

Von
Der Weltseele,
eine
Hypothese der höheren Physik
zur Erklärung
des allgemeinen Organismus.

Nebst einer Abhandlung
über das
Verhältniß des Realen und Idealen in der Natur
oder
Entwicklung der ersten Grundsätze der Naturphilosophie an
den Principien der Schwere und des Lichts.

Von
F. W. J. Schelling.

Dritte verbesserte Auflage.

Hamburg,
bey Friedrich Perthes.
1809.

Introduction to Schelling's *On the World Soul*

Iain Hamilton Grant

EDITIONS

The first edition (1798) of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's *On the World Soul. An Hypothesis of Higher Physics for Explaining Universal Organism* was published by Perthes in Hamburg, as was the second, revised edition (1809) to which a new Foreword and Essay 'On the Relation between the Real and the Ideal in Nature, or the Development of the Basic Propositions of the Philosophy of Nature from the Principles of Gravity and Light' were added. The third edition (1809), also published by Perthes, slightly revised the second edition, but added no new material.

The edition from which the present translation is taken is that found in vol. II of K.F.A. Schelling's edition of *Schellings sämtliche Werke (SW)*, XIV vols (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J.G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1856-61), reprinted in

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a new order, ed. Manfred Schröter (Munch: Beck, 1927), and the numbers in the margin refer to this edition. It is based on the 1809 edition of Schelling's text, and supplies the changes from the first edition in footnotes.

The text is found in vol. I, 6 of the new *Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe (HKA)* of Schelling's works, which provides a concordance with *SW*, but does not contain the 1806 essay, despite retaining the second edition's Foreword, which serves principally to introduce the accompanying essay, along with Schelling's revisions to the main text (in footnotes). The *HKA* edition is a work of considerable scholarship, with some one hundred and fifty pages of explanatory notes (some translated here), and was used as the source for Stéphane Schmitt's translation *De l'âme du monde* (Paris: Éditions Rue d'Ulm, 2007), which I have also consulted. Also consulted is the magnificent *HKA Ergänzungsband zu Werke Band 5 bis 9*, which contains a wealth of material on the scientific background against which Schelling produced his naturephilosophical writings up to 1800. Since the *HKA* remains incomplete yet infuriatingly references Schelling's works, where these have appeared in the *HKA*, only in that edition's pagination, I have maintained the *SW* pagination, since it remains the only complete referenceable edition of Schelling's works as a whole.

The section translated here includes the first edition preface (*SW* II, 347-51), which contains the nearest thing to an overview provided for this work, and the initial setting out of the 'primary force in nature' (*SW* II, 381-97). The footnotes are in part my own, in part K.F.A. Schelling's notes to *SW* II, and in part Jörg Jantzen and Thomas Kisser's, from *HKA* I,6, and their provenance is noted in the text.

INTRODUCTION

This is the second of Schelling's three major, early naturephilosophical books, published in 1798 between the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797; *SW* II, 1-343) and the *First Outline of a System of Naturephilosophy* (1799; *SW* III, 1-268). The other key naturephilosophical works of this period are the *Introduction to the Outline* (1799; *SW* III, 269-326) the *Universal Deduction of the Dynamic Process* (*SW* IV, 1-78), which Schelling published in his *Journal of Speculative Physics* vol. 1, no. 2 (1800). Across these works, Schelling had demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for synthesising the results, procedures and hypotheses that were leading the field in each of the sciences. As a result, the *Weltseele* is a systematic yet experimental, or 'constructive' work in the sense Schelling gave this term, pursuing the 'decomposition' of the All by chemical, electrical, meteorological and vital means across the entirety of the 240 pages of the *SW* it takes up.

It is often claimed that Schelling merely pursues the goals established by Kant's transcendental philosophy – namely, to suspend ontology in the interests of rational certitude, and therefore to place the ethical at the head of philosophy. Yet whereas analysis and synthesis were powers of the understanding for Kant, for Schelling, they are powers of nature; not content with chemical *analogies*, Schelling pursues a chemical philosophy, a distinction recognised by Novalis when he called Schelling 'the philosopher of the new chemistry, the absolute oxygenist'.¹

Accordingly, *On the World Soul* presents a single, consistent 'decomposition' or *analysis* of nature into its primitive forces. Indeed, 'primitive force' is precisely the

1. Novalis, *Die Christenheit oder Europa und andere philosophische Schriften* (Köln: Könnemann, 1996), 300.

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object of a 'higher science of nature', i.e., that at which this science aims. The work therefore pursues this object through the media of light, heat, gases, electricity, magnetism, meteorology, until it arrives at a determination of the concept of polarity, which became something of the cliché of Idealist philosophy of nature. At the core of this concept, however, is the 'dualism' or *real opposition* of forces² that animate all natural phenomena. Therefore, upon making the transition from 'anorgic' to organic nature, *On the World Soul* demonstrates a continuity of analysis in the twofold sense that primitive forces are thereby exhibited as the common medium of all phenomena, and that there is therefore no *specifically vital matter or vital force*. Rather than seek a substance dualism dividing the natural world, Schelling pursues that immanent duel of forces throughout it, by which nature is *organised*. So just as the concept of polarity is misunderstood if considered purely conceptual rather than actual, so too the oft-touted 'organicism' of romantic naturephilosophy ignores the true focus of Schelling's work: the origins and conditions of natural *organisation*, of which minerals, animals, weather systems and chemicals are merely regional expressions.³

2. See the third thesis with which the present translation concludes: 'real antithesis is possible only between things of one kind and common origin' (SW II, 397). Note the *chastite* difference Schelling here introduces with respect to Kant's account of real antithesis in 'Attempt to introduce the concept of negative magnitudes into philosophy' (Ak. II, 167-204), tr. David Walford in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 207-41.

3. There has been a lively debate on Schelling and self-organisation, beginning with Marie-Luise Heuser-Kessler, *Die Produktivität der Natur. Schellings Naturphilosophie und das neue Paradigma der Selbstorganisation der Naturwissenschaften* (Berlin: Duncker und Humboldt, 1986). Bernd-Olaf Küppers' *Natur als Organismus. Schellings frühe Naturphilosophie und ihre Bedeutung für die moderne Biologie* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1992) is a critical response to the thesis that there is a parallel between the modern natural scientific conception of self-organisation and Schelling's conception of the

What Schelling may here be said to retain from Kant is therefore twofold: (1) the conclusions of the latter's study of real (or actual, *wirkliche*) opposition; (2) that because the primitive conflict of forces is the *object* of the philosophy of nature, such forces are never (by 1, above) 'transcendently' available, i.e., uninvolved in actual oppositions, on the one hand, or something 'in themselves', on the other. In other words, the analysis of forces results necessarily in actual individuation. Rather therefore than the structure of consciousness furnishing phenomena and their conceptual forms, nature is its own analyst. This point is clearly made by Karl August Eschenmayer,⁴ whose *Propositions from the Metaphysics of Nature* Schelling excitedly noted towards the end of his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* of the same year.

same, and the debate is critically presented by Camilla Warnke, 'Schellings Idee und Theorie des Organismus und der Paradigmawechsel der Biologie um die Wende zum 19. Jahrhundert', *Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Theorie der Biologie* 5 (1998): 187-234. See also *Selbstorganisation. Jahrbuch für Komplexität in den Natur-, Sozial- und Geisteswissenschaften 5: Schelling und die Selbstorganisation* (1994), ed. Marie-Luise Heuser-Kessler and Wilhelm G. Jacobs.

4. Karl August Eschenmayer (1768-1852), medical doctor (1797) and chief medical officer (1800-1811) in Kirchheim an der Teck, Württemberg, before becoming professor of medicine and philosophy in the University of Tübingen. After two excellent critiques of Schelling's philosophy of nature, the first, 'Spontaneität = Weltseele', published in Schelling's own *Journal of Speculative Physics* vol. 2, issue 1 (1801), and the second, anonymously, as 'Über Schelling: Erster Entwurf und Einleitung' in the *Erlanger Literaturzeitung* no.67 for July 4, 1801. In *Propositions from the Metaphysics of Nature applied to Chemical and Medical Objects (Sätze aus der Natur-Metaphysik auf chemische und medizinische Gegenstände angewandt*. Tübingen: Jacob Friedrich Heerbrandt, 1797: 8), from which Schelling quotes at the end of the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (SW II, 313-14n; tr. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988: 249), Eschenmayer writes: 'There is no absolute freedom or bondage of the forces in matter. – For the concept of matter would be eliminated thereby. In absolute freedom the forces would be independent of one another, and an infinitely larger or smaller degree of matter, that is, no degree at all, would be existent. Absolutely bound, the gradation would be equally eliminated and sensibility = 0.' Jörg Jantzen gives an excellent account of Eschenmayer's work in Thomas Bach and Olaf Breidbach, eds., *Naturphilosophie nach Schelling* (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2005), 153-79.

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In deciding whether naturephilosophy extends Kant's transcendental philosophy or inverts it, such passages are crucial:

[I]t is only from the standpoint adopted by the metaphysician of nature that the necessary assumption of these forces can be proven and the duplicity of matters and forces which so many have introduced into natural science to explain the phenomena, justified. The theoretical dualism for natural science is actually postulated by dynamics, but we do not commonly observe its lineage. Thus we set acids and alkalis in opposition to one another, two electrical and two magnetic materials; hence Gren assumes a gravitational and an expansive force [...]. Ultimately such a dualism is deduced from the necessity of the original positing and opposing, which are the conditions under which even the possibility of our consciousness stands.⁵

If the dualism in question amounts to the actual opposition of forces – in a later passage from the same work,⁶ Eschenmayer argues that even Kant *proves their existence*, rather than demonstrates their transcendental necessity – and conditions ‘even the possibility of our consciousness’, it is clear that the ‘positing’ at issue is primitive, issuing *in* rather than *from* consciousness. It is precisely this inversion that *On the World Soul* pursues. Of course, that the ensuing ‘constructions’ thereby lose any purely epistemic guarantee follows from this; and here we note, albeit telegraphically, a central difference between Schellingian and Hegelian speculation: if the latter aims at the identity of identity and difference, the former differentiates the identity of the dualism that forms it.

5. Eschenmayer, *Propositions from the Metaphysics of Nature*, 3.

6. *Ibid.*, 60.

Finally, then, what sort of a theory of nature is the higher one from which this hypothesis concerning ‘universal organism’ derives? It shares with Kant’s *Transition between Metaphysics and Physics (Opus Postumum)*,⁷ and with a great many contemporaneous natural scientists, the aether hypothesis. While the beginning of the twentieth century marked the end of the hypothesis concerning such a substance, its real import is that it is an attempt at a physical field theory. As such, the problem it poses concerns whether this ‘universal medium’ is a substance separable from the forces it vehiculates, or whether it is nothing other than the totality of such forces in actual oppositions. If this seems a merely historical point now, consider the extent to which powers ontologists from Bruno to our contemporaries, consider forces not as primitive, but as properties – the question ‘what of?’ still remains.⁸

In consequence, the animating ‘soul of the world’ that is the object of the work translated below is no indicator of a substance dualism, and instead assumes the character of a properly dynamic, field-theoretical theory of nature *within which alone* a dualism not of substances, but of forces accounts for individuation and organisation.

7. Schelling supplies this as the title of what is published as the *Opus Postumum* in his obituary for Kant (SW VI, 8).

8. On contemporary powers ontology, see G. Molnar, *Powers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and S. Mumford, ‘The Ungrounded Argument’, *Synthese* 149 (1996): 471-89. On Bruno, see G. Harman, ‘On the Undermining of Objects: Grant, Bruno, and Radical Philosophy’, in L. Bryant, N. Srnicek, and G. Harman, eds, *The Speculative Turn* (Melbourne: Re.Press, forthcoming), my response to it, ‘Mining Conditions’ and my ‘Does Nature Stay What-it-is?’, in *ibid*.