living or not, is constituted from elements having a nature that is both physical and nonphysical—that is, capable of combining into mental wholes. So this reductive account can also be described as a form of panpsychism: all the elements of the physical world are also mental” (Nagel 2012: 57). This is confusing, considering Nagel’s earlier stark separation between neutral monism and panpsychism: “this view would imply that the fundamental constituents of the world, out of which everything is composed, are neither physical nor mental but something more basic. This position is not equivalent to panpsychism. Panpsychism is, in effect, dualism all the way down. This is monism all the way down” (Nagel 2002: 231). However, in the latter citation, he proceeds from understanding neutral monism as committed to the Neither-View, whereas the first takes it as the Both-View.

⁸⁹³ Nagel (1986: 51).

What does Schelling's neutral monism consist in? He unfolds a Spinoza-influenced model of neutral monism that defines "nature" and "mind", or the real and ideal, as different *potencies* or *aspects* of one and the same X, which he sometimes refers to as "substance".⁸⁹⁴ He also refers to his theory as the absolute "identity" or "indifference" between the real and the ideal. The history of the world, he argues, is the evolution of beings that in different and more and more complex way combine real and ideal determinations.⁸⁹⁵ The conclusion is that every event or object in the world has a determinate weight of "natural" and "minded" features. Whereas human mindedness has a proportionate overweight of ideal features (e.g., through theory construction or political conversation), inanimate matter has an overweight of real features. Hence, there is nothing purely "real" or "ideal". A piece of music has an overweight of ideal (non-physical) properties (and natural scientific ways of being understood and explained), while the processes of rock formation have an overweight of real (physical) properties (and human scientific ways of being understood and explained). But the latter still has "ideal" aspects, e.g., relational and organisational principles, just like the former has an array of physical properties necessary for the piece of music to be instantiated at all. But the physically describable vibrations that propagate the acoustic wave in a piece of music does not exhaust the piece and its meaning content.

The different expressions or aspects Schelling often refers to as "potencies [Potenzen]".⁸⁹⁶ "Potence" is a label, as a "general model of the universe",⁸⁹⁷ for the stages of the developmental process based on a constant combination and rearrangement of the real and the ideal. As Schelling writes, potencies concern what "we are able to discern and distinguish in general" under "various determinations. I call these determinations potencies".⁸⁹⁸ Schelling also often refers to the different potencies as "forms" or "modes" of existence, which characterizes individuality or particularity. Schelling does say, on a general level, that the ideal realm (human mindedness) as such is a higher potency than the real realm (non-human nature). But this generalization can blur the picture somewhat. Since what Schelling aims at, on a specific

⁸⁹⁴ Some of his most Spinozistic moments are found in his *Presentation* and the *1804 System*, where he regularly talks about there being only "one substance" (e.g., SW, 1, 6, 156). In the Foreword to his *Presentation*, he writes that Spinoza comes "nearest my system in terms of content or material and in form" (SW, 1, 4, 113). And later, he writes that Spinoza "always remains the model" (SW, 10, 36). Even though his usage of "substance", due to what Schelling believes is a lack of processual and dynamic character, decreases in later writings, he occasionally uses the term there as well, for example in the *Weltalter*, e.g., SW, 1, 8, 284 (2000: 62). However, he makes it very clear in these later texts that the problem with Spinoza is that between the two principles (or modes) in Spinoza's substance-monism, there is, as it says in the *Stuttgart-Lectures*, no "dynamic opposition nor a living interpenetration" (SW, 1, 7, 443 (1994b: 214)).

⁸⁹⁵ As he formulates it in his *Lectures on the Method of the Academic Study*: "If we want to speak about Nature absolutely, we understand by that the universe without opposition, and only as different from the two sides: the one from which the ideas are born out of the real, and the one from which the real is born in an ideal way" (SW, 1, 5, 317).

⁸⁹⁶ On Schelling's use of "potencies", see Grün (1993b) and Whistler & Berger (2020: 94-116).

⁸⁹⁷ SW, I, 5, 381.

⁸⁹⁸ SW, 1, 5, 366.

level, is to say that the potencies within each “realm” both exhibit different proportions of real and ideal determinations. In his *Stuttgart-Lectures*, in the context of discussing both French materialism and Fichte’s subjective idealism, Schelling presents the idea as follows: “[I]n every real thing, be it whatever kind, the subjective and the objective, the ideal and the real are always together, only to different degrees”.⁸⁹⁹ For example, the arrangement of the ideal and the real is different in human interactions than it is in the morphologies of fungi. Every object or being is a complex of mental (or protomental) properties and physical properties.

But what type of neutral monism does Schelling propose? Is it the Neither-View, the Both-View, or the Constitutive View? Schelling indicates that it is all three at once. The following passages exemplify his commitment to the Both-View:

[T]he objective is itself *simultaneously the real and the ideal*; the two are never separate, but exist together originally (even in nature).⁹⁰⁰

[I]n all *reality*, regardless of what kind, both the subjective and the objective or the Ideal and the Real exist conjointly, albeit in varying proportion.⁹⁰¹

There is nothing in the universe that is merely body [Leib] and not as such also and immediately soul [Seele].⁹⁰²

[B]y their inner nature [...] nature and the spirit world are related to each other. But this is only abstractly stated, as if these were fixed concepts. The truth is that this inner unity is a more and more nascent, and in the proportion of separation a developing one.⁹⁰³

The power that bursts forth in the stuff of nature *is* the same in essence as that which displays itself in the world of mind, except that it has to contend there with a surplus of the real, here with one of the ideal [...] this opposition [...] is not an opposition in essence, but in mere potency.⁹⁰⁴

The Both-View could be read as a type of panpsychism, since it claims that everything is (also) ideal.⁹⁰⁵ However, as we have seen, “ideal” does not mean conscious,

⁸⁹⁹ SW, 1, 7, 445-46 (1994b: 216, *modified translation*).

⁹⁰⁰ Schelling (2020: 50-51).

⁹⁰¹ SW, 1, 7, 445-446 (1994b: 216).

⁹⁰² SW, I, 6, 217.

⁹⁰³ Schelling (1993: 65).

⁹⁰⁴ SW, 1, 4, 428 (2001: 358).

⁹⁰⁵ Stubenberg (2017) argues that neutral monism and panpsychism are fundamentally different because neutral monism claims that neither mind nor matter is fundamental, while the panpsychist claims that both mind and matter are. But this is confusing, since in Stubenberg (2016) he suggests that neutral monism can also come in the both-and-version. Neutrality need not be thought of exclusively as neither-nor: something can be neutral between two things if it contains both. To take an example: If I am *neutral* towards who wins a presidential election, it does not necessarily mean that I am indifferent in the sense that I have inclinations towards *neither*. It could also be that I am indifferent in the sense that both, in my opinion, are “equally” good options. But

or (proto-conscious). Inorganic nature is epistemically blind. But it exhibits (productive and relational) structures that are isomorphic to organic agency and human mindedness. But what does Schelling mean by saying the real and ideal exist “conjointly”? He explicitly says that all beings, for example the human, have a set of features *in one respect* and other features in *another respect*, a template he inherits from Spinoza.⁹⁰⁶ But, as the citations show, this aspectual model is not “fixed” or static, but rather pluralist: The unity between the ideal and the real is a “developing one” that takes many distinct forms during natural and human history. This is where Schelling departs, or at least takes himself to depart, from Spinoza: Whereas Spinoza conceives of one substance that can have different modes or forms, Schelling believes this structure is universal and applies to every individual being. Thus, Spinoza’s monism is what Schaffer has called “existence monism”: There exists exactly one concrete object token (the one substance),⁹⁰⁷ which can be conceived in two aspects or modes. Schelling’s monism is not an existence monism of this sort. Instead, Schelling’s monism is a structural (perhaps even “layered”) account of the plurality of things there are: All concrete things are complexes of both “real” and “ideal” aspects, just in different proportions. Hence, the whole is in some sense prior or more fundamental to its parts (physical and mental descriptions, say). There are many distinct objects or beings, but they all share, or are derivative from, the same basic structure.⁹⁰⁸

This is why Schelling also departs from Kant’s standpoint-dualism, since Kant’s duality of justified descriptions (of the “empirical” and “intelligible” character) is restricted to human agency only. By restricting the “ideal” to human agency, he does not succeed in, or even make the attempt of, explaining how this specific dual perspective is metaphysically possible. Hence, Spinoza and Kant’s models are, according to Schelling, too narrow. Also, Kant’s dualism of descriptions is, according to Schelling, still caught in the reflexive net of merely validating the two perspectives *for us*. Schelling’s model, in contrast, has metaphysical import. His model is not just, as he says in the *Weltalter*, “in accordance with the concept”: “But it still remains that “one and the same = x” is both principles (A and B). But not just in accordance with the concept, but really and actually”.⁹⁰⁹ That is, one and the same X (e.g., the human) cannot merely be conceived from two perspectives; it really contains the two different aspects or principles.

Stubenberg is right to point out that there is a sense in which the Both-View conflates more easily with other theories, e.g., panpsychism and dual-aspect theories. See Velmans (2008) for a discussion.

⁹⁰⁶ On Spinoza as a neutral monist, see Rosenkrantz & Hoffman 2011: 287).

⁹⁰⁷ Thus, Spinoza’s monism is what Schaffer has called “existence monism”: There exists exactly one concrete object token (the one substance). A contemporary version is found in Horgan & Potrč’ conception of the whole universe as a “blobject” (2000). See Schaffer (2018).

⁹⁰⁸ See also Gabriel (2020: 139). Beiser (2003: 143) has suggested something along these lines too. We can say that Schelling’s monism, in contrast to Spinoza’s, comes closer to what Schaffer calls priority monism: “Priority monism also targets concrete objects but counts by basic tokens. This is the doctrine that exactly one concrete object token is basic, and is equivalent to the classical doctrine that the whole is prior to its (proper) parts” (Schaffer 2018). For example, the “human” would be “basic” and prior to its parts (or aspects): the mental and physical.

⁹⁰⁹ SW, 1, 8, 216 (2000: 10).

Although his dual structure is universal, most of the examples Schelling gives in order to justify how two seemingly opposed perspectives can both be valid are related to human agency. For example, with reference to Leibniz, he is saying that the statement “the soul is a body and body a soul” is not contradictory, for they are “indeed the same”: For “what in one respect is body is in another respect soul. One = X is soul and body, which is to say one is the expressing of both, and to the extent that it actually expresses them, it is actually both as well”.⁹¹⁰ The mind and the body, as he says in his *Aphorismen zur Einleitung in die Naturphilosophie*, refer to the same, but just “considered from different sides [nur von verschiedenen Seiten betrachtet]”. It is one of the same X that is both physical and mental. This is why Schelling restrains from saying that there is any causal relations between the real and the ideal, between the physical and the mental, because they are different names or descriptions of one and the same ontologically neutral domain or being or structure. As John Heil has described it:

Both Spinoza and Davidson regard the distinction between mental and physical attributes as a distinction in conception only, not what Descartes called a real distinction. Both Spinoza and Davidson contend that anything at all that answers to a description framed in a mental vocabulary could be designated using a material vocabulary (and vice versa): the mental–material distinction is a distinction among concepts or terms, not a distinction in reality.⁹¹¹

The two predicates “love” and “x-fiber stimulation in the brain” (or, in Schelling’s language: mind and body) apply to one and the same X. A true description of something as “x-fiber stimulation in the brain” can also be truly described as “love”. Because Schelling is introducing the idea of complex objects that can make both claims true, the predicates are not completely distinguishable, and therefore there is no requirement of introducing a conception of their connection (e.g., through causality or reduction).

When we usually adopt just one of the dual perspectives, or when we assume that it is a “real distinction”, between the real and the ideal, it is because, Schelling argues, of our “subjectivity” and our “finitude”.⁹¹² Dualism is a psychological, natural propensity (a “conceptual distinction”, as Heil says), not a philosophical option. Abstracting from the unity, the bond between them, makes the specific relata appear in their difference. When Schelling in his system of identity makes what sounds like insane and megalomaniac claims – such as: individual and empirical things don’t exist, time and duration doesn’t exist – we must understand the methodological context: He is always saying it from the perspective of the philosopher. For the philosopher, the individual things don’t exist as a direct and important object of study (for the philosopher). What exists, for the philosopher, is the structural and general features that connect individual beings, and these features 1) do not exist merely as

⁹¹⁰ Schelling (1946: 28).

⁹¹¹ Heil (2020: 180).

⁹¹² SW, 1, 6, 140.

concrete individuals (although they are manifested in concrete individuals), and 2) they are not “in time” in the sense that they are not reserved for a specific temporal point but “eternal”, as he likes to say.

Let us return to what this means regarding understanding Schelling’s neutral monism: The standpoint of indifference is the standpoint of the philosopher that seeks a total or universal view on the world. Whereas particular sciences – e.g., physiology and cultural studies – can investigate different aspects of the human being, either as a physical or cultural being, the philosopher looks to view the human being as a unity of both. This is why he can say that “in itself” there is nothing that is purely real or purely ideal, only the “absolute indifference”.⁹¹³ The physiologist’s object – the human as a physical organism – only has being “relative” to the human being as such. That is, the philosopher does not engage (solely) with specific determinations, such as the human’s evolutionary background or physiological make-up. It takes all determinations into account and then abstracts from them to reach a total picture. Schelling is not denying the value of individual or relative descriptions. In fact, he even says, for example in the *Lectures on the Method of the Academic Study*, that philosophy has no self-standing existence but is dependent upon the concrete human, social, and natural sciences that attend to difference or specific determinations, thereby calling for collaboration and interdisciplinarity. What he is denying is that philosophers should be directly occupied with demarcating the specific differences and determinations of the world.⁹¹⁴

From the philosophical point of view, Schelling thinks, we can achieve a unified perspective. He argues that we can ascribe different predicates to one and the same being, even in cases where the two predicates are contradictory. As long as both the aspects are not, as he says in the *Weltalter*, “equally active”:

The same person can be called, for example, good in accordance with their character or in their actions and as this, namely, likewise in accord with their character or in their actions, cannot be evil. But this does not disallow that they might be evil in accord with what in them is not in their character or active. In this manner, two contradictory, self-opposed predicates can certainly be ascribed to that person. Expressed in other words this would mean: of two things exactly opposed that are stated of one and the same thing, according to the law of contradiction, if one is in force as the active and as that which has being, then the other must become that which is respectively not acting, Being.⁹¹⁵

We can now say that Schelling’s neutral monism amounts to the following: Physical and mental states are not different in themselves, when the individual being is considered in itself or as a whole, but only from a perspectival or reflexive point of view.⁹¹⁶ This does not mean that the “real” and “ideal” are not different, but they are

⁹¹³ SW, 1, 4, 124.

⁹¹⁴ See in particular Whistler (2023).

⁹¹⁵ SW, 1, 8, 214-15 (2000: 8).

⁹¹⁶ See Schwenzfeuer (2012a: 228) and Frank (2014).

just never, Schelling believes, completely separated. We can understand this in terms of how David Lewis famously remarks in his “Events” that distinctness does not exclude “identity”: “Me and my nose are not identical, but neither are we distinct. There is a clear sense in which our second event is part of the first: the subclass is part of the class, they are neither identical nor distinct”.⁹¹⁷

These considerations are intimately related to Schelling’s conception of identity judgements. The structural unity between nature and mind, or the real and ideal, does not mean that they are logically identical. As he writes in the *Stuttgart-Lectures*:

[T]he absolute identity of the Real and the Ideal. This is not to say that the Real and the Ideal are numerically or logically the same but, instead, designates an essential unity; it is the same aspect that is posited in both forms, though it is proper [ein eignes] in each of these forms and not one essence.⁹¹⁸

As showed in the previous chapter, “identity” does not mean “sameness” for Schelling.⁹¹⁹ That would entail, when saying that the “the mind is the body”, that the mind is nothing but the physical (“material, air, ether, never, fluid, and the like”) or that the body is nothing but the mind (e.g., an extreme form of empirical or subjective idealism). This reductive understanding of identity does not express the “real meaning of the law of identity” or the “copula in judgement”. The law of identity, which Schelling renders as judgements of predication (‘S is P’), differentiates “subject and predicate as what precedes and what follows (*antecedens et consequens*)”. The example he gives in the *Freedom Essay* is “this body is blue”. This judgement means, Schelling suggests, the following: There is something, X, which is both S and P, and can be considered either as S or P (or both at the same time). In a passage from the *Weltalter* he elaborates:

The true sense of each judgement – for example, that “A is B” – can only be the following: THAT which is = A IS THAT which is = B, or: THAT which is A and THAT which is B are as one. Thus, a doubling lies at the ground of even the simple concept: A in this judgement is not A, but rather is X, which is A; B is not B, but rather is X, which is B, and it is not the case that A and B are as one, either for themselves or as such, but rather, the X which is A and the X which is B are as one. The proposition cited above (A is B) in fact contains three propositions: first, A is = X; second, B is = X; and only from these follows a third, A and B are the same – to wit, both are the same X.⁹²⁰

⁹¹⁷ Lewis (1986: 256).

⁹¹⁸ SW, 1, 7, 422 (1994b: 198).

⁹¹⁹ On Schelling’s understanding of identity and the copula, see Hoglebe (1989), Rang (2001), Neuman (2011), Gabriel (2014, 2015, 2021), Frank (2014, 2018), Thomas (2014), Garcia (2015).

⁹²⁰ Schelling (1997: 129-130).

Identity is, according to Schelling, a symmetrical relation, not a reductionist one.⁹²¹ To say ‘A is B’ equals, on Schelling’s account, the possibility of two sub-judgements: What A is is the same as what B is. A and B are aspects under which we can describe X. A reductive understanding of identity would mean, for example, that mind is *nothing over and above* the brain, or that freedom is *nothing over and above* physical processes (hence an illusion) – that they are exactly the same, in the sense of Leibniz’ Law of identity: two objects (or states), A and B, are identical when any property of A must also be a property of B. This is crucial for understanding Schelling’s neutral monism. For him, “identity” between mind and nature means the following: There is an X – a topic-neutral X (which is any individuated being) – that has minded *and* physical aspects. This structure is what Schelling signifies with the word “bond [Band]”, or “living bond”,⁹²² namely a synchronised unity and difference. The “link in a judgement” is always, as he says, “doubled within itself”,⁹²³ or “reduplicated”.⁹²⁴ We can say about a person that she is bad *as* a moral subject but good *as* a scientist. We can even, Schelling argues, say that a person morally bad *as* agent in situation A but morally good *as* agent in situation B, if both (contradictory) predicates are not “active” simultaneously.⁹²⁵ Although the predicates are related to the same X, they have different truth-conditions.

Schelling thereby highlights what is today referred to as the sortal relativity of statements. To say that ‘A is B’ does not in itself express a complete proposition; one needs to specify what kind of sameness one is talking about. To have something truth-evaluable, we must ask: The same what? Like Schelling, the sortal relativity view says that a proper identity statement must have the form “A is the same X as B”, for some sortal X. Other examples than those that Schelling gives could be: How do we account for the sameness of a piece of bronze that is first melted into a statue of Lenin and then later melted down and made into one of Churchill? The same piece of bronze is two different statues at different times. This seems to suggest that one and the same thing, X, can be different things, A at one point and B at another. Hence, there is, in some cases,⁹²⁶ something incomplete about saying that “A is B”: The same what? It is possible for objects to be the same and yet not the same. In one

⁹²¹ Donald Davidson would probably agree with Schelling: “I see no good reason for calling identity theories ‘materialist’: if some mental events are physical events, this makes them no more physical than mental. Identity is a symmetrical relation” (1987: 453).

⁹²² SW, 1, 7, 440, 442 (1994b: 211, 213).

⁹²³ Schelling 1946: 26. See in particular Frank (Frank 2014 and 2019: 230-236, 248-249, 263-64). Frank has retraced Schelling’s use and the historical significance of the word “reduplication” to the debates surrounding the Leibnizians at his time and especially Ploquet. Reduplication refers to the specification of a certain way of considering a subject. As Frank has argued, we find a parallel in contemporary philosophy of language in Peter Geach’s theory of identity as relative according to which a meaningful identity judgement (‘A is B’) must always, explicitly or implicitly, be relative to some general term.

⁹²⁴ Schelling (1989: 49).

⁹²⁵ SW, 1, 8, 214-215 (2000: 9). See also his *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (1989), where he uses the particle “as [als]” to demarcate unity and difference (44, 49).

⁹²⁶ Gupta (1980) argues that absolute and relative identity are not incompatible. Some cases might be better understood through one or the other.

respect, the human is a moral being, in another respect it is a physical organism. But it is one and the same being.

This is Frege's point when he writes: "While looking at one and the same external phenomenon, I can say with equal truth both 'It is a copse' and 'It is five trees,' or both 'Here are four companies' and 'Here are 500 men.'" ⁹²⁷ The "external phenomenon" is the X (or target), while "copse" and "tree" are A and B, potential and equally truthful ways our describing (or counting) the target. We could also say, with Frege, that the "=" in "A = A" and "A = B" are different: The first one is tautological, the other informative. In "On Sense and Reference", Frege introduces the notion of "cognitive value [Erkenntniswert]", which should be understood in terms of informativeness. One type of identity statement, "A = A" (e.g. Hegel = Hegel), has one cognitive value, being trivial or non-informative. Another type of identity statement, "A = B" (e.g., "The morning star is the evening star"), has a different cognitive value, namely the value of extending knowledge, and is thus non-trivial or informative by providing information that cannot be inferred by analysing the content on each side of the equal sign. Or otherwise put: the difference between "A = A" and "A = B" is that it is impossible not to know the first, while it is possible not to know the second. If identity were a relation between objects, the two statements would be indistinguishable. But since they obviously are different, although they denote the same, this difference cannot be accounted for by a purely referential theory of the meaning of words and sentences. Frege assumes that all statements of the form "A = B" are statements where "A" and "B" each are names that stand for individuals or objects. But although the truth of these statements only holds if the object denoted by "A" is the same as the object denoted by "B", Frege argues that these statements must have another semantic component than statements of the form "A = A" (e.g., Hegel = Hegel), since a thinking subject actually has to do more than inspecting the words, for example do some astronomical or arithmetical work, to analyse the truth of statements of the form "A = B". If the reference or truth-clause is all there is to it, there would be no difference between the two types of identity statements. The semantic property that Frege introduces as the solution to this puzzles is his notion of sense, which he describes as the "mode of presentation [Art des Gegebenseins] of that which is designated"⁹²⁸. He illustrates what sense is in the following way:

Let a, b, c be the lines connecting the vertices of a triangle with the midpoints of the opposite sides. The point of intersection of a and b is then the same as the point of intersection of b and c. So we have different designations for the same point, and these names ("Point of intersection of a and b," "Point of intersection of b and c") likewise indicate the mode of presentation; and hence the statement contains true knowledge [...] In our example, accordingly, the referents of the expressions "the point of intersection of a and b" and "the point of

⁹²⁷ Frege (1953: 59).

⁹²⁸ Frege (1948: 210).

intersection of b and c" would be the same, but not their senses. The referent of "evening star" would be the same as that of "morning star," but not the sense.⁹²⁹

"Sense" has a descriptive function – a sense is a way of determining a certain object, or even more precise (since a sense need not have a corresponding referent): the way in which a competent speaker of a given language understands or grasps a specific expression. This helps to solve the problem of cognitive significance in non-trivial identity statements like $a=b$. While "morning star" and "evening star" denote the same object, namely the planet Venus, they express different senses, different ways in which one can describe or grasp the object. As Schelling would say, what is at play here is two sub-judgements: There is an X (Venus) which is both A (morning star) and B (evening star). A and B are different in their sense, in their "mode of presentation", but are united through referring to one and the same object.

We have now seen in what sense Schelling's neutral monism has a "both-and-structure". However, towards the end of the *Freedom Essay*, reaching the "highest point of the entire investigation",⁹³⁰ he appears to shift his strategy and embrace the Neither-View and the Constitutive-View. This happens with the introduction of the concept of the "unground [Ungrund]" and "indifference". The unground is stipulated as the condition of possibility for any real and ideal determinations as such, for any dual descriptions, for any potencies. Without a non-ground, there "would be no two-ness of principles". In that sense, it is *constitutive*: By being prior to the real and ideal, it constitutes their possibility. As he writes, the "indifference (neutrality)" between the real and the ideal cannot be "described as the identity of opposites", since it comes "before" and "precedes" all difference, opposition, and duality (between the ideal and the real).⁹³¹ This seems very different from saying that all beings are *both* real and ideal in some sort of unification in different relational degrees.⁹³² What he here calls the "unground" or "indifference" does not contain the oppositions "implicitly", as it is "separate from all opposition [...] and that, for this reason, also has no predicate, except as the very lacking of a predicate". The neutral is, in principle, undeterminable: The moment one predicates it, it has already entered the relational structure of language. The real and ideal can "never be predicated of the nonground as opposites", for precisely "because it relates to both as total indifference, it is neutral toward both". From the Both-View, the unground would be, as he writes, both "at

⁹²⁹ Frege (1948: 210).

⁹³⁰ SW, 1, 7, 406 (2006: 68).

⁹³¹ It is debatable whether Schelling uses "absolute identity" and "indifference" as synonymous throughout his writings on the system of identity. Here, in the *Freedom Essay*, they are clearly supposed to signify something different: identity signifies "both-and", indifference "neither-nor". As Rang and Schwenzfeuer have pointed out, in Schelling's later writings "indifference" means "neither-nor" and "identity" means "both-and". The exact opposite seems to be the case in his *1804 System* (Rang 2001: 28; Schwenzfeuer 2012a: 242).

⁹³² However, Schelling oscillates in his characterizations. For example, he also says that in the point of indifference, the ideal and real "cannot be distinguishable in it nor can they be present in any way" (SW, 1, 7, 406 (2006: 68)). But that would seem to suggest that the real and ideal are already at least *in potentia* in the unground, although they are "indistinguishable" and not "present". He is not saying that they are not somehow there; they are just not determined as such.

the same time”, and hence both would be “predicated of it as opposites” and would thereby be separate again. This neutral zone, which is not merely neutral in the sense of being an equilibrium between two principles or tendencies,⁹³³ but in the sense of preceding and conditioning any determinations as such. It is what Russell, in describing his own neutral monism, called the “common ancestor” of both mind and matter, lying “in a sense between the two, in a sense above them”.⁹³⁴ The X is not anything. It is an X, whose nature is not, as Gabriel writes, “settled in advance”.⁹³⁵ Or, as Russell said it, “both mind and matter are composed of a neutral-stuff which, in isolation, is neither mental nor material”.⁹³⁶

On Schelling’s conception, this neutral X comes forth with and disappears the moment we begin to predicate something: It comes forth in the sense that the X is what carries different predicates (e.g., “body and mind”) and makes them true or false: Both the morning star and evening star are different descriptions, or senses, of one and the same X or thing (Venus), and what makes them true or false is whether they refer to one and the same thing. For example, the truth-maker of the two judgements “the morning star is the evening star” and the “the morning star is the author of the *Animal Farm*” are identical, namely the common referent (Venus). But the X also disappears, or steps back, as something in itself: It can only exist *in difference*, and therefore retreats as neither-nor (as the predicate-less) the moment it appears as something. It has, as Mark J. Thomas has put it, an “anonymous, hidden character”.⁹³⁷ It is, in a sense, nothing without difference. Therefore, the neutral X for Schelling, rather than implying something more “primitive” – e.g., basic building blocks from which the mental and physical can be composed as basic (as most contemporary neutral monists do) – Schelling is attempting to formulate the conditions of possibility for any determination or predication as such. The neutral X, the unground, does not signify a transcendent object beyond human grasp. It signifies the ultimate background for any determinations as such, something completely contrast free, that makes possible any determinations as such without itself being determinable.⁹³⁸

This neutral X has, for Schelling, a global and local structure. Or, it is a universal structure that is locally instantiated every time a judgement is performed. As a global structure, the “indifference” is the space of intelligibility as such within which all judgements take place. To be able to make distinctions and determinations as such, there must be *something* that can be determined – what he will later call “pure being”, the “pure that”, the “unprethinkable”.⁹³⁹ This pure facticity precedes, Schelling believes, any determinations (e.g., ideal and real determinations), and is therefore

⁹³³ Schelling often exemplifies the Both-View with the neutral point on a magnet where the poles are in an equilibrium, where neither dominate.

⁹³⁴ Russell (1921: 10-11).

⁹³⁵ Gabriel (2015: 96). As Gabriel continues: “It is maximally topic-neutral: it stands for whatever can be the case and make a statement about it true” (97).

⁹³⁶ Russell (1921: 25).

⁹³⁷ Thomas (2014: 26).

⁹³⁸ See Hoguebe (2006: 307-308).

⁹³⁹ SW, 2, 4, 337-341). See Hoguebe (1989) and Gabriel (2011).

neutral towards and necessary for the possibility of judgements as such. It is the contrast-free, uncolored world as it is before any determination as such. With the (“first”) act of judgement, differences start to appear. As he writes in the Stuttgart-Lectures, it is through judgements (or the “word”) that every “possibility of difference arises”.⁹⁴⁰ On a local scale, what Schelling is aiming for with the indifferent X is this: In every particular judgement – e.g., “the mind is the brain” – there must be *something* that precedes the determination attempt, an X, that *can* carry different determinations or predicates. In “isolation”, as Russell said, this X is neither (purely) material nor (purely) minded.

To sum up, we must note that Schelling’s theory of identity and predication is merely meant to justify the *possibility* of different and (seemingly) opposing predicates applying to one and the same X, just like Kant attempts to justify the possibility of both statements in the third antinomy to be true if they are considered as “sub-contrary” judgements whereby one and the same thing (restricted, for Kant, to the human being) is “taken in a different significance [Bedeutung]” or “sense [Sinn]”.⁹⁴¹ But this *possibility* does not entail *actuality*. Whether the judgement “the mind is the brain” is a true judgement, whether the mind and the brain have the same truth-maker, cannot be determined via the sheer semantic possibility that both *can* be applied to one and the same X. Senses (or predicates) do not necessarily have a referent. Against the skeptic, we need more; we need an integrated conception of reality, a metaphysics, that makes judgements such as “love is x-fiber stimulation in the brain” true, not merely truth-apt. Schelling’s attempt at such an integrated conception of reality is exactly what he carries out through his neutral monism, which results from a less crude conception of what it means to be “physical”. Because Schelling proposes a less crude conception of the “physical”, we could also call his model a form of naturalism. But obviously one very different from both strong and liberal (quietist) naturalism.

⁹⁴⁰ SW, 1, 7, 442 (1994b: 213).

⁹⁴¹ 20: 291-292. See Chapter 2. Kant’s solution is closer to Schelling, on a methodological level, than one would first think. Kant does not think, contrary to most quietists, that it is enough for us to merely conceive the possibility of both sub-judgements being true at time T. We need more; we need an account of the objectivity reality (truth) of both judgements. But the way Kant and Schelling then go about justifying this objectivity could not be further apart.

7. Conclusion: Towards an Ecological Thinking

[T]o the extent that we can silence ourselves does nature speak to us.⁹⁴²

I have argued in this thesis that Schelling proposes a model for thinking the relation between mind and nature that evades the two forms of naturalism presented in Chapter 1 and 2: Hard naturalism and quietist (Kantian) naturalism. Proceeding from the Monist Thesis (Chapter 3), the Continuity Thesis (Chapter 4), the Autonomy Thesis (Chapter 5), I have concluded in Chapter 6 that Schelling's thinking about how mind and nature hang together results in a version of neutral monism. Compared to Spinoza, however, it is a neutral monism with a pluralist bearing: Everything – from chemical substances and blades of grass to human moral agency – are structured from a specific relation between the “ideal” and “real” aspects. In contrast to Kant, these are not just aspects under which we are justified in referring to certain things (for Kant: human actions). These are *ontologically real aspects* of things in themselves. This conclusion comes with a panpsychist element: Everything is (also), to some degree, “ideal”, which does not, as I have argued, mean “minded” or “conscious” in any anthropomorphized way. I do not want to argue that Schelling's model is *per se* superior to hard naturalism, quietist naturalism, theories of strong emergence, dualism, etc. However, his model is a consequence of taking the pitfalls of all these other suggestions into account. If we want to respect a set of basic explanatory principles in our metaphysical theory-building – e.g., that the mental exists, that there is only one world, that nothing comes from nothing – Schelling's model, for all its speculative flavor, might be a model that deserves more future exploration in terms of thinking less crudely about the physical.

These are all theoretical or metaphysical questions. However, in Schelling's writings, we find implicit and explicit reflections on the practical implications of his view of mind and nature that can be relevant for contemporary for understanding of and actions towards mitigating the current climate- and biodiversity crises. We can call this *Schelling's ecological thinking*.⁹⁴³ For example, he frequently refers to Descartes'

⁹⁴² SW, 1, 2, 378.

⁹⁴³ Schelling developed this template for an ecological thinking in tandem with the ideas and aspirations of the romantic movement (see e.g., Dürbeck et al. 2017). All though many parts of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* contain implicit eco-ethical commitments, they are never unfolded.

and Fichte’s dualisms and idealisms as an “annihilation”⁹⁴⁴ of nature or that they give a “complete deathblow [Todtschlag]” to nature;⁹⁴⁵ in the *Freedom Essay*, he famously writes that the problem with “modern philosophy” is that “nature is not available for it”;⁹⁴⁶ and in his *Ideas*, he refers to pure reflexivity – which is that state of human alienation whereby we have severed ourselves completely from nature and consider it as a dead mechanism – as the “spiritual sickness in mankind”. He continues the text with a call for (philosophical) action: We must reunite become “identical” with nature, “cancel out that separation”, as he says. To conclude this dissertation, I will give a sketch of this *becoming identical with nature* in Schelling’s thinking as an essential topic for future studies.⁹⁴⁷ First, I will suggest a methodological framework for current environmental theory that fluctuates between what I call *criticism* and *imagination* (7.1.). Second, I will suggest how Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* and its panpsychist elements (Chapter 4 and 6) is a type of non-anthropocentric model that foreshadows recent trends within environmental theory such as new materialism or posthumanism (7.2.). Third, I will suggest that Schelling’s philosophical anthropology and his conception of moral responsibility and evil (Chapter 5) is an important supplement to the non-anthropocentric framework (7.3.).⁹⁴⁸

7.1. Criticism and imagination

Contemporary culture has to come to terms with the fact that the human species has entangled itself in a form of life and self-conception which threatens its own natural conditions. Collective behaviors and habits – as well political, socio-economic and legal practices – are deeply embedded in philosophical ideas about human beings and their place in nature. We can say that the planetary crises require more than anything a strong dialectic between theory and practice. That is, the relation between understanding the biophysical as well as “cultural” or “metaphysical” reasons behind the crisis on the one hand and the actions that can stabilize the Earth’s conditions on the other. As the Australian philosopher Val Plumwood phrased it, the current crisis is not only a biophysical crisis, but also a crisis of reason: a crisis related to the ideas and frameworks we use to understand the natural world and our place within

The reason is probably that he conceives *Naturphilosophie* (most of the time) as a theoretical project. Karoline von Günderrode, who read and commented on Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, was in that respect much more succinct about the practical consequences of the *Naturphilosophie*, for example in her short text *Idee der Erde* (1805). Günderrode actually gives a direct version of what can truthfully be called an ethics of nature (Nassar 2022).

⁹⁴⁴ SW, 1, 5, 276.

⁹⁴⁵ SW, 1, 7, 445 (1994b: 215).

⁹⁴⁶ SW, 1, 7, 356 (2006: 26).

⁹⁴⁷ Many commentators have suggested that we find an implicit or explicit template for ecological thinking in Schelling’s thinking. See e.g., Schmied-Kowarzik (1984, 1985, 1996), Mutschler (1990), Miller (2005), Frank (2013), Schwenzfeuer (2013), Wirth (2015), Matthews (2015), Hackl (2016), Le (2017), Nassar (2020).

⁹⁴⁸ Besides these two aspects, his holistic conception of the whole as preceding the parts and of constant interaction between different levels of nature resembles basic premises with current Earth-System-Science (see Chapter 4). Like Earth-System-scientists, Schelling understands nature as dynamic, interconnected, and precarious. See e.g., Thomas et al. (2020).

it.⁹⁴⁹ Frameworks that are inscribed in our daily life. Therefore, we must expose those ideas, frameworks and related socioeconomic structures that have, directly or indirectly, brought us here. And we must develop alternative ones. As long as we view the forest as timber, it will be cut down. As long as fossil sources are viewed as fuel, they will be burned. As long as animals are seen as objects, and not subjects, they will be eaten. As the author Amitav Ghosh has reminded us, the history of environmental catastrophe is also a history of the “muting of nature”, which has close ties to the colonial muting of Indigenous people.⁹⁵⁰ These “mutings” of certain life forms – be it trees, animals, or other people – were, and are, essential for extracting the Earth. But one thing we can learn from history is that any such framework can be dismantled. There is nothing necessary about perceiving the more-than-human as something to be conquered and controlled. Stimulating nature friendly production and consumption, circular economies, and sustainable use of resources, also requires major behavioral changes. That calls for new knowledges about social norms and incentives, political agencies, and sustainable life-forms and worldviews. Many of our collective ideas and habits – embedded in political, socio-economic, and legal practices – are directly and indirectly related to the ecological crises by being deeply anthropocentric.

Does the removal of *extractivism*, as Naomi Klein has named the view of nature as a bottomless vending machine, require some sort of “post-humanist” shift in our social and philosophical make-up? Does “human exceptionalism” block for an ecologically sustainable life-form? Within the so-called Environmental Humanities, we have seen various efforts to “decenter” the human in the wake of posthumanism or new materialism⁹⁵¹ as well as various efforts to dissect and criticize certain socio-economic organizations of life – i.e., capitalism – in the wake of eco-Marxism.⁹⁵² Posthumanists argue that anthropocentric worldviews are complicit in the crises and should be replaced by conceptions of *distributed agency*, *more-than-human assemblages*, and *nature-cultures* that redirect our attention towards the more-than-human world through radically new narratives and bio-social forms of living. Eco-Marxists, on the other hand, preserve a sharper division between the human and the non-human by locating past, present, and future responsibility and political agency within human-social relations and forms of production, and they assail posthumanists for ignoring this supposition. If it is not human beings, or human socio-economic structures, that can be held responsible, who then? And if not from human beings, where should the political transformations come from?

This has created an unwarranted trench warfare within the environmental humanities. Eco-Marxists tend to criticize posthumanists for having too few anthropocentric assumptions in their frameworks, whereas posthumanists tend to accuse eco-Marxists for having too many. The reason for this is that there is no mutual

⁹⁴⁹ Plumwood (2002).

⁹⁵⁰ Ghosh (2021).

⁹⁵¹ See Ferrando (2019) for an account of the historical development of posthumanism. Classic versions of posthumanism or new materialism are found in Bennett (2010) and Braidotti (2013).

⁹⁵² Malm (2016) and Saito (2022)

understanding of the basic methods, aims and strategies for environmental theory. I believe we need a methodological pluralism within the Environmental Humanities that needs to be further explored. We can construct a methodological framework centered around two focal strategies:

- 1) *The Critical Strategy*: Following the tradition of eco-Marxism and critical theory,⁹⁵³ Environmental Humanities must offer *examinations and criticisms of human based structures complicit in the current natural crises*, such as political and socio-economic structures, but also socio-cultural narratives shaped by deeply ingrained (anthropocentric) worldviews that systematically undermine the possibilities of climate mitigation. They must expose how these structures saturate our lives (e.g., food production and legal systems).
- 2) *The Imaginative Strategy*: Following the tradition of eco-feminist and post-anthropocentric thinking,⁹⁵⁴ Environmental Humanities must *think beyond the confines of the criticized structures by imagining habitable futures*. They must cultivate different life forms beyond fossil-capitalism and anthropocentrism – e.g., non-exploitative ways of organizing the production and distribution of food, or new ethical, political, and legal perceptions of human/nature relations that transcend anthropocentric biases.

Whereas eco-Marxists (mainly) employ the critical strategy, posthumanists (mainly) employ the imaginative one. However, this variance is seldom observed. The framework makes posthumanism and eco-Marxism not merely compatible, but potentially mutually enriching. Both can help to understand and mobilize post-anthropocentric and post-growth actors. Eco-marxists are mainly driven by the critical analysis that global warming and the exploitation of nature is mainly the result of capitalism's fossil economy, which means that a fighting *for* the climate entails fighting *against* capitalism – be it referred back to the steam engine and the coal industry or the exploitation of “cheap” natural resources. Posthumanists are driven one the one hand by a critique of a certain anthropocentric world-picture that has detached or elevated human beings above the rest of nature and, perhaps even more important, an attempt to develop alternative stories or frameworks on the other hand, in the tradition of biocentrism and deep ecology,⁹⁵⁵ that direct our focus, care and sensibilities towards the more-than-human world. This strategic shift of perspective⁹⁵⁶ entails “decentering” or “parenthesizing” the human, or certain conceptions of it at least,⁹⁵⁷ by inciting us to sense and talk about something that has been ignored and overseen throughout history. Whereas eco-Marxists appeal to transforming and re-developing certain *socio-economic structures*, posthumanists appeal to transforming and re-developing certain *imaginative or ideal structures*.

⁹⁵³ Rosa et al. (2022).

⁹⁵⁴ Barca (2020).

⁹⁵⁵ Leopold, (1949), Næss (1973).

⁹⁵⁶ Larsen (2023).

⁹⁵⁷ Bennett (2010: ix, 30).

7.2. Schelling's non-anthropocentrism

As I will argue in this and the next section, Schelling shares basic assumptions with both the posthumanist and the Eco-Marxist: We ought to combine a bit of non-anthropocentrism and a bit of anthropocentrism. What is anthropocentrism? Two assumptions underlie all environmental concern and action: *Human* activity is responsible for the climate- and biodiversity crisis and *humans* are responsible for interspecies injustices. And (2) *humans* are calling upon *humans* to alleviate these activities and develop new *human* relations to the non-human. These two assumptions have led to a renewed and critical interest in the concept of the human being and various forms of *anthropocentrism*. In particular, it is argued by posthumanists that anthropocentric conceptions of the human and its relations to the non-human are somehow complicit in the on-going climate and biodiversity crisis. Francesca Ferrando, a self-declared posthumanist, writes: “Anthropocentrism is inextricably connected to the rise of the Anthropocene which [...] shall be addressed as one of the effects of an anthropocentric *Weltanschauung*, based on an autonomous view of the human as a self-defying agent”.⁹⁵⁸ Posthumanism aims, in short, to critically expose and replace certain anthropocentric beliefs that contribute to interspecies injustice and the current planetary predicament.

However, anthropocentrism is a highly ambiguous term. Focusing on the posthumanist critique of anthropocentrism, we must keep two things in mind. First, posthumanists join forces with environmental ethicists in rejecting what we can call *normative anthropocentrism*, the claim that human beings have a unique moral status that sets them apart from non-human beings. However, posthumanists can be said to go further than those that merely discard normative anthropocentrism by attacking a related but analytically distinct type of ontological anthropocentrism. *Ontological anthropocentrism* claims that human beings possess *abilities* that make them ontologically distinct from other beings. Clive Hamilton seems to have this distinction in mind when he distinguishes between anthropocentrism “as a description of the uniqueness of humans as a species and our actual power on the Earth” from anthropocentrism as “the attitude of arrogance and mastery that typically, though not necessarily, has gone with it”.⁹⁵⁹ A fundamental trait of posthumanism, it seems, is its rejection of these two kinds of anthropocentrism.

Like the posthumanists, Schelling argues for a re-enchantment of nature that counters human exceptionalism. This is what I have argued for amounts to Schelling's Continuity Thesis. Self-organization, life, sensibility, intuition, teleological agency, consciousness, conceptuality, and freedom comes in degrees. These concepts are not merely signifiers of the quintessence of human subjectivity for Schelling but characterize also non-human nature. For example, he refers to the “spark of sensibility” that exists in “everything organic, even if its existence cannot be demonstrated everywhere in nature”, for example in the “greater part of the plant world”.⁹⁶⁰

⁹⁵⁸ 2019: (103-104).

⁹⁵⁹ Hamilton (2017: 90).

⁹⁶⁰ 2004: 114, 146. See also SW, 1, 6, 280.

Although Schelling puts it in different terms, he opened up for understanding what is nowadays well-established facts: Non-human animals can communicate, cooperate, feel emotions, have long memories, create meaning and so on. As Jakob von Uexküll already explained in the 1930's, many animals actively interpret their surroundings and create their own experiential worlds.⁹⁶¹ And now we even know that trees can communicate with each other in certain circumstances – they can send help, in the form of carbon, to ailing members of their group; and they can warn each other about pestilence and disease. Most, if not all, organisms have what Peter Godfrey-Smith calls “minimal cognition”:

Minimal cognition is a package of capacities, including sensing and responding to conditions, perhaps also bringing present and past together in some form of memory, and integrating different sensory cues. The “responses” here are not mere effects, but reflect the importance of sensed conditions to the vital projects of the organism. Minimal cognition is not restricted to animals; it is a feature of all known cellular life.⁹⁶²

In short: By opposing mechanistic conceptions of nature, Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* broadens the concept of mind in the world. To think of the natural world as “dead”, is a result of what Schelling in his *Ideas* refers to as the original separation of humans from nature, the separation from the “(philosophical) state of nature”, as he calls it. This original separation, whereby we at first become alienated, makes us misrecognize nature: We become a part of nature that fails to recognize that it is in fact a part of nature. In a sense, since we are natural beings, we express nature that comes to misrecognize, nature's self-alienation. As we saw in Chapter 4, the philosophical method of overstepping this alienation process is by constructing a *Naturphilosophie* whereby we “abstract” from our subjective, transcendental point of view, and take up nature's point of view. To do that requires what he calls a “depotentiation” of the human standpoint.

Schelling considers the *Naturphilosophie* as a completely theoretical project. We find no “oughts” in the texts. However, he frequently points out the practical implications of his *Naturphilosophie*. The *Naturphilosophie* can certainly function as a foundation for an ethics of nature, a foundation for rethinking the practical relations between humans and nature.⁹⁶³ As he writes in the dialogue *Clara* (1810), the *Naturphilosophie* is calling us “back to earth”.⁹⁶⁴ The practical implications are most obvious in the text *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine* (1806), which is an all-out attack on Fichte's conception, or lack thereof, of nature. Regarding the practical consequences of the *Naturphilosophie*, he explicitly states that it can “act as a poison to he whose will is caught in the pain of a fiery subjectivity”. The mechanical conception of nature that results from

⁹⁶¹ See Shettleworth (2001).

⁹⁶² Godfrey-Smith (2020: 212).

⁹⁶³ See e.g., Dirksmeier (2002), Schwenzfeuer (2013), and Hackl (2016).

⁹⁶⁴ 2002: 4.

Fichte's subjective idealism presents us, Schelling thinks, with a nature that becomes directly and eminently instrumental: Nature is only valuable (or meaningful) in terms of what it provides for human beings. As Schelling writes, it is only considered to be worth something for "the sake of its moral usefulness".⁹⁶⁵ What is directly valuable is the human good, and the services provided by natural processes are the foundation of human social systems, hence of human good on any conception.

One of Fichte's central claims, resembling a view deeply embedded in Western societies to this day, is that we become fully human through a (victorious) conquering of nature (through extraction etc.), which is seen as a "limitation" to overcome. In this way, we can measure our rationality over and against the "dead, fixed, and selfenclosed" nature.⁹⁶⁶ Nature thereby becomes an "empty phantom".⁹⁶⁷ Nature, writes Schelling, should on this instrumental view of nature be "exploited, used and only exists in order to be exploited; his principle, according to which he views nature, is the economic-teleological principle". Reducing nature to an instrument for our rationality resembles extractivist capitalism's view of nature as an endless resource that merely exists in order to be exploited for profit.

Schelling's underlying claim is that if we lose an understanding of how our life-forms are related to, and conditioned upon, the living world around us, we become incapable of developing any moral instincts that could make our exploitative relations feel wrong at all. Since we can safely say that Schelling opposes the "economic-teleological principle" of nature, the view that nature is "only valued in that it can be made into tools and household goods", he must endorse the view that nature has intrinsic value, and hence should be considered subjects of direct (moral) concern. This resembles the post-humanist strategy like for like. By extending the concepts of agency beyond the human realm, they encourage us to act less selfcentered. Or, as Schelling says in the Stuttgart-Lectures, we ought to install a "sympathetic relation to nature".⁹⁶⁸ Nature should not be an *it*, it should be a *you*.

This discussion is of course highly pressing with respect to something like animal ethics and the appalling and industrialized treatment of non-human animals. I do not want to suggest where we ought to draw the limit for morally relevant non-human nature, but based on present knowledge about animal psychology, it would simply just be a regressive standpoint embedded in ignorance and historical stubbornness to suggest that no non-human animals should be ascribed a moral status, as if they were not a part of the moral landscape just because they are not as morally self-conscious as us.

I am not sure that Schelling would ascribe direct moral value to non-human nature.⁹⁶⁹ But he would claim that our belief that non-human nature is an endless

⁹⁶⁵ 2018: 8.

⁹⁶⁶ 2018: 7.

⁹⁶⁷ 2018: 8.

⁹⁶⁸ SW, 1, 7, 465 (1994b: 230).

⁹⁶⁹ Schwenzfeuer seems to indicate that he does, talking about nature's "Eigenwert" (2013: 191). As Dierksmeier has noted, though, there are no grounds for talking about "rights of nature" in Schelling's thinking, although his student K. C. F. Krause does explore the idea (2002: 173).

resource for us to feed our appetite for profit, fuel, technology and entertainment, is wrong. As we have seen, his non-mechanical conception of organic agency results in the view that non-human animals have “consciousness”,⁹⁷⁰ “perception”,⁹⁷¹ and “conceptuality and intuition”⁹⁷² However, he does also refer to them as “completely blind”, and as “incessant somnambulists”,⁹⁷³ although he is very explicit that they should not be thought as Cartesian machines.⁹⁷⁴ And he never mentions moral attitudes towards animals. Hence, there is little ground for considering Schelling to be a direct forerunner of animal ethicists, although the seeds for such a view can definitely be extrapolated.⁹⁷⁵

Schelling does not only adopt what I in the previous section called the critical method. After stating polemically that horses only exist for Fichte so that they can pull his wagon, that trees only exist because they are good for making furniture, that everything in nature is seen as “something that can be manipulated, that he can work on and stomp with his feet”, he writes that Fichte’s incapability of grasping nature as alive leads to “complete spiritual death”. That is, the lack of grasping nature as alive is not only bad for nature itself; it is also bad for ourselves, since “all healing lies in nature”.⁹⁷⁶ Schelling not only points to the deficits of the mechanical conception, he also calls for us to orient ourselves towards the myriad of life in the more-than-human world as a way of making ourselves feel at home.⁹⁷⁷ Nature is, as he says, the “eternally fresh source of exaltation and an infinitely repeatable rejuvenation”. We ought to develop more caring relations with nature for nature *and* our own sakes.

⁹⁷⁰ 1, 10, 388.

⁹⁷¹ 1984: 255.

⁹⁷² SW, 1, 1 393.

⁹⁷³ Schelling (1984: 255).

⁹⁷⁴ Animals are not machines because they through their sensibility are the source of their own movement. As he writes in the *First Outline*: “The animals would become machines if we concurred with the absurd opinion of the Cartesians that allows all external causes of excitation to act by impulse or attraction upon animals (in mass), for then these causes act only mechanically, i.e., in straight lines [...] I assume that even where sensibility disappears directly into external movements (i.e., where the movements appear as completely involuntary) they are still not directly produced through the external impulse, but are mediated by sensibility (as the universal, dynamic source of motion) [...] sensibility is the source of life itself, precisely because through it alone the organism is torn away from universal mechanism [...] and by this means becomes its own source of motion”.

⁹⁷⁵ See Shaw (2016). He argues that Schelling does not escape the anthropocentrism that he attempts to criticize. For example, he claims that Schelling does not ascribe freedom to animals (80). However, that is not accurate, as I argued in Chapter 4. Also, Shaw is correct to point out that human beings have distinctive capacities, but this does not mean, as he suggests, that Schelling regards us as “privileged” (82).

⁹⁷⁶ 2018: 14.

⁹⁷⁷ The parallels with Rosa’s conception of resonance, which he relates to German Romanticism, are obvious (Rosa 2018).

7.2. Schelling's anthropocentrism

Although Schelling has an at least implicit affiliation with posthumanist thought, he maintains, as I have argued in Chapter 5, a conception of human distinctness. What is particular about human freedom is our capacity for good and evil, our status as moral agents. In this sense, we could say that Schelling aligns with the Eco-Marxists,⁹⁷⁸ who preserve a sharper division between the human and the non-human by locating past, present, and future responsibility and political agency within human-social relations.

I believe Schelling's analysis of evil in the *Freedom Essay* is of striking relevance for the planetary crisis. His definition of evil as an egotistic "perversion [Verkehrtheit]" or "reversal [Umkehrung]" of what he calls the principles of particularity and universality, whose open and ongoing negotiation constitutes human agency, is embodied by the fact that we have a fatal impact on the basic functions of the 'Earth System'. The possibility of evil only arises, he claims, in creatures that are determined by this structural, but negotiable relation between dependency and independency. That explains why, as he says, we (almost) exclusively attribute evil to human beings, and not pigeons, proteins, and planets. Humans are not calling upon pigeons, proteins, and planets to mitigate the climate catastrophe. The moral addressee – as responsible for the situation and responsible for mitigating it – is the human agent. Nonhumans aren't susceptible to the injunctions of overcoming interspecies injustice and remedy planetary exploitation. That would amount to making them blameworthy for not ending their own oppression and exploitation.

Schelling often exemplifies his holistic conception with organisms and their life. For example, the life of a body depends upon the co-operating mechanisms of the body's individual organs. Evil is comparable to a disease where an organ, which ought to play a subordinate role within the general functioning of the organism, strives for centrality, for dominance. Thereby it brings the body as a whole into a state of pain and disorder. This inversion is a moral choice. We must decide for good and evil in the sense that we must decide how to enact the relation between our particular self-interest and what goes beyond ourselves, whether it is other people, societal arrangements, or bio-chemical natural systems. The good is when I subsume my personal interests within a larger picture. When I do not strive to dominate, but strive towards restoring balances, towards forgetting myself, towards immersing myself in something that is not me.

Human reason can escalate into a poisonous kind of megalomania, a self-perception of universal dominance and power, a spirited sense of playing God on Earth. Evil is, as he says, the "longing" for gaining "control over the condition" [die Bedingung in seine Gewalt bekommen]" and "to rule [herrschen] over all things [...]" From this arises the hunger of selfishness [der Hunger der Selbstsucht] which [...]

⁹⁷⁸ Or non-Marxist "humanists" like Clive Hamilton. Hamilton in fact brings up Schelling himself towards the end of his book as an inspiration for his "new anthropocentrism": "We look across the unbridgeable gulf that separates us from all other beings; it is the gulf of responsibility. We have it; they don't." (2017: 53).

renounces the whole and unity”. This holistic view of good and evil relates to our current predicament in the following way: The Anthropocene underscores that we are capable of overstepping and disrupting our ground. We have, through freedom and creativity, become a powerful agent that plays God on Earth. Evil introduces, as Schelling says, an imbalance into reality. We have created an imbalance in the ‘Earth System’ by perverting the relation between the particular and the whole on which we depend.

When looking at the level of human societies, evil is, according to Schelling, not so much the uncontrolled madness that breaks forth from time to time and disrupts the safe and decent order of society. Evil, on Schelling’s account, is more present in the sly or shrewd refusal to change our attitudes in order to restore balances. On a more local scale regarding social inequality, for example. On a more global scale between our human wants and the non-human natural systems on which we depend. According to Schelling (and Kant), human beings can develop an evil *Gesinnung* because they integrate the propensity for evil in their daily life through deceptive messages and injunctions, because they have opened themselves up, as Schelling says, to the “spirit of lies and falsehood [Lüge und Falschheit]”.

Human reason is not as innocent and blissful as certain types of ‘modern’ thinking want to assert. Freedom is being misused. It might be unpleasant to accept that a rational subject can perform evil actions based on conscious reflection; it is much easier to wave the philanthropic flag and conclude that evil is a weakness of reason in the Fichtean sense. That is the view behind Hannah Arendt’s idea of the banality of evil, where a person like Adolf Eichmann is reduced to a guy with a weak capacity for reflection (remember that Fichte refers to evil as a ‘lethargy’ (Trägheit) of reason). Schelling insists that evil is something quite different. It is the silent spreading and acceptance of false and destructive information, and the actions springing therefrom, which only aim towards nurturing particular interests (either taken individually or group-wise) without any universal vision, care or responsibility. Evil, in Schelling’s sense, can also be understood as an intellectual vice in the shape of arrogance, imperviousness to evidence and lack of epistemic humility, which does not respect scientific knowledge or the need for rational discourse and mutual inspiration, and even aims towards destroying them. Evil actions paint morally bad behavior as its opposite. In this sense, climate deniers and the like, say Big Oil and Coal, are the proper embodiment of evil, in that they contribute massively to the game of playing God-on-Earth while also presenting this game as the most natural and righteous thing in the world through a perverse game of justification.

Because humans are distinct in virtue of being moral agents, Schelling would not agree with some self-declared posthumanists or new materialists. For example, Bennett argues that we ought to give “up the futile attempt to disentangle the human from the nonhuman”.⁹⁷⁹ The idea is that human beings cannot be said to possess distinctly human abilities because such abilities only exist by virtue of a “structural interdependence” between the human and non-human or by virtue of more-than-

⁹⁷⁹ Bennett (2010: 116).

human “assemblages”, “hybrids” or “naturecultures”.⁹⁸⁰ According to this argument, your writing a paper cannot really be said to be possessed by or ascribed to you as an ability because it depends on or is entangled with a great range of nonhuman artifacts and your life is sustained by, say, the ecosystem of microbes that inhabits your digestive tracts (cf. Bennett 2010: 120f). Therefore, so the argument goes, it is not “you” who do the writing; instead, the writing emerges out of many subprocesses.⁹⁸¹ Schelling would disagree: The ecosystem that inhabits my digestive tracts are a part of *me*, just like my capability being an agent worthy of moral praise and blame is a part of *me*. That does not mean that there is no coherent subject, it just means (as argued in Chapter 6) that there are different descriptions or aspects under which it can be true (or false) to describe *me*.

The difference between the Schellingian model and some posthumanists becomes especially obvious when it comes to conception of moral agency. Some posthumanists argue that the category of moral agency cannot meaningfully be restricted to the domain of human beings.⁹⁸² The argument has a modest and a radical version.

The modest version argues on empirical grounds that some nonhuman animals form and participate in complex social practices in which they exhibit social emotions tantamount to them praising or blaming each other morally.⁹⁸³ Something is a moral agent only if it is an appropriate target of moral praise and blame, so depending on our conceptions of moral praise and blame, these nonhuman animals are candidates for moral agency.

The radical version argues, on conceptual grounds, against the claim that there should be something exceptional about human agency and responsibility and in favor of expanding these categories to include all organic life and, perhaps even, the non-organic. Haraway thus substitutes the humanistic conception of “responsibility” for “response-ability” and claims that response-ability characterizes all forms of life including that of *vira*.⁹⁸⁴ Barad, on her part, writes that “responsibility is not the exclusive right, obligation, or dominion of humans”.⁹⁸⁵ No matter where we draw the line between moral agents and other beings, it seems that it must be drawn

⁹⁸⁰ Braidotti & Gilroy 2018: 22. Other concepts used to refer to this interdependence include “dependency” (Bennett 2010: 120-121; Braidotti 2013b: 40, 90, 113, 160; Frost 2016: 11-12), “conditionality” (Frost 2016: 11-12), “interconnections” (Braidotti 2013b: 193), and “constitutiveness” (Frost 2016: xxvi, 18, Braidotti 2013b: 67, Braidotti & Hlavajova 2018: 2).

⁹⁸¹ In Barad’s terms, “agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has. It cannot be designated as an attribute of subjects or objects (as they do not preexist as such)” (2007: 178).

⁹⁸² For a contemporary critique, see Soper (2012).

⁹⁸³ See Rowlands (2012).

⁹⁸⁴ Haraway (2016: 114).

⁹⁸⁵ Barad (2007: 172. See also 393). Bennett is another example. She occasionally stresses that her theory of distributed agency implies that the “concept of moral responsibility fits only loosely” to anything. When the idea of an agent is replaced with that of a “federation of actions” (e.g., a fossil based electrical grid made of coal, computer programs, plastic, wire, legislation, neo-liberal policies, etc.), the “charge of blame will not quite stick” (2010: 28). On this picture, “strong responsibility” becomes meaningless because “individuals” are “simply incapable of bearing full responsibility for their effects. The notion of a confederate agency does attenuate the blame game” (2010: 37).

somewhere. On Schelling's model, the minimal condition for being a moral agent is to be an appropriate target of moral praise and blame (good and evil).⁹⁸⁶ What would it mean that brittlestars and electrons are responsible to others? Barad must either implausibly claim that brittlestars and electrons are appropriate targets of moral praise and blame or admit that she operates with conceptions of agency and responsibility that are entirely divorced from our practices of praising and blaming. Understood this way, radical or global non-anthropocentrism turns out to be unstable. In line with this, Kate Soper has rightly noted:

Unless human beings are differentiated from other organic and inorganic forms of being, they can be made no more liable for the effects of their occupancy of the eco-system than any other species, and it would make no sense to call upon cats to stop killing birds. Since any eco-politics, however dismissive of the superiority of homo sapiens over other species, accords humanity responsibilities for nature, it presumes the possession by human beings of attributes that set them apart from all other forms of life.⁹⁸⁷

The demands to end interspecies injustice and the destruction of ecosystems are only make sense if we assume that some beings are susceptible to them. Therefore, the ethical demand that motivates the critique of anthropocentrism implicitly stipulates or points to a kind of moral agency. For the simple reason that it is nonsensical to blame anyone else for interspecies injustice and for the ongoing destruction of the biosphere, this kind of moral agency is human agency. Only human beings, as Schelling would say, stand on that *summit* where we can move toward good or evil: Whatever we choose, it will be our act: but we cannot remain undecided.

⁹⁸⁶ The modest version can accommodate this fact. It merely suggests that the category of moral agency is not *a priori* coextensive with the category of human beings and suggests instead that its extension should be settled empirically.

⁹⁸⁷ Soper (1995: 160).

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Abstract (English)

This thesis develops a metaphysical framework for understanding the bond between “nature” and “mind”. The framework is modelled on F. W. J. Schelling’s philosophy as he presents it between 1795 and 1809. Dissatisfied, both from a metaphysical (theoretical) and existential (practical) point of view, with the common ways of answering the question about how nature and mind hang together – e.g., Cartesian dualism, reductive materialism, Kantian standpoint-dualism, and Fichtean constructivism – Schelling proposed a framework with historical and contemporary relevance. From a set of simple explanatory principles – e.g., minds exist, there is only one world, nothing comes out of nothing – he argued that we can only make sense of the existence of human mindedness if we recalibrate some of our basic understandings of the natural order. Such a recalibration strives to deflate certain “crude” conceptions of what it means for something to be *physical* or *natural* that are still caught up in a set of mechanistic assumptions inherited from the 17th and 18th century. To think less crudely about the physical entails that “mindedness” – and its related features such as autonomous agency – is not a human privilege. For example, other organic beings act and think too. In that sense, Schelling’s view has a range of echoes within contemporary theory (e.g., new materialisms) that defies *human exceptionalism*. That does not entail, as I argue in the thesis, that humans are not *distinct* from the rest of nature. But it does mean that this distinctness occupies a point, a very indefinite and potentially dangerous one, on a *continuum* alongside everything else.

The radicality of Schelling’s account, which I reconstruct as a Spinoza-influenced version of what contemporaries call *neutral monism*, is that not only do non-human organisms have degrees of autonomy, conceptuality, and sentience (which should not be controversial); we must also understand the inorganic world (“matter”) as being *structurally isomorphic* to the organic world in terms of being self-organizing and active as fundamentally *relational*. This is the central aim of Schelling’s so-called *Naturphilosophie*. We could also call Schelling’s monism a form of *naturalism*, but an expanded or open-minded kind. Everything in nature – from chemical substances and blades of grass to human moral agency – (also) contains, to a certain degree, what he calls “ideal” aspects.

I will argue that Schelling’s metaphysical model exhibits a radically new world-picture that is designed to challenge and replace other world-pictures that, at least since “modernity”, have been governing how we think about our place in nature. Such a strategy is more imperative today than ever. As I will argue towards the end of the thesis, Schelling’s anti-mechanism and his broadening of the concept of mind in the natural world can have direct influence how to understand and engage today’s

environmental catastrophes that result from what Schelling calls the “economic” and “exploitative” view on nature that he associates with Fichte’s idealism and modern philosophy as such. Whereas other world-pictures entail an “annihilation” of nature by reducing its myriads of life to machine-like things that have nothing but instrumental value, what Schelling seeks is a basis for humans to develop “sympathetic” relations to the natural world.

Chapter 1 and 2 present contemporary and historical attempts to answer how mind and nature hang together, namely reductive materialism, liberal naturalism, and Kantian standpoint-dualism. The rest of the thesis is staged around Schelling’s dissatisfaction with all these answers. In Chapter 3, I present Schelling’s systematic methodology and how we see an attempt to overcome Kantian dualism in some of Schelling’s earliest texts. Chapter 4 is about Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*. Chapter 5 is about what I call Schelling’s philosophical anthropology, which is supposed to supplement the *Naturphilosophie*. In Chapter 6, I present Schelling’s neutral monism as a result of the conclusions in the previous chapters. In the Conclusion, I point towards the ecological aspects of Schelling’s thinking that can be relevant for contemporary perspectives.

Resumé (Dansk)

Denne afhandling udvikler en metafysisk model til at forstå båndet mellem ”natur” og ”ånd” (*Geist*). Modellen konstrueres igennem F. W. J. Schellings filosofi som den kommer til udtryk mellem 1795 og 1809. Med afsæt i en utilfredshed, fra både et metafysisk (teoretisk) og eksistentielt (praktisk) synspunkt, med de almindelige måder at besvare spørgsmålet om sammenhængen mellem natur og ånd på – cartesiansk dualisme, reduktiv materialisme, kantiansk standpunkts-dualisme, og fichteansk konstruktivisme – Schelling foreslog en metafysisk teori, der har historisk og nutidig relevans. Med afsæt i et sæt af simple forklaringsprincipper – fx at der findes frihed og mentale tilstande i verden (”ånd”), at der kun eksisterer én verden og at intet kommer ud af intet – argumenterede Schelling for, at vi kun kan redegøre for eksistensen ånd, hvis vi omkalfatrer nogle af vores mest grundlæggende forståelser af naturen. Denne omkalfatring består i at udfordre rå eller reduktive forståelser af, hvad det vil sige for noget at være ”naturligt” eller ”fysisk”, som stadig er fanget i en række mekanistiske antagelser fra det 17. og 18. århundrede. At tænke mindre ”råt” eller reduktivt om det fysiske betyder, at ”ånd” – og dertilhørende begreber som frihed og autonomi – ikke er et menneskeligt privilegie. Andre organismer, for eksempel, handler og tænker også. Således har Schellings forståelser en række ekkoer inden for nutidig teori (fx nymaterialisme) som fra et teoretisk og praktisk standpunkt går imod *menneskelig exceptionalisme*. Det betyder ikke, som jeg argumenterer for i afhandlingen, at mennesker ikke er *distinkte* i forhold til resten af naturen. Men det betyder, at denne distinkthed optræder på et punkt, et meget ubestemt or potentielt farligt punkt, på et kontinuum sammen med alt andet i naturen.

Radikaliteten bag Schellings teori, som jeg rekonstruerer som en Spinoza-inspireret version af det, der inden for nutidig filosofi kaldes *neutral monisme*, består i, at ikke bare har ikke-menneskelige organismer en grad af autonomi og konceptualitet (det burde ikke være kontroversielt); vi må også forstå den anorganiske verden som strukturelt isomorf til den organiske i kraft af at være selvorganiserende, produktiv og relational. Det er den centrale påstand bag Schellings *naturfilosofi*. Som jeg argumenterer for, kan vi også kalde det en form for naturalisme, men en udvidet eller åbensindet form for naturalisme. Alt i naturen – fra kemiske substanser or græsstrå til moralsk agens i mennesker – indeholder (også), i en bestemt grad, det han kalder ”ideale” aspekter.

Jeg argumenterer for, at Schellings model præsenterer et radikalt nyt verdensbillede, der er designet til at udfordre og erstatte andre verdensbilleder, der i hvert siden det ”moderne” har domineret hvordan vi tænker om vores plads i naturen. Sådant strategi er mere afgørende i dag end nogensinde før. Som jeg argumenterer for mod slutningen af afhandlingen, så kan Schellings model have en direkte indflydelse på

hvordan vi forstår og handler i forhold til vor tids klima- og miljøkatastrofer, som resulterer fra det, Schelling kaldte det ”økonomiske” eller ”udnyttende” syn på naturen, som han forbinder med Fichtes filosofi og den moderne filosofi som sådan. Mens andre verdensbilleder involverer en ”destruktion” af naturen ved at reducere dens myriader af liv til maskinagtige ting, som har intet andet end instrumentel værdi, så søger Schelling en base for, at mennesker kan udvikle ”sympatiske” relationer til naturen.

Kapitel 1 og 2 præsenterer nutidige og historiske forsøg på at besvare hvordan ånd og natur hæng sammen. Det involverer reduktiv materialisme, liberal naturalisme (kapitel 1) og kantiansk standpunkts-dualisme (kapitel 2). Resten af afhandlingen af bygget op omkring Schellings utilfredshed med alle de svar og det alternativ, han byder i stedet. I kapitel tre præsenteres Schellings systematiske metodologi samt hvordan han allerede i nogle af sine tidligste tekster forsøger at overkomme Kants dualisme. Kapitel 4 handler om Schellings naturfilosofi. Kapitel 5 handler om det, jeg kalder Schellings filosofiske antropologi, som skal supplere naturfilosofien. I kapitel 6 præsenterer jeg Schellings neutrale monisme som et resultat af konklusionerne fra de forrige kapitler. I konklusionen peger jeg fremad mod de ”øko-kritiske” aspekter ved Schellings tænkning, som er relevante i en nutidig kontekst.