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

IAIN HAMILTON GRANT

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Abstract

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

1. Introduction: That a Universe Exists¹

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

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

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

50 This is the problem forged from the conclusions Kant reached re-
51 garding the domains of the concept and of freedom, that is, of nature
52 and purpose, in the *Critique of Judgment*. Yet it is a problem recurrent
53 wherever, as for example in McDowell,² the transcendental consti-
54 tution of nature – its irreducibly conceptual nature – is maintained,
55 in part against those, such as for example Rescher,³ who maintain a
56 conceptual or explanatory idealism exceeded ontologically by
57 objects irreducible to such explanations.

58 To begin to address these problems therefore makes an account of
59 its first formulations, in the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling, into a de-
60 sideratum. The following paper therefore proposes to investigate the
61 problems encountered by any transcendental account of nature by
62 way of a detailed reading of Schelling's formulations of them in the
63 Introduction to the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. While often dis-
64 missed as 'neomedievalising obscurantism',⁴ as the revenge of nature
65

66 ² See J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, second edition (Cambridge MA:
67 Harvard University Press, 1996), and 'Two sorts of naturalism', in *Mind,*
68 *Value and Reality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996),
69 167–197. See also McDowell's 'Responses' in J. Lindgaard (ed.), *John*
70 *McDowell. Experience, Norm and Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008),
71 200–267 and 'Responses' again in N.H. Smith (ed.), *Reading McDowell on*
72 *Mind and World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 269–305,
73 esp. 274–5: 'The transcendental work [...] is done here by the idea that con-
74 ceptual capacities figure not only in free intellectual activity but also in oper-
75 ations of receptivity outside our control. Nature is relevant here only in
76 connection with a possible threat to that idea.' Hence, 'once my reminder
77 of second nature has done its work, nature can drop out of my picture'.

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

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

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

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

2. Invention and Identity

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

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

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

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

130 anything actual.⁸ Two stipulations should be made. First, the
131 grounds for the satisfaction of a transcendental argument must
132 include the complete discovery of the possibilisers⁹ for any
133 actuality = X, or their transcendental deduction will have no end.
134 Second, if X means ‘anything actual’, then all objects, insofar as
135 they are actual, can in principle be demonstrated to derive from the
136 conclusions reached in a grounded, that is, an exhaustive, trans-
137 cendental deduction. What cannot be achieved is a transcendental deduc-
138 tion of the transcendental deduction itself, or the stipulation of the
139 conditions of possibility for the transcendental deduction of the
140 source and origin of actual phenomena. The reflexive asymmetry of
141 the transcendental deduction has the important consequence that
142 the deduction itself is non-deducible, or only deducible once the
143 totality of its conditions are exhausted, since it is only by ‘carrying
144 the empirical synthesis [of conditions] as far as the unconditioned’
145 that reason ‘is enabled to render it absolutely complete; and the un-
146 conditioned is never to be met with in experience, but only in the
147 idea’.¹⁰ This means that there are no stipulated conditions of possi-
148 bility for the emergence or conduct of a transcendental deduction.

149 These considerations are important because it is by way of such ar-
150 guments that it is demonstrated that *no nature in itself need exist* in
151 order that I experience. Hence the late Husserl’s attempts to ‘re-
152 Ptolemize’ the Copernican turn in accordance with experience.¹¹

154
155 ⁸ ‘Actual’, that is, in the broad sense, indicating some state minimally
156 susceptible of predication rather than, for instance, the modal contrary of
157 ‘potential’.

158 ⁹ A condition of possibility is a ‘possibiliser’ just when it is necessary
159 and sufficient for the possibility, i.e. just when it creates a possibility.

160 ¹⁰ See, *KRV* A409/B436; Kant writes: ‘reason demands the uncondi-
161 tioned’ (*KRVA*564/B593); ‘Reason is a power of principles, and its ultimate
162 demand aims at the unconditioned’ (*KUK Ak.V*, 401). References to Kant’s
163 works are to *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, ed. *Königlich Preußischen*
164 *Akademie der Wissenschaften* (AK), XXIX vols. Berlin: Walter de
165 Gruyter, 1902–, which pagination is retained in all referenceable trans-
166 lations. Of these, I refer as *KRV* to *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N.K.
167 Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929); *KUK* to *Critique of Judgment*, trans.
168 W.S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987); *Op.p = Opus postumum*, trans.
E. Förster and M. Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

169 ¹¹ Edmund Husserl, ‘Foundational investigations of the phenomenol-
170 ogical origin of the spatiality of nature: the originary ark, the earth, does not
171 move’, in M. Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, trans.
172 L. Lawlor and B. Bergo (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press,
2002), 117–131.

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

184 That is, transcendental arguments begin and end by reducing
185 nature to experience; or, the alpha and omega of experience coincide
186 in the elimination *from mind* of mind-independent nature. From this,
187 two prospects open: the first is to accept the *elimination* which, since it
188 would have the consequence that nothing that cannot be thought can
189 exist, would result in what Kant would have called a dogmatic
190 monism. In such a case, Schelling's judgment that 'criticism is
191 bound for self-annihilation just as much as dogmatism is',¹⁵ would
192 be correct, since there would no longer remain a thinkable that was
193 non-intuitable, and therefore no discrimination, of the kind on
194 which a critical philosophy relies, between legitimate and illegitimate
195 judgments in accordance with their objects. Arguably, indeed,
196 objects vanish altogether from such a perspective. The second pro-
197 spect is to accept the *identity* of mind and nature. Since I agree
198 with the relatively neglected German Idealist philosopher Schelling
199 that 'it is not because there is thinking that there is being but rather
200

201
202 ¹² J.G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, trans. P. Heath and J. Lachs
203 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

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

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

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

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

227 Before continuing, a caveat: the suggestion of an *identity* between
228 mind and nature seems – but only *seems* – to entail a *reciprocity*
229 between them, such as that, for instance, frequently ascribed to
230 Schelling's *desideratum* that 'Nature *should be* [soll] Mind made
231 visible, Mind invisible nature'.¹⁷ Yet the 'should be' entails – a
232 point Hegel would make repeatedly against Fichte¹⁸ – that it *is not*.
233 Reciprocity – *Wechselwirkung* or 'operating by mutuality' –
234 amounts to a trap for identitarians regarding mind and nature,
235 since it proposes that the two are reciprocally limiting and exhaustive
236 of the whole. Reciprocity therefore maintains both (a) that everything
237 in mind is in nature and (b) that everything in nature is in mind.
238 Rejecting reciprocity without falling into dogmatic monism therefore
239 means accepting (a) and rejecting (b), thus retaining as irreducible the
240 asymmetry between being and thinking. Yet the onus falls upon such
241 an account to formulate in what such an identity consists if its factors
242 betray a priori differences. Lest the point be lost in jargon: if mind
243 were *not nature*, what would it be?

244 There are two ways in which Kant accounts for transcendental argu-
245 ments, two termini he provides for the satisfaction of their deduc-
246 tions. The first concerns the function of apperception, the source to
247 which transcendental deduction leads and from which its legitimacy
248 ultimately derives. The second, simpler in appearance, concerns the
249 'manner in which concepts can relate *a priori* to objects'.¹⁹ I will
250 briefly address each in turn.

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

254 ¹⁷ SW II, 56; *Ideas* 42.

255 ¹⁸ In *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of*
256 *Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and W. Cerf (Albany NY: SUNY, 1977),
257 117, 133–5.

258 ¹⁹ *KRV* A85/B117.

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

276 As Kant notes, the imagination does indeed become ‘very mighty
277 when it creates a second nature’; but it can only do so ‘from the
278 materials that first nature provides’.²¹ Experience is therefore
279 forged by transcendental means only given the participation of the
280 paradoxical non-faculty of *receptivity* (*Rezeptivität*). Receptivity is
281 not, strictly speaking, a faculty or *Vermögen*, but rather a capacity
282 ‘to be affected by *objects* [*Gegenstände*]’ and that ‘necessarily precedes
283 all intuition of these objects’.²² Whence the ‘necessity’ with which
284 this capacity ‘precedes all intuition’? The suggestion is that in order
285 that conceiving experience not become a ‘frictionless spinning in
286 the void’, it must be grounded in an antecedent to which the function
287 of forging experience, remains open. So because receptivity, as the
288 one remaining non-spontaneous power amidst the economy of the
289 faculties – but not, for all that, transparent to nature²³ – is necessary
290 in order to generate experience, it follows that the transcendental de-
291 duction of experience yet requires a basis or ground lying outside
292

293 ²⁰ J.F. Lyotard, *Leçons sur l’analytique du sublime* (Paris: Galilée, 1990),
294 15.

295 ²¹ *KUK*, AK V, 314.

296 ²² *KRV* A26/B44.

297 ²³ McDowell has emphasised this point in responding to Robert Pippin
298 on ‘leaving nature behind’, insisting that ‘our conceptual capacities’ are not
299 limited to overt conceptual activity, but figure equally in ‘operations of re-
300 ceptivity outside our control’ (Smith, *Reading McDowell on Mind and*
301 *World*, 274).

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

308 Consider the statement Kant has just made: it involves a relation
309 anterior to the *relata*, as the 'manner in which concepts can relate *a*
310 *priori* to objects'. It is this relatedness, then, rather than the nature
311 and mind so related, that provides the ultimate ground of the subject-
312 ive function of creating experience – a function, to remind ourselves,
313 that transcendental philosophy paradigmatically fulfils by recipro-
314 cally isolating nature from abstraction. Nevertheless, the suggestion
315 that there is an *a priori* relation between concept and object is a
316 radical one, insofar as it proposes an oblique transection of transcen-
317 dental autochthony, of the subjectivity attaching to the function by
318 which experience is generated, a fundamental *irreducibility* of the
319 object to the autonomy of the function.

320 By this account, transcendental philosophy may sustain the relation
321 between mind and nature without stipulating their identity. Yet
322 because the termini of transcendental deduction remain apperception
323 in the first case and relation in the second, the prospect of a necessary
324 antecedent to the autochthonous generation of experience begs the
325 question as to the termination of arguments resulting in either. In
326 the case of generation, regardless of the actual or experienced antecede-
327 nce of that generation with respect to the subject's apperception of
328 it, a 'first nature' remains necessary. In the second case, that of the *a*
329 *priori* relation of concept and object, *if* they are so related, this relation
330 is primary either with respect to their separation, or with respect to
331 both subject and object. Neither first nature nor the *a priority* of
332 relation have been deduced, which, as the Preface to the *Critique of*
333 *Judgment* would make clear, required Kant to revisit the foundations
334 of transcendental philosophy²⁵ and, ultimately, to abandon the non-
335 conceptual element in the interests of a wholly relative creation, aban-
336 doning epistemic support from anything extra-subjective.²⁶

338 ²⁴ *KRV* A85/B117.

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

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

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

359 [F]or we require to know, not how such a Nature arose outside us,
 360 but how even the very *idea* [*Idee*]²⁸ of such a Nature has got *into*
 361 *us* [1]; not merely how we have, say, arbitrarily generated it, but
 362 how and why it originally and *necessarily* underlies everything
 363 that our species [*Geschlecht*] has ever thought about Nature. [2]
 364 [... W]hat we want is not that Nature should coincide with the
 365 laws of our mind *by chance* [*Zufällig*] (as if through some *third* in-
 366 termediary) [3], but that *she herself*, necessarily and originally,
 367 should [/] not only *express*, but even *realize*, the laws of our
 368 mind, and that she is, and is called, Nature only insofar as she
 369 does so. [4] Nature should be Mind made visible, Mind the invis-
 370 ible Nature. Here, then, in the absolute identity of Mind *in us* and
 371 Nature *outside us*, the problem of the possibility of a Nature ex-
 372 ternal to us must be resolved. [5]²⁹

374 Schelling's questions are then:

- 375 1. How do ideas arise [*entstand*] and 'get into us', rather than how
 376 we invent or project representations
 377

378
 379 ²⁷ The Introduction is a sustained four-way (unhelpfully, Schelling
 380 does not structure it accordingly) analysis of transcendental philosophy, em-
 381 piricism, rationalism (especially Leibniz's) and *Naturphilosophie* with
 382 respect to their emergence. The critique of transcendental philosophy
 383 runs from SW II, 12–34; *Ideas* 10–26.

384 ²⁸ For reasons the translators do not explain, Harris and Heath render
 385 both *Idee* and *Vorstellung* (Kant's 'representation') as 'idea', rendering it
 386 unclear, bluntly, where in the Introduction Schelling criticizes transcen-
 387 dentalism and where he praises Platonism.

²⁹ SW II, 55–6, *Ideas* 41–2.

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

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

3. What is Nature?

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

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

³⁰ SW II, 55–6, *Ideas* 41–2.

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

443 The inversion of the access problem from ‘how can I know nature’
444 to ‘how does the idea of nature enter our species’ is therefore *natura-*
445 *listic* in that it does not presuppose conceptual mastery of what pre-
446 cedes it. Schelling notes that nature grips or even ‘conceives’
447 (*begriffen*) those who investigate it.³² The question therefore of the
448 concept or *Begriff* by which nature in turn is grasped or conceived
449 turns on the capacity of a part to conceive the whole – that is, to
450 achieve for the concept an extension greater than that whole. The
451 two routes by which this is possible are (1) reduction of the conceived
452 to the content of the concept, and (2) maintaining the asymmetry
453 between nature and its concept without the assumption of the limita-
454 tion of the latter thereby.

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

465 The inversion of the access problem has the following ultimate
466 consequence: it pits a naturalistic creation against the Kantian
467

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

471 ³² SW II, 12; *Ideas* 9.

472 ³³ SW VI, 207; cf. VI, 185.

473 ³⁴ SW II, 13; *Ideas* 10.

474 representation or *Vorstellung*. The action, that is, of ‘arbitrarily gener-
475 ating’ a representation disconnected not only from a nature outside
476 me but also arising only within me, may have as its positive element
477 the confident outlook of a nature *to be produced* in the bitter triumph
478 of merely relative creation. But it is a production that can neither be
479 accounted for *from reality* nor in terms of a *reality finally made*. The
480 latter remains a desideratum and as such, acknowledges from the
481 outset that it neither is nor can be an actuality issuing from the trans-
482 cendental except as such a desideratum. This is why Fichte is correct
483 to argue that all transcendental arguments issue ultimately in practical
484 problems.

485 With this, we move to the second of Schelling’s questions. The
486 question does not concern a representation of nature such as we
487 have arbitrarily generated, ‘but how and why it originally and *necess-*
488 *arily* underlies everything that our species [*Geschlecht*] has ever
489 thought about Nature’.³⁵ Granting that the capacity for ‘arbitrary’,
490 i.e. non-necessary, generation exists, transcendental philosophy
491 itself demands that we ask *what necessarily underlies this capacity for*
492 *invention*. Insofar as anything necessary does underlie it, the arbitrary
493 is its product; insofar as it does not, then whatever underlies representa-
494 tion has no relation whatever to representations, which therefore
495 become arbitrary in the strong sense, i.e. that there is no reason for
496 the arbitrary production of representations. Since this is precisely,
497 as we have seen, what transcendental arguments set out to disprove,
498 by arguing that there is an *a priori* relation between concept and
499 object, some necessary basis, of whatever nature, is in fact assumed.
500 This being the case, the question ‘what is its nature?’ leads to the fol-
501 lowing problem: either the necessity is a necessity that attaches
502 simply to the function of forging experience, which does not prove
503 but reiterates the claim that there are unmotivated productions of rep-
504 resentations. Or the necessity is such as to withdraw the authority for
505 their production from spontaneity – the function of forging experi-
506 ence – and to place it, as Schelling recommends, in the species.
507 Accordingly, the thesis here is that it is in the nature of the species
508 to generate representations, via the introduction of ideas of the
509 same nature as those species into their members *qua* members of a
510 species.

511 Summing up so far, ideas access species susceptible to them, and
512 that species is one: nature. It is within this one species that the ques-
513 tion underlying the difference between arbitrary and necessary gener-
514 ation arises, namely, the question of generation itself. Amongst

515 ³⁵ SW II, 55–6; *Ideas* 41–2.

517 the aims of the ‘Introduction’ to the *Ideas* is that ‘philosophy become
 518 genetic’.³⁶ Accordingly, a philosophy must demonstrate itself in
 519 ‘arising before our eyes’ and be tested according to its capacity for ‘de-
 520 velopment’.³⁷ The question Schelling poses to the transcendental
 521 concept of nature is twofold: firstly, what ‘reality’ belongs to its
 522 ‘concept of nature’³⁸ and secondly, from what does it derive, on
 523 which the answer to the former depends.

524 Since Schelling cannot eliminate reality from the transcendental
 525 concept of nature without undermining his argument, some reality
 526 must attach to it. It is the reality of reflection, which rests in turn
 527 on the ‘activity of separation [*zertrennedes Geschäft*]’ proper to it.³⁹
 528 Such separation arises from the doubt that the nature I grasp and
 529 that grasps me is nature in itself or merely for me; but this doubt is
 530 in turn parasitic upon the activity of reflection from which it issues.
 531 While what reflection separates is conceptual content – concept
 532 from thing, or intuition from object – separation is an activity dis-
 533 turbing an ‘equilibrium of forces’ original only with respect to the re-
 534 flection that disturbs it. The theory of action underwriting the
 535 withdrawal of force from acting in a world whose forces in turn we
 536 feel⁴⁰ rests in turn upon dynamics as the ‘grounding science’ of
 537 *Naturphilosophie*.⁴¹ At its root, therefore, is the community of
 538 forces necessary in order that there be separation at all and, since
 539 no force is possible that is not limited by another,⁴² such separation
 540 can only be for reflection. The reflective separation of mind from
 541 nature is therefore actual precisely insofar as it effects a redistribution
 542 of forces affected by dynamic activity in a common nature.
 543

545 ³⁶ SW II, 39; *Ideas* 30.

546 ³⁷ SW II, 11; *Ideas* 9.

547 ³⁸ SW II, 6; *Ideas* 5.

548 ³⁹ SW II, 14; *Ideas* 11; t.m.

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

556 ⁴¹ SW II, 6; *Ideas* 5.

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

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

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

588 In his excellent book *All or Nothing*,⁴⁴ Paul W. Franks argues that German Idealism
589 was motivated to respond to the sceptical challenges it encountered from neo-Humean
590 and other sources. Franks describes the form these challenges take as the Agrippan
591 Trilemma⁴⁵: to the question '*Why X?*' all answers will either (a) lack justification;
592 (b) supply a justification that retriggers the *Why-*

598 ⁴³ SW II, 44; *Ideas* 33.

599 ⁴⁴ Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments and Skepticism in German Idealism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

602 ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

603 question rather than resolving it, creating a regress, or (c) presuppose
 604 what they seek to establish. Thus, when Hume seeks to demonstrate
 605 the inconclusiveness of relying on reason to explain nature, he has
 606 Philo ask ‘What peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the
 607 brain which we call thought that we must make it the model of the
 608 whole universe?’⁴⁶ Philo’s question seeks to demonstrate, contrary
 609 to Schelling’s account, that there is no reason to assume what is
 610 true of the part to be true of the whole. The coincidence, in other
 611 words, between thought and the universe, is absolute in the sense
 612 of *mere* coincidence. It renders any attempt to argue a necessity, for
 613 instance, between the causal patterns involved in the production of
 614 thought and those involved in the production of other events or enti-
 615 ties, (a) unjustified; (b) retriggers the why question (a); and (c) is re-
 616 gressive. On this basis, no demonstration of coincidence as other than
 617 absolute could succeed. The only positive conclusion, therefore, is
 618 the impotence of reason on the cosmic scale.

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

630 However, the passage goes on to stipulate the requirements for sat-
 631 isfying the question: nature is ~~only~~ nature when and only when ‘*she*
 632 *herself*, necessarily and originally [...] not only *express[es]*, but even
 633 *realize[s]*, the laws of our mind’.⁴⁷ Nature is nature only if it is
 634 capable of realizing and expressing the laws of mind. The passage
 635 does not state the conditions under which this might occur, since it
 636 articulates as fundamental a condition that is not a terminus to a de-
 637 duction, but rather opens the conditions attaching to the laws of mind
 638 to a naturalism whose basis is given neither in experience nor in ‘pure
 639 thought’. The cost, in other words, of the absolutisation of coinci-
 640 dence is the abolition of absolute termini, and therefore of a
 641

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

645 ⁴⁷ SW II, 55–6; *Ideas* 41–2.

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

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

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

675 Our penultimate Schellingian problem therefore concerns the
676 nature of identity, and its consequences as regards the apparent
677 equivalence or non-decidability of unity over dichotomy, or necessity
678 over arbitrariness. When we consider thought and nature as coinci-
679 dent, and seek reasons for their identity as advening consequently
680 upon their separate natures, such reasons remain arbitrary additions
681 that demand explanation rather than offering any, since such a con-
682 ception of identity presupposes what it seeks to explain. Moreover,
683

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

688 ⁴⁹ SW II, 14; *Ideas* 11.

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

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

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

705 We have seen that opening transcendental inquiries to termini se-
706 questered in particular domains of being remains inconsistent
707 unless it is absolutised, so that such a transcendental philosopher
708 could claim that ‘there is being because there is thinking’ or ‘what
709 being there is is thought-being’. We have not yet seen that nature
710 supplies other termini, but that it replaces one set of terms with a
711 ground that recedes from epistemic or transcendental access precisely
712 where thought and nature separate. What this means is that whatever
713 grounds is not merely logically nor chronologically prior to what is
714 grounded, but rather that there is always an *ontogenetic antecedent*
715 for any product or event that accesses us, despite our inability to
716 recover it. This is what nature is for German Idealism: at once unlim-
717 ited production and its ruins, the World-Phoenix, as Kant and
718 Carlyle have it,⁵² antecedent to the production of thought it necessi-
719 tates and accordingly unlimitable save through all its possible
720

721 ⁵⁰ SW IV, 119; trans. Michael G. Vater, *Philosophical Forum* 32 (2001),
722 343–371, here 352.

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

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

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

741 4. The Universe in the Universe

742
743 What strives against the intellectual or thinking – the real, being
744 as such – of which we may indeed become conscious, and the
745 concept of which consists, however, in not being taken up into
746 the concept.⁵³

747 Having examined the five questions Schelling poses regarding the
748 relation between nature and the concept, we turn finally to the char-
749 acter and function of the concept of nature Schelling recommends. If
750 conception is consequent upon division, how is nature capable of a
751 concept of the divisions antecedent to its emergence – that is, of a
752 ‘natural history of mind’?⁵⁴

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

764 While the image of the point-concept retains the asymmetry
765 necessary to overturning eliminative idealism, it simultaneously
766 functions as the limit of nature, its *nec plus ultra*, in that nature
767 does not continue after, but only up to, this point. Yet it is precisely
768 what a concept is that it conceives something. The problematics of
769

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

773 ⁵³ SW VIII, 164.

774 ⁵⁴ SW II, 39; *Ideas* 30.

The Universe in the Universe

775 nature and history – which together exhaust ‘applied philosophy’⁵⁵,
776 Schelling tells us – alter the conception of nature, and the concept
777 of the concept, in accordance with dynamics, the ‘basic science
778 [*Grundwissenschaft*]’ of the philosophy of nature.⁵⁶ While the asym-
779 metry of nature and the concept remains, or while the separation at
780 the latter’s root remains actual, the history of a concept is always
781 catching up with the concept from which natural-historical inquiry
782 began and which issues from that inquiry. It is precisely in that con-
783 ceiving has its history in the separation from the nature that conceived
784 it to begin with that the concept acquires an extension that, while
785 necessarily insufficient to recover its antecedents, is also additional
786 to them, that is *genuinely* consequent upon them. Since, moreover,
787 the concept begins its career neither arbitrarily in mind alone nor co-
788 incidentally between mind and nature, but asymmetrically in the
789 nature from which it issues, the concept’s history already conceives
790 the separations that form it. The concept’s extension, therefore, is
791 always greater than consciousness of it, and what it conceives is its
792 own nature, that is, the nature from which it issues. Accordingly,
793 Schelling will later consider the concept’s extension to be subject to
794 ‘powers’ as instancing its basic recursive function.

795 It is for this reason that Schelling gives, as the test of a concept, not
796 adequacy to a thing, but operative range, that is, whether it ‘admits of
797 *development*’.⁵⁷ Only insofar as it does so does it exceed antecedence
798 just as the idea – the concept of the concept – enjoys only part of its
799 career in mind.⁵⁸ Indeed, Schelling is at pains to stipulate that con-
800 cepts do not have prior limits, and defines the idea therefore as the
801 ‘infinite’ or ‘unlimited concept’ which is itself ‘the concept of the
802 universe’.⁵⁹

803 The philosophy of nature does not propose to eliminate nature or
804 concept but, in seeking a concept of nature capable of the concept,
805 changes the form in which nature’s antecedence is thought into the
806 movements proper to the conceiving operative in nature. A concept
807 is not a thing, an object, nor an abstract container, but a form of move-
808 ment overcoming its beginning in pursuit of the history of which it is
809 consequent.

810 German Idealism therefore confronts philosophy both with the in-
811 superability of the philosophy of nature, and with the necessity of its

813 ⁵⁵ SW II, 4; *Ideas* 3.

814 ⁵⁶ SW II, 6; *Ideas*, 5.

815 ⁵⁷ SW II, 11; *Ideas*, 9.

816 ⁵⁸ SW III, 553; *System* 172.

817 ⁵⁹ SW VI, 185.

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

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