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Kant's *Opus postumum* and Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*: The Very Idea

Abstract

This paper is about Kant's late unfinished manuscript, *Opus postumum* (1796-1803) and some of the resonances it has with Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie* (1797-1800).

Most of the secondary literature on *Opus postumum* investigates its relation to the rest of Kant's corpus, often framing the drafts as an attempt to fill a so-called "gap" in the Critical philosophy whilst ignoring the relationship it has to the wider landscape of late 18th century German philosophy. Whether *Opus postumum* may provide grounds for reviewing the relationship between Kant and Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, for example, is rarely discussed. Some scholars have remarked upon the striking parallels between *Opus postumum* and *Naturphilosophie*, but there has yet to appear a single monograph-length text on the relation. Whilst certainly "Schelling's Post-Kantian confrontation with nature itself begins with the overthrow of the Copernican revolution" (Grant 2008, 6), what if Kant was himself overthrowing the Copernican revolution? In this paper, I will outline some of the points of contact to start from in support of posing this question.

1. Observations on the Coincidence of *Opus postumum* and *Naturphilosophie*

In March 1804, one month after Kant died, Schelling published an obituary to Kant in the *Fränkischen Staats- und Gelehrten Zeitung*. At one point Schelling says, "Still in the year 1801, in his few hours of free-thinking power, [Kant] laboured over a work [entitled] *Transition [Übergang] from Metaphysics to Physics*, which, had age granted him the completion of would have undoubtedly been of the highest interest" (SW 6:8; K, 268).¹ This is the third time that

the prospective name of the drafts which became *Opus postumum* appear in print. The first time is in Kant's own *Metaphysics of Morals* from 1797 where he says, "just as a transition [*Überschritt*] from metaphysics of nature to physics is required [and] which has its own special rules, so [something] similar is rightly requested for the metaphysics of morals" (AA 6:468; MM, 584). The second mention is in Kant's *Physical Geography*, published in 1801, where a note appended by its editor Friedrich Theodor Rink reads, "If only the venerable author of this physical geography made known his *Transition from the Metaphysics of Nature to Physics!*" (AA 9:221; PG, 498). So Schelling's mention of the *Transition* project is really the first in print outside of Kant's own corpus. This raises a few questions, not least of which is how Schelling knew of these drafts. Knowledge of Kant's last project only reached a wider audience after publication of the biographical trilogy written by Ludwig Borowski, Reinhold Jachmann and Ehregott Wasianski entitled *Über Immanuel Kant*. The infamous line that Kant described the *Transition* project as the "keystone to his philosophical work" (Jachmann 2012, 113), for example, comes to us through Jachmann's part of this trilogy.

So perhaps Schelling received the information from these biographical sketches. The problem is that the trilogy was published in June 1804, some three months after Schelling's obituary had appeared, and so cannot be the source of Schelling's knowledge of the late Kant's project. It is most probable that Schelling picked up on Rink's note in *Physical Geography* although as Ernst-Otto Onnasch comments, "the source for Schelling's knowledge of [the *Transition* project] is still unclear" (Onnasch 2009, 311).

Although Schelling does limit the date Kant was working on the *Transition* to 1801, the publication year of *Physical Geography*, he seems to know more about the project than is contained in Rink's note. For the next line in Schelling's obituary provides us with perhaps the first, albeit entirely speculative, analysis of what the *Transition* project might be about. Of course, we must bear in mind that Schelling had no access to the manuscript, nor (to the best

of my knowledge) did he ever have access to it.² Nonetheless, he says, Kant's "views on organic nature are laid out in his critique of teleological judgement separated from and without connection to his general natural science" (SW 6:8; K, 268). Schelling anticipates the secondary literature on *Opus postumum* here in so far as he sees a gap between two divided parts of Kant's thought other than the theoretical and practical. He sees the gap as lying between the philosophy of natural science set out in *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Metaphysical Foundations*, and the theory of organisms set out in *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. This chimes with Michael Friedman's interpretation in so far as he places the gap between the "constitutive procedure of the *Metaphysical Foundations* and the regulative procedure of reflective judgement" (Friedman 1994, 256), an element of *Opus postumum* I will explore in the following.³

But this is not a one way street because Kant also mentions Schelling two times in *Opus postumum*, in fascicle I which was written between 1800 and 1803. These are both "mentions" in the strict sense of the term; Kant only writes Schelling's name, once paired up with Lichtenberg and Spinoza (AA 21:87; OP, 251) and once in relation to a book review of *System of Transcendental Idealism* (AA 21:97; OP, 254). These mentions of Schelling have been excellently reconstructed by Onnasch based on an in depth analysis of the manuscript.⁴ Friedrich Heman in 1904 and Burkhard Tuschling in 1991 have also suggested a more doctrinal reading which situates Schelling at the forefront of *Opus postumum*, going so far as to claim that Kant was very much aware of Schelling's early project and saw it as the heir to his Critical work. It is noteworthy, for example, that in his library Kant had a copy of Schelling's 1795 work *Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy* (Warda 1922, 54), and that one of his mentions of Schelling aligns him with the "present" incarnation of transcendental idealism. Heman's and Tuschling's rejoinders, however, are very brief and not exhaustive. For beyond simply stating that Kant had knowledge of Schelling or writes out his name, beyond the fact that Schelling is

perhaps the first to provide a sentence on the meaning and place of *Opus postumum*, there is a deeper question that arises and forms the basis for research into the late Kant. That question is: “does *Opus postumum* show Kant moving towards a standpoint akin to that of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*?” or perhaps put more bluntly, “was Kant becoming a post-Kantian?”

Beyond this being merely a provocation, it is this question which would help structure further research. In this connection, I think we should move beyond reading *Opus postumum* as simply in dialogue with Kant’s earlier work, but I think we first need to situate *Opus postumum* as a “*Leitfaden*” to Kant’s work *for the sake of* relating it to early German Idealism. For without a firm basis from which to philosophize out of *Opus postumum*, without seeing it as both containing a problem and itself problematic, it is difficult to fully explore the relationship it may have to a wider landscape. As Howard Caygill claims, “Kant did not *have* a philosophy; he *did* philosophy [...] reading Kant is to engage in philosophizing with him” (Caygill 2007, 16). This is one of the obstacles that the Schelling scholarship faces when it reads *Opus postumum* alongside *Naturphilosophie*. It is treated as an unproblematic text with a clear philosophical status, thereby missing some of the profound issues Kant was tackling.⁵ It is for this reason that Ben Woodard’s otherwise excellent reading of *Naturphilosophie* next to *Opus postumum* draws the conclusion that they radically differ.⁶ I am, rather, of one mind with George Di Giovanni when he claims, *Opus postumum* “give[s] evidence that Kant was exploring a line of argumentation that, if pressed to its ultimate conclusions, would have forced him to rethink his Critical premises” (Di Giovanni 1979, 203), a rethinking which would end up quite close to *Naturphilosophie*. Despite Woodard’s conclusion, however, this niche in the Schelling scholarship compellingly suggests that there is a vantage point from which to read *Opus postumum* through the prism of the *Naturphilosophie*, just that it needs fleshing out in more detail. Therefore, explicating a few of the resonances between them would be a useful undertaking.

I will focus on three different points of contact between *Opus postumum* and *Naturphilosophie* written around the same periods: (1) *System of Transcendental Idealism* and the “Beylagen I-IX” drafts on self-positing, (2) *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* and the “Oktaventwurf” drafts on transition, and (3) *First Draft for a System of Naturphilosophie*, the “A-R” drafts and the “Übergang 1-14” drafts on the organism.

2. *System of Transcendental Idealism* and “Beylagen I-IX” on Self-Positing

One of the most significant similarities between the late Kant and early Schelling is the accounts they give of self-consciousness. Granted, we do not get this in Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* as such but in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (published in April 1800), but we can still glean parallels from it. Where *Naturphilosophie* tries to show how the subject (self-consciousness) emerges from the object (nature), transcendental idealism tries to show the opposite, how the object emerges from the subject. This latter definition is a recapitulation of Kant’s transcendental deductions, where the categories are legislative prescriptions identical to what we mean when we say “nature” (CPR A125/B163). For Kant, nature is determined by the categories, such that it overlaps wholly with the faculty of understanding. Schelling sets the scene like this: in transcendental idealism “the subjective is made primary and its task is: how an objective supervenes, that harmonizes with it” (SW 3:341; ST, 6); whereas in *Naturphilosophie* “the objective is made primary and asks: how a subjective supervenes into it, that harmonizes with it” (SW 3:340; ST, 5). There are two sides, then, which in Hegel’s words comprise a “subjective subject-object” side (transcendental idealism) and an “objective subject-object” side (*Naturphilosophie*) (Hegel 1977, 82).

Schelling develops his own transcendental idealism by starting with self-consciousness as the genetic act through which the “I” (*Ich*) becomes an object, such that self-consciousness

(which includes all the faculties Kant had developed) is nothing more than this very act: “self-consciousness is the act whereby thinking immediately becomes the object, and conversely, this act and no other is self-consciousness” (SW 3:365; ST, 24). Moreover, Schelling describes this act very specifically (in harmony with its Fichtean root) as the I which “posits itself” (*setzt sich selbst*) (SW 3:381; ST, 37). Schelling believes that only by starting from this point can transcendental idealism stay in tune with its desire for a so-called “Copernican turn”, that in order to properly orient the object around the subject we must view nature emerging from self-consciousness as entirely indexed in its own positing. Yet for Schelling this is something more than merely recovering the subjective kernel of Kant’s transcendental idealism, for positing is not only an ideal-subjective act, but also a real-objective act. This is borne out in his treatment of space and time, which remain akin to the pure forms of intuition (inner and outer sense) but now have a more forceful base for Schelling (SW 3:468; ST, 104-5). Space left unchecked is just the tendency to expand outward (infinite extensity), whereas time left unchecked is the tendency to contract inward (infinite intensity). The meeting point between them or the point at which they limit each other is the appearance of a real object (SW 3:467; ST, 104). Where the Critical Kant views the forms of intuition as subjective indicators of how experience is ordered, Schelling moves toward a position in which space and time are indicative of tendencies to expand and contract. Hence, self-consciousness becoming an object means positing itself into space and time, into the fold of forceful limitation, as something real.

Schelling goes on to show how this act goes through stages (“epochs”) which culminate in self-realization, that “transcendental abstraction” itself creates the dichotomy between the subject and object (SW 3:525-6; ST, 150). In this connection, self-consciousness is cached in continuity with nature: where nature strives for self-realization of its identity through the various stages of “diremption” which culminate in the human being, the human being strives for self-realization of its identity through various stages of diremption culminating in the

object. As Frederick Beiser eloquently puts it: “This means that the subject’s consciousness of the object is nothing less than the self-realization of the nature of the object itself” (Besier 2008, 371). This represents an inversion of Kant’s transcendental idealism, which operates on the premise that we only have access to appearances, that there is an epistemological “block” from knowing things in themselves.⁷ Kant places a restriction on what we mean when we theorize nature since it only refers to what is categorized such that, as Adorno states, “the object of nature that we define with our categories is not actually nature itself” (Adorno 2001, 175-6). On the other hand, because Schelling’s inverted transcendental idealism operates an objective identity between subject and object it leads to knowledge of real things in themselves, or better, *absolute* nature.

Around the time of the publication of *System of Transcendental Idealism*, between April and December 1800, Kant was busy writing a set of drafts entitled “Beylagen I-IX” in fascicle VII. The subject matter of these drafts is dominated by self-consciousness and self-positing. Whilst perhaps Kant had not read *System of Transcendental Idealism* – the question is still open to interpretation – he clearly draws out some parallel theses. Kant too starts to describe self-consciousness in terms of becoming an object. He says, “consciousness of myself (*apperceptio*) is the act of the subject making itself into an object (*Object*)” (AA 22:89), which he often describes as “positing oneself” (*sich selbst setzen*).⁸ This further informs Kant’s repetition of the scholastic phrase, “*forma dat esse rei*”, “form gives being to the thing” in fascicle X and VII.⁹ The form (self-consciousness) has become the condition of possibility for content (object) instead of the other way around. Whilst there is much debate about fascicle VII and the role of self-positing, it seems clear that Kant is talking about a primordial act in which self-consciousness establishes an identity with the object. That is, there is a move antecedent to the transcendental deductions in which self-consciousness and the object transition into one another, a movement from the purely logical subject to the subject as an empirically substantial

entity. Eckart Förster puts it well: Kant attempts “to show how the I as mere object of thought (*cogitabile*) can become an empirical object given in space and time (*dabile*).” (Förster 2000, 103).

Amongst other things, what Kant has in mind is an elaboration of two lines of thought he previously set out, one in 1763’s *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* and one from a line he does not expand upon in the second edition *Transcendental Aesthetic* from *Critique of Pure Reason*.

In *The Only Possible Argument*, Kant distinguishes between two types of positing: “relative” and “absolute” positing (AA 2:73-4; OPA, 119). Relative positing is an epistemological operation of creating relationships between concepts, it is the “copula” connecting two distinct things (e.g., the word “is”). He sums it up as a matter of *how* things are posited: “no more is posited in an actual thing than is posited in a merely possible thing” (AA 2:75; OPA, 121); both “actual” and “possible” are equal with regards relative positing such that the proposition, “there is a red house” contains the same positing as “there is going to be a red house”. Relative positing does not concern what is either side of the “is” in its reality, only how the “is” connects the sides. Absolute positing, on the other hand, is a more directly ontological operation and is an attribute of God. God “posits [a] series of things with all predicates absolutely or simply” (AA 2:74; OPA, 120), like a cosmos. Therefore, *what* is posited is the important thing here, such that “the thing itself [*Sache selbsts*] is posited together with these relations” (AA 2:75; OPA, 121), meaning that it must pertain to actuality or existence (*Dasein*).

Now, this type of terminology reappears in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, which is what is taken up in fascicle VII. Kant says,

Now that which, as representation, can precede all acts of thinking something is intuition and, if it contains nothing but relations, it is the form of intuition, which, since it does not represent anything except insofar as something is posited [*gesetzt*] in the mind, can be nothing other than the manner in which the mind is affected through its own activity, namely through this positing [*Setzen*] of its representation, thus is affected by itself. (CPR B67)

Clearly this pertains to his earlier use of the term “positing” only this time positing is the mind affecting itself by its own act. What’s striking is that this line is found in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, where intuition is supposed to be a purely receptive faculty. Whilst auto-affection is at stake, the positing of oneself as an *ontological* object is not at work here.¹⁰ Instead, the positing is still wedged between a representation and a mind. This changes in fascicle VII, where the act of self-consciousness is identical to – not only a representation of – the object itself. In short, the switch that occurs in fascicle VII is from the *Transcendental Aesthetics*’ relative positing to an absolute positing; from the restriction to epistemological self-affectivity to the epistemological restriction as itself inscribed by an absolute ontological and objective ground.

The similarities between fascicle VII and *System of Transcendental Idealism* are striking, to the point that, as Tuschling exclaims, “Many details of the doctrine of self-positing [*Selbstsetzungslehre*] in the VIIth and Ist fascicles are [...] only comprehensible against the background of Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism*” (Tuschling 1991, 140n61). Even after the brief surveyance above, I agree with Tuschling’s sentiment and consider it of vital importance to conduct further research into how fascicle VII and *System* coincide and what wider conclusions we might draw from it. But is there also a resonance between the *Naturphilosophie* and *Opus postumum*?

3. *Ideas* and “Oktaventwurf” on Transition

Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature was published in April 1797. Its aim is perhaps best summed up in its most infamous line: “nature shall be visible spirit, spirit [shall be] invisible nature” (SW 2:56; IN, 42). Schelling hopes this thesis will form a “transition to a second part” which would consider the organic constitutively rather than regulatively. The reason is that if nature and spirit, or what is the same, object and subject, are originally one, then the idea of nature cannot help but pertain to nature as it is in itself. Hence, where Kant went wrong, according to Schelling, is when he cuts off the shared root of the understanding and that which it conceptualizes; where he denies the constitutive transition between the judgement of organic nature and organic nature itself.¹¹ In this connection, the same critique Schelling levelled at Spinoza could also be levelled at Kant: “he gave no transition [*Übergang*] in his system from the infinite to the finite” (SW 2:36; IN, 28), except that Kant moves in the inverse direction, that he blocks the transition from finitude to infinitude.

In many ways, the mantra of *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* is oriented around the injection of transition into nature, such that each part of the text can be read as a different angle on how particular matters (light, heat, air) transition into one another, until nature as whole is considered as nothing more than a continual transition equal to the absolute. He says:

certainly nature makes no leap, but it seems to me that this principle is much misunderstood if one tries to bring things into one class, things that nature has not only separated but also set into opposition with one another. This principle will only say so this much: everything, which *becomes* in nature, *becomes* not through a leap, every *becoming* occurs in a continuous sequence. [...] Thus from everything that is, nothing has *become* without a steady progress, a steady transition [*Übergang*] from one state to another. (SW 2:171-2; IN, 133)

For this reason, Schelling sets out to reconstruct this transition so that it becomes the principle which underlies all oppositions in nature. By viewing how a liquid turns into a solid, or the division of heat and light, the whole scope of nature is derived without gaps, as containing only a difference of degrees. A good example of what Schelling is driving at here is what is now called a “supercritical fluid” in chemistry, where a material is simultaneously in a liquid and gas state. Thinking the exact point at which this transition occurs ultimately lends itself to Schelling’s preference for a dynamics rather than a mechanics. For Schelling, mechanical philosophy (such as atomism) stops far short of providing a complete system of nature because it sets off with only disconnected pieces of empirical data (SW 2:40; IN, 30). Therefore, he develops a view in which “the system of nature is simultaneously the system of our spirit” (SW 2:39; IN, 30) so that we do not end up with independent pieces of empirical information and no way of gluing them together into a constitutive whole. Just as liquid and gas are identified in the supercritical fluid, so too are nature and spirit identified in the dynamics of *Naturphilosophie*. Moreover, mechanics only accounts for matter in so far as it is subject to “impact” and thereby cannot offer a convincing theory of phenomena such as chemical cohesion and the forces involved with this (SW 2:185-6; IN, 147-8). Methodologically speaking, mechanical philosophy will always fall back upon viewing nature as filled with gaps that it cannot overcome. Therefore a method of viewing nature without gaps must be given and this can only be achieved by dynamics, which has the capacity to view all things in a continuum of objective forces.

During the same period, Kant was working on a series of drafts called the “Oktaventwurf”, which comprise the earliest parts of *Opus postumum*. Here, Kant reflects on subjects close to Schelling’s *Ideas* such as the various states of matter, chemical cohesion and the need for a concept of transition. As alluded to above, the Kant scholar Heman controversially argues that Kant read *Ideas* and that it prompted him to “take out” *Metaphysical*

Foundations again, which lead to the writing of the “Oktaventwurf” (Heman 1904, 177-8). Based purely on speculation, Heman’s thesis has been rejected by Onnasch as an “absurd assertion” since, “*Ideas* appeared in 1797, thus at a point in time when Kant had already begun his *Transition* project” (Onnasch 2008, 321). That is, if we go by Erich Adickes’ dating of the “Oktaventwurf” (Adickes 1920, 45 and 51n2), Kant first started it around 1796, before the publication of *Ideas*. Onnasch is clearly justified in dismissing Heman’s thesis, but it would be remiss not to admit that the “Oktaventwurf” and *Ideas* share something profound.

At one point Kant lays out what he means by the concept of transition:

the transition [*Übergang*] (*transitus*) from one kind of knowledge to another must only be a step (*passus*) and not a leap (*saltus*). That is, the doctrine of method demands one *to-step-over* [*überzuschreiten*] from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics, [or what is the same] from concepts of nature given *a priori* to the empirical which delivers a knowledge of experience. (AA 21:387; OP, 13)

Similar to Schelling, the aim is to get to an *a priori* concept of nature and from there to show how it moves into the empirical realm of physics. In this connection, Kant seeks a philosophy of transition that can participate in both *a priori* and empirical territories simultaneously, but capturing this transition – which is never wholly *a priori* and never wholly empirical – becomes a methodological problem *Opus postumum* struggles with. Yet at the very least this represents Kant’s desire to develop a profoundly dynamical view of nature.¹² As Kant repeatedly puts it throughout *Opus postumum*, if we start out with the mechanical and empirical, we could only attain an aggregate, never a system.¹³ Moreover, just like Schelling, Kant also charges the mechanical philosophy with not being able to properly grasp force other than at the level of motive impact. What is needed, according to Kant, is a theory of nature in which there are no

gaps, where the objective logic of nature is an oscillatory continuum called “aether” or “caloric”, which becomes the site of Kant’s revitalized thinking of the absolute.

Both Kant and Schelling hope to account for what is continually transformative in nature to the degree that this becomes identical to what nature is in itself. But for Kant’s thought this signifies a transgression of his previous concept of nature as well as the difference in kind between regulative and constitutive principles. For if the idea one has of nature is identical to nature in itself, one inverts the epistemological restriction where nature is limited to legislation by the understanding. This inflects how Kant divides regulative and constitutive principles, that perhaps all is not as it seems.¹⁴ He says in a marginal note written in 1799: “Regulative principles which are at the same time constitutive” (AA 22:241; OP, 57). The move Kant makes here is to find what is constitutive in the regulative itself, that perhaps the regulative idea contains something constitutive; maybe we have based our regulative limitation on a tacitly assumed constitutive absolute. Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* expresses this same *motif*, showing that whilst nature is independent of the subject and is therefore real, the real itself is always already bound up with the ideal, that in itself it has the structure of an idea.

There are also other resonances, including the insistence on preserving the role of the categories in presenting the modes of motion and matter (a trait inherited from *Metaphysical Foundations*),¹⁵ the repeated emphasis on the primacy of force,¹⁶ extensive discussions about solidity and fluidity,¹⁷ and accounts of chemistry;¹⁸ Förster also points out a shared modification of space and time.¹⁹ But here I only want to sketch out these possible avenues to show that there is a compelling basis for further research, and that the shared emphasis on the need to think according to transition is at work in both.²⁰

4. First Draft, “A-R” and “Übergang 1-14” on the Organism

I have saved perhaps the most difficult relationship between *Opus postumum* and *Naturphilosophie* until last. We are dealing here with three “drafts” on organism.

Schelling published *First Draft for a System of Naturphilosophie* in March 1799 as a preparatory guide to lectures he was to give in Jena. This text represents Schelling’s explicit attempt at viewing organic nature as primordial, something he failed to do in *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. It attempts to show how nature is originally organic, that the inorganic arises out of it and not *vice versa*. In this connection, Schelling is always insistent on dragging the activity of productive nature in front of what it produces; he says, “From the common point of view, the original productivity of nature vanishes in the product. For us the product must vanish in productivity” (SW 3:13; FD, 15). Whether the product be inorganic or organic, what interests Schelling is the productivity which brought it about, how it emerges from an “unconditioned” (*unbedingt*, literally, “un-thinged”)²¹ root, that nature considered unconditionally never “is” but is always becoming (SW 3:21; FD, 19-20). The question he asks is how an unconditional productivity brings about a variety of conditioned products whilst maintaining itself as unconditioned, and how philosophy can think the unconditioned if all it has access to is the conditioned.

Later in this first section Schelling answers this question by “presuppos[ing] that the totality of nature is = one organization [*Organisation*]” or what he also calls a “universal organism [*allgemeinen Organismus*]” (SW 3:70; FD, 54).²² Whilst this view is derived from the third *Critique*, as we will see, how Schelling beds this into his own theory is ingenious. He strives to show how unconditioned nature genetically reproduces its species through the conditioned products which emerge from it. It cannot be exhausted because it is continuously cause and effect of itself, which Schelling frames as nature infinitely inhibiting itself into finite products organized along a recursive chain.²³ In this connection, Schelling places nature on a more primordially organic footing, that the inorganic is a descendent link in the “*dynamic*

sequence of steps [dynamische Stufenfolge]” (SW 3:68; FD, 53), a failed (but necessary) experiment by nature to achieve awareness of itself. Moreover, Schelling views the organic through a constitutive rather than regulative lens.²⁴ We only act *as if* nature were a universal organism in so far as our “as if” contains within it the seed of certainty that *it is* a universal organism; that – *apropos* the previous section – the regulative is grounded by a more profound constitutive base.²⁵ More generally, this is indicative of the wider conception of nature Schelling works with where it is not a thing “out there” that we think about, but an objective logic or unconditioned environment which strikes through the conditioned which emerges within it. What this means is that all activity of thinking can only ever be a recursive rearticulation of the very structure which gives rise to it, which Schelling views through the paradigm of products and productivity: “*Nature is absolutely active, for in each of its products lies the drive to an infinite development*” (SW 3:19; FD, 18).

Underpinning Schelling’s view is a deep engagement with Kant’s definition of the organism in the third *Critique*, which claims that it is “cause and effect of itself”, that an organism is causally related to itself in a way that is not entirely explicable through mechanics (AA 5:370-1; CJ, 242-3). Kant justifies this in the “antinomy of the power of judgement” (AA 5:385-9; CJ, 257-61) where he sets out a thesis claiming that all things can be explained through mechanical law (the realm of the inorganic) next to an antithesis which claims with equal rigour that some things cannot be explained through mechanical law, thus opening a peephole into the realm of the organic (AA 5:387; CJ, 259). Owing to this Antinomy Kant claims that we cannot know *a priori* if the organism is ends driven (free) or mechanically driven (necessary) and so we must act *as if* it were free.²⁶ The antinomy keeps judgement in check, restricting it to a merely “reflective” or “regulative” employment (AA 5:389; CJ, 260).²⁷ Schelling’s *First Draft* interjects this frame by arguing that the Antinomy is not really antinomous at all since we can consider nature as constitutively free and organic, and show how mechanical laws

emerge out of it. In this connection, Schelling challenges the difference in kind of the Antinomy by asking, “what if inorganic phenomena are just lower-level organic phenomena?” Starting with nature as an organic unconditioned, Schelling moves through its stages to show its inorganic conditions emerge, constitutively developing Kant’s *regulative* view that,

this concept [of nature as a natural end] necessarily leads to the idea of the entirety of nature as a system in accordance with the rule of ends, [and under] which idea must now be subordinated, according to the principles of reason, all mechanism of nature. (AA 5:379; CJ, 250)

In the same period, Kant was writing a series of drafts entitled “A-R” and “Übergang 1-14”. In these drafts he is mostly concerned with exploring what physics means²⁸ and developing the concept of caloric/aether (*Wärmestoff/Äther*), but there are also sections spliced into these drafts which constitute a revitalized attempt to think the organic. One of those sections is found in the middle of “Übergang 9” and is entitled “Material Classification of Natural Bodies which Contain these Moving Forces in Themselves. They are either organic or inorganic” (AA 21:557). Kant proceeds by showing how underlying both is “only one material (*materia ex qua*) that is capable of all forms. – Hence there is only one *body* (*corpus physicum*) to which one can attach these predicates” (AA 21:558). Hoping to find the unity which binds together the organic and inorganic, Kant suggests that there is a single material which lay at the root of the division between the organic and inorganic. Conceiving of the division in this way means that it necessarily belongs to the transition between metaphysical foundations, which gives us only an idea of inorganic nature, and physics, which gives us an empirical realm of organic nature. Yet if physics is to become a system it cannot stay at the level of the empirical since it would “never be a complete whole”, and hence the organic must now also be grounded on an “*immaterial* principle (faculty of desire)” (AA 21:558).²⁹ That is to say, the organic is

not thought in terms of mechanical causality at all, nor in terms of an unknowable *telos* but in terms of a dynamical, immaterial principle of desire or reason. In the end it is the immaterial which indexes the need for thinking the organism as constitutively outside of empirical causality.³⁰

But as Onnasch points out, the problem with this reading is that in the “A-R” drafts Kant repeatedly claims that the organism is not *a priori* knowable, that it is *only* encountered empirically (Onnasch 2014, 247-8). The reason for this stems from the first *Critique* and its table of categories, where it is the inorganic which is knowable with *a priori* certainty since it conforms to mechanical causality and necessity. That way, the picture of nature Kant derived from the categories was one in which the possible *telos* of the organism was merely potential. Therefore, that the organism should be known only empirically is somewhat in conformity with Kant’s Critical philosophy. However, the paradox is clear, the organism is also the condition of possibility for the empirical itself; to have the faculty of sensibility one must first be an organic creature, that is, one must be composed of an *immaterial* principle before any faculties of knowledge, experience and judgement can be ascribed. It seems, then, that Kant is peddling a circular and contradictory reasoning by basing the fact of experience on an immaterial condition of possibility which is itself only encountered through experience.³¹

Kant’s solution is to extend the conditions of possibility of the organism from a particular being’s experience to a totality. He does this by suggesting that the organism arises within a larger organic community: “on the organization of a whole of organic beings of different species, for each other, serving for the species’ preservation” (AA 22:300; OP, 103). What this means is that the organism is not only defined in terms of a creature which is both cause and effect of itself, but also in terms of an environment which is cause and effect of itself and within which the creature is situated. Therefore the organism is not only that which is cause and effect in relation to its own body,³² but is also the cause and effect of other organisms in

its species, which constitutes an iterative organic nexus. Moreover, this nexus is itself a recursion of a larger organization akin to a universal organism. Thus, Kant says, echoing Schelling's "dynamic sequence of steps":

nature organizes matter in a very manifold [way], not only in kind, but also according to stages [Stufen] [...] the organizing force [of nature] has also organized the whole [such that] plants and animals are created for each other so that they form a circle as links in a chain (humans not excluded) [...] which indicates a world-organization [Weltorganisation] (to unknown ends) of the galaxy [Sternsystems] itself. (AA 22:549; OP, 85-6)

Therefore, whilst the particular organism is only known through experience, its condition of possibility is found in a larger chain of nature which is self-organizing and universal. It is this larger organic chain Kant refers to when he considers the organism as involving a constitutive immaterial causality.³³

Whilst this is positively close to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* there is also a seemingly negative side. An illuminating – if not frustrating – point of contact between the drafts is that they both exhibit a lack of patience for gradually working through empirical data. As Adickes says, they share “the same impatient inclination in proceeding to *a priori* construction, to pure thinking and speculations [...] They want to anticipate with prophetic vision results far in the future, to unite [things] lying far apart under one concept” (Adickes 1920, 473). The “A-R” drafts, “Übergang 1-14” drafts and *First Draft* veer off into the speculative at every opportunity, setting out position and counter-position in immediate succession, which leads us to an examination of the *style* of their thinking.

Both demonstrate *in actu* the method of thinking *transitionally*. Whilst this is a common way of reading Schelling (often signified in the use of “Protean” to describe his work), Kant is usually thought of in an opposite way, as mechanical, static, regular. Yet *Opus postumum* shows us Kant’s insistence on revising, rewriting and reformulating aspects of his work. Moreover, if we start from the perspective that Kant is a static thinker who never changed his mind and who was unwilling to shift his position then we would find ourselves in difficulty trying to explain his many “turns” and “awakenings”.³⁴ It is this style of thinking that most echoes the methodology of the *First Draft*, which also fugally unfurls according to shifts at the level of the sentence, the paragraph and the section.

5. The Common But to us Unknown Root of *Opus postumum* and *Naturphilosophie*

After setting out these points of contact, the question is: what allows Kant to venture this close to a post-Kantian thinker like Schelling, and what permits his apparent trespass of the “Kantian block”?

Clearly, in these parts of *Opus postumum* Kant tries to formulate a new addition or even a different theory of nature altogether to that given in *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Metaphysical Foundations* and the third *Critique*. This is exactly what Schelling latches onto in his speculative interpretation of *Opus postumum*. From a broad angle, the transition is between the constitutive theory of inorganic, mechanical nature in the first *Critique* and *Metaphysical Foundations*, and the regulative theory of organic, dynamical nature in the third *Critique*, which is a task Schelling himself takes on in his early work. It would therefore not be surprising if Kant’s own attempt to steer a course through these two sides echoes Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*.

Furthermore, Kant was dissatisfied with the *Metaphysical Foundations*,³⁵ specifically on the issue of what he considered a “circle problem” between force and the distribution of varieties of density. As Dina Emundts suggests, Kant tries to deal with this problem in *Opus postumum*.³⁶ and his repeated reformulations of the issue of density are beyond count in the early fascicles which suggests, in Tuschling’s words, a “self-critique” or even a re-writing (Tuschling 1971, 46-56). Kant continuously frames and re-frames the problem, experimentally searching for a possible solution. Interestingly, Schelling also picks up on this problem at work in *Metaphysical Foundations*, saying,

it is not sufficient to make comprehensible the *formation* even of *one* matter, namely, because in that case one abstracts from all specific difference of matter and contemplates no other difference than that of the different degrees of its *density* (i.e., its space-filling) as is the case in Kant’s *Naturmetaphysik*.³⁷ Namely, in this work Kant starts with the product given merely as a space-filling. Now, since this serves no other manifold than that of different degrees of space-filling, naturally it cannot be constructed in any other way than by two forces, whose variable relationship gives differences in degrees of density. (SW 3:101; FD, 76)

Schelling sees a resolution to this problem by deferring attention away from the product of nature to its productivity. Hence, instead of trying to account for how matter appears in a variety of densities, Schelling only needs to show how nature itself is continually unbalancing or varying with itself through oscillations of force. Kant’s account is therefore shifted away from what Schelling calls the “merely space-filling” view of matter to bring its forceful condition of possibility to the foreground. That both thinkers locate this problem and try to solve it is therefore a strong candidate for the common root of *Opus postumum* and *Naturphilosophie*.

But, in my view, there is an even deeper problematic in Kant's project which may be a strong candidate for such a common root. In Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and Kant's experimentation in *Opus postumum* what is really strived after is a metaphysics of nature.³⁸

To open this further, it is important to ground this shared root in its appropriate location, which is at the centre of the Critical philosophy. Kant mentions in both editions of the first *Critique* that he plans on completing a work entitled *Metaphysics of Nature* (CPR Axxi and Bxlili), but we do not end up with any such work in Kant's corpus. The closest we get is the *Metaphysical Foundations* which in my understanding of it (and in Förster's understanding of it)³⁹ is not the same as a metaphysics of nature. It is a fact that *Opus postumum* contains more references to a "metaphysics of nature" than in any of Kant's other work. As Di Giovanni claims, "what the Critical Kant wanted was a metaphysics of nature. What he really got [...] was only the idea of a possible nature" (Di Giovanni 1979, 214), and the transition in this light would then be from the idea of a possible nature to a properly grounded account of actual nature. At one point Kant seems to point out exactly this sort of reading: "this treatise is determined to fill what is still a gap (*Lücke*) [both] in the pure doctrine of nature (*Naturlehre*) and in the general system of *a priori* principles and thus to completely execute my metaphys[ics] work" (AA 21:626). It would therefore seem justified to suggest that *Opus postumum* is the site of at least a partial working up of the metaphysics of nature. Now, what would a metaphysics of nature involve, according to Kant?

Broadly, such a metaphysics would include an ontological objectivization of the concept of nature given in *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Metaphysical Foundations*, and a constitutive account of the organism. This can be gleaned from Kant's outline of the metaphysics of nature in the Architectonic of Pure Reason. Echoing Christian Wolff's outline for a "philosophy of material things" which is sub-divided into ontology, natural theology, psychology, cosmology and physics (Wolff 1963, 35 and 40-5), Kant lays out his own sub-

divisions: “1. Ontology. 2. Rational Psychology. 3. Rational Cosmology. 4. Rational Theology” (CPR A846/B874). Whilst what is plotted out in *Critique of Pure Reason* is a negative critique of these sub-divisions in the Transcendental Dialectic, the positive element is limited to “*transcendental philosophy*” and “considers only the *understanding* and reason itself in a system of all concepts and principles that are related to objects in general, without assuming objects [*Objecte*] that *would be given (Ontologia)*” (CPR A845/B873). The positive aspect of the sub-division (an account of them which would not only be focused on their negative critique) would be located in a metaphysics grounded on the discoveries of the Critical philosophy. It is just such a metaphysics that a properly wrought out metaphysics of nature would explicate. So, Beiser is correct to point out that “the young idealists revive metaphysics in the name of Kant, the very thinker who banished it” (Beiser 2008, 368), but we must also recognize that Kant did not banish it entirely, rather he left open a gap for its revitalisation as Reinhold pointed out in 1791: the Critical philosophy

overturned *one-sided* dogmatism and dogmatic scepticism, but not in order to replace them just with *critique* [...] but to salvage from the still usable ruins of the previous systems the *materials* for a *future edifice of doctrines constructed according to strict scientific norms*. (Reinhold 2000, 93)

Whilst in contemporary scholarship it is usual to consider Kant’s system as nothing other than the three *Critiques* themselves, in the immediate post-Kantian world it was clear that there was a gap in Kant’s corpus: the system itself.

Schelling is one of the young post-Kantians who picks up on this gap and tries to fill it by what he calls a “speculative physics” (SW 3:274-5; FD, 195-6). This involves something extremely close to a metaphysics of nature which founds an objective, ontological concept of

nature.⁴⁰ But in attempting to provide a speculative physics or metaphysics of nature Schelling necessarily oversteps the limits instigated by the Critical philosophy. However, this also informs the central paradox and ambiguity in Kant's own demand for a metaphysics of nature, one that he starts tackling in *Opus postumum*: by demanding it, Kant himself rung the death-knell of the Critical philosophy from within the Critical philosophy itself. For to provide it necessarily requires a transgression of the "Kantian block" through the establishment of an absolute ground of nature, a system of nature including ontological accounts of the inorganic and the organic, a thinking of nature as an objective logic of forces striking through everything, or an unconditioned environment which expresses itself within all conditioned things that emerge within it.

The above points of contact provide support for opening an extensive reading of *Opus postumum* as participating in early German Idealism in a much more radical way than we have previously thought in Kant studies. Can Kant be considered one of the first to actively take up Schelling's post-Kantian position and if so, how would this change our understanding of the trajectory that goes Kant-Fichte-Schelling-Hegel? That is the question that has yet to be answered.

Notes

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¹ All translations of Kant and Schelling are my own. Citations of Kant refer to Kant (1902-) apart from *Critique of Pure Reason* which is cited according to A/B pagination (as is

customary). I also include English pagination which always refers to the standard Cambridge University Press translations using the following abbreviations: “C”, *Correspondence*; “CJ”, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*; “CPR”, *Critique of Pure Reason*; “MF”, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*; “MM”, *Metaphysics of Morals*; “OP”, *Opus postumum*; “OPA”, *Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*; “P”, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Citations of Schelling refer to Schelling (1856-61). I also include English pagination using the following abbreviations and editions: “FD” *First Draft for a System of Naturphilosophie* (Schelling 2004); “IN”, *Ideas For a Philosophy of Nature* (Schelling 1995); “K”, “Immanuel Kant” (Schelling 2021); “ST”, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (Schelling 2001).

² For a history of the manuscript itself see Förster (1999, xvi-xxiii) and Basile (2013, 459-98).

³ Schelling implicitly hints at a more profound picture, that the gap is between the phronomical frame of *Metaphysical Foundations*, and the dynamics of teleological force in *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. It is therefore all the more astonishing when *Opus postumum* attempts to develop a “*Kräftenlehre*” (“doctrine of forces”) (AA 21:137) as distinguished from a “*Bewegungslehre*” (“doctrine of motion”) (AA 5:477; MF, 12).

⁴ See Onnasch, (2008; 2009).

⁵ For the Schelling literature on *Opus postumum* see Di Giovanni (1979), Grant (2008, 75-81), Woodard (2020, 63-9, 75-9). For the Kant literature on Schelling and *Opus postumum* see Heman (1904, 177-80), Adickes (1920, 471-4), Förster (1990, 167-8), Tuschling (1991, 123-33), Onnasch (2008) and Wandschneider (2010, 72).

⁶ See Woodard (2020, 79).

⁷ For more on the “Kantian block” see Adorno (2001, 170-9; 2006, 384-90).

⁸ See e.g., AA 22:25, 31; OP, 173.

⁹ E.g., AA 22:11, 300, 355; OP, 170, 104, 115.

¹⁰ To situate this limitation more feasibly, we should recall Kant’s curtailing of ontology in the first *Critique*, that it “must give way to the modest [doctrine of] a mere analytic of pure understanding” (CPR A247/B303).

¹¹ See Fisher (2015, 51).

¹² Whilst Kant certainly aimed to produce such a dynamical position in *Metaphysical Foundations* it is an open question in the *Opus postumum* literature whether Kant considered himself successful in this regard. See Tuschling (1971, 37-9) and Duque (1974, 61).

¹³ E.g., AA 21:474, OP, 39

¹⁴ The regulative ideas in the Critical philosophy are limits placed on knowledge of the absolute such as God, the world and the soul, which go beyond possible experience. Constitutive principles announce certain knowledge such as that given by the categories which are limited to possible experience.

¹⁵ E.g., AA 21:394-5 and SW 2:28; IN, 22.

¹⁶ E.g., AA 21:478; OP, 42 and SW 2:13; IN, 11.

¹⁷ E.g., AA 21:395 and SW 2:245-6; IN, 196.

¹⁸ E.g., AA 21:369 and SW 2:257-72; IN, 206-17.

¹⁹ See Förster (2000, 108-9).

²⁰ Both Kant's and Schelling's accounts of transition have a root in Leibniz's principle of continuity. That "nature makes no leaps (*natura non facit saltus*)" (Leibniz 1996, 473) is surely being riffed on by both.

²¹ See Grant (2008, 16, 109).

²² Thomas Kuhn reads the universal organism as "the fundamental metaphor" of *Naturphilosophie*, which "constantly sought a single unifying principle for all natural phenomena" (Kuhn 1977, 97).

²³ For more on recursivity in Schelling see Hui (2019, 21-5).

²⁴ As argued by Gare (2011, 47).

²⁵ Woodard describes this as an expansion of Kant's teleological claims "to all of nature as such" (Woodard 2020, 75).

²⁶ See Beiser (2008, 369) and Guyer (2009, 327).

²⁷ See Di Giovanni (1979, 203). For a reading which is premised on the development of Kant's regulative theory of organism and its influence on 19th century natural science see Lenoir (1982, 12-14). For a convincing refutation of Lenoir's thesis as an appropriate starting place for understanding the relationship between the regulative and 19th century natural science see Richards (2002, 3-4, 210, 227-8) and Zammito (2011).

²⁸ Kant repeatedly asks, "What is physics?" and "How is physics possible?", giving a variety of shifting answers. See AA 22:380, 396.

²⁹ This in and of itself has resonances with Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* in so far as it is oriented around the role of the unconditioned and its relationship to the extension of the empirical.

³⁰ See Mathieu (1989, 44) and Wandschneider (2010, 72).

³¹ I read this alongside Onnasch (2014, 252).

³² As Förster (2000, 28) suggests.

³³ After these drafts in fascicle I (1800-3), Kant comes increasingly to discuss the “world soul” in similar terms which has clear parallels to Schelling’s *On the World Soul*. This would be another striking example of the cross-over between *Opus postumum* and *Naturphilosophie* but for reasons of space will not be developed here.

³⁴ E.g., the most famous example being David Hume “which was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber” (AA 4:260; P, 10). Interestingly, Kant rephrased this formula in a 1798 letter to Christian Garve: “It was not the investigation of the existence of God, immortality, and so on, but rather the antinomy of pure reason, [...] that is what first aroused me from my dogmatic slumber” (AA 12:257-8; C, 552).

³⁵ E.g., see Adickes’ comments on Reflection 42 (AA 14:183-4). Also see AA 22:282; OP, 100.

³⁶ See Emundts (2004, 103-6, 149-55).

³⁷ I have left this term untranslated since it presents a complication of (1) Kant’s own proclamations about a “*Metaphysik der Natur*” and (2) Schelling’s development of a “*Naturphilosophie*” rather than a “*natürlich philosophie*”. This may be Schelling’s way of reflecting the ambiguous place *Metaphysical Foundations* occupies in Kant’s corpus, which he describes as a “metaphysics of corporeal nature” (AA 4:473; MF, 9).

³⁸ To the best of my knowledge, the only commentator to link *Opus postumum* and *Naturphilosophie* through a shared desire to construct a metaphysics of nature is Di Giovanni (1979).

³⁹ See Förster (2000, 54).

⁴⁰ Arran Gare comes close to this suggestion, although instead of a metaphysics of nature, he considers Schelling to develop a process metaphysics which “is the logical solution to the problems raised by Kant’s philosophy” (Gare 2011, 30). And whilst I agree with Gare that, “the conclusions [Schelling] came to can be interpreted as solutions of the *aporias* of Kant’s philosophy” (Gare 2011, 35), and that Schelling “overcom[es] Kant’s dualisms and gulfs” (Gare 2011, 61), the most essential *aporia* and gulf is that left by the metaphysics of nature.

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