

## **Schelling II: *Naturphilosophie* and the Problem of Evil**

### **Main reading**

- F. W. J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797, 2nd & revised edn. 1803), Preface to the First Edition (1797) (pp. 3-5), and Supplement to the Introduction (1803) (pp. 43-55).
- F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom* (1809), trans. J. Gutmann (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), at least pp. 7-39 {marginal pagination 336-64}.

### **Further reading**

- R. Stern, Introduction to Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*.
- D. Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, ch. 6. On Schelling's *Freedom* text.
- A. Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*, ch. 5. On Schelling's *Freedom* text.
- M. Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. J. Stambaugh (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985), Part C, esp. pp. 146-64.

### **Essay questions**

- What, if anything, is achieved in Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*?
- Does Schelling succeed in accounting for the possibility of evil?

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**Schelling's criticisms of contemporary (Newtonian) science** (see the Introduction to the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 17ff, and the Supplement to the Introduction, pp. 52-3). Schelling complains that materialist Newtonian science is 1) explanatorily vacuous and unable to account for the concepts it uses; 2) wholly incapable of comprehending the existence of self-organising, organic beings; and 3) delivers only possibilities (mere 'theory of nature' or hypothesis) in place of the necessities that philosophy of nature is able to provide. 'After the blind and mindless type of natural research, which has generally established itself since the corruption of philosophy by Bacon and of physics by Boyle and Newton, with *Naturphilosophie* a higher knowledge of Nature begins; a new instrument for the intuiting and conceiving of Nature is taking shape': 'Nature should be Mind made visible, Mind the invisible Nature ... in the absolute identity of Mind *in us* and Nature *outside us*.' 'In Kant himself, of course, it [the 'empirical realism' of modern natural science] was not so fully elaborated in its entire empirical character as it appeared among his followers, but it was, in germ, implicit in his writings ... It remained [after Kant] quite the same, only translated into another, idealistic-sounding language.'

### **Naturphilosophie:**

1. The idea of nature must be arrived at from the basic idea of infinite pure *activity*. This activity is *impeded* or subject to *inhibition* [Hemmung]. The result of this checking of infinite pure activity is *not* 'finite products' (e.g. atoms). Nature is *producing*, or *productivity*, containing an *infinite manifold* of ultimately simple *actions*. We are to conceive these as *interpenetrating* and *passing into* one another – a 'primordial fluidity'. To this there must be some counterweight, in order for (appearances of) finite products to arise. Nature in general is the 'mediation' – or residue – of these opposed directions of activity. Inorganic nature emerges in relation to organic being (its capacity to receive sensations and stimuli).

ORGANIC	GENERAL	INORGANIC
construction-drive [Bildungstrieb]	light	chemical process
excitability	electricity	electrical process
sensibility	ground of magnetism	magnetism

2. How can unconditionedness (absoluteness) be ascribed to nature? The unconditioned cannot be found in any individual thing, nor can one say of it that it 'is': it *is being itself*. The unconditioned presents itself in finite products, and is itself nothing but *constructing activity*: individual beings are conceivable only as forms or 'limitations' of this activity. Nature is to be regarded as the *content* of being. Nature could not be regarded as unconditioned if we did not suppose a hidden trace of *freedom* in being: 'To philosophise about nature is to raise it up out of the dead mechanicity in which it appears to be trapped, to animate it with freedom and to posit it as a free development; in other words, to tear oneself free from the common view which sees in nature only that which merely occurs; which sees in action only a *fact*, not the *doing* itself.' How must nature appear, in order that it should be possible to view it as absolute activity? Absolute activity can be represented only through an *infinite product*. Nature must be its own lawgiver (autonomy of nature) and self-sufficient (autarchy of nature). Individual products in nature are *appearances* ('points of inhibition'): the 'absolute product' in which absolute activity exhausts itself is 'that which always becomes and never is', i.e. infinite becoming. Awareness of individual products in nature is self-intuition of the absolute (as spirit, Geist), intuition of the infinite conflict of self-consciousness.

3. { 'Supplement to the Introduction': } 1. 'Philosophy is an absolute science.' 2. 'Philosophy, in order to know in an absolute way, can only know of the absolute.' 3. 'The first idea of philosophy already rests on the tacit presupposition of a possible indifference between absolute knowing and the absolute itself.' – 'The absolute is an eternal act of cognition.' 4. 'The absolute-ideal is the absolute-real.' 5. 'This absolute-ideal is therefore in itself neither a subjective nor an objective, neither his [the philosopher's] own thinking, but just absolute thinking ... we define it as *absolute knowing*, the absolute act of cognition.' 6. 'An absolute knowing is not one in which subjective and objective are united as opposites [Fichte], but one in which the entire subjective is the entire objective, and *vice versa*.' 7. 'The absolute identity of subjective and objective as the principle of philosophy has been understood in part [i] merely negatively (as mere non-difference) and in part as [ii] the mere conjunction of two intrinsic opposites in one another.' 8. 'In this characterisation of the highest idea of subjective and objective, ... both, whether opposed or combined, are simply to be conceived from out of that identity alone.' 9. 'We have to demonstrate the necessity of this self-differentiation of the undivided absoluteness into subject and object.' 10. 'The absolute is an eternal act of cognition, ... whole subjectivity in its absoluteness becomes objectivity, just as ... the whole objectivity, in its absoluteness, becomes subjectivity.' – 'In the absolute act of cognition we have provisionally distinguished two actions.' 11. 'The absolute, in the eternal cognitive act, expands itself into the particular, merely so that, in the absolute embodiment of its infinity into the finite itself, it may take the latter back into itself.' 12. 'The first, as these differentiate, is Nature ... objectification of the infinite in the finite ... the other is the ideal world.' 13. 'Each [Nature, and ideality] contains a point of absoluteness, where both opposites flow together.'

The 'inner relationships and structure of the Philosophy of Nature as a whole' (threefold division corresponding to different *degrees of embodiment* of the infinite in the finite):

1. 'the universal structure of the world', through the series of bodies
2. 'universal mechanism': 'the universal issues as *light*, the particular as *bodies*, in accordance with dynamical determinations'
3. 'the absolute integration into one, or indifferencing, of both unities' is 'expressed by *organism*', which is 'the perfect mirror-image of the absolute in Nature'.

Man appears among organisms: 'where the embodiment of the infinite into the finite reaches the point of absolute indifferencing, it immediately resolves itself again into its opposite ... so that with the perfectly real image of the absolute in the real world, the most perfect organism, the completely *ideal* image, also immediately enters, as reason, although even this again only for the *real* world; and here, in the real world, the two sides of the absolute act of cognition show themselves as archetype and ectype [reproduction, copy] of each other.'

**Schelling's verdict on Fichte:** 'Fichte's philosophy was the first to restore validity to the universal form of subject-objectivity, as the one and all of philosophy; but the more it developed, the more it seemed to restrict that very identity, again as a special feature, to subjective consciousness; yet as absolute and in itself, to make it the object of an endless task, an absolute demand, and in this way after extracting all substance from speculation, to abandon it as empty froth, while proceeding, on the other hand, like the Kantian theory, to reconnect absoluteness with the deepest subjectivity, through action and faith. Philosophy has higher demands to fulfil ... The character of the whole modern era is idealistic ... The ideal world presses mightily towards the light, but is still held back by the fact that Nature has withdrawn as a mystery ...'

**The asymmetry between idealism and realism in Schelling's philosophy:** 'If we therefore define philosophy as a whole according to that wherein it surveys and presents everything, namely the absolute act of cognition, of which even Nature is again only one side, ... then it is Idealism. Idealism is and remains, therefore, the whole of philosophy, and only under itself does the latter again comprehend realism and idealism, save that the first absolute Idealism is not to be confused with this other, which is of a merely relative kind.'

**The problem of evil** (*Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, 1809).

1. The possibility of freedom: 'dependence does not exclude autonomy or even freedom. Dependence does not determine the nature of the dependent ... it does not declare what this dependent entity is or is not'; 'We attain a much loftier view by regarding the divine Being itself ... The procession of things from God is God's self-revelation. But God can only reveal himself in creatures who resemble him, in free, self-activating beings for whose existence there is no reason save God, but who are as God is ... Immanence in God is so little a contradiction of freedom that freedom alone, and insofar as it is free, exists in God, whereas all that lacks freedom, and insofar as it lacks freedom, is necessarily outside God'; 'The error of his [Spinoza's] system is by no means due to the fact that he posits all *things in God*, but to the fact that they are *things* – to the abstract conception of the world and its creatures, indeed of eternal Substance itself, which is also a thing for him'; 'the most profound difficulties which lie in the concept of freedom will be as little solvable through idealism, taken in itself, as through any other incomplete philosophical system'; 'For idealism supplies only the most general conception of freedom, and a merely formal one. But the real and vital conception of freedom is that it is a **possibility of good and evil.**'

2. The possibility of evil: 'a view such as would be fully adequate to the problem with which we are concerned, could only be developed from the fundamental principles of a genuine philosophy of nature'; 'Naturphilosophie ... established the distinction ... between Being in so far as it exists, and Being insofar as it is the mere basis of existence ...'; 'God ... must contain within himself the ground of his existence ... The ground of his existence, which God contains, is not God viewed as absolute, that is insofar as he exists. For it is only the basis of his existence, it is *nature* – in God, inseparable from him, to be sure, but nevertheless distinguishable from him'; 'It is the longing which the eternal One feels to give birth to itself. This is not the One itself, but is co-eternal with it. This longing seeks to give birth to God, i.e. the unfathomable unity, but to this extent it has not unity in its own self. Therefore, regarded in itself, it is also will: but a will within which there is no understanding ... [it is] the unruly ... This is the incomprehensible basis of reality in things, the irreducible remainder which cannot be resolved into reason ...'; 'Every being which has arisen in nature ... contains a double principle ... The first principle is the one by which they are separated from God or wherein they exist in the mere basis of things [in nature]'; 'The principle of darkness, insofar as it was drawn from the depths and is dark, is the self-will of creatures, but self-will,

insofar as it has not yet reason to complete unity with light, as the understanding cannot grasp it and is mere craving or desire, that is blind will. This self-will of creatures stands opposed to reason as universal will'; reason in man 'makes use of the former and subordinates it to itself as a mere tool'; 'This elevation of the most abysmal centre into light, occurs in no creatures visible to us except in man. In man there exists the whole power of the principle of darkness and, in him too, the whole force of light. In him there are both centres – the deepest pit and the highest heaven'; 'If, now, the identity of both principles were just as indissoluble in man as in God, then there would be no difference ... God as spirit would not be revealed. Therefore that unity which is indissoluble in God must be dissoluble in man – and this constitutes the possibility of good and evil.'

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