



Nature, Ethics and Gender in German Romanticism and Idealism

Alison Stone

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Abbreviations

KANT

Ak. *Kants gesammelte Schriften*. Edited by the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences. Berlin: Reimer, subsequently de Gruyter. 29 vols. 1900– .

CJ *Critique of Judgment* [1790]. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987/Ak. 5. Cited by paragraph number when applicable then English/German pagination.

CPR *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781]. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1929. Cited by A then B edition then English page number.

CPrR *Critique of Practical Reason* [1788]. Translated by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997/Ak. 5. Cited by paragraph number then English/German pagination.

REINHOLD

FPK. *The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge* [excerpt] [1791]. In *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, edited and translated by George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris, 51–103. Indianapolis: Hackett, second, revised edition, 2000/*Über das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens, nebst einigen Erläuterungen über die Theorie des Vorstellungsvermögens*, edited by Martin Bondeli. Basel: Schwabe, 2011. Cited by English then German page number.

FICHTE

AR *Review of Aenesidimus* [1793]. In *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, edited and translated by Daniel Breazeale, 59–77. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988/SW I: 3–25.

CCW *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* [1794]. In *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, edited and translated by Daniel Breazeale, 59–77. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1988/SW I: 29–81.

EE *First Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre*. In *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797–1800)*, translated and edited by Daniel Breazeale, 7–35. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994/SW I: 417–50. Cited by English/German page numbers.

FNR *Foundations of Natural Right* [1796–1797]. Translated by Michael Baur, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000/SW 1: 1–385. Cited by English/German pagination.

SIW *Second Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre* [1797]. In *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797–1800)*, translated and edited by Daniel Breazeale, 36–105. Indianapolis IN: Hackett, 1994/SW I: 451–518.

SW *Fichtes Werke*. Edited by I. H. Fichte, 11 vols. 1791 reprint of the 1845–1846 edition. Berlin: Veit/de Gruyter.

VM *The Vocation of Man* [1800]. Translated by Peter Preuss. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987/SW II: 167–319.

WL *The Science of Knowledge* [1794]. Translated and edited by Peter Heath and John Lachs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982/SW I: 86–326. Cited by paragraph number and German pagination.

HÖLDERLIN

Unless otherwise indicated, English translations are cited together with volume and page numbers to the German historical-critical edition (SW). If no English translation exists citations are simply to the German edition.

DE *The Death of Empedocles: A Mourning-Play*. Translated by David Farrell Krell. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008/SW 13: *Empedokles II*, edited by D. E. Sattler. Cited by version number then line number.

EL *Essays and Letters*. Edited and translated by Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2009. German texts: Letters = SW 19: *Stammbuchblätter, Widmungen und Briefe II*. Edited by D. E. Sattler; Earlier essays = SW 17: *Frühe Aufsätze und Übersetzungen*. Edited by Michael Franz, Hans Gerhard Steimer and D. E. Sattler; Essays on poetics = SW 14: *Entwürfe zur Poetik*. Edited by Wolfram Groddeck and D. E. Sattler; ‘The Basis for Empedocles’ = SW 13: *Empedokles II*. Edited by D. E. Sattler; ‘Notes on Oedipus’ and ‘Notes on Antigone’ = SW 16: *Sophokles*. Edited by Michael Franz and D. E. Sattler.

H *Hyperion and Selected Poems*. Edited by Eric L. Santner. New York: Continuum, 1990/SW 11: *Hyperion II*. Edited by Michael Knaupp and D. E. Sattler.

HS *Hölderlin’s Sophocles: Oedipus and Antigone*. Translated by David Constantine. Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2001/SW 16: *Sophokles*. Edited by Michael Franz and D. E. Sattler.

PF *Poems and Fragments*. Translated by Michael Hamburger. London: Anvil/SW 4: *Oden I*. Edited by D. E. Sattler and Michael Knaupp.

SW *Sämtliche Werke: Frankfurter Ausgabe: Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*. 20 vols. Edited by D. E. Sattler et al. Frankfurt: Stroemfeld/Roter Stein, 1975–2008.

NOVALIS

AB *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon* [1798–1799]. Translated by David W. Wood. Albany: SUNY Press, 2007/S 3: 242–478. Cited by fragment number then English page number.

FL *Faith and Love; or, the King and Queen* [1798]. In *Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*. Edited by Frederick Beiser. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 33–50/S 2: 485–98. Cited by fragment number then English page number.

FS *Fichte Studies* [1795–1796]. Translated by Jane Kneller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003/S 2: 104–296. Cited by fragment number then English page number.

N *The Novices of Saïs* [1802]. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Valentin, 1949/S 1: 79–112. Cited by English/German page numbers.

PW *Philosophical Writings*. Translated and edited by Margaret Mahony Stoljar. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997. Cited by page number.

S *Schriften*. Edited by Richard Samuel. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960–1975. 6 vols. Cited by volume, page and, when applicable, fragment numbers.

FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL

AF *Athenaeum Fragments* [1798]. In *Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Peter Firchow. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991/KFSA 2: 165–255. Cited by fragment than English page number.

AW *Vom ästhetischen Werte der griechischen Komödie* [1794]. KFSA 1: 19–33. Cited by page number.

CF *Critical Fragments* [1797]. In *Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Peter Firchow. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991/KFSA 2: 147–63. Cited by fragment then English page number.

DP *Dialogue on Poetry* [selections; 1799]. Translated by Ernst Behler and Roman Struc, in *German Romantic Criticism*. Edited by A. Leslie Willson. New York: Continuum, 1982/KSFA 2: 284–351. Cited by English (where applicable)/German page numbers.

GS *Über die Grenzen des Schönen* [1794]. KFSA 1: 34–44. Cited by page number.

KFSA *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*. Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958–2006. 35 vols.

L *Lucinde* [1799]. Translated by Peter Firchow. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press/KFSA 3: 1–82. Cited by English/German page numbers.

OSGP *On the Study of Greek Poetry* [1797]. Translated by Stuart Barnett. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002/KFSA 1: 217–367. Cited by English/German page numbers.

PL *Philosophische Lehrjahre 1796–1828*. Edited by Ernst Behler. KFSÄ 18. Cited by fragment then page number.

WSGR *Vom Wert des Studiums der Griechen und Römer* [1795]. KSFA 1: 621–42. Cited by page number.

SCHELLING

FO *First Outline of a System of Philosophy of Nature* [1799]. Translated by Keith R. Petersen. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004/*Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie*, in *Werke: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe Reihe 1*, vol. 7. Edited by Wilhelm G. Jacobs and Paul Ziche. Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2001. Cited by English/German pagination.

IFO *Introduction to the Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature, or, On the Concept of a Speculative Physics and the Internal Organization of a System of This Science* [1799]. In *First Outline of a System of Philosophy of Nature*. Translated by Keith R. Petersen. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004/*Einleitung zu dem Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie*. In *Schriften (1799–1800)*. *Werke: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe Reihe 1*, vol. 8. Edited by Manfred Durner and Wilhelm G. Jacobs. Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2004. Cited by English/German pagination.

IPN *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* [1797]. Translated by Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988/*Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur*, *Werke: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe Series 1*, vol. 5. Edited by Manfred Durner. Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1994. Cited by English/German pagination.

SPG *System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular* [1804]. In *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory*. Translated by Dale Snow, 139–94. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994; *System der gesamten Philosophie und der Naturphilosophie insbesondere in Sämtliche Werke*. Edited by K. F. A. Schelling, 2 series, 14 vols. Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–1861, vol. 6: 131–536. Cited by English/German pagination.

WMF *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*. Translated by Jeff Lowe and Johannes Schmidt. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006/*Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*. Edited by Thomas Buchheim. Hamburg: Meiner, 1997. Cited by English/German pagination.

WS *Von der Weltseele – Eine Hypothese der Höhern Physik zur Erklärung des Allgemeinen Organismus* [1978]. Edited by Jörg Jantzen with Thomas Kisser, in *Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, Reihe 1: Werke*, vol. 6: 62–433. Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2000. Cited by page number.

HEGEL

A *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Translated by T. M. Knox, 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975/*Werke* 13–15. Cited by English/German pagination.

EL *Encyclopedia Logic* [1830]. Translated by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1991/*Werke* 8. Cited by paragraph then English page number.

EM *Philosophy of Mind* [1830]. Translated by William Wallace. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971/*Werke* 10. Cited by paragraph then English page number.

EN *Philosophy of Nature* [1830]. Translated by M. J. Petry. 3 vols. London: Allen & Unwin, 1970/*Werke* 9. Cited by paragraph number and English vol. and page number.

EVPG *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Volume 1: Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of 1822–3*. Edited and translated by Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson, with assistance of William G. Geuss. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011: 67–130/*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte: Einleitung, in Vorlesungsmanuskripte II (1916–1831)*. Edited by Walter Jaeschke. *Gesammelte Werke* Vol. 18. Hamburg: Meiner, 1995, 119–213. Cited by English/German page numbers.

Hei *Die Philosophie der Geschichte: Vorlesungsmitschrift Heimann (Winter 1830/1831)*. Edited by Klaus Vieweg. Berlin: Wilhelm Fink, 2005. Cited by page number.

HG *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Volume 1: Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of 1822–3*. Edited and translated by Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson, with assistance of William G. Geuss. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011, 133–521/*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, Berlin 1822/23. Nachschriften von Griesheim, Hotho und Kehler*. Edited by Karl Brehmer, K.-H. Ilting und Hoo Nam Seelmann. *Hegel: Vorlesungen: Ausgew. Nachschriften und Manuskripte* Vol. 12. Hamburg: Meiner, 1996. Cited by English/German page numbers.

LHP *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Translated by E. S. Haldane, 3 vols. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995/*Werke* 18–20. Cited by English/German volume and page numbers.

LNR *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science: The First Philosophy of Right, Heidelberg 1817–1819, with Additions from the Lectures of 1818–1819*. Translated by J. Michael Stewart and P. C. Hodgson. Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1996. Cited by paragraph then English page number.

PhG *Phenomenology of Spirit* [1807]. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971/*Werke* 3. Cited by paragraph and English page number.

PR *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* [1821]. Translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991/*Werke* 7. Cited by paragraph then English page number.

RH *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction: Reason in History*. Translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press/*Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*. Edited by Johannes Hoffmeister. Hamburg: Meiner, 1955. Cited by English/German page numbers.

VPG *The Philosophy of History*. Translated by J. Sibree. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1956/*Werke* 12. Cited by English/German page numbers.

W *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*. Edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Hegel's 'remarks' to paragraphs are indicated 'R', 'additions' 'A'.

Translations from all non-English works – not only those listed above – are occasionally amended in view of the original-language texts without special notice.

ONE

German Romantic and Idealist Accounts of Nature and Their Legacy

In this book I give an account of the development of ideas about nature from Early German Romanticism into the philosophies of nature of Schelling and Hegel. I explain how the project of philosophy of nature took shape and made sense in the post-Kantian context. I also show how ideas of nature were important to the philosophical and literary projects of the Early German Romantics, with attention to Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis and Friedrich Hölderlin. And I explore the contemporary relevance of these approaches to nature in terms of environmental ethics, debates about naturalism, and the politics of gender, race and colonialism.

In this first chapter, I give an overall account of my interpretation of Romantic and Idealist views on nature. The Romantics and Idealists, I argue, make metaphysical claims about nature – namely, under different versions, that it is a unified, self-organising whole. Schlegel and Novalis stress how nature’s unity cannot entirely be captured by our understanding; Hölderlin stresses nature’s self-dividing unity; Schelling stresses the polar forces through which nature organises itself into an ordered whole, and that nature is both creative and intelligible to us; and Hegel stresses the rationality with which nature organises itself.

Early German Romantic and Idealist ideas of nature originated during the period of intellectual ferment in German-speaking philosophy, which dated from 1781 to 1806 (see Förster 2012). But the ideas about nature which began to emerge then continued to be worked out over subsequent decades by Schelling, Hegel and others, along with their broader philosophical positions. Only over the last forty or so years have English-speaking philosophers come to appreciate the interest of these positions.¹ But one aspect of German Romantic and Idealist thought which has re-

ceived relatively little recent attention is their views of nature. Hegel and Schelling initiated and practised 'philosophy of nature'. This project fell into disfavour with philosophers and scientists around the mid-nineteenth century and, as Terry Pinkard bluntly says of Hegel's version in particular, 'It fell into . . . disrepute . . . after his death and has rarely been looked at since by anyone other than dedicated Hegel scholars' (2000: 562–63). This is unfortunate: even though philosophy of nature is probably not a project that any philosopher today can readily take up directly, it still offers us much to think about.²

Philosophy of nature has two key aspects. First, in metaphysics, philosophers of nature hold that nature is not reducible to the sum total of the interactions amongst bits of matter in motion. Rather, they hold, nature is at a more fundamental level self-organising, dynamic, creative, vital, organic and/or a living whole (although different philosophers emphasise some of these qualities more than or instead of others). Second, in epistemology, philosophers of nature take it that insofar as nature has this vital, self-organising or holistic dimension, it must be understood using tools proper to philosophy as well as those of empirical science. For instance, for Hegel and Schelling a priori reason is needed if we are to grasp nature as a rationally interconnected whole. But whatever exactly philosophy's methods are taken to be, they are taken to differ from those of empirical science in ways that suit them for comprehending nature as more than merely a mechanical aggregate. To give a non-prioristic example, for Bergson the relevant philosophical method is intuition (Bergson [1907] 1960).³

Philosophy of nature was initially articulated by Schelling in the 1790s, and Hegel pursued it into the 1820s. After gaining some popularity in the first half of the nineteenth century, the approach went into sharp decline with the later-century rise of harder naturalist and materialist approaches to nature. But philosophy of nature was only part of a wider family of approaches to nature within which we can include Early German Romantic ideas. As Novalis takes it, empirical scientific findings need to be integrated into a whole, but this can only ever be a whole-in-progress, never completed. What ought to guide our integrative efforts, for Novalis, is an *aesthetic* intuition into nature's unity, an intuition to which philosophical and conceptual, discursive knowledge can never be entirely adequate. Still, Schelling's and Hegel's philosophical approach and the Romantics' more aesthetic one are not sharply opposed. Philosophical systematising can be guided by aesthetic intuition – as Schelling thinks at times – or one may hold that philosophising must assume an aesthetic form – as Schlegel thinks at times. Or one might believe that our basic intuition into nature's unity is both aesthetic and philosophical at once, depending how one understands intuition. Thus, Romanticism and Idealism approach nature in a continuum of overlapping ways.

What possible contemporary relevance could such Idealist and Romantic ideas have? First, these ideas speak to issues presented by environmental crisis. Is nature an overarching whole, and, if so, are human beings merely dependent parts of this whole along with everything else, or do human agents in some way 'stand out' from this whole in ways that make for human/nature disharmony? Romantic and Idealist thinkers offer their own answers to such questions. Second, these ideas of nature can prompt us to rethink what we understand by *naturalism*, as I'll elaborate below. Third, these thinkers provide distinctive accounts of how human freedom is both located within nature and yet remains freedom in a strong sense, as a power of spontaneous self-determination: for self-determining human agency realises to a higher level the same power of self-organisation already found within non-human nature.

Fourth, engaging with Romantic and Idealist views of nature can help us to reflect upon and re-assess what we understand by *nature* in the first place. We can helpfully put these views in contrast to the distinction between two senses of 'nature' which is made, following David Hume ([1739] 1978: III.i.ii: 474), by John Stuart Mill in his essay *Nature* (1874: 8–9). In one sense, Mill says, *nature* means everything that exists, all of it subject to natural laws, there being no supernatural agencies such as the Christian God or supernatural events such as miracles. That is, *nature* just means *reality*. In another sense, Mill says, *nature* means not everything but, more narrowly, everything non-artificial: everything that has not been produced, manufactured or transformed by voluntary, intentional human agency. For Mill, we can speak of *nature* in this second sense without having to presume that human volitions, intentions and actions really 'stand out' metaphysically from the domain of nature, such that what gets shaped by the human mind thereby gets put into a different metaphysical class than it was in before. On the contrary, Mill is a naturalist: he sees the human mind as part of the natural world in sense one. We do not have any mysterious or 'spooky' powers or faculties that cannot be explained, in principle, by the empirical sciences. Neither the mental nor the artificial are 'supernatural' vis-à-vis physical or non-artificial things; rather, the natural/artificial distinction under *nature's* second sense arises within reality; that is, *nature's* first sense.

It is in Mill's second sense of *nature* that we might see the countryside as particularly natural (see Soper 1995: 18). Yet the UK countryside – and pretty much the entire world – bears the stamp of human agency. For some, therefore, there is no more nature. But we should not overhastily assimilate all the things and places that bear humanity's stamp – say, putting plastics factories and sheep farms on a level. We can distinguish degrees of naturalness depending on how far human agency is responsible for the character of an entity – partially, totally, only marginally and superficially, and more.⁴

Hegel might at first seem to be concerned with nature in Mill's second sense – the non-artificial (or, at least, relatively non-artificial). This is despite Hegel's overall philosophical outlook differing hugely from Mill's. Hegel's mature system as distilled in his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* has three parts: Logic, Philosophy of Nature and Philosophy of Mind. The latter concerns the human mind and the products of intentional, mindful human activity, including social and political institutions, belief-systems, and works of art and culture. Conversely, the philosophy of nature deals with the processes and items studied by the natural sciences of physics, chemistry and biology. And the Logic deals with general metaphysical principles and structures – such as becoming, difference, and causality – which obtain in different concrete forms in both nature and mind. Apparently then, 'nature' in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* refers not to everything but to the particular region of the world which, unlike the human mind's products, is non-artificial, all its components being as they are independently of any exercises of human agency.

For Hegel, though, unlike Mill, this difference between the domains of nature and mind is metaphysical, for in Hegel's view the human mind really does, to an extent, 'stand out' from nature. Admittedly his statements on this seem inconsistent: 'mind has for its *presupposition* nature' (EM §381, 8), yet mind 'differentiates itself [*sich unterscheidet*] from nature' (§381A, 11). Hegel seems to say both that the mind is in and of nature *and* that it breaks from nature. To understand this, we need to consider the metaphysical dimension of nature on his account. For Hegel, nature is organised by 'the idea' – the rational, organised structure of basic metaphysical principles that orders reality as a whole and is described in his Logic. But in nature, the idea is 'outside itself', external to itself – partially lost in the mass of material particulars: 'In nature . . . the idea is in the form of *externalisation* [*Entäußerung*]' (EL §18R, 42). Consequently, nature has a material aspect and a rational or 'ideal' aspect. In some natural items, the idea is more lost in the details, while in others it does more to organise those materials, above all in living organisms, where the function and character of each part is shaped by its place in the whole system. When a further step occurs and the 'idea' comes to organise materiality more pervasively, we enter the realm of mind. Mind thus piggybacks on living organism and so arises *within* some organisms, specifically human ones. Leaving aside exactly what it means for the idea to organise materials such that mind arises and takes successive forms, we can now see how Hegel's apparently conflicting statements on nature and mind fit together. Mind stands out from nature insofar as it is constituted by a higher level of organisation of materials by idea, higher than any level found within nature. But mind is also within nature, both because mind takes to a higher level the same organisation of materials by idea which occurs to varying degrees in nature, and because mind thereby realises more fully what was already occurring in nature.⁵

For Hegel, nature is structured by the idea; for Mill, nature in sense one contains nothing supernatural, hence presumably, one might think, no such metaphysical structuring principles as the idea. Mill's position is often said to be 'naturalistic', so we might wonder whether Hegel rejects 'naturalism'. But this depends what *naturalism* means, and here, although most contemporary philosophers endorse naturalism, there is little consensus. In this book, I adopt a cluster-based view, that the cluster *naturalism* has various strands and one can be more or less naturalist depending on how many of these strands one embraces and to what degree. One strand of naturalism is the belief that philosophy ought to be continuous with the empirical natural sciences. Another is the rejection of supernatural powers and often, as part of this, of any causes other than efficient ones. A third strand is the treatment of the human mind and its powers as just one amongst all the other parts of nature. On all these, Hegel takes a middle position between the two extremes of full-blown anti-naturalism and 'hard naturalism' (as I'll call it, following Sebastian Gardner). He thinks that philosophy must learn from the empirical natural sciences but also subject their findings to a priori reconstruction; he admits formal and final causes, but he regards them as being completely intelligible by reason, and he holds, as we saw above, that mental powers are both continuous with *and* set apart from natural powers.

For Hegel, then, mind emerges out of nature as mind's particular powers and features do not reduce to anything found at preceding levels of nature. This view makes sense within the context of Hegel's hierarchical account of nature, according to which its main gradations are the mechanical, physical and organic levels and, within the organic level, those of the earth, plant and animal life. Those stages are ranked hierarchically by how far they involve the idea organising matter: the more organisation, the higher a level of nature ranks in the progression. Some might deny that this position is naturalistic at all, since it involves belief in a metaphysics of organising form and the idea. But one might reply that it is naturalistic insofar as it treats the mind as arising out of nature in stages and in ways that can be fully rationally explained (where the explanations of how each stage of mind arises are provided in Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*). A cluster picture of naturalism allows us to say that Hegel's view of mind and nature is naturalistic to a degree, although not as much as many self-professed naturalists would want.

Admittedly, Hegel's metaphysics of the idea is at odds with hard naturalism: he thinks that the world is structured by 'substance-kinds' (Stern 1990) and that these are manifestations of 'the idea' as the overall system of organising structures. Further, for Hegel, the idea is a *rational* system in that each structure within it resolves tensions or conflicts within its lower-level structures – the idea, like nature, is hierarchically configured. To this extent, for Hegel, the world is rational *in itself*, which is what makes it capable of being understood by us using our reason. Fur-

thermore, the idea *organises itself* rationally in that each of its stages resolves tensions within preceding ones, and this is so independently of and prior to any rational thinking about the world in which we, minded beings, may engage. Or, at least, such are Hegel's views if we interpret him 'metaphysically' (as do such Hegel interpreters as Stern, Kreines, Houlgate, Beiser and others).⁶ That said, the non-metaphysical interpretations of Pippin and Pinkard especially are very popular. But I lean towards a metaphysical reading, as offering the best way to make sense of Hegel's approach to nature.

Let me sum up how Hegel's view of nature contrasts with Mill's: for Hegel, reality is not exhausted by nature but fundamentally consists of the idea as well as the matter that the idea organises. Nature is a particular domain within reality: the domain in which the idea is relatively 'lost' within material particularity, in contrast to the domain within which the idea has 'returned to itself' out of matter; that is, the domain of the human mind and its powers, products and expressions. Nature is the realm of the non-artificial to the extent that its component entities are not the products or expressions of the human mind. But this also characterises these entities as ones in which materiality predominates, whereas in the mind and its expressions the idea has regained predominance over matter.

We can now consider how Hegel's view of nature compares to and differs from those of the Romantics and Schelling, turning first to the former. The difference arises within broader disagreements about metaphysics and epistemology. For Hegel, 'the idea' organises the world and, considered specifically in its organising and pervading aspect, the idea is 'absolute' or, in noun form, 'the absolute'. The Romantics also espouse a metaphysics of the absolute, treated as an infinite whole encompassing all the things of the world and all their causal interrelations. Unlike Hegel, though, the Romantics do not think that we can ever fully know about the absolute. We feel its presence, as that of the whole context of things in which we are held and have experience, but we cannot adequately translate that feeling into discursive knowledge. Nonetheless, we have a degree of knowledge of the absolute just in apprehending its real presence.

As we've seen, for Hegel the absolute is internally complex, hierarchically structured, and structures itself in accordance with reason; the world is a self-developing whole that develops itself rationally. The Romantics agree that the absolute organises itself, for as the unity of all the different things that exist it unfolds into them all: it self-differentiates. But whereas Hegel emphasises that the world develops *rationally*, the Romantics emphasise that the world develops *organically*.

Here we need to pause to spell out the decisive influence exerted on this entire climate of thought about nature by Kant's Third Critique, the *Critique of Judgement*. Above all, what exerted decisive influence was Kant's idea that in studying living organisms we must think of each of

them as if it was organised by a 'natural purpose' – an end or set of ends which shapes all the parts of that organism so that they form a functionally interconnected system, within which each organ only is the way it is because of its place within the whole (CJ §68, 263–64/383–84). As Hegel restates this idea: 'The single members of the body are what they are only through their unity and in relation to it. So, for instance, a hand that has been hewn from the body is a hand in name only, but not in actual fact, as Aristotle has already remarked' (EL §216A, 291). Kant also holds that we must study nature as a whole on the kindred assumption that it forms an interconnected whole. For Kant, however, these are only regulative assumptions: we must think of nature and organisms in this way, but we cannot possibly know whether they really do have purposes. For various reasons, the Romantics and Idealists come either to complicate, qualify or outright reject that epistemic restriction or at least to re-deploy it with different meanings than it had for Kant.

For the Romantics, the absolute as the whole self-differentiating world operates in the manner of an organism, understood following Kant: the world differentiates itself into interconnected parts and so forms a complex unity. And insofar as nature is or must be thought to be a total interconnected system, the absolute is nature. But for Kant, one reason why we cannot know whether nature really has purposes is that we can only think of purposes on the model of human ideas and intentions, which cannot apply in non-human nature (CJ §68, 263/383). Likewise, for the Romantics, we cannot know or understand how the absolute self-organises. Its ways are not ours. But this is not entirely because of epistemic restrictions, as in Kant, but rather because the absolute overarches and transcends us and we are only parts of it, with limited powers compared to those of this much greater whole (our limited epistemic capacities are given a metaphysical explanation in terms of our place within the whole). Overall, for the Romantics, there is a dimension in the world's self-organisation which defies understanding, explanation or prediction.

In its mystery, its transcendence vis-à-vis our understanding, the world as a whole prefigures and anticipates human artistic creation, which also precedes rules and operates in excess of the intellect. Here the metaphysical differences between the Romantics and Hegel are bound up with their different views of the respective value of art and the aesthetic as against philosophical reason (although they both agree that these are superior to mere abstract understanding). Artistic creation is the highest manifestation of the human mind for the Romantics, and correspondingly aesthetic intuition offers us our highest – albeit still never fully complete – level of knowledge of the absolute, insofar as its *modus operandi* is proto-aesthetic, evincing a creativity that transcends understanding. Conversely, for Hegel, philosophical reason is the highest manifestation of our mental powers, giving us our highest – and complete – level of knowledge of the absolute, insofar as its *modus operandi* is rational.

Another difference is that because the absolute unfolds itself *organically*, for the Romantics, it can be equated with nature; whereas, as we've seen, for Hegel nature is only the self-alienated *region* of the absolute. The Romantics, then, seem to return to a version of the view that nature is everything. Unlike Mill, though, they identify reality as a whole with nature specifically as a self-organising, vital and creative whole (the force of the identification is not so much that nature is *reality*, but more that reality is *nature*). Do the Romantics, then, retain anything of Mill's second sense of nature, as the non-artificial? Yes, they do. In essence, they think, first, that it is in aesthetic experience of certain paradigmatically 'natural' – that is, non-artificial – phenomena that we best apprehend the absolute: these phenomena manifest the absolute most directly. In contrast, what is artificial has been subjected to the discriminating force of the human intellect. Whereas nature is associated with (complex) unity, the human mind and intellect are associated with division. We might wonder how this is possible. If mind is part of nature, which after all supposedly encompasses everything, how *can* we do anything artificial? The answer, for the Romantics, is that we are a self-alienated part of nature. Although nature is all-encompassing, it encompasses everything only by dividing, and thus it contains some parts that are relatively estranged from the others. Whereas for Hegel *nature* is the self-alienated form of the absolute idea, for the Romantics *mind* is the self-alienated form of absolute nature. This circles back to their view that, having a form of cognition that involves discriminations and judgements, we cannot fully know absolute nature as it really is in its unity.

Having mapped out these differences between Hegel's and Romantic views of nature, we can locate the views of Hölderlin and Schelling intermediate between them. Hölderlin stresses more emphatically than Schlegel or Novalis that nature is a self-*dividing* and self-differentiating unity, and correspondingly, that human subjects are self-alienated parts of nature. Schelling also maintains that nature differentiates itself into two forces in his philosophies of nature of the 1790s. Originally productive and creative, nature necessarily divides to contain another, opposed force of inhibition, this being necessary so that the range of natural forms and processes can result from the dynamic interaction between productive and inhibiting forces. Thus, with Hölderlin, Schelling stresses that nature self-differentiates and that this is necessary for the generation of finite things. With the Romantics more broadly, Schelling stresses that nature is originally creative: it begins as pure productivity, a pure upsurge of force through which everything emerges. However, closer to Hegel, Schelling emphasises that we can understand nature because it develops rationally, as it tries to resolve the tension between its constituent forces and so generates the various natural 'products' in each of which productivity and inhibition are held in balance. Yet as their tension is necessary for anything finite to exist, it cannot be conclusively re-

solved; hence, nature makes successive attempts to resolve that tension ever more comprehensively, which produces a hierarchical range of natural forms. At the apex of this series we come to the human mind, and here another series of forms arise, this time polarised between concept and intuition, the rational and active and the felt and receptive (these forms are traced in Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* [1800] 1978).

It is the fact that the human mind arises out of nature and continues its polarity in higher form which, for Schelling, makes our knowledge of nature possible, for we can know nature to the extent that it is structured in the same way as our minds. For, just as we can know ourselves, we can know what is like us. In this regard Schelling, with Hegel, believes that nature can be understood, being intrinsically amenable to our understanding. This is one reason why Schelling and Hegel are rightly classified as German *Idealists* rather than Romantics: for them, nature as it is mind-independently is 'ideal' – that is, rational, intelligible, amenable to being understood by us through reason.⁷ However, Schelling, unlike Hegel, combines this view with other ideas closer to those of the Romantics: nature self-divides to produce all finite things, and it is creative, in a proto-aesthetic way. Indeed, Schelling's combined beliefs in nature's creativity and rationality are potentially unstable. Hegel stresses the latter against the former, while others, such as Schopenhauer, stress the former against the latter; and Schelling continues to wrestle his life long with how far nature and the world admit of or resist rational comprehension.⁸

Let us note that Schelling does not simply assume that nature is rational, any more than Hegel does. They are post-Kantians, and Kant had established that we cannot simply assume that reality as it is mind-independently is such that we can understand it. We cannot take it for granted that the world is suited to our intellects. That, and how far, it is possible for us to understand and know about the world has to be *accounted for*. Schelling and Hegel, however, respond in ways that yield the conclusion that what accounts for our ability to understand the world is that that world is *itself* rational and self-organising, as our minds are.⁹ Suppose we agree that our minds are rational and self-organising – for example, when we make judgements, we unify the elements of subject and object, substance and predicate, and so we thereby organise the elements of our own thought.¹⁰ But we can only explain our rational self-organising powers if they are a development of what is already occurring, albeit less explicitly, in the non-human – that is, natural – world. We could not possibly be rational, given that we are embodied, sensing, and located within nature amidst other species, unless there were already something in the rest of nature that prefigures our own reason and provides the precondition for reason to come to fuller development and realisation within us. As we are living beings, something in organic life

must prefigure our powers of reason. But in turn something in chemical life must prefigure and make possible those organic powers, and so on all the way back to nature's most rudimentary material constituents. The thought, then, is that human reason is only possible on condition that the world is already embryonically rational. But in that case nature is intrinsically such that we can know it by reason.

I now want to note some ways in which these ideas of nature bear on contemporary ethical issues. As I've remarked above, they bear on environmental problems amongst others, and one respect in which they do so is around the theme of disenchantment. According to the Romantics, in modernity nature has been 'disenchanted'; in response the Romantics look for routes within modernity along which nature can be, or is already being, re-enchanted. But plausibly nature's disenchantment is a consequence of modern science and technology. And perhaps those latter projects are predicated on the goal of controlling or dominating nature for human purposes (Adorno and Horkheimer [1944] 1997, for example, so regards modern science). In that case the disenchantment of nature is inherently tied up with the projects of human control which have led to environmental crisis, and so re-enchantment might offer a way to mitigate, perhaps even move past, that crisis.

Hegel's metaphysics of nature also has environmental-ethical implications, albeit mixed ones. For him, all natural things and processes have their 'ideal' dimension: they are all self-organising to some degree, however minimal. Yet whereas Hegel claims that the agency of other human subjects obliges us to treat them with respect, he makes no equivalent claim about natural things. On the contrary, in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* of 1821 he maintains not only that one may treat as one wishes those (natural or artificial) things that are one's private property, but also that one ought to transform and remould those things to embody one's will. Hegel calls this the 'absolute *right of appropriation* which human beings have over all things' (PR §44/75). Here he effectively seems to advocate controlling and remodelling nature for human purposes. But this is inconsistent with his view that all natural things have self-organising aspects, as human subjects do, where that agency in human subjects means that they are owed moral and practical respect. Natural things, then, should also be owed a degree of respect. To be sure, in nature the idea is self-alienated, whereas in human agents the idea has returned to itself. But that does not necessarily support Hegel's claim that we have obligations *only* to human agents and not to any natural beings at all. More likely, it supports the view that we have different degrees of obligation to different, more or less 'ideal', kinds of natural things, and different degrees of obligation to natural and human beings.

Contra Hegel, then, his view that all natural things contain an 'ideal' aspect generates normative consequences – that we ought to give these things levels of moral consideration proportionate to their degrees of self-

organisation. Romantic views have normative import as well. They hold that all natural things contain an aspect of mystery concomitant with the fact that nature-as-reality organises itself in ways partly transcending our comprehension. Given this mysterious aspect, these things deserve to be treated with appropriate caution, respect and humility. In different ways, then, Romanticism and Idealism both open up ways of saying that nature imposes normative demands.

Romantic and Idealist views of nature also bear on gender and race. Historically, gender and race have been treated as hierarchies grounded in nature or human biology, but feminists and critical race theorists have exposed many ways in which they are in fact socially constructed. Accordingly, these theorists tend to be wary and critical of claims that hierarchies of gender and race have a basis and justification in nature. Londa Schiebinger's work (1989) exemplifies this critical tendency. She shows how, in the wake of the Enlightenment with its potential to throw established social hierarchies into question, new scientific accounts of the female body were produced. These accounts emphasised female reproductive capacities and their supposed all-pervasive effects on the female body, thereby providing a new rationale for confining women to the household. Thus, scientific accounts of this kind, which purport to be about mere natural facts, view those facts all along through lenses supplied by social and political agendas. And these scientific appeals to natural facts disguise contingent and changeable social arrangements as being requirements of nature which either cannot be changed at all or can be tampered with only at the cost of bringing in ways of life that are dangerously 'unnatural', harmfully estranged from nature. So whereas environmental concerns push us towards seeing natural things as imposing normative demands on us, feminist and anti-racist concerns pull towards scepticism about claims for nature's normativity (Soper 1995: 3–4).

Here Hegel's work may seem to present an especially unappealing combination. On the one hand, he overtly resists seeing natural things as imposing moral demands. On the other hand, he accords some, qualified, normative weight to natural differences of both sex and race as he construes them within his system. He says nothing so direct or simple as that women should be homemakers who gestate and bear babies. Rather, for Hegel, women's biological role in reproduction gets taken up and given new significance in view of social requirements that – allegedly – there must be a specific class of individuals to play the homemaker role. This requirement arises from the properly organic structure of the state (i.e., politically organised society as a whole): each branch of that state, each basic institution or structure, should have a dedicated class of people to represent its functions. Hegel's stance on gender fits in with his overall view that mind – including society – emerges out of nature and has its own structures and requirements but remains dependent on nature and subsists within it. These are united in that society re-organises its natural

preconditions – reproductive difference – for its own purposes – satisfying the requirements of an organically structured organic whole.

Hegel regards race similarly. For him, geographical differences lead to biological racial differences (*Rassenverschiedenheiten*), such as differences in skin colour (*EM* §393, 40). He also holds that the different world civilisations – those of the indigenous Americans, Africa, the Orient, the Greeks and Romans, and European Christendom – are hierarchically graded. Now, to be sure, he ranks their *civilisations*, not their racially diverse *peoples* (Houlgate 1998: 35–37). Hence one might claim that even though Hegel believes in race he is not a racist; he does not regard some races as being inherently or biologically superior to others (on the distinction between belief in distinct races – ‘racialism’ – and racism, see Appiah 1990). Rather, for Hegel, (hierarchical) differences between civilisations *correlate* with (non-hierarchical, normatively neutral) racial differences. The correlation arises because geographical differences *both* produce racial differences *and* furnish the conditions of possibility for the emergence of different civilisations. For example, supposedly, the geographical diversity of Greece made it possible for its original spirit of freedom to arise. Having said this, for Hegel, racial differences include differences of temperament, and these are a further causal factor – alongside, although subordinate to, geography – in the formation of civilisations. Racial factors thus have *some* causal bearing on civilisations and their hierarchy. So it would be oversimplifying to say that Hegel is not a racist at all. And this is the more so as he believes that civilisations ‘overgrasp’ and reshape our racial natures in their own light, so that the peoples who inhabit an inferior civilisation become moulded into an inferior condition. With race as gender, then, Hegel’s view of the nature/mind interaction generates problematic conclusions.

However, one can adopt an organic model of society and reach different conclusions about gender, at least, if one espouses a different conception of the organism. Novalis does so at his best, when – unlike Hegel – he takes the plant, not the animal, as the paradigmatic organism. In an animal organism, each sub-system (e.g., digestion) has dedicated body parts that serve its functions (stomach, colon, rectum, etc.). In contrast, in a plant organism, each part either participates or is ever-ready to participate in realising each function of the whole (the same part can serve as root, or become stem, etc.). Envisaging an ideal society structured on vegetal organic lines, Novalis therefore envisages that *both* sexes would participate in every aspect of social life.

This divergence between Novalis and Hegel suggests that we need not reject all appeals to nature’s normativity outright. There has been a long history of these appeals being made in different ways, where different understandings of nature yield different political conclusions about race and gender. There has been and remains scope for disagreement, interpretation and re-interpretation of what normative demands nature

may make, how nature manifests itself within our bodies and lives, and how we should take account of these manifestations – or not. And from an environmental perspective, it is important that we acknowledge our dependence on nature – perhaps, by recognising it as an all-encompassing whole as the Romantics do. If trying to escape from nature is vain or hubristic, then perhaps instead we need to re-assess what it means for us to depend on nature, and what normative requirements this dependency imposes on us, relative to what we take nature to be in the first place. In re-assessing these matters, we can take our political goals in respect of race and gender into account – just as these concerns have always shaped what nature has been taken to be.

To conclude this first chapter, let me outline the chapters to follow. The book is divided into three parts, and the first, Romantic Nature, is on the Early German Romantics, with chapters on Schlegel, Novalis and Hölderlin. I aim to show how ideas of nature were central to these figures' philosophical and literary projects.

Chapter 2 sets out the nature of the Early German Romantic philosophical project as a whole. The Romantics understand 'the absolute' – their central metaphysical notion – to be an infinite whole encompassing all the things of the world and all their causal interrelations. As to whether the absolute can be known – a point of contention between Frederick Beiser and Manfred Frank – I argue that, for the Romantics, we feel the absolute in the sense that we aesthetically intuit it in certain phenomena of the natural world. This kind of feeling occupies a middle ground between knowledge and non-knowledge. Not only aesthetic experience, then, but also nature, play important roles in Romantic epistemology and metaphysics.

In chapter 3, I examine the Romantic concern to 're-enchant' nature, specifically in Schlegel's version. Initially Schlegel opposes modernity, partly on the grounds that it is responsible for disenchanting nature. Subsequently, however, Schlegel re-evaluates modernity. He argues that Romantic poetry and its associated devices such as irony – all characteristically modern – can re-enchant nature, and in ways that remain compatible with modernity and its epistemic, moral and political values.

In chapter 4, I reconstruct the evolution of Novalis's thought concerning being, nature and knowledge. In his *Fichte Studies*, Novalis argues that unitary being underlies finite phenomena and that we can never know, but only strive towards knowledge of, being. In subsequent writings, he comes to maintain that the unitary reality underlying finite things can be known in part, insofar as it is an organic whole – nature – which develops and organises itself in patterned ways. However, insofar as this organic whole exercises spontaneity in organising itself, we can never wholly know why it assumes the particular forms it does; nature remains partly mysterious.

Chapter 5 draws out the ethical implications of Romantic views on nature. The Romantics set out a vision of human reconciliation with nature on which reconciliation *includes* a dimension of alienation from nature, in the form of an awareness that nature is greater than and exceeds human understanding, as we are merely limited parts of the all-encompassing whole that nature is. To be reconciled with nature, we need to accept rather than strive to overcome its otherness. Alienation from nature, then, is not wholly bad; it can function positively if it is integrated into reconciliation with our dependence on nature.

In chapter 6, I reconstruct Hölderlin's philosophical position. Hölderlin holds that finite subjects and objects arise from a primordial self-division of being. This whole, being, can be identified with nature insofar as it self-differentiates organically. As part of this, being or nature divides into human subjects over against non-human objects (i.e., nature as just one region of the world, akin to Mill's *nature* sense two, whereas Hölderlin's being-as-nature is closer to Mill's *nature* sense one). On this metaphysical basis Hölderlin theorises the changing ways in which historically evolving cultures negotiate the division between humanity and non-human nature, including through Greek tragedy. Hölderlin's views also imply that human alienation from nature and, by extension, contemporary environmental crisis are products of nature itself in its primordial sense as the self-dividing whole. Consequently, we human beings neither can nor should attempt to prevent this crisis; that would presuppose that we are able to act independently of nature, as in fact we cannot. I call this position 'environmental quietism', and I argue that it is not so utterly unhelpful in the contemporary climate as it might appear.

The book's second part, Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature, moves on chronologically to the German Idealist accounts of nature of Schelling and Hegel and the character of philosophy of nature as a project. In this part of the book I also explore Hegel's relation to naturalism, the substance of his account of nature, and its ambiguous ethical implications.

Chapter 7 sets the scene for this second part of the book, and provides an anchor to this book overall by giving a two-pronged account of what sort of project philosophy of nature was and why it arose and made sense in the wake of Kant's Critical philosophy. In particular, the motivating ideas were (1) that human freedom must be grounded in a prior level of self-organisation within nature, and (2) that knowing how nature organises itself requires reference not only to the empirical sciences but also to additional sources of knowledge – specifically a priori reasoning, for Schelling and Hegel. This Schellingian-Hegelian version of philosophy of nature is post-Kantian because of its concern with the conditions of possibility of human freedom. Strip out that preoccupation with freedom, and what remains characterises philosophy of nature more generally – (1) the view that nature is an organised or self-organising whole and (2) that nature must therefore be known not only scientifically but also through

philosophical methods appropriate to its self-organising and holistic character.

With this scene set, I explain the key stages in Schelling's thinking about nature as it took shape in the post-Kantian context. I then distinguish two rival approaches to nature that came after Schelling: Hegel's and Schopenhauer's. Whereas for Schelling, nature is *both* rational *and* evinces pure, spontaneous creativity, Hegel emphasises nature's rationality whereas Schopenhauer emphasises the creativity but denies the rationality, such that for him nature exhibits mere brute, meaningless will. Finally, I briefly note how Humboldt's later version of 'philosophy of nature' fits in with its two-pronged character.

The remainder of Part Two concentrates on Hegel. In chapter 8, I explain Hegel's view that philosophy of nature involves a priori reconstruction and re-interpretation of empirical scientific claims. Through such reconstruction, the philosopher of nature gives an account of how nature forms a rationally interconnected whole.¹¹ As a result, nature is also presented as self-organising, and each of its component kinds as being self-organising to some degree, rising from the lowest mechanical level through 'physical' and chemical processes up to organic life-forms. Hegel construes these levels of organisation in terms of matter's increasing permeation by 'the concept'; that is, rational structure.¹²

I consider how far Hegel's position counts as 'naturalist', recently a matter of some debate amongst Hegel scholars.¹³ I propose that naturalism is a cluster concept, so that one can be a naturalist to varying degrees. I locate Hegel at a midpoint between naturalism and anti-naturalism in terms of his epistemology of nature – learning from science but reconstructing its claims rationally – and his metaphysics of nature – his emphasis on nature's rational organisation and his elimination of Schelling's appeal to creative forces.

In chapter 9, I explain Hegel's substantial account of the various 'stages' of nature as they exhibit increasing self-organisation. In ethics, we might expect that because Hegel regards all natural beings as self-organising to a degree, he would argue that these beings deserve moral consideration, just as human agents deserve respect on account of their powers for self-determination. Yet Hegel instead maintains in his political philosophy that human agents can and indeed should transform natural beings at will in order to realise human freedom. Although Hegel thus failed to develop the potential environmental implications of his own philosophy, I sketch an alternative way of taking those implications forward.

The book's third part, Hegel, Gender and Race, traces the implications of German Romantic and Idealist views of nature, particularly Hegel's, for political questions, especially around gender and race. In chapter 10, I set out the explicit accounts of sexual difference which Schelling and Hegel give within their philosophies of nature. They both regard sexual

difference as manifesting nature's fundamental polarities: for Schelling, the polarity of creative and inhibiting force; for Hegel, the polarity of concept and matter. Schelling aligns the female sex with inhibition; Hegel aligns it with matter. These gendered polarities are hierarchical. Hegel further brings race into the picture: sexual reproduction, for him, is how animal organisms (including humans) endeavour to overcome their embodied differences by 'uniting' in a new being. But finite embodiment cannot be overcome, and neither therefore can sexuation. Reciprocally, as finite embodied beings, we are necessarily located in the terrestrial environment, therefore subject to differences of race. Gender and race, then, co-exist for Hegel.

In chapter 11, I explain how Hegel's view of sexual difference in nature ties in with his position in the *Philosophy of Right* that women's place is in the family and home. For Hegel, modern society is subdivided into three spheres: the family, embodying 'immediate unity' between its members; civil society, embodying 'difference' between its members; and the state, embodying 'differentiated unity'. Since in his philosophies of nature and mind Hegel also holds that the female body is organised upon a principle of 'immediate unity' between the female individual and the species, the essential principles that organise the female body and the family correspond, making women pre-eminently suited to family life.

In chapter 12, I situate Hegel's approach to women and the family within his 'organistic' view of modern society. Nonetheless, I argue, Hegel's sexism demonstrates a problem not with organicism but only with Hegel's particular conception of the organism as a unified whole, modelled on the animal body. An alternative model of the organism as a vegetal and less hierarchical structure, found in Novalis, supports a more inclusive gender politics.

Chapter 13 takes up Hegel on race again in relation to his stance on colonialism. I argue – critically – that Hegel's philosophy of world history is Eurocentric and generates a case for colonialism. I then ask whether Hegel's basic account of freedom can be extricated from his Eurocentric and pro-colonialist interpretation of the actual course of world history. I argue that matters are more complicated, because that interpretation has significant connections with Hegel's basic conception of freedom as self-determination.

Having so far offered a largely critical account of Hegel's own positions on gender and race, I take a more optimistic turn in chapter 14 by revisiting the reception of Hegel's thought in one strand of twentieth-century French philosophy: the existentialisms of Beauvoir and Fanon, founding figures respectively for second-wave feminism and anti-colonialism. Histories of 'Hegel in France' have tended to ignore Beauvoir and Fanon. I correct this omission, showing how Kojève's reading of Hegel made possible Beauvoir's and Fanon's innovations. They used Hegel's ideas of the struggle for recognition and master/slave dialectic to theor-

ise, respectively, gender oppression and racial oppression in colonial and post-colonial contexts.

While I am critical of Hegel and other Idealists and Romantics when they endorse hierarchies of gender and race, I also try to tease out progressive and fruitful possibilities in their thought. Beauvoir and Fanon find ways of doing that too – yet they do so by distinguishing intersubjective structures of gender and racial oppression from the realm of nature, thereby accepting an opposition between subjectivity and nature. In this book, I hope instead to unearth positive possibilities within German Idealist and Romantic views of nature and of our own status as beings who are inescapably located within and dependent on nature. To be sure, in part, these views reinforce traditional assumptions about race and gender hierarchies. But there is more to these views of nature than that, and I hope that this book will illuminate that ‘more’: the many ambiguities, complexities, nuances, and points of interest, tension and internal divergence within the pictures of nature we find in Hegel, Schelling, Hölderlin and the Romantics.

NOTES

1. Hegel has received the bulk of Anglophone attention (for an account of his recent reception and interpretation, see Moyar 2017). But Schelling has undergone a renaissance too, more modestly; see, amongst others, Gabriel (2013), Norman and Welchman (2004), Ostaric (2014), Wirth (2003) and (2004), and Žižek (1996). So too, still more modestly, has early German Romanticism (*Frühromantik*), which flourished in Jena and Berlin between 1794 and 1802, amongst a group that included Schelling, Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel and his brother August, F. D. E. Schleiermacher, Ludwig Tieck, Wilhelm Wackenroder, Dorothea Veit Schlegel and Caroline Schlegel Schelling, and centred on the journal *Athenaeum*.

2. That said, Grant (2008) is one contemporary practitioner of Schellingian philosophy of nature.

3. This formulation may seem to suggest that philosophy of nature is inherently opposed to naturalism, if naturalism is defined as the view that the methods of philosophical inquiry should be continuous with those of the empirical sciences. But it depends on how ‘continuity’ is interpreted. For Schelling and Hegel, philosophers of nature should use a priori reasoning, but the latter can be ‘continuous’ with empirical inquiry in the sense that a priori and empirical methods can work together constructively.

4. See O’Neill, Holland and Light (2007: ch. 8). Another issue is whether the human agency has to be intentional: climate change has arisen as an *unintended* product of human actions. We might also distinguish different types of human activity by how far they allow natural items to manifest whatever characters or properties they have independently of our agency. For instance, Ted Benton (1989) classifies some activities such as farming, tilling, gardening, and others, as ‘eco-regulatory’, as distinct from being more straightforwardly ‘productive’ or ‘fabricating’.

5. On the mind-nature relation in Hegel, see Ng (2018) and Testa (2012), amongst others.

6. See Stern (2009), Kreines (2015), Houlgate (2006) and Beiser (2005).

7. ‘Mind-independently’ deserves a caveat: nature with its ideal structure exists the way it is prior to our intellectual efforts to understand it. But it does not strictly

speaking exist independently of our having the capacity, in general, to engage in those efforts, for nature *necessarily* develops into mind—a logical, not temporal, development.

8. See, in particular, Schelling's 1809 *Freiheitsschrift* ([1809] 2006), and, for some discussion, Žižek in Žižek and Schelling (1997).

9. As I noted above, Schelling makes this point especially clearly and does so throughout his work. '*The first presupposition of all knowledge is that the knower and that which is known are the same*' (SPG 141/137). And, therefore, 'so long as I myself am identical with nature, I understand what a living nature is as well as I understand my own life' (IPN 36/100).

10. This picture of the mind, in which epistemic functions involve the exercise of powers to unify lower-level elements, is Kant's, and became widespread in his wake. To judge is to unify; the categories and concepts we use in our judgements are functions of unity; to reason is to unify judgements into or towards a system; and so on.

11. In this book, then, I argue that Hegel reconstructs empirical scientific accounts of natural processes and objects on an a priori basis. I took a different view in *Petrified Intelligence* (Stone 2004). There I distinguished between 'strong' and 'weak' a priorism. On a 'strong a priori' approach to nature, one first works out rationally what natural forms must exist, characterising those forms in very thin and abstract terms, and then one correlates each of these forms with some empirically described natural phenomenon. On a 'weak a priori' approach, one first gathers all the empirical scientific information and then reconstructs on a priori grounds why each of these natural phenomena must be as it is, given all the nature of all the other phenomena as scientifically described. In *Petrified Intelligence*, I argued that the problem with interpreting Hegel as a weak a priorist is that much of the information he reconstructs is now hopelessly out of date and flawed, so that if he is a weak a priorist then there can be little to learn from him about nature, substantially. In contrast, I argued, if he is a strong a priorist, then there is more prospect of mapping his abstractly characterised natural forms onto the phenomena theorised by science now. In this book, to put its claims in terms of my earlier contrast, I concede that Hegel is best seen as a weak a priorist after all. It is true that this means that little substantial detail of his account of nature can interest us now. However, I no longer think this matters, because what does retain interest is his overall *metaphysics* of nature, in terms of which he reconstructs scientific accounts of its components. I've set out the key aspects of this metaphysics in this chapter. The interest of Hegel's metaphysics of nature and its ethical ramifications can survive the lack of interest—other than narrowly historical—of the details of his account. This is why I no longer see the need to defend a strong a priori reading.

12. Earlier, I spoke of the *idea* structuring nature. I now speak of the concept because concept and idea are not straightforwardly different, for Hegel. The idea is the *realised* concept: more precisely, 'the *self-originating and self-actualizing universal concept* [is] *the logical idea*' (EM §379A, 5). All particular concepts are contained within and led out of the idea, Hegel also says here. And: 'The idea is what is true *in and for itself, the absolute unity of concept and objectivity* . . . its real content is only the presentation [*Darstellung*] that the concept gives itself in the form of external existence [*Daseins*]; and since this figure is included in the ideality of the concept, or in its might, the concept preserves itself in it' (EL §213/286). Thus, to the extent that, in nature, material existents are structured by the idea, they equally realise 'the concept'.

13. E.g., Giladi (2014), Ng (2018), Papazoglou (2013).

Part One

Romantic Nature

TWO

The Romantic Absolute

Recent work on the philosophy of the Early German Romantics has established that the aesthetic and literary-theoretical views for which they are best known are entwined with their views in metaphysics and epistemology.¹ In metaphysics, their central concept is that of the absolute (*das Absolute*) – or, what they take to be synonymous with the absolute, being (*Sein*). What do they understand by the absolute, or being? I will argue that the Romantics understand the absolute to be an infinite whole encompassing all the things of the world and all the causal relations between these things.²

Do the Romantics believe that we can have knowledge of the absolute? This is a contested issue amongst scholars. According to Frederick Beiser, they think we can know the absolute through a form of aesthetic intuition which transcends mere discursive knowledge. In contrast, for Manfred Frank, the Romantics equate knowledge with discursive knowledge and so conclude that we cannot know but only feel being. Based on this feeling we strive to know being, but we never achieve this goal. Instead, our striving results in our systematising our knowledge of the finite things that are amenable to discursive knowledge.³

In this chapter I re-examine the Romantics' accounts of our supposed original feeling or intuition of the absolute, based on which we strive endlessly to know the absolute discursively.⁴ Actually, we find in the writings of Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel, on which I focus, at least two divergent accounts. The first, which Novalis suggests in his 1795 to 1796 *Fichte Studies*, is that feeling gives us a kind of access to being which logically precedes any conceptualisation, judgement or understanding. I will argue that this appeal to feeling is problematic, above all because Novalis conceives of feeling as wholly antithetical to conceptualisation

and understanding, such that the deliverances of feeling cannot give us any rational justification for striving to know being.

The second account of our feeling of the absolute, outlined by Schlegel, is that we feel the absolute in the sense that we aesthetically intuit it in certain natural phenomena. Drawing on but extensively modifying Kant's aesthetics of natural beauty, Schlegel holds that certain natural features – such as a skyscape, the atmosphere of a season, or a complicated natural scene – are infinitely complex, yet that we intuitively apprehend them as wholes. However, given their complexity, we apprehend their wholeness as lying beyond these phenomena. We glimpse this wholeness through the phenomena, rather than grasping them as completed wholes. Thus, we intuit that there is an infinitely complex whole that surpasses yet also animates all particular objects – that is, the absolute.

What epistemological status does this form of aesthetic intuition have? It is not full knowledge, since it is not articulated discursively; but neither is it totally non-cognitive: it gives us not merely the idea that the absolute may possibly exist, but a more definite apprehension of the absolute glimmering through nature before us. This form of intuition occupies a curious middle ground between knowledge and non-knowledge. Since this is an uneasy status, we become rationally compelled to try to convert our intuition into full knowledge; hence our endless striving to know the absolute. Regarding the Beiser/Frank controversy, then, I will argue that our aesthetic intuition of the absolute is neither fully cognitive as Beiser claims, nor fully non-cognitive as Frank claims. Moreover, Schlegel's account of aesthetic intuition is preferable to Novalis's account of the feeling of being, since our aesthetic intuition of the absolute at least approximates to cognition and so can give us rational justification for striving to know the absolute.

It may be objected that this approach to the Romantics exaggerates how far epistemological issues preoccupied them. Arguably, one of their aims was to set aside philosophers' widespread preoccupation with knowledge so as to explore aesthetic (including literary) and religious (including mythological) experiences in their own right, as alternative ways of relating to the world. Nevertheless, the Romantics see aesthetic and religious experience – at least the particular kinds of these that most interest them – as forms of experience of the absolute. Consequently, their interest in these forms of experience does extend, although it is not confined, to an interest in whether they give us any knowledge of the absolute, the issue that is my focus here.

I. ROMANTIC ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM AND THE ABSOLUTE

As scholars of Early German Romanticism have established, Schlegel and Novalis defined their philosophical position in opposition to the foundationalist and systematic programs pursued by their erstwhile mentors Reinhold and Fichte. For Reinhold, Kant's account of mind was insufficiently systematic because it relied on the idea of discrete faculties (sensibility, understanding, reason), all of which Reinhold instead sought to deduce from one single 'fact of consciousness'. This 'fact' is that in consciousness the subject relates to and differentiates itself from its representations and their objects. From his description of this fact, Reinhold aimed to derive systematically a series of claims about our mode of representation, all inheriting (what he saw as) the certainty of that original description. Fichte continued Reinhold's program insofar as he put forward his description of the self-positing self as a new first principle designed to overcome problems that he found in Reinhold's principle of consciousness (see Reinhold [1794] 2000: 67, 70).⁵ Fichte's 1794 *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* ('theory of knowledge' or 'science') thus purported to be 'scientific' in that all its elements were systematically derived from its first principle.

Opposing Reinhold and Fichte, Schlegel and Novalis deny that we can ever find any certain first principle. 'Why do we need a *beginning* at all? This unphilosophical . . . goal is the source of all error' (AB #634, 115), Novalis writes. Instead of having a beginning, Schlegel affirms, philosophy 'always begins *in medias res*' (AF #84, 28) – with whatever fallible knowledge-claims lie to hand.

The Romantics take it (for reasons that I will examine shortly) that any such first principle, were we *per impossibile* to have one, would give us certain knowledge of 'the absolute' (which they also call 'being', 'the infinite' and 'the unconditioned'). Lacking such a first principle, we instead *strive* to know the absolute. But, they think, we cannot attain, any more than we can commence inquiry from, knowledge of the absolute. This is because our striving only ever results in us acquiring knowledge about what is finite, that is, about 'things' (*Dinge*) that are finite in the sense that they are each different from and limited and conditioned by one another. 'Everywhere we *seek* the unconditioned and only ever *find* things', Novalis famously writes (S 2: #1, 412). Our striving to know the absolute remains ever unsatisfied, but rather than abandoning it as futile, we continue to strive endlessly and acquire ever more knowledge concerning finite things.

Based on these claims, Schlegel and Novalis retain a notion of systematicity despite rejecting Reinhold's and Fichte's foundationalism. As we learn more about finite things, we also gain increasing knowledge of both the causal relations between these various things and the logical relations between our items of knowledge; we thus progressively systematise our

knowledge. Novalis contributes to this systematisation with his *Allgemeine Brouillon* of 1798–9, his draft encyclopedia mapping how various kinds of natural and mental phenomena are constituted by their differences from and similarities to one another, and concurrently how the findings of the different empirical sciences parallel one another. But for the Romantics our knowledge can never be completely systematised, because there is an infinite variety of finite things and of causal relations between them. ‘Every cause gives rise to causes . . . however, this chain is infinite both forward and backward’ (AB #615, 110). Since, then, we cannot complete the system of knowledge, no element within that system ever achieves certainty. The justification for each element increases the more it proves inferentially supported by other elements, but each element always remains liable to be falsified as the system-in-progress unfolds (Frank 2004: 175).

This idea of a system-in-progress informs the Romantics’s fragmentary, literary, often cryptic writing style. The model of interconnected fragments corresponds to the notion of a system-in-progress. Literary devices of allusion, irony, wordplay, dialogue and self-reference are intended to expose how knowledge is always limited, never complete. Deliberate obscurity is meant to show that individual knowledge-claims can be understood only in relation to the whole system of knowledge – and that, because this system is incomplete, these claims can never be definitively understood, so that their meanings always remain subject to reinterpretation.

Why, though, do the Romantics deny that we can commence inquiry from knowledge of the absolute, and what do they mean by ‘the absolute’ here? And *why* do they also deny that we can attain knowledge of the absolute? We can infer the answer to the second question from the Romantic approach to systematicity. *If* we could completely systematise our knowledge, then we would have attained knowledge of the absolute; but we cannot. That is, if we had a complete knowledge of all the world’s causal interconnections and all the relations among our beliefs, then we would know the absolute. Thus the Romantics understand the absolute to be the universe as a whole, a totality that encompasses all finite things and beliefs and all their interrelations (akin to Spinoza’s substance). Indeed Novalis is explicit on this: ‘*Only the All is absolute*’ (AB #454, 145). ‘In every moment, in every appearance, the whole is operating. . . . It is all, it is *over all*; In whom we live, breathe and have our being’ (FS #462, 147). He adds: ‘The universe is the absolute subject, or the totality of all predicates’ (AB #633, 113). Novalis takes this whole to be synthetic, not merely the sum of all finite things. For him each finite thing is the way it is only because of its causal relations with other things: intended in Novalis’s talk of ‘things’ (*Dinge*) is the idea that each thing’s causal relations condition (*bedingen*) it to be as it is. Ultimately, therefore, each thing is as it is only because of its place within the complete web of causal relations

obtaining amongst all things. Each thing is as it is because it is part of the whole. Therefore, the whole is not the sum of independently existing things but constitutes these things, its parts; the whole is synthetic, not composite.

We can now see why the Romantics use a cluster of interchangeable terms for the absolute. The absolute is 'the infinite' (*das Unendliche*) because it is not a finite thing but the non-finite whole encompassing all finite things. The absolute is 'being' because all finite things contain negation in that they differ from and so are-not one another, whereas the absolute encompasses everything so that there is nothing outside it for it to not-be: it entirely is. The absolute is 'the unconditioned' (*das Unbedingte*) because, as the whole, there is nothing outside it to causally condition it.

It is because the Romantics take the absolute to be the universe as a whole, and because they also believe that we can never know everything about finite things, that they maintain that we cannot know the absolute. Again, because the Romantics understand the absolute to be the universe as a synthetic whole, this explains why they think that (*per impossibile*) any first principle would have to describe this absolute. Since, as Reinhold had argued, consciousness is only intelligible in contrast to the objects towards which it is directed, any putatively 'first' principle describing the basic structure of consciousness (such as Reinhold's fact of consciousness) would actually require an accompanying principle describing the nature of objects. But then we would have two principles, not one first principle. To reintroduce a first principle, we would need one describing that which overarches and includes both subject and object as aspects, from which one could derive knowledge of these subject and object poles and of the many finite beliefs and things. Or, as Novalis puts it: 'The act by which the I posits itself as I must be connected with the antithesis of an independent Not-I and of the relationship to a sphere that encompasses them' (*FS* #8, 7). This encompassing sphere is the absolute; but why cannot we construct a first principle describing this sphere?

The Romantics have at least two reasons for denying that this is possible. First, because the absolute just is the synthetic web of all interrelated things and ideas, we cannot know the whole in advance of knowing about these things/ideas and their relations (and our knowledge of the latter can never be completed).⁶ Second, and more importantly, the Romantics are convinced by Kant that to know anything we must conceptualise it, and that 'all conceptualisation is determination, involving some form of negation where one predicate is contrasted against another' (Beiser 2002: 372).⁷ We can only conceptualise and know anything insofar as we pick it out as different from other entities – that is, insofar as we delimit the object of our knowledge as a finite thing. Since the whole is *ex hypothesi* not a finite thing but the synthetic totality of all finite things and ideas, it follows that we cannot conceptualise or know the whole. Even if

we try to know the whole under the concept of the whole *as* that which differs from finite things/ideas, we still fail to know the whole, because in fact, rather than differing from finite things/ideas, the whole encompasses and includes them. As Novalis cryptically puts this: 'The expression "absolute" is in turn relative' (*AB* #10, 195). Consequently, the 'concept' of the 'absolute ground' – the universe as a whole – 'contain[s] an impossibility' (*FS* #566, 167); to conceptualise the whole is inescapably to distort its non-finite character – hence: 'The essence of identity [of the whole which is absolutely one] can only be presented in an *illusory* [distorting] proposition' (*FS* #1, 3). To try to know the whole in conceptual, propositional, form is necessarily to distort it.

To sum up so far: for the Romantics we cannot know the whole at the start of inquiry (1) because of the discriminating character of our concepts, (2) because we could not know the whole prior to knowing all about its parts since it is not separate from these, and (3) we cannot attain knowledge of the whole by knowing all about these parts because they and their relations are infinite. These arguments raise some questions. Firstly, why cannot we conceptualise the absolute *as*, precisely, the universe as a whole that encompasses and constitutes its parts? The answer is that for the Romantics, simply conceiving of the absolute as a synthetic whole would not suffice for knowledge that it exists. For knowledge, (following Kant, again) we require sensory material to which our concepts find application (conceptualisation is a necessary but not sufficient condition of knowledge). The epistemic condition that concepts find application is met for finite things but not for the absolute: we can know only what we can sense under our spatial and temporal forms of intuition, but if there were an absolute whole it could not be in time or space, for it would then be conditioned either by something preceding it in time or by its own spatial constituents. (On the same grounds, Kant concludes that even if there were an unconditioned whole we could not know of it; see Kreines 2007.)⁸

Second, if we cannot know that there is an absolute, then why do we strive to know it and thereby come to acquire a systematic body of knowledge? Surely we must have some kind of notion of the absolute to justify us in engaging in this striving. We might wonder whether there is a relevant distinction between knowing *that* the absolute exists and knowing *about* the absolute – so that we cannot know about the absolute but we have some initial knowledge *that* it exists, which motivates us to strive to know about it. Novalis indeed does stipulate that only knowing about – having predicative knowledge of what properties things have – counts as knowledge. 'One knows nothing of a thing if one knows only that it *is* – in actual understanding. Being in the ordinary sense expresses the properties and relations . . . of an object' (*FS* #454, 145). It is not clear how helpful this distinction between knowing that and knowing what is here, since our presumed original notion of the absolute surely includes

some notion of *what* the absolute is: that it is an unconditioned whole encompassing all objects. On Novalis's own terms, then, this initial notion of the absolute seems to count as knowledge – and yet this is just what he, and the other Romantics, wish to deny. For them, our original notion of the absolute, which gives us reasons to try to know the absolute, cannot count as knowledge, given that the absolute is unknowable. What, then, *is* the epistemic (or other than epistemic) status of this original notion of the absolute such that it can justify us in striving to know the absolute?

II. THE ABSOLUTE: IDEA OR FEELING?

The Romantics sometimes say that in any inquiry we must *postulate* the absolute. Novalis writes that 'all quest for the first is nonsense – it is a *regulative idea*' (FS #472, 152). 'The whole of philosophy is . . . only of regulative use – exclusively ideal – without the slightest reality in the actual sense', he adds (FS #479, 154; as here, he often uses 'philosophy' to mean intellectual inquiry in general). As Frank has shown, there is a strong Kantian influence on the Romantic position here. For Kant, whenever we discover any fact we necessarily seek to explain it, to identify its condition (*Grund*: its cause or reason). Since by the same requirement we must seek to explain the *explanans* too, we ultimately seek to complete the chain of conditions, either by finding a first condition or by identifying the total web of conditions – a 'totality [that] is [an] absolutely unconditioned whole' (CPR A417/B445, 391), like the Romantic absolute. Thus, for Kant, any theoretical inquiry into the world must proceed under the goal of knowing the 'unconditioned' (as either first cause or totality), a legitimate goal insofar as it guides us to systematise our knowledge, although we can never reach the point of knowing anything about the unconditioned, not even whether it exists (A645/B673, 533–34).

Evidently, these Kantian claims resemble the Romantic theses that we cannot know the absolute but that we unceasingly strive to do so and thereby progressively systematise our knowledge. Perhaps, then, the Romantics do not think that we have any kind of original apprehension that the absolute exists, but rather – with Kant – that we as inquirers must initially assume the idea of the absolute as the (in fact unattainable) goal of our inquiry. However, there is a crucial difference between the Romantics and Kant. They repeatedly claim that we *sense* or *feel* the absolute. Schlegel refers to our 'sense for the infinite' (*Sinn fürs Unendliche*; AF #412, 83), our 'intuiting [*Anschauung*] the whole' (DP 323), and to his being 'infatuated with the absolute' (CF #3, 17). Novalis holds that philosophy begins with the 'feeling' (*Gefühl*) of 'mere-being' (FS #3, 6). For Kant, though, (as we saw) our form of sensibility precludes our knowing the absolute by ensuring that we can know only things subject to the condi-

tions of space and time. Moreover, the Romantics had seemed to agree that our spatio-temporal form of sensibility is one of the factors prohibiting us from knowing the absolute. They appear, then, to be distinguishing between our usual spatio-temporal form of intuition and a different kind of sensibility that is unrestricted by space and time and thus permits us some kind of apprehension of the absolute. Indeed, Novalis in the *Fichte Studies* explores the possibility that what we sense is only ordinarily spatio-temporally conditioned because we organise the sensible manifold into a form, the form of discrete combinable elements, which permits concepts to be applied to it.⁹ In other words, for Novalis our ordinary form of intuition is spatio-temporal only because it operates under the tutelage of our discursive understanding or power of ‘reflection’ (our faculty of imposing concepts). Another kind of intuition, or feeling, is also possible. This Kant denies. He thinks that an intuitive understanding (as he calls it), which would grasp objects and ultimately nature as a whole as synthetic unities instead of ascending from finite particulars towards unity, is available only to God, not to finite human minds whose intellects can proceed only analytically (CJ §77, 288-94/405-10). The Romantics are proposing to bring Kant’s intuitive intellect down to earth (in precisely what way remains to be seen). Consequently, whereas for Kant reason is the faculty that drives us to seek completeness of explanation and ultimately to form the idea of the unconditioned, the Romantic view is that we develop a ‘longing’ (*Sehnsucht*) to know the absolute because of our *sensible* or felt awareness of it.

Does the Romantic appeal to an initial feeling of the absolute entail that, after all, we *do* at the outset of inquiry have knowledge – perhaps certainty – of the absolute, in the form of feeling? Not necessarily: because for the Romantics we can only know what we conceptualise, they deny that feeling in itself gives us knowledge, certain or otherwise. Instead, they hold that feeling gives us *non*-cognitive awareness of the absolute and that this motivates us to try to convert our non-cognitive awareness into knowledge. Is this initial non-cognitive awareness certainty in all but name? Have the Romantics effectively reverted to the foundationalism they sought to reject?

This depends on what is meant by ‘feeling’ the absolute. A vague notion, ‘feeling’ could mean any or all of sensation, intuition, perception, emotion, or passion. The Romantics offer at least two more precise accounts of this feeling. For Novalis, feeling gives us immediate pre-conceptual access to the absolute. For Schlegel, feeling the absolute consists in intuiting it aesthetically. I will look at these accounts in turn.

III. THE FEELING OF MERE BEING

Novalis's *Fichte Studies* is concerned with many topics besides epistemology. However, one prominent theme within it is that we immediately apprehend the absolute in the form of feeling. For this thesis Novalis is indebted to Heinrich Jacobi.¹⁰ Jacobi himself draws on Kant's distinction between predicative judgements, which 'posit' their subjects 'in . . . relation to' their predicates, and existential judgements which 'posit' their subjects 'in themselves', without relation to any predicates. For Kant we may only posit something in this latter way if that thing is given to us in sense-experience (CPR A598–9/B626–7, 504–5). Jacobi takes over this distinction – "The "is" of the exclusively *reflective* understanding is equally an exclusively *relative* "is" . . . not the *substantial* "is" or "being"" ([1815] 1994a: 582). But he holds the 'substantial' kind of positing to be more basic, on the grounds that relative positing contains substantial positing, to which it merely adds an act of relating. But, from Kant, substantial positing is only valid if it presupposes a feeling or sensation of the things whose existence is affirmed. Thus, by pushing certain Kantian claims in an empiricist direction, Jacobi concludes that sensation is the basis of all knowledge.¹¹

For Kant, though, as for the Romantics, sensation on its own is not cognitive: knowledge requires the conceptualisation of what is given in sensation. Jacobi agrees, but turns this point to sensation's advantage by arguing that sensation has a certainty unavailable to any item of knowledge. Whereas judgements attain the status of knowledge in proportion as they are warranted either within the network of other judgements or by sensations, doubts may always arise regarding either the supporting judgements or the inference relations, whereas sensation, being basic, has immediate certainty, which

not only needs no proof, but excludes all proofs absolutely . . . Conviction by proofs is certainty at second hand . . . [which] can never be quite secure and perfect . . . [So] conviction based on rational grounds must itself derive from faith, and must receive its force from faith alone. (Jacobi [1785/89] 1994b: 230)

By 'faith' (*Glaube*) Jacobi partly means simply the immediate sensation of some object. In immediately sensing or feeling an object we apprehend it as a particular individual, since we are not yet judging it to fall under any general concept. However, Jacobi also intends 'faith' in a religious sense. He suggests that because in sensing we are not yet applying concepts, we do not make any discriminations regarding what we sense, which we therefore sense not only as some unique object but equally as the simple, indeterminate fact that there is something rather than nothing – that anything exists at all. What we feel 'cannot be apprehended by

us in any way except as it is given to us, namely, *as fact – IT IS!* He equates this fact of existence with God ([1785/89] 1994b: 376).

Building on Jacobi, Novalis in the *Fichte Studies* claims that knowledge is about things – or ‘determined beings’ (FS #2, 5) – which we discriminate from one another using concepts, but that (for Jacobi’s reasons) knowledge presupposes feeling. ‘Philosophy [i.e. theoretical inquiry] is originally a feeling . . . philosophy always needs *something given*’ (#15, 13). Since in feeling as such we are not applying concepts, we make no discriminations with respect to what we feel. Consequently, in feeling as such, rather than feeling any particular things, what we feel is just undifferentiated being. ‘No modification – no concept – clings to mere-being . . . Reference occurs through differentiation – Both [are possible only] through the thesis [i.e. the prior positing] of an absolute sphere of existence. This is mere-being’ (#3, 6), being as such, ‘in opposition to . . . determined-being’. Thus, all knowledge derives from our original feeling of being: ‘Knowledge comes from something. It always refers to a something – It is a reference to Being’ (#2, 5).

Essentially, this argument is the same as Jacobi’s argument for how feeling acquaints us with being in the sense of the bare fact that there is any existence at all. Novalis, however, wants to establish that feeling acquaints us with being in the more substantial sense of the whole encompassing all existents. Discussing how we ‘limit’ – introduce distinctions into – what we feel when we reflect upon it (i.e. when we conceptualise it), he describes that which we initially feel as unlimited and as ‘the absolute, as I want to call the original ideal-real or real-ideal’ (FS #17, 13). ‘Real-ideal’ signifies that the absolute contains objects (real) and subjects (ideal) – or as Novalis also has it, both nature and persons. The being with which feeling acquaints us, then, is the absolute in the familiar Romantic sense of the whole encompassing all existents. Thus, Novalis refers to ‘The material of all [conceptual] form, of which nothing more or less can be said than that it *Is*, that is, is its whole’ (#228, 70).

Unlike Jacobi, though, Novalis denies that feeling gives us certainty of the absolute: this would resurrect the sort of foundationalism he wishes to avoid. He maintains that feeling is non-cognitive: it is prior to knowledge, which is only ever of determined beings. Being non-cognitive, feeling cannot have the certainty Jacobi claims for it.¹² Being non-cognitive, feeling motivates us to engage in the striving to know being: ‘Reflection finds the need of philosophy . . . because the need is in feeling’ (FS #19, 14). We strive to convert our non-cognitive apprehension into knowledge, although the only knowledge that ever results from this striving is of finite things.

However, there are at least three problems with Novalis’s thesis that feeling acquaints us immediately with being. These are problems specifically with his appeal to feeling as the source of our immediate apprehension of being, not necessarily with his notion of feeling *per se*,

which plays various roles in the *Fichte Studies*. (Most generally, it is central to Novalis's attempt to re-emphasise the importance of relating to the world feelingly as well as cognitively in the narrower sense.)

First, then, Novalis seems to assume – perhaps owing to the direct realism implicit in Jacobi's conception of feeling – that in feeling we apprehend the real nature of what we are feeling. Novalis conveys this by stressing that in feeling something is *given* to us (e.g., *FS* #15, 13). Specifically, he appears to think that in feeling we apprehend the absolute as it really is – a synthetic whole. Yet the fact that we feel the absolute *qua* whole seems to be merely a consequence of the structure of feeling – the fact that when we feel we do not discriminate as we do when we conceptualise ('the pure form of feeling', Novalis says, 'is merely unity'; *FS* #19, 15). This suggests that what we feel appears to us to be a whole because we are operating in the mode of feeling, but that we are not necessarily apprehending what we feel as it really is. Novalis might reply that rather than imposing certain constraints (of distinctionlessness rather than conceptual distinction) under which reality appears to us, feeling is the state in which our mind imposes no constraints, and so in which we apprehend reality as it is in itself, not as it appears. But his reference to the 'form' of feeling belies this.

Second, since in feeling we draw no distinctions whatever, it seems that feeling must acquaint us with a kind of unity that is utterly distinctionless. The Romantic absolute, however, is not a totally distinctionless unity. Rather, the Romantic absolute *incorporates* differences between things. What we apprehend in feeling threatens not to be the Romantic absolute after all.

Even if Novalis can address this worry, a third problem concerns the way that he takes feeling to be wholly antithetical to conceptualisation and judgement. This becomes a problem given that Novalis needs our feeling of the absolute to *justify* us in striving to know the absolute. He needs to show that our initial sense that there is an absolute is not merely silly or 'romantic' in the pejorative sense, but has some sort of rational necessity, such that our ensuing efforts to try to gain knowledge of this absolute are equally rational, not deluded and liable to mislead empirical research. Likewise, for Kant, the quest to unify our knowledge under the idea of the unconditioned is justified because it stems from reason. Novalis also needs to show that the striving to know the absolute is rational so that the system of knowledge that results from this striving can be warranted – as for Kant the hypotheses about systematic order which result from our rational striving for unity are (provisionally) warranted because this striving is itself rational. Novalis thus requires that feeling not only explain but also justify our efforts to know being.

However, following Jacobi, Novalis thinks that judgements form a fabric, each thread of which derives warrant from its relations to the others, whereas feeling lies outside this justificatory order. Novalis con-

siders feeling to be the faculty for receiving what is given to us, whereas the understanding actively imposes concepts on what is given and then connects concepts together in judgements. Novalis thus implicitly pictures feeling in antithesis to a 'space of reasons' comprised of judgements and their normative relations, to use John McDowell's (1994) parlance. If feeling lies outside the 'space of reasons', then it cannot perform any justificatory function, and so cannot justify us in striving to know being.

To avoid this problem, Novalis might potentially give feeling a justificatory role by adopting some version of McDowell's proposal that in feeling our conceptual capacities are drawn on passively. No such solution is open to Novalis, since the idea that feeling involves the operation of conceptual capacities would contradict his aim of establishing that feeling gives us access to the absolute just because it does *not* involve the operation, even the passive operation, of any determinate and discrimination-imposing concepts. For feeling to give us access to *the absolute*, feeling may not involve conceptualisation; but if feeling involves no conceptualisation, then feeling cannot *justify* us in striving to know the absolute.

IV. AESTHETIC INTUITION OF THE ABSOLUTE

Schlegel offers a more promising interpretation of our feeling of the absolute: as aesthetic and intuitive. This idea begins to emerge, without being fully worked out, in his 1794 essay 'On the Limits of the Beautiful'. The essay dates from his pre-Romantic, classicist period, but versions of the idea that we aesthetically intuit the absolute persist in Schlegel's – and Novalis's – later writings.

'On the Limits of the Beautiful' is explicitly concerned with aesthetics, not epistemology. The essay identifies, compares, and ranks three types of beauty – the beauty of nature, of human beings, and of art works. Schlegel is primarily interested in beauty, and in natural beauty, in their own right, not in relation to epistemology. But because he identifies a form of aesthetic experience in which we directly apprehend the absolute to be present in nature, his analysis of natural beauty inescapably becomes entwined with epistemological issues.

Schlegel deems natural beauty to be the highest and most original type of beauty. The beauty of even the most beautiful artworks – those of ancient Greece, for Schlegel in this classicist phase – is incomplete, because the unity of these works is 'external' to their parts. That is, an artwork's unity is imposed on a relatively narrow set of particulars, narrow in that they have had to be isolated from the world's multiplicity so that they *can* be coherently unified in a single work. Consider Aristotle's formula that a tragedy must be whole and complete and so must deal with a range of events limited enough to permit the work to be whole

and complete, and which therefore must be isolated from the indefinite range of surrounding events (Aristotle 1965: 41–42). Schlegel sums up, '[any] single work of dramatic art admittedly unifies nature, but even it forcibly tears a particular individual out of the infinite richness' (GS 39).

These criticisms of art beauty have a Kantian background. For Kant an object is beautiful if its sensible form – its shape or play of shapes – is, when considered in abstraction from whatever concepts the object may fall under, suitable to arouse pleasure in us. For this the form of the object must arouse the imagination (for Kant, the mental power of arranging sensory data) to combine its elements in the way that the imagination would if it were 'left to itself [and] free', constrained only to harmonise with 'the *lawfulness of the understanding* in general' (CJ 91/241). In non-aesthetic perception the understanding imposes conceptual unity on the imagination's product. A form arouses the pleasure that sustains a judgement of beauty, then, if it permits the imagination to combine its elements into a unity spontaneously, without the imposition of determinate concepts. The object's form must thus be one in which 'variety . . . is perfectly unified, the elements manifestly according with one another or belonging together . . . a perfect combination of unity and heterogeneity' (Budd 2002: 33), whose unity allows full rein to, rather than restricts, heterogeneity. Presupposing this approach, Schlegel supposes that artworks as unified heterogeneities are beautiful – but defectively so because their unity curtails their heterogeneity.

For Schlegel, beautiful nature *does* have 'inner' unity that accommodates full heterogeneity. He focuses on natural phenomena of a rather intangible character, which have indefinite boundaries (they are *grenzenlos*) and contain a complicated multiplicity of elements. His examples are the 'friendly arch of the sky', 'the spring' with its 'most diverse life', and 'a [scene of] terrible-beautiful struggle in which the fullness of repressed force bursts forth in destruction', perhaps a waterfall gushing violently forth (GS 39). All of these phenomena are rather diffuse, atmospheric and 'frameless' (Ronald Hepburn's term; 1966: 290–91). Schlegel calls them 'infinite'.

Some sinners . . . call nature an artist. As if all art were not limited and all nature were not infinite! Not only does the whole stretch out boundlessly [*grenzenlos*] on all sides; the smallest single thing is in itself doubly inexhaustible. The universal animation of the living is infinite . . . for every point of space, every moment of time (of which there are infinitely many) is filled. (GS 38–39)

Schlegel's relation to Kant creates a puzzle about his claim that these natural phenomena are beautiful. Since they lack circumscribed boundaries and have infinite parts, it would seem that they must defeat our imagination rather than lend themselves to imaginative unification in the pleasurable spontaneous way that for Kant characterises the beautiful. Surely

these phenomena have too much complexity, are too diffuse, for us to grasp them as unities. They might be closer to Kant's mathematical sublime. This for Kant arises when our repeated efforts to take something in with our imagination are painfully thwarted because of the object's infinitude. Moreover, for Kant, the pleasure of the mathematical sublime is in our own status as rational beings, a pleasure that arises insofar as guiding our imaginative efforts is a rational *idea* of the infinite whole that in its magnitude or power defies, but equally arouses, our imaginative powers (CJ 127–28/268). So perhaps Schlegel really believes that certain natural phenomena elicit a sublime response, in which we come to an idea of the unconditioned whole, which can then regulate our cognitive inquiries. If so, then our original aesthetic 'feeling' of the absolute is a rational idea after all, and Schlegel's difference from Kant vanishes: the Romantics would be a species of Kantians who see the absolute as a regulative idea.

However, this interpretation loses both the Romantic emphasis on feeling and the fact that Schlegel does describe the natural phenomena that interest him as beautiful, on grounds that reflect a general familiarity with Kant's aesthetics. He must think that we do imaginatively unify these phenomena despite their heterogeneity. Confronted with this heterogeneity, we endeavour to subsume it under unity; but as discursive intellects, we proceed from part to whole, which means that given the infinite complexity of these natural phenomena we could never come to perceive them as unified using discursive understanding (the limitations of which Schlegel stresses at the start of 'On the Limits of the Beautiful'). If we do grasp these phenomena as unities, then, we must do so in some way not subject to the conditions of discursive, conceptual knowledge; that is, we must *directly*, intuitively grasp a unity pervading all the parts of these phenomena. This for Schlegel does not require a divine mind, *pace* Kant; it is something that we, finite subjects, do in our aesthetic experience of nature. Thus, Schlegel says, we grasp all the parts of a landscape or a dramatic natural scene as 'filled': filled by the unity of the whole landscape or scene. We directly see each part as pervaded by the whole and connected to all the other parts within this whole. We thus see the whole as alive: as animating and constituting all these parts and being immediately manifest in them (as the physiognomy of a face directly expresses emotions rather than the emotions needing to be inferred or reconstructed from a 'bare' physiognomy).

How, then, does Schlegel understand the beautiful/sublime distinction? For Kant, if a form is suitably unified then imagination and understanding harmonise and the object is beautiful; if the object is infinite and formless then imagination and reason are in tension and the experience is sublime. In supposing that we can directly intuit unity within infinite diversity, Schlegel is in effect suggesting that there is an alternative form of aesthetic experience, not countenanced by Kant, in which our imagina-

tive activity spontaneously harmonises with the rational activity of seeking unity in phenomena. It is because this form of experience is harmonious, and is of unity, that he calls it experience of beauty. But the experience also has features of the sublime: the expansion of the imagination towards an infinite whole. Consequently, Schlegel tends (across various works) to speak of the highest form of beauty as 'sublime beauty'.¹³ For him, beautiful and sublime need not contrast; rather, beauty in its highest form includes the sublime.

How do we grasp unity in these cases of infinitely diverse natural phenomena, given the complexity of their parts? For we are trying to discern unity in phenomena so complex that they threaten to defy unification. As a result, we can only discern the unity as lying *beyond* these parts, as lying just outside the reach of our perception and imagination – hence as *in-finite*, beyond the finite that lies before us. We thereby come to an idea of the unity-in-infinite-complexity for which we seek, of an infinite unified whole, which we seem to glimpse beyond the natural phenomena that do not instantiate this whole, that lack its unity.¹⁴ But matters do not stop there. As infinite, the whole must after all encompass the natural phenomenon before us in all its diversity, which must be included within the whole. The highly complex phenomenon must be part of the whole, and constituted by that whole, thus a part in which the whole *is* embodied and manifested, a part that is 'filled' by the whole; so, after all, we can unify the phenomenon – by seeing it as partaking of the unity of the whole that we envision through it.¹⁵ How can the whole be both *beyond and* embodied within its part? The whole is beyond its part in that the whole is more extensive and complex than any single one of its parts; the whole is embodied in the part insofar as the part is constituted by and manifests the constituting power of the whole. We grasp sky-scapes, dynamic natural scenes, seasons, and more as 'partial totalities': wholes inasmuch as they participate in a bigger whole, but only partially united insofar as their unity derives from this larger whole that lies beyond them.¹⁶

For Schlegel, then, the importance of the aesthetic experience of these unbounded natural phenomena is that they provoke us to intuitively unify them in this peculiar way. We do not do so with the spontaneous ease characteristic of Kantian beauty. Instead, given the immense complexity of these phenomena, we unify them with reference to a whole that we place beyond as well as within them, a super-whole that coincides with the universe – the absolute. If natural beauty surpasses art beauty by fully accommodating heterogeneity, this is possible because the experience of natural beauty involves an intuition of this whole that lies beyond as well as within any and every natural object and scene. We do not merely form an idea of this super-whole (as in the Kantian sublime). We intuit the whole *within*, not only beyond, its parts. Thus, the absolute does become present to our sensory apprehension, and so Schlegel justifiably

categorises our aesthetic intuition of it as a feeling, not an idea. (This categorisation follows from his view that imagination and reason are in harmony here, not dissonant as in the Kantian sublime, so that our imagination does succeed in making the unity of the whole present to us.)

How plausible is this account of our aesthetic experience of nature? Certainly, Schlegel is neither the only person nor the only Romantic – viz. Wordsworth, Coleridge – to think that aesthetic appreciation of nature culminates in experience of nature’s unity (and of ourselves as parts of nature’s unity), and thus in accession to a metaphysical unity in the cosmos. Ronald Hepburn argues that such experiences of unity are one pole in the aesthetic appreciation of nature (the opposite pole being close attention to particular natural objects) and that, despite the ‘grandiose, speculative’ flavour of the former experiences, we cannot ignore them if we want to make sense of the aesthetic experience of nature (1965: 294, 307–10). He suggests that there are actually several different kinds of experience of unity, including our tendency when we enjoy some natural feature to ‘move . . . towards more and more complex and comprehensive synopses’ of the contexts shaping that feature, its similarities to other features, and the recurrent natural forms or patterns it embodies (296). Schlegel’s account is not entirely different: we grasp a complex feature before us as (partially) unified by referring it to a larger whole of which it thereby comes to offer us a presentiment – a partial, anticipatory presentation. To be sure, Schlegel’s is not a complete account of the varieties of aesthetic experience of nature. It is, however, not implausible as an account of the particular, unity-oriented variety of this experience that arguably provides us with an apprehension of the unity of the cosmos (the absolute).

Novalis inadvertently made feeling incapable of providing rational justification for our cognitive inquiries. Schlegel avoids this problem. Firstly, he assumes (following Kant once more) that our activity of trying to grasp the unity of natural phenomena is rational. Secondly, Schlegel assumes that our intuition of the super-whole within nature gives us some level of knowledge of that whole. After all, we are not merely forming the idea that there may, possibly, be a whole. We perceive that whole as present – although we only see part of it, in a way that points us towards the remainder of the whole lying beyond the part that we see, a remainder at which we merely glimpse ‘through a glass darkly’. Nonetheless, we *do* apprehend and not merely think of that whole; this apprehension is rationally grounded, grounded in our rational activity of seeking unity in nature. Our apprehension of the whole thus represents a level of knowledge, of rationally grounded apprehension: an approximation to, or harbinger of, justified true belief.

Yet this apprehension is not *fully* cognitive. For Schlegel, as we have seen, knowledge is necessarily discursive and conceptual. The aesthetic intuition of the absolute does not meet this condition. It involves no

determinate concepts (to recall, it rather involves the co-operation of feeling with reason) and is not propositionally articulated. This does not mean that our aesthetic intuition of the absolute is not cognitive at all – as we have seen, it is a certain level of knowledge. Aesthetic intuition lies in a strange middle ground between knowledge and non-knowledge.

One might worry that since this kind of aesthetic intuition is both cognitive and non-cognitive, it violates the law of excluded middle. This problem will be addressed by Hegel, who inherits from the Romantics and from Goethe the view that we aesthetically intuit unity in living organisms. Hegel also takes this aesthetic intuition to fall in a grey area between knowledge and non-knowledge (see Hahn 1997: chs. 4 and 5): Hegel's solution to the affront to reason that this poses is that we are rationally compelled to resolve the contradiction of aesthetic intuition by progressing from intuition to conceptual knowledge. In the retrospective light of Hegel's solution, we see from the structure of Romantic philosophy that Novalis and Schlegel took a (partly) similar view. After all, they believe that based on our original feeling of the absolute we are driven to try to know the absolute fully – to gain discursive, conceptual knowledge about it, although this is an unachievable goal fuelling an endless systematising quest. This drive arises, presumably, *because* our original feeling of the absolute has an uneasy, liminal epistemological status between knowledge and non-knowledge, such that we are compelled to try to convert our feeling into full knowledge. But for the Romantics we can never succeed. Our rationality only ever exists as an unsatisfied striving to resolve the contradiction of feeling, never winning the exhaustive satisfaction that rationality does in Hegel, for whom a complete system of knowledge *is* possible.

Finally, one might suspect that Schlegel's post-1796 turn against classicism must surely affect and force revisions to his account of natural beauty and so, too, his suggestions regarding our aesthetic intuition of the absolute. But Schlegel continues to employ a notion of (aesthetic) intuition in subsequent works. In the *Dialogue on Poetry* he says that we 'intuit' the whole in nature (*DP* 323), and in the *Athenaeum Fragments* that one who had a sense for the infinite would 'conceive of ideals organically' (*AF* #412, 83) – that is, would see the whole as alive and animating its parts. Although Novalis does not seem to put as much weight on the notion of intuition, his notion that we *imagine* the absolute is similar, suggesting that we both think of the absolute as beyond particular material things and simultaneously see it as embodied within them. Moreover, the view that we aesthetically intuit the absolute in nature particularly persists in some of Schlegel's post-classicist writing.

The classicist Schlegel saw ancient Greek artworks as beautiful, unlike modern (i.e., post-medieval) artworks, because the former achieve unity whereas the latter are hopelessly fragmented. From 1797 onwards, Schlegel sets new value upon the fragmentation of modern (renamed

Romantic) artworks, especially literary works. The interrelations between these works' parts, and between their parts and those of other literary works, are so many and so complex that these works cannot achieve unity. Indeed, so deeply constituted are these works by their intertextual relations to other literary works that they ultimately form parts of a single developing artwork comprised of all modern literature. Thus, for the Romantic Schlegel, modern literature as a whole displays the same unity-in-infinite-heterogeneity which he previously attributed to beautiful nature. 'The world of poetry is as immeasurable and inexhaustible as the riches of animating nature with her plants, animals, and formations of every type, shape, and color' (*DP* 284). As such modern literary works not only may equal nature in beauty; we also intuit the absolute whole in them.

Nonetheless, Schlegel declares beautiful nature to be prior or more 'original': the 'poetry of nature' is 'the first, original poetry without which there would surely be no poetry of words' (*DP* 285). Nature has priority because, before Romantic literature can allow us an intuition of the absolute, artists must produce it, which they do by bringing together a vast wealth of subject matters, genres, and inter-textual references, where artists are motivated to assemble and systematically interconnect these materials *because* they are striving to know the absolute. Since any such striving logically postdates our having intuitively felt the existence of the absolute, we must be brought to intuit the absolute by our aesthetic experience of nature before we can (re-)intuit the absolute through literature. The aesthetic intuition of the absolute in natural beauty thus remains the original source of our striving to know it. For the Romantics, it is primarily our aesthetic experience of nature that gives us a 'sense for the infinite'.

NOTES

1. A good review of this literature is Millán-Zaibert (2005).
2. I'll argue against interpretations on which Romantic being is merely 'the Being of the I', such as Larmore (2000: 154).
3. Beiser speaks of the absolute to bring out that his view of the whole is knowable, amenable to reason (albeit a higher, aesthetic form of reason), so that Romanticism anticipates Hegel's 'Absolute Idealism' on which reality is intelligible to reason (2002: 349–74). In contrast, Frank speaks of being to bring out his view that the 'ground of unity of mental and physical reality' is not discursively knowable but just is, in a way that transcends explanation and understanding (1997: 27). I will explain presently why I think that for the Romantics 'being' and 'the absolute' are actually synonymous.
4. This claim that we originally feel the absolute does not conflict with the Romantics' anti-foundationalism, because for the Romantics this feeling is not fully cognitive and so cannot provide the first principle of a philosophical system.
5. The key problem, for Fichte, is that the representing subject must already be self-conscious to be able to ascribe its representations to itself, but to be self-conscious the subject must – on Reinhold's account of consciousness – have a representation of itself which it ascribes to itself, requiring a prior level of self-consciousness, and so on in an infinite regress. Fichte's solution in his *Aenesidemus Review* is that the self-con-

sciousness that precedes and enables consciousness must consist not in the self's representation of itself as an object but rather in an immediate, intuitive self-acquaintance (AR 63/7–8; and see Henrich 1966).

6. In claiming that for the Romantics 'the absolute' is a real synthetic whole akin to Spinoza's substance, I disagree with Charles Larmore's and Fred Rush's view that, for Novalis at least, 'the absolute' or 'being' only denotes immediate pre-reflective self-acquaintance (Larmore 2000: 154; Rush 2006: 176–77). Fichte made knowledge of our immediate self-acquaintance the first principle of his 1794 system. Novalis objects that this self-acquaintance cannot be known. If knowledge (*Wissen*) is necessarily conscious (*bewusst*) and if, following Reinhold, consciousness involves a subject/object distinction, then any attempt to know immediate self-acquaintance must falsely describe it in terms of subject and object poles, even if these are described as united. If we cannot know our self-acquaintance, then we cannot derive a system from any knowledge thereof. We can only feel self-acquainted, Novalis concludes. Now for Rush and Larmore Novalis understands our original pre-reflective selfhood to be our ultimate ground and so to be 'the absolute', and the goal of our striving in so far as we seek endlessly to 'invert' ourselves back into self-feeling out of reflection. Novalis does sometimes use 'the absolute' in that way, speaking of the 'absolute I'. But he also uses 'the absolute' to refer to the whole of the universe, as we have seen. Moreover, this latter usage has a more central place in Novalis's (and Schlegel's) thought as a whole, for it explains why they think that we seek systematic knowledge of the connections between natural and mental phenomena, and why they try to contribute to providing this knowledge (e.g., with Novalis's *Brouillon*).

7. For Beiser the Romantics believe in aesthetic intuitive knowledge as well as discursive knowledge and hence do think we can know the absolute. Yet Schlegel is emphatic: 'Knowing already means a conditioned knowing. The unknowability of the absolute is therefore an identical triviality' (KFSa 18: #64, 511). Still, the Romantics do not see our feeling of the absolute as entirely non-cognitive, as we will see.

8. Frank and Jane Kneller argue that the Romantics agree with Kant that our form of sensibility precludes our knowing the absolute (Frank 2004: 29; Kneller 2006: 201–2).

9. At FS #211, 65, Novalis suggests that (spatio-temporal) intuition results from the organisation of feeling (or sense) under the imagination (and by implication, the latter being organised in conformity to the understanding).

10. On Novalis's familiarity with Jacobi, see Frank (2004: chs 4 and 9).

11. But for a different reconstruction of Jacobi's use of Kant, see Frank (2004: ch. 3).

12. In *David Hume* Jacobi concedes that certainty must be certain knowledge, contrary to the first edition of the Spinoza-Letters which opposed faith to knowledge as feeling/sensation to reason/concepts/judgement. In *David Hume* he says that faith gives us certain 'knowledge of actual existence' ([1815] 1994a: 255). He now claims that he always believed in immediate perceptual knowledge of real things but did not previously call this immediate perception 'knowledge' in deference to the doxa that knowledge must be judgemental and conceptual.

13. 'The sublime . . . is the appearance of the infinite – infinite abundance [*Fülle*] or infinite harmony . . . Sublime beauty [*Erhabne Schönheit*] affords a complete pleasure' (OSGP 69). 'Beautiful is what is at once charming and sublime' (AF #108, 30). And the 'highest beauty' is that of the 'infinite fullness of life [*Lebensfülle*]' as found in nature (PF #86, 101).

14. Novalis speaks of our imagining the absolute: 'the element of imagination . . . the one and only absolute anticipated – that is to be found through the negation of everything finite' (FS #567, 171).

15. 'In the whole everything must be whole' (FS #646, 185).

16. The phrase *partial totalities* is Songsuk Susan Hahn's (1997: 95). I am influenced by Hahn's account of how for Hegel the Idea of life is both beyond and within particular living organisms.

THREE

Friedrich Schlegel, Romanticism and the Re-Enchantment of Nature

Despite recent philosophical interest in Early German Romanticism,¹ relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to Early German Romantic conceptions of nature and the relationship between humanity and nature.² The Early German Romantics, Frederick Beiser notes, 'hoped to restore the beauty, magic and mystery of nature in the aftermath of the ravages of science and technology' (Beiser 1998).³ They perceived modernity to have estranged humanity from nature and 'disenchanted' nature by applying to it a narrowly analytic and reflective form of rationality. The Romantics thus essentially conceived their programme for cultural and aesthetic transformation to have the aim of re-enchanting nature and reconciling humanity with nature. This neglected aspect of Early German Romantic thought deserves examination and reconstruction, especially because the Romantic ambition to restore a sense of nature's mystery and magic anticipates the concern of some contemporary environmental philosophers to develop a conception of natural things as animated and so worthy of respect and care.

Indeed, scholars have noted that 'ecological critique . . . has its roots in Romantic philosophy' (Bowie 2003: 95). However, they often interpret this association negatively, based on a view that Romanticism is a reactive retreat from modernity into medievalism.⁴ This view is mistaken with respect to early German Romanticism, which endorses Enlightenment values of 'secularization, humanism, the libertarian and egalitarian values of republicanism, [and] the primacy of reason' (Critchley 1997: 85–86). As Simon Critchley remarks, though, the Romantics aimed to transform these values so as to overcome 'the disenchantment of the world that those values . . . [typically] bring about' (86). The Romantics, then, sought to create a culture that would re-envision nature as en-

chanted, but in a distinctively modern way. This makes early German Romanticism important for any current philosophy which hopes to re-conceive nature as animated without jettisoning the epistemic and political values of modernity.

The notion that nature has undergone ‘disenchantment’ and could be ‘re-enchanted’ may seem unhelpfully vague – as may, too, the notion of ‘modernity’. But we can derive a relatively precise understanding of these concepts from Schlegel’s work, on which this chapter focuses. For Schlegel, as I will show, humans ‘disenchant’ (*entzaubern*) nature if they perceive it as not at all mysterious but completely intelligible by reason. Conversely, humans would ‘enchant’ (*bezaubern*) nature by perceiving it as partly mysterious, not fully rationally comprehensible. For Schlegel, to perceive nature as partly mysterious is equally (given the German word for magic, *Zauber*) to see its behaviour as partly magical, deriving from sources that are occult to us. An ‘enchanted’ view of nature, on which the character and behaviour of natural phenomena can never be entirely grasped or predicted, also implies (as we will see) the appropriateness of care for these phenomena. Throughout, I will use ‘disenchantment’ and ‘re-enchancement’ in Schlegel’s senses, saying that someone disenchants or enchants – or holds disenchanting or enchanting views of – nature when they see it as (respectively) wholly rationally intelligible (‘disenchanted’) or partly mysterious (‘enchanted’); I say ‘partly’ for reasons that will emerge presently. I’ll also rely on Schlegel’s understanding of modernity as a post-medieval culture which endorses a cluster of values (freedom, criticism, egalitarianism) stemming from the specific form of rationality that becomes dominant in this culture – an analytic, reflective, form. This form of rationality, Schlegel thinks, encourages the belief that nature is wholly intelligible to reason; modern culture can be said to ‘disenchant’ nature by educating its members to practise rationality in this form.

I’ll focus on a series of Schlegel’s texts: *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, written in 1795, published in 1797; the *Critical and Athenaeum Fragments* of 1797 and 1798; the novel *Lucinde* of 1799; and the *Dialogue on Poetry*, also of 1799. Admittedly, Schlegel’s own writings are far from unified: he underwent considerable intellectual development from 1795 to 1800, and rarely argues systematically for the theories he endorses at each stage. But despite his fragmentary and highly allusive style (which, anyway, he adopts for complex theoretical reasons), Schlegel’s thinking concerning nature can be identified as falling into successive phases, each resolving philosophical difficulties within its predecessor. Schlegel, then, has no single understanding of nature’s disenchantment and re-enchancement, but a series of progressively improving understandings. I will reconstruct these in chronological order, exhibiting the problems within each and concluding with his most satisfactory account (from his *Dialogue on Poetry*).

First, I'll explore how Schlegel's early, pre-Romantic work criticises modern culture for propagating a form of rationality that leads to a disenchanting view of nature. Subsequently, Schlegel reconceives this modern form of rationality more positively, as making possible a new kind of literature – an ironic, fragmentary, Romantic poetry – which can reinvest natural phenomena with the very mystery of which analysis and reflection, in their more usual application, have deprived them. Because Romantic poetry aspires to knowledge of reality whilst ironically recognising the finitude of its perspective, it can portray natural phenomena as having a mysterious aspect, in that they point to an underlying reality which transcends knowledge. Romantic poetry thereby 'points to what is higher, the infinite, [it offers] a hieroglyph of the . . . holy fullness of life of creative nature [*bildenden Natur*]' (DP 106–7/334). However, Schlegel's account of the historical genesis of this form of rationality relies on a contrast between human freedom and natural necessity which embodies the same disenchanting view of nature which he seeks to surpass. He then overcomes this problem by reconceiving nature itself as poetic and creative, so that human beings create freely only by participating in nature's more primordial poetic processes. This final stage in Schlegel's thinking about the enchantment of nature is, I hope to show, his most coherent and satisfactory.⁵

I. MODERNITY AND THE DISENCHANTMENT OF NATURE

Schlegel's early, pre-Romantic essay 'On the Study of Greek Poetry' advances a wide-ranging critique of modern culture, affirming the aesthetic superiority of classical Greece. This essay forms the point of departure for Schlegel's thought about nature, since he criticises modern culture partly because it encourages a disenchanting conception of nature. By considering this essay (and others of Schlegel's early, classicist essays which amplify its claims), we can clarify his implicit understanding of the 'disenchantment' of nature and of the 're-enchantment' with which it contrasts. We can also clarify what Schlegel means by modernity: a post-medieval culture regulated by the specific – analytic, reflective – form of rationality which he calls the 'understanding', *der Verstand*. Having clarified these concepts, we can see how Schlegel takes modern culture to 'disenchant' nature, a criticism of modernity which prepares for his subsequent defence of Romantic poetry as the solution to modernity's problems.

Schlegel opens the essay by arguing that modern literature or 'poetry' has several 'characteristic traits' (OSGP 225/22) that make it inferior to ancient literature (he uses 'poetry' – *Poesie* – in the broad sense of artistic literature). Modern works are disunified: their various parts do not cohere together, and they generate in us an unsatisfied longing for unity. This disunity arises because modern works concentrate on depicting par-

ticular phenomena, individuals or events in great detail rather than subordinating the depiction of the particulars to the preservation of the work's symmetry and coherence. Modern works depict these particulars in sufficient detail, though, to exhibit their singularity and complexity, so that they become interesting (228/24). All these features render modern works imperfect: dissatisfying and internally discordant. Furthermore, many modern works are produced under the influence of theories and concepts, which render them sterile and mannered.

Since Schlegel sees modern poetry as the outgrowth of a coherent cultural formation, his criticisms of modern poetry embody a broader criticism of modern culture. Generally, he understands a 'culture' (*Bildung*) to be an all-embracing way of life, embodied in customs, art, science and political institutions, and in which its members become educated (*WSGR* 627). Specifically, modern culture (or modernity), for Schlegel, emerges in stages, culminating in the eighteenth century, from the 'barbaric' period that succeeded classical antiquity (*OSGP* 356/89). Modern culture has a cluster of characteristic values: republicanism and belief in freedom; secularisation; and cosmopolitan mixing of traditions (*AF* #214 and #216, 198; #231 and #233, 203; *OSGP* 225/22). These values derive from the central feature of modernity, its artificial (*künstlich*) character. Schlegel sometimes simply calls classical and modern culture 'natural' and 'artificial' (*WSGR* 635). Modernity is artificial in the sense that the principles guiding its development are concepts and theories drawn from the understanding (*OSGP* 232/26, 263/41; see also *GS* 35). Schlegel counts the understanding as artificial because its operations are not governed by nature but are free – the understanding directs its own operations, acting independently of nature (*OSGP* 229–30/24–25). The understanding, he remarks, is a specific type of rationality (*CF* #104, 159), not identifiable with rationality per se (*Vernunft*); understanding is the particular form that rationality assumes once it begins to operate independently of nature. His classicist writings imply that the understanding has the following defining features.

First, the understanding divides and analyses whatever it studies: 'The isolating understanding begins by dividing and dismembering [*vereinzelnd*] the whole of nature' (*OSGP* 245/32). 'The understanding arduously builds up the singular, and loses the whole'; it introduces *Zerstückelung* (dismemberment) (*GS* 34, 37). Second, the understanding is dispassionately reflective; consequently, a culture of understanding 'splits up' (*zerspaltet*) human beings by educating them to pursue reflection to the neglect of sensibility, passion and uninhibited action which, Schlegel assumes, can only issue from passion (*AW* 29). Within this culture, sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) is 'in a state of suppression'. These analytic and reflective powers shape modern literature, leading artists to focus on isolated particulars and to follow aesthetic theories and concepts dispassionately. The defects of modern literature thus reflect its production

under the aegis of the understanding: 'All . . . aspects of modern poetry can be explained entirely by this domination of the understanding, by this artificiality of our aesthetic culture' (OSGP 237/28).

Contained in Schlegel's criticisms of the aesthetic consequences of modern culture is the further objection that this culture disenchant's nature. We can see this by considering some of his claims about intelligibility. He holds that, in modernity (or *die neue Zeit*), the view becomes widespread that everything is wholly intelligible to the understanding (*verständlich*). This culture, Schlegel maintains, demands that 'the whole world [should] become wholly comprehensible [*verständlich*]' (KFSa 2: 370). This picture of modernity anticipates Weber's famous statement that in modernity 'there are no mysterious, incalculable forces that come into play, but . . . one can in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted' (Weber [1919] 1948: 139). Weber's statement implies that something is disenchanted just when its character and behaviour are assumed to admit exhaustively of being understood and calculated. Although it might appear anachronistic to attribute the same understanding of disenchantment to Schlegel, he does seem to presuppose it, for he contrasts the modern belief in nature's complete intelligibility to a contrasting conception of nature. Across several texts, he says that this conception, which speaks with a magical or enchanting word (*Zauberwort*) (DP 312), 'regards everything as a mystery [*Geheimnis*] and a wonder' (AF #121, 33). On this conception, 'everything is strange, significant [*bedeutend*] . . . and enveloped by mysterious enchantment [*geheimem Zauber*]' – all phenomena, including natural phenomena, are seen as (at least in part) magical and mysterious (KFSa 2: 130).⁶ Thus, this conception 'enchants' nature by denying that it is fully comprehensible by the understanding.

In Schlegel's early writings he takes it that the specific form of rationality which he calls the understanding encourages the disenchanting view of nature. Because the understanding analyses natural phenomena into their component parts, it makes the operations and interactions of those parts transparently intelligible, depriving those phenomena of the mystery and inexplicable agency they previously appeared to possess. The rise of the understanding, Schlegel writes, puts an end to the pre-modern experience of nature as infinitely rich, creative, inexhaustible – and, by implication, enchanted, incapable of being exhausted by analysis (GS 34, 38). Moreover, rational analysis requires that one hold back from an immediate emotional response to natural phenomena, adopting an attitude of dispassionate comprehension. Hence, Schlegel writes, the 'human understanding has a gap beyond the limits of knowledge' – it suppresses the immediate emotional responses to nature which prevailed in ancient Greece (40). Overall, he thinks that the reflective, analytical form of rationality which prevails in modern culture dissolves the mystery,

and the attendant emotive force, which humanity formerly found in natural phenomena.

Further evidence of Schlegel's picture of how modernity disenchant nature comes from his contrasting conception of ancient Greek culture, which he identifies as being natural rather than artificial (*OSGP* 276/48). This sounds odd, for Greece was still a culture and as such emerged through humanity's struggle to free itself from natural givenness and define its mode of life autonomously (*WSGR* 627). However, in Greece, 'the entire composite human drive is . . . the guiding principle of culture . . . the culture is natural and not artificial' (*OSGP* 287/55). The Greeks produced culture not only from their 'drive' (*Trieb*) to act freely but also from their natural impulses and powers. The Greeks reconciled these dual components of the 'drive' by producing cultural artefacts which portrayed freedom as embodied within given natural phenomena and places and within natural human impulses, thereby sanctioning reliance on those impulses as something compatible with freedom.

Schlegel's account of the Greeks suggests that they depicted the natural world as enchanted. Greek poetry portrays natural phenomena as embodying freedom, by seeing them as the incarnations of divine or quasi-divine beings: there is an 'inner connection between this [Greek] . . . poetic fullness of life and the . . . ancient pagan faith in nature' (*AW* 19). Particular places are seen as inhabited by gods and mythical beings, and natural forces and entities are seen as forms assumed by gods – for example, Poseidon inhabits and governs the sea, while Zeus can assume the form of a swan or a bull. Greek poetry is simultaneously mythology, seeing divinity as contained in all nature (*OSGP* 302–3/64). Crucially, Greek poetry sees natural phenomena as embodying or containing deities whose actions are spontaneous and unpredictable, therefore presuming that the behaviour of natural phenomena cannot be exhaustively understood through rational analysis of their parts. From the classical perspective, this behaviour must always remain partly mysterious. Even though Greek culture, qua mythological, offers a comprehensive scheme for making sense of nature in terms of traditional legends concerning the gods (277/49), this scheme itself presupposes the presence in nature of a dimension of (divine) spontaneity and unpredictability that will never fully yield to rational analysis.

Schlegel's key critical claim in *On the Study of Greek Poetry* is that modern culture is based exclusively on the understanding and not also on natural impulses. Having contrasted modernity with classical culture and traced the defects of modern poetry to those of modern culture as a whole, Schlegel claims that modern poetry can only surmount those defects by setting modern standards aside and emulating the harmony and symmetry of classical works. His early 'classicism' is a proposal not for narrowly literary change but for a poetry which would portray nature as free and enchanted, justifying renewed acceptance of our natural im-

pulses and inaugurating a less artificial culture as a whole. Since this aesthetic transformation would constitute a break with modernity, though, it cannot occur organically from within the modern world. Schlegel therefore claims that it must be induced by theoretical understanding of Greek poetry (347/84). However, this risks making his proposed new culture still typically modern, reliant on artificial concepts and rules. He therefore suggests that the theoretical understanding in question must itself be not analytic but holistic, in the sense that it regards all aspects of Greek culture as connected together to compose an indivisible whole. The problem, though, is that it is unclear how modern individuals, entrenched in analytic forms of reasoning, can produce this holistic theory: as he admits, classicists study isolated aspects of the ancient world and generally cannot suppress their penchant for individual details (*WSGR* 622, 625). Schlegel's proposal for a resurrection of classical culture is therefore unfeasible.⁷ He needs, instead, to reconceive modernity as containing opposing tendencies – not only inducing a disenchanting view of nature, but also unleashing forces which resist this disenchanting view. He achieves this with the theory of Romantic poetry sketched in his next writings.

II. ROMANTIC POETRY AND THE RE-ENCHANTMENT OF NATURE

In the *Critical and Athenaeum Fragments*, Schlegel re-evaluates modern poetry, suggesting that it can re-enchant nature in a distinctively modern way, corresponding to its distinctively fragmentary and reflective character, which he rethinks as its Romanticism. In Schlegel's revised view, Romantic literature depicts natural phenomena as partly mysterious by portraying them not as the embodiment of the gods but as indications of an unknowable, underlying reality. Moreover, Romantic poetry suggests that this underlying reality is nature as a whole, a mysterious, incomprehensibly creative force. Let us review the central features of Schlegel's theory of Romantic poetry, especially his central theory of Romantic irony, before considering how this poetry portrays natural phenomena as infused with mystery.

In 1796 to 1797, Schlegel re-evaluates the very traits of modern poetry he had formerly condemned; crystallising this re-evaluation, he reconceives modern literature as 'Romantic'. He famously defines Romantic literature as 'universal', in that it combines many genres and various subject matters, which it attempts to unify in single works (*AF* #116, 182–83). These elements are so diverse that they necessarily resist unification, so that Romantic works only ever strive for unity without attaining it. The Romantic work remains in a fragmentary state, yet insofar as it strives for unity it is 'progressive', in 'becoming'. Through this conception of Romantic literature, Schlegel redescribes the fragmentation, un-

satisfied yearning and reflective orientation of modern literature in positive terms. He does not consider Romantic poetry to oppose modernity, then, but rather to be quintessentially modern. (However, he denies that all works produced in the modern era are Romantic: although the essential tendency of poetry qua modern is to be Romantic, many second-rate works fail to realise this essential tendency.)

Romantic poetry's central feature, for Schlegel, is irony. Irony 'contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the unconditioned and the conditioned, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication . . . [it leads us to] fluctuate endlessly between belief and disbelief' (CF #108, 160). Any attempt to know and communicate about what Schlegel calls 'the absolute' or 'the infinite' can only be partial, offering a limited perspective upon it (what he means by 'the infinite' will be examined shortly). Irony comes about insofar as the text reflects upon and makes explicit its partiality, not only incessantly attempting to describe the infinite but also reflecting continuously upon its merely perspectival status, so that it 'hovers at the midpoint between the presented and the presenter' (AF #116, 182). Literary texts, for Schlegel, exemplify this ironic stance because – in Claire Colebrook's words – 'the literary work presents itself in the particularity and specificity of its point of view' (2002: 131), drawing attention to the subjective character of all its representations.

Initially, Romantic irony appears ill equipped to re-enchant nature. On traditional critical readings of Schlegelian irony, advanced by Hegel and Kierkegaard, it is premised on a Fichtean metaphysics according to which only the (absolute) ego or 'I' is ultimately real and everything else depends for its existence upon the I (A 1: 64/93; Kierkegaard [1841] 1989: 273). Supposedly, for Fichte, the absolute I necessarily posits the objective world or non-I which it then strives to recognise as its own product. Likewise, in Romantic irony, the self strives to 'annihilate' external existents – to expose their ultimate unreality – by displaying all its descriptions of reality as mere perspectives which it can 'set up and dissolve . . . out of its own caprice', or so Hegel alleges (A 1: 65/94). Hence, Hegel and Kierkegaard conclude, the ironist denies intrinsic reality and value to anything outside the self, including nature – a position which seemingly intensifies the denial of any mystery and inaccessibility in nature. This traditional reading has been widely criticised, however, since Schlegel believes that literature attempts to gain and give knowledge of an 'infinite' reality which, he assumes, *does* exist. Yet perhaps this infinite reality is really only that of the *absolute* I – not the finite self, which is distinguished from the objects of which it is conscious, but the unlimited I which, on one understanding of Fichte's metaphysics, logically precedes the self/object opposition that it institutes.⁸

Schlegel, though, always had intellectual sympathies which oppose this Fichtean view: in 1793 in a letter to his brother August, he already

equated 'the truth' not with the absolute I but with 'eternal nature', which he also called 'the great hiddenness' (quoted in *PL* xvi). Despite his (subsequent) attraction to Fichte, from mid-1796 Schlegel increasingly rejected Fichte's metaphysics, above all due to his professed 'loyalty to the universe' (*KFSA* 2: #26, 164).⁹ Schlegel, along with other Romantic thinkers, had reached the view that, since the absolute precedes the subject/object contrast, it cannot be identified with subjectivity, but must be some deeper, unitary reality that underwrites both subject and object, the character of which remains necessarily unknowable by us as subjects. Poetry, then, arises in and as the expression of our endeavour to know this infinite reality; and poetry becomes ironic in exposing that we can only ever access this reality partially, perspectively. Nonetheless, in exposing that reality lies beyond our cognitive reach, irony generates a 'sense of the infinite [*Sinn fürs Unendliche*]' (*AF* #41, 243) – it points towards infinite reality, albeit as not fully knowable. This instils a renewed longing to know the infinite, impelling further – unsuccessful – poetic efforts to do so. This striving to know the infinite, then, need not rest on a Fichtean metaphysics on which the I strives to unmask the non-I's ultimate unreality. For Schlegel, by contrast, the self strives, unsuccessfully, to transcend its limitations and cognitively access reality itself.

How does Romantic poetry's generation of a 'sense of the infinite' re-enchant nature? Schlegel's writings indicate two ways in which this occurs. First, insofar as Romantic texts describe natural phenomena, they portray those phenomena as pointing to an inaccessible underlying reality. This renders those phenomena partly mysterious, for they come to signify (*bedeuten*) something beyond them that remains obscure. Schlegel claims that a Romantic work should be 'true to fact and truthful in the realm of the visible and full of secret meaning and relation to the invisible' (*DP* 90/270). Writers try to know the absolute, but can only access and describe visible, finite, natural things; yet in describing these finite things, writers convey a sense that the infinite is located beyond them. In this way, the Romantic text 'tries . . . to enchant (*bezaubern*) the mind' (*AF* #429, 250) – to fill the mind with a sense of the mystery of natural phenomena.

Notably, Schlegel also suggests that, in Romantic poetry, finite things indicate (*hindeuten*) the 'fullness of life of creative nature' (*DP* 107/334): that is, Romantic poetry engenders a sense that infinite reality is creative nature. This seems to contradict his view that the infinite is unknowable. However, he believes that, because the infinite is irreducible to any or all of the finite natural phenomena which we can know (perspectively), we gain a sense that the infinite has an inexhaustible richness (*Lebensfülle*) in virtue of which it stands to the finite realm as *natura naturans* (creative nature) does to *natura naturata* (created nature). Although infinite reality is unknowable, when we sense its unknowability we confer upon it the connotation of nature as an incomprehensibly rich and dynamic power.

Hence: 'Every fact must have a strict individuality, [but also] be both a mystery and an experiment . . . of creative nature' (AF #427, 249). As a whole, Romantic poetry, first, depicts particular natural things as having a mysterious kind of meaning, and, second, engenders a sense that reality – in its transcendence of finite, knowable things – is an incomprehensibly creative nature bursting with 'holy fullness'.

At the same time, natural things are only depicted as *partly*, not wholly, mysterious because they are also portrayed in their 'strict individuality' and in terms of 'truth to fact in the realm of the visible'. That is, they are depicted at once as everyday, intelligible items admitting of rational analysis *and* as having a further dimension that points elsewhere. Schlegel's project is not to abandon rational analysis altogether but to find ways of re-enchanting nature within a modern, analytically inclined culture.

If we are puzzled by the idea that literature gives and expresses knowledge of reality rather than, say, concerning fictional worlds, we should bear in mind that for Schlegel – as for Hegel after him – art and literature fundamentally present *truth* about reality, in some sense. While literature of course deals with fictional characters, places, objects, events, situations, and more, these are generally imagined instances of types of which there are also real instances in the outer world. For example, fictional forests are instances of the type *forest* of which real instances also exist in nature. (Of course, literature may also directly present real phenomena such as the city of Berlin.) In the way that the fictional instances present these phenomena – say, as invested with mystery – these works simultaneously suggest that the corresponding real phenomena have the same character too; for example, of being mysterious. Literary works, in short, present the things they describe as having a certain overall metaphysical character, and in doing so they suggest that this is the character that the real, mind-independent things of the same kind have too.

Schlegel does not spell out the ethical implications of this reconception of nature as enchanted, but they can be inferred, as they were by his fellow Romantic, the writer and critic Ludwig Tieck. Tieck concludes from Schlegel's epistemological reflections that we should acknowledge our cognitive limits, adopting a stance of epistemic modesty (see Tieck 1855: vol. 2, 250), quoted in Frank (1988: 298). For Tieck, to acknowledge our limits is, simultaneously, to 'forebear' from 'illuminating too harshly [nature's] gentle twilight' (Tieck 1985– : vol. 12, 228) – to refuse to make the mistake of treating natural phenomena as fully intelligible. Tieck supposes that such forbearance also requires 'care' for natural phenomena, in a double sense: respect for their mysteriously significant dimension, and circumspection about acting upon them insofar as their behaviour can never entirely be predicted.

The Romantic view of enchanted nature which Schlegel proposes remains fundamentally modern. He no longer proposes that we should return to the classical poetic paradigm in which natural phenomena are

taken to embody gods whose activities, although unpredictably spontaneous, are narrated under familiar mythic schemes. Romantic poetry instead portrays natural phenomena as not merely everyday objects but also 'hieroglyphs' of an unknowable reality. Anticipating this contrast between ancient and modern ways of seeing natural phenomena as enchanted, Schlegel had in *On the Study of Greek Poetry* already stated that ancient poetry depicts 'the visible divinity of man' rather than the 'divinity of a nature that lies beyond the eternal veil no mortal can peer through' (OSGP 329/77). The contrast is between a divinity incarnated in human and non-human nature and made familiar through traditional legends, and an infinite reality which exceeds comprehension and which is not incarnated in particular natural phenomena but indicated by them as something that lies beyond them.

Although Schlegel does not make this explicit, he believes that Romantic poetry enchants natural phenomena in this distinctively modern way because this poetry results from the analytic and reflective form of rationality that prevails in modernity. First, reflection is the necessary precondition of irony: it enables the poet to temper his enthusiasm for knowing about reality with dispassionate reflection on the partiality of his efforts. Second, analysis is at work when Romantic texts describe phenomena in exhaustive individual detail. Yet as a result, they give so much detail as to preclude any overall understanding, which again exposes the limitations of our cognitive powers and instils a sense that infinite reality remains unknowable. Thus, the very features of modern rationality – reflectiveness and analysis – which Schlegel had in his classicist writings blamed for disenchanting natural phenomena, he now takes to enable and generate an essentially modern form of poetry which re-invests those phenomena with mystery in a modern way. Schlegel's call to overcome modernity's disenchantment of nature is not a retreat from modernity, but rests on the idea that the modern form of rationality contains opposing tendencies: its reflective and analytic elements encourage the view that nature is wholly intelligible, but they also enable a kind of poetry which opposes that very view. Schlegel urges artists to produce a body of literature of this kind which, he hopes, would transform our experience of the natural world around us (a transformation that would remain compatible with modern values of freedom and critical thought). This Romantic programme for overcoming the disenchantment of nature is preferable to Schlegel's classicist account, for it is clear how the programme is realisable within modernity. Yet Schlegel's theory of Romantic re-enchantment still has significant problems, which we should explore.

III. PROBLEMS WITH SCHLEGEL'S CONCEPTION OF RE-ENCHANTMENT

The first problem concerns Schlegel's idea that Romantic literature is a product of the artist's freedom. He thinks that whereas classical literature is partly a natural expression of the artist's instincts (*AF* #51, 172–73), modern poetry issues from that complete freedom from nature that manifests itself in modern authors' abilities to analyse and reflectively withdraw from their conceptions. Schlegel regards these abilities as functions of the exercise of human freedom, as he makes explicit in his *Ideas* of 1800, stating bluntly that 'reason is free'. Accordingly, he writes, the Romantic poet must understand his endeavours in terms of the 'creative philosophy which starts from . . . belief in freedom, and then shows how the human spirit impresses its law on all things and how the world is its work of art' (*AF* #168, 192). Evidently, Schlegel presumes that modern individuals really have developed a capacity to act freely and independently of nature, a separation which arises, historically, through the breakdown of the classical synthesis between freedom and natural drives.

Schlegel's account of this breakdown is that ancient culture reached a stage when human freedom broke from nature's 'guardianship' and became independent (*WSGR* 633). This historical account presupposes that there is an original duality between humanity's 'drive' to freedom and its natural drives. Here Schlegel effectively sets freedom in opposition to a nature that is implicitly defined, by contrast, as unfree – presumably in the sense of comprising an endless sequence of causal interactions. These assumptions are displayed when Schlegel says of Romantic poetry, 'it alone is free; and it recognises as its first law that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself' (*AF* #116, 183). Poetry is the only art that genuinely expresses freedom because it relies on the humanly produced media of 'fantasy' and 'arbitrary sign-language', and so has no admixture of nature (*OSGM* 265/42, 294/59). By implication, nature is a locus of unfreedom, of 'external [causal] influence' (265/42). This view that nature is unfree is part and parcel of the very idea of nature as a realm of fully intelligible, predictable interactions which Schlegel seeks to overcome.¹⁰

To distance himself from this disenchanting view of nature, he must argue that nature itself, in some way, *already* evinces spontaneous creative agency. He needs, as he notes: 'To observe nature as a whole which, in itself, is infinitely purposive' (*PL* #308, 149). From this perspective, human freedom would have to be rethought not as opposed to nature but as a manifestation, or derivative form, of a more generalised creativity located within the natural world. Schlegel's subsequent writings will pursue this rethinking.

Before considering this, though, we should turn to a second problem: Does Schlegel naively overestimate the power of poetry to transform our

everyday life and experience of nature? If Romantic poetry depends on a form of rationality the non-poetic exercise of which leads to a disenchanting view of nature, then this poetry can arise only in a social context in which the disenchanting view is widely held. Consequently, even if poetry can change how we experience nature, this experience seems liable to be overwhelmed by the prevalent disenchanting view.

Schlegel outlines an interesting solution to this problem. He suggests that other intellectual disciplines and forms of knowledge are developing, internally, to become increasingly poetic: 'The boundaries of science and art . . . are so confused that even the conviction that these eternal boundaries are unchangeable has generally begun to falter' (*OSGP* 219/18). And this is a development that Romantic poetry can hasten by opening itself to simultaneous fusion with those other fields. Schlegel argues this, most importantly, apropos of natural science, which is often identified as a principal source of nature's disenchantment.

Natural science is a recurring theme in the *Athenaeum Fragments*.¹¹ In one fragment Schlegel states that many scientific explanations either explain nothing or 'obscure' everything (*AF* #82, 177), implying that science often reflects the modern predisposition towards meticulous analyses that obscure the mystery of natural phenomena. Sometimes, though, scientific explanations give a 'hint' of reality – a growing tendency which, for Schlegel, makes science increasingly poetic. He compares recent discoveries in chemistry to *bon mots* – inspired, witty insights into hidden connections (#220, 200) – whose scientific discoverers are, actually, artists (#381, 236). To appreciate Schlegel's point, his comments must be situated in their contemporary scientific context. Numerous phenomena had been discovered – oxygen in 1774 and electricity in 1789, while Lavoisier had experimented with broader processes of chemical mixing and separation – but so recent were these discoveries that, as yet, no generally accepted and fully satisfactory theoretical frameworks existed to understand them. Consequently, Schlegel could maintain that contemporary chemists are discovering patterns of chemical attraction which surpass analytic understanding, pointing to underlying connections and affinities which, themselves, transcend comprehension. Scientific research generates only an obscure sense of these connections, just as Romantic poetry gives only a sense of the infinite.

By hinting at the reality underlying natural processes and phenomena, science (Schlegel believes) is superseding the disenchanting form that it had acquired with the rise of the Newtonian paradigm and the elimination of poetic and mythic elements from scientific writing which took place from the seventeenth century onwards.¹² Now, in contrast, 'the ultimate goal of physics must be mythology. – The highest presentation of physics necessarily becomes a novel' (*PL* ##378–79, 155). Schlegel urges scientists to advance this poetic tendency by drawing openly on literary inspiration. Similarly, many contemporary German biologists, influenced

by Romanticism, believed ‘the aesthetic comprehension [in, say, an artist’s sketch] of the entire organism or of the whole interacting environment [to] be a necessary preliminary stage in . . . scientific analysis’ (Richards 2002: 12). Schlegel did not believe, then, that poetry must struggle to change our experience of nature in the face of scientific currents that disenchant it. Rather, for him, contemporary science intrinsically tends towards seeing nature as partly mysterious, a tendency with which poetry has only to co-operate.

Romantic poetry should synthesise itself with science, for Schlegel, and do so by acknowledging and accentuating its own intrinsically ‘chemical’ form.¹³ Schlegel assumes that in chemical processes, substances strive to realise their hidden affinities and to dissolve their separation, but, even when they unite, they only produce new, discrete items to be drawn into fresh chemical cycles. He takes this chemical interplay between mixing and separation to have the same structure as Romantic poetry, which positions the infinite as ‘the result of eternally separating and uniting powers’ and so ‘thinks of [its] ideals . . . as being chemical’ (*AF* #412, 243). In chemical processes, bodies try to overcome their separation (likewise, the poetic self tries to overcome its limitations and know about the infinite), but bodies only end up forming another finite body (likewise, the self realises that its attempted knowledge was merely perspectival). Since poetry produces the sense of the infinite through this oscillation, Schlegel claims that this sense is produced ‘chemically’ and, by extension, that poetry portrays the infinite *as* chemical – as consisting in the same type of hidden connection at which chemical processes hint.

Schlegel’s account of the growing similarity between poetry and science exemplifies his broader view that, across the whole range of intellectual fields, attempted applications of analysis and reflection are re-creating a view of nature as partly mysterious – in this way the entire modern age is chemical (*AF* #426, 248). But perhaps Schlegel’s assessment of modern intellectual trends is too optimistic – especially given the extensive repudiation of Romantic science by later nineteenth-century scientists and their elaboration of a unified mathematical framework for explaining chemistry and electricity. However, perhaps he would reply that later scientists have exposed new mysteries in turn.

Be this as it may, Schlegel’s idea that Romantic texts have the form of series of chemical processes opens up a route for thinking of natural processes as creative and so for avoiding his problematic opposition of human freedom to natural necessity. If the poetic process of striving to know the infinite has a chemical structure, this implies that the identically structured chemical processes which suffuse all of nature – since, for Schlegel, the ‘whole of nature divides itself into products, processes, and elements’ (*PL* #304, 148) – also have a poetic or proto-poetic structure. These processes are proto-poetic because, through their interactions, they hint at a hidden, underlying reality: ‘The true phenomenon is a represen-

tative of the infinite, therefore an allegory, a hieroglyph – therefore also a fact' (#380, 155). By developing this idea that natural processes are poetic in themselves, Schlegel can attribute to them an inherent creativity in virtue of which they already approximate to and prefigure human freedom. He pursues this idea in his ensuing set of writings, especially *Lucinde* and the *Dialogue on Poetry*.

IV. THE POETRY OF NATURE

By developing the idea that natural processes are poetic, Schlegel succeeds in rethinking the natural world as creative and reconceiving human freedom to consist in participation in nature's underlying creativity. However, the idea that natural processes are poetic proves to be not straightforwardly compatible with his previous philosophical framework. As I will explain, this new idea implies that infinite nature *can* be known in its real creativity, which obliges Schlegel to revise his whole understanding of how Romantic poetry re-enchants nature. Ultimately, this revision produces his most satisfactory conception of re-enchantment.

Schlegel's novel *Lucinde* appears, initially, to apply his pre-existing theory of Romantic poetry and its re-enchantment of nature. At one point, for example, Lucinde's central character Julius sinks into a dream-like state: his imagination takes over, he finds the external world 'transfigured and purer: above [him] the blue canopy of the sky, below . . . the green carpet of the rich earth, soon teeming with happy shapes' (L 19/57). All natural things appear as allegories of a 'spiritual breath' hovering over them (59/104). These comments seem to fit with Schlegel's earlier view that poetry portrays natural phenomena as pointing to an unknowable reality. But in fact the comments are embedded within a theoretical framework which significantly modifies that of the *Athenaeum Fragments*. It does so, first, in stressing the artist's passivity, and second, in understanding nature and poetry on the model of the plant and not chemical processes.

Just as Julius imagines by sinking into a passive, dreamlike state, likewise Lucinde's 'Idyll of Idleness' suggests that creativity arises from passive submission to the non-conscious workings of one's nature (25–26/64). Genuine artists allow works to gestate within themselves without intervention. They also allow the formation of works to be influenced by chance events. Whereas the *Athenaeum Fragments* emphasise the modern poet's freedom and rationality, Lucinde urges him to submit to non-rational elements, a submission that should ideally be unimpeded by reflection. The 'Idyll' unfavourably contrasts Prometheus, who creates 'mechanically' by following artificially imposed rules, with Hercules, who creates by allowing his natural impulses to prevail and develop

organically (28–29/66–68). Lucinde therefore stresses the artist's need to reject conventional, artificial values that cramp his nature.

The claim that creativity consists in passivity sounds odd – surely creation involves activity. Schlegel's point, though, is that the artist best creates if he desists from deliberate action and – passively – allows his non-rational nature to exercise *its* creativity (which, *qua* creativity, is indeed active). This natural process of creating is a vegetal process, for Schlegel: the poet should let the work grow and take shape through a plant-form process of natural growth and self-formation. As the *Dialogue on Poetry* says, 'Poetry blooms forth [*hervorblüht*] from itself out of the invisible original force of humanity' (DP 285). Schlegel's assumption is that plants grow non-consciously, from instinct, in a gradual and incremental fashion that incorporates chance influences. On this basis, he re-thinks Romantic poetry as having the form of a plant – resulting from gradual, contingent growth. Schlegel's earlier idea that the Romantic work unsuccessfully strives for unity becomes recast as the idea that the work continually grows and proliferates parts that never achieve the stable interrelatedness and functionality by which the organs of an animal body secure its coherent unity.¹⁴

Moreover, for Schlegel, the poetic work is not merely like a plant but actually results from vegetal growth within the artist. This vegetal creativity of the artist is an offshoot of a generalised vegetal creativity that Schlegel finds throughout nature, noting: 'The world as a whole, and originally, is a plant' (PL #332, 151). This strange idea that the world is a plant occurs within a loose series of unpublished fragments which hint that the natural world is free, developing, purposive and composed of interlinked processes (#304–80, 148–51). Read in this context, and in relation to *Lucinde*, the idea that the world is a plant suggests that all natural processes are vegetal, in the sense that natural things continuously strive to interweave into coherent bodies and groupings, but never achieve stable, unified organisation. Instead, they only move towards such unity, and so display the same form of creativity that is manifest in Romantic poetry. Hence, the 'artificial works or natural productions that bear the form and name of poems . . . what are they in comparison with the formless and unconscious poetry which reigns in the plant, radiates in the light . . . ? – Yet this is first, original, without it there could certainly be no poetry of words' (DP 285). 'All the holy plays of art are only distant imitations of the infinite play of the world, the eternally self-forming [*bildende*] art-work' (324). Human beings can be creative insofar as they participate in these more 'original' processes within nature. Schlegel's idea that natural processes are creative and poetic thereby recasts the human freedom to create art (and to create and redefine the self culturally) as a manifestation of nature's overarching creativity.

Although Schlegel's idea that natural processes are creative overcomes his earlier contrast between freedom and nature, this idea is not

straightforwardly compatible with his pre-existing philosophical framework. Certainly, he had already affirmed that Romantic poetry engenders a sense that infinite reality is nature which is creative and inexhaustibly full, *natura naturans*. But within this preceding framework, one does not know reality to be creative nature, but only senses it to be creative nature insofar as one senses that it surpasses understanding, inexhaustibly transcending all finite, knowable things and processes. Now, Schlegel also attributes creativity to finite human individuals *qua* natural and to the other finite, particular processes of nature. According to his earlier epistemology, the infinite would transcend finite creative processes, the creativity of the latter giving no knowledge of that of the former. Yet now, Schlegel assumes that our knowledge of finite creative processes does give us the knowledge that (as he puts it) the world as a whole (that is, as infinite) is a plant and an infinitely, eternally, developing artwork. Particular things, he also states in the *Dialogue on Poetry*, provide 'means to the intuition [*Anschauung*] of the whole' (DP 323).

Why has he moved away from his earlier conviction that the infinite cannot be known? He now sees natural things and processes as directly creative, their creativity being immediately visible in their self-forming behaviour. These things, therefore, no longer merely signify (*hindeuten*), a creativity that lies beyond them. These things and processes manifest a creativity which, existing in identical form within all of them, is not a finite particular but a universal, and which is immediately visible in the behaviour of these particulars, present to our inspection (*Anschauung*). Just as finite creative processes can be known, so can the universal creativity of nature be known insofar as it is embodied and manifested within them. On Schlegel's new view, then, one does not merely form a sense that unknowable reality is creative: one can know that infinite reality is nature that is creative; and know, specifically, that nature as a whole creates poetic significance through incremental and gradual processes of vegetal growth. This character of creative nature can be known because it is manifest within particular vegetal processes. Hence, Schlegel says, these processes trace the 'history' of nature's 'free becoming' – making nature's creativity knowable (PL #386 and #390, 155–56).

Schlegel's movement away from the belief that the absolute is unknowable is also shown in his *Dialogue on Poetry* when he argues that the Idealism' of his earlier Romanticism must be synthesised with an 'equally unlimited realism' (DP 315/98). He clarifies what he means by his 'Idealism' by reprising his earlier Romantic theory: modern culture lacks the mythology that prevailed in classical times, a mythology which arose through the ancients' direct perception of spiritual forms within the 'sensible world' (312/96). Modern poets must create a new mythology artificially, by applying the irony and analysis which generate a recognition that reality lies unknowably beyond finite things. In the *Dialogue on Poetry*, then, Schlegel defines his Romantic theory as 'Idealistic' because on it

we can only cognitively approach the infinite through perspectival conceptions of finite things, but cannot know the infinite as it really is, independently of our perspectives upon it. To clarify how this Idealism must fuse with realism, Schlegel reconsiders the poetry/science relationship, reiterating that physics increasingly formulates 'dynamic paradoxes' and opens up 'sacred revelations of nature', while poetry, equally, must become scientific (322/101). Since he aligns this physics/poetry confluence with that of realism and Idealism, he apparently assumes that physics adopts a 'realist' standpoint, which purports to describe nature as it really is – a standpoint which, for Schlegel, poetry must come to share. How is Romantic poetry to describe nature as a whole as it really is?

Schlegel's answer can be reconstructed from his literary practice in *Lucinde*, specifically from the changed function he gives to irony. The novel still uses irony to expose the partiality of the writer's perspective, spurring further attempts to know the infinite. But this results in a process by which the work emerges incrementally and vegetally, and this process confers knowledge of the vegetal creativity of nature as a whole. By experiencing the developmental relations between the parts of the work, one comes to know the creativity of nature, which is exemplified in (that of) the work. Irony, then, serves to stimulate the poetic text's growth. This reflects an emergent Schlegelian view that the role of reflective, analytic rationality in poetic creation is to (repeatedly) cancel itself out. 'The highest, most complete life would be nothing other than pure vegetating [*Vegetieren*]' (L 27/66) – the ideal poet allows non-rational nature to be creative – so reflection and analysis can only function positively within art if they are used, in some way, to negate themselves. This happens in irony, which uses reflection to check the operation of the understanding and create space for a process of poetic growth which proceeds, vegetally, from the artist's nature. Hence, Schlegel writes, the poet achieves 'an intentional, arbitrary, and one-sided [ironically induced] passivity, but still passivity'.

Granting that Romantic poetry, physics, and other disciplines, in their respective ways, provide knowledge of creative nature as a whole, how does Schlegel's revised framework incorporate Idealism – which, to recall, he has defined in the *Dialogue on Poetry* as the belief that infinite reality surpasses knowledge? The answer can be gleaned from a 1799 note in which he adopts the apparently different definition that Idealist views of nature know it to be *free* (PL #390, 156). By this definition, his own view of nature, which knows it to be creative and spontaneous, is Idealist. But this is consistent with his definition of Idealism in the *Dialogue*. He counts his view of nature as 'Idealist' because it knows that nature has a creative, spontaneous, character such that its dynamic processes cannot be wholly understood, nor their course entirely predicted – thus knowing (paradoxically) that nature resists full comprehension. Thus, Schlegel's view of nature is both realist – holding that we can have

knowledge of nature as a creative, vegetal force, manifesting itself in myriad particular processes – and Idealist – for this knowledge includes the knowledge that nature necessarily remains, to a significant extent, mysterious to us, precisely in respect of its creativity and spontaneity. He therefore calls his view of nature ‘idealist realism’ (*DP* 315/98). Within this framework, he preserves the idea that Romantic poetry, and other fields of knowledge inasmuch as they increasingly resemble Romantic poetry, describe nature as partly mysterious and thereby ‘enchant’ it.

Schlegel’s ‘Idealist realist’ account of re-enchantment can advance the environmentalist project of reconceiving natural things as animated and therefore meriting respect. Several environmental philosophers have argued that the mechanistic worldview that became dominant in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, on which nature is inherently inert material stuff, licensed unrestrained manipulation or exploitation of this bare stuff (see Merchant 1982 and Marcuse 1964: esp. 157–58). These philosophers conclude that, to resolve environmental problems, we above all need an alternative worldview on which natural entities have their own agency and freedom (see, e.g., Plumwood 2002: 50–57). This conception of nature would be re-enchanting, portraying natural phenomena as being partly mysterious in virtue of their independent spontaneity, and, therefore, as deserving respectful and circumspect treatment. The worry might be that such conceptions herald a return to pre-modern worldviews in which natural things act from purposes installed by God or express obscure series of correspondences in meaning. Because these worldviews have religious, hierarchical and esoteric overtones, they are not readily compatible with modern values of secularism, individual freedom, criticism and self-criticism. In contrast, on Schlegel’s ‘Idealist realist’ account of re-enchantment, modernity’s distinctive form of rationality is necessary to Romantic poetry and its re-enchanting view of nature. Romantic poetry does not oppose modernity but uses reflection and analysis to liberate a process of natural growth through which nature can be known as creative and so, too, as significantly mysterious, hence enchanted. Schlegel thus retains the idea that Romantic literature has a specially modern way of infusing nature with mystery. For this kind of literature does not depict natural phenomena as embodying the agency of the gods, as classical works do, but embodies and reveals the creativity of nature itself, as an infinitely self-forming, spontaneous power. This form of re-enchantment is distinctively modern because it depends upon the exercise of rationality in its modern form, and hence can only exist together with the attendant manifestations of this form of rationality in values of criticism, secularisation, and individual freedom. Schlegel’s final conception of re-enchantment is therefore his most satisfactory, preserving the strengths of his Idealist account – above all its explanation of how nature’s re-enchantment is possible within modernity – while abandoning his previous, problematic assumption that nature is unfree and

predictable. Moreover, this conception contributes significantly to contemporary environmental philosophy, outlining a way to preserve the central values of modernity while reconceiving nature as spontaneously creative, partially mysterious, and therefore worthy of respect and care.

NOTES

1. See, amongst others, on Romantic aesthetics and literary theory, Bowie (1997) and Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy [1979] (1988); on epistemology and metaphysics, Beiser (2002: 349–461), Frank (1997) and Pinkard (2002: 131–71); on ethics, Eldridge (2001) and Larmore (1996).

2. However, see Becker and Manstetten (2004), and Bowie (1995), who argues that the Romantics sought to overcome the subject's domination of nature by highlighting the subject's lack of transparency to itself. In contrast, I stress the Romantic idea that *nature* is inexhaustibly mysterious. On the related area of Romanticism and natural science, see Cunningham and Jardine (1990), Richards (2002), and, on Schlegel specifically, Chaouli (2002).

3. Beiser's reference to technology might sound anachronistic, but the Romantics were sensitive to current technological developments such as mining – Novalis, after all, studied mining technology and worked as a director of salt mines.

4. Andrew Feenberg, for example, expresses the standard worry that criticising technology makes someone into a 'romantic technophobe', describing Romanticism as a 'retreat from the technical sphere into art, religion, or nature' (1999: 153, 152).

5. Calling this 'final' sounds odd, since Schlegel continued writing until his death in 1829. Yet after the *Dialogue on Poetry*, his view of nature does not fundamentally change; rather, he increasingly understands nature's creativity as life, force and energy. In the 1800–1801 *Lectures on Transcendental Idealism*, he identifies the reality underlying both subject and object with a single, energetic, life force. In the 1827 *Philosophy of Life*, he again describes nature as a 'dynamic, living, force' manifest in particular processes and phenomena (*KFS* 10: 66). So I call his *Dialogue* framework 'final' because it guides all his subsequent thinking concerning nature.

6. Schlegel is referring to the conception of the world he finds in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* – a novel which, at this time, he finds paradigmatic of the romantic.

7. As Stuart Barnett concludes, *On the Study of Greek Poetry* 'does not successfully outline how a synthesis between antiquity and modernity might be achieved . . . [because] the antinomy between the two seems irreconcilable' (2002: 13).

8. For example, Kai Hammermeister claims that, for Schlegel, the self 'never arrives at full self-knowledge or self-certainty, but remains elusive [to itself], the object of . . . longing' (2002: 83). Although, on this reading, romantic irony deflates the self's power by allowing only that it can feel – but not know – itself, it still sees only the self as ultimately real.

9. On this reason for Schlegel's disillusionment with Fichte, see Beiser (2002: 443).

10. For more on Schlegel's contrast between free poetry and unfree nature, see Bernstein (2003b: xxvii–xxix).

11. Schlegel's term *Wissenschaft* refers to any systematic form of knowledge, but context makes clear when he means specifically natural science, which he also sometimes calls *Physik*.

12. On the historical process of purging modern science of poetry, see Schiebinger (1989: 150–51).

13. Chaouli shows how Schlegel 'conceiv[es] of verbal artworks as chemical experiments' (2002: 11), taking chemical processes of unexpected mixing and separation as a model for how words and parts of words unpredictably combine (see, esp., 26, 121, 126).

14. See Miller (2001) on how the Romantics generally took the plant – which they contrasted with the animal – to be emblematic of subjectivity understood as creative, never fully unified.

FOUR

Being, Knowledge and Nature in Novalis

It is now widely recognised that Early German Romanticism makes important contributions in epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics, but there is considerable disagreement on what its central philosophical positions are. According to one of its most influential interpreters, Manfred Frank (1997), the German Romantics believe that the unity of being underlies finite phenomena, and that we can only strive towards, and never achieve, knowledge of being. In contrast, Frederick Beiser argues that for the Romantics the unitary reality underlying finite phenomena can be known, because it is a self-realising organic whole which develops in an intelligible way (2002: 349–461; 2004). Here I want to provide support for a third interpretation of Early German Romanticism through a reading of Novalis’s writings on nature. I shall argue that, from 1795 to 1800, Novalis advances from believing that being is in itself unknowable to finite human knowers to believing that we can know reality, ultimately, to be self-organising nature – but that, because nature organises itself spontaneously, we cannot understand or explain why it assumes the particular forms of organisation that it does. Thus, on Novalis’s mature view, nature is partly knowable, insofar as it develops organically, but partly unknowable, insofar as it develops spontaneously. The evolution in Novalis’s thinking becomes apparent once we appreciate his central aim of showing how we could re-acquire a (presently lost) experience of natural phenomena as ‘enchanted’ – meaningful, mysterious and animated by spirit.¹ As it transpires, Novalis can satisfactorily move past our presently ‘disenchanted’ view of natural things only by arguing that all these things correspond meaningfully with one another, correspondences, he then explains, which manifest the spontaneous self-organisation of nature as a whole.

The shift in how Novalis thinks of being and nature is not only of historical interest but also bears on the question of whether, and how, we should revalue the natural world. Arguably, modern Western conceptions of nature implicitly devalue it and therefore result in environmentally damaging practices. Perhaps, then, we should revalue non-human natural beings by recognising that they display agency, creativity and rational intelligibility – qualities traditionally seen as sources of value exclusively in humans. Yet this approach seems to assume that natural things can have value only insofar as they resemble or approximate to humans. So perhaps, instead, we should revalue natural things by recognising that they are unknowably different from us, and merit wonder and respect on that account. However, on its own, the principle that we should respect the mystery of nature seems too thin to provide everything that is required for renewed ethical appreciation of nature. This appreciation must consist in something more complex: a combination of the perception that nature is mysterious with a perception that, in other respects, it exercises creativity and rationality of a recognisable kind. Novalis's mature thought provides a way to combine these perspectives.

The chapter is structured as follows. In section II, I offer an initial account and evaluation of Frank's and Beiser's interpretations of Romanticism. This is necessary because a plausible reading of a Romantic thinker must build on these interpretations, while also identifying and correcting their limitations. Moreover, because these interpretations illuminate the philosophical significance of Early German Romanticism (namely, its intervention into post-Kantian debates about knowledge and being, self and nature), assessing these interpretations provides a way in to reading Romanticism and, specifically, Novalis's reflections on nature, philosophically. With this entry point established, in section III I re-examine Novalis's account of the unknowability of being in his *Fichte Studies* of 1795 to 1796. As I explain, this account underpins his subsequent idea that Romantic poetry can 're-enchant' natural phenomena by portraying them as referring, meaningfully, to the unknowable unity of being (in this context, I explain how Novalis understands 'disenchantment' and 're-enchantment').² In section IV I identify a problem in Novalis's account of re-enchantment: this account presupposes that we originally experience natural phenomena as *disenchanted* prior to re-imagining them poetically. Consequently, I argue in section V that Novalis in his *Allgemeine Brouillon* adopts the new view that natural things are in themselves infused with meaning, and that, in the right culture, we could all directly observe and experience these qualities in natural things. In section VI, I clarify Novalis's emergent view that we can know nature as a whole to be spontaneously self-organising but that, because nature's development is spontaneous, we can never wholly comprehend it.³

I. INTERPRETING EARLY GERMAN ROMANTICISM

The dispute between Beiser and Frank concerns whether the Romantics believe (as Frank claims) that the absolute is the unknowable unity of being, or (as Beiser claims) that the absolute is the organic and rationally comprehensible unity of nature. Let us first examine Frank's interpretation. He argues that the Romantics endorse (1) '*ontological* realism . . . [namely] the thesis that reality exists independently of our consciousness' and (2) '*epistemological* realism . . . the thesis that we do not possess adequate knowledge of reality' (2004: 28).⁴ Frank goes on to say that, in endorsing these positions, the Romantics remained faithful to Kant (29). We might conclude that Frank thinks that the Romantics believe that we cannot know about things as they are in themselves, independently of how they appear to us given our mode of representation. However, Frank claims, the Romantics characterise the independent reality that they affirm not as things in themselves but as 'the ground of unity of physical and mental reality' (1997: 27). The Romantics, for Frank, are monists, for whom one unitary substance precedes the distinctions between the mental and the physical, and, correspondingly, between subjects and objects.⁵ Why, then, can we not attain knowledge about this unitary substance? For the Romantics, all knowing involves conceptual discrimination, and so we cannot cognitively apprehend the whole that is the prior condition of any distinctions. As Frank shows, Novalis defends this view of knowledge in his *Fichte Studies*. Novalis argues that all knowledge and consciousness involve conceptualisation and that – as Beiser puts it – 'all conceptualisation is determination, involving some form of negation where one predicate is contrasted against another' (Beiser 2002: 372). When we are conscious we distinguish objects from one another and (implicitly) distinguish our selves, as subjects of consciousness, from these manifold objects. Consequently, we can only know about or have consciousness of finite entities, ones that we conceptualise in their difference from other such entities.

As Frank notes, a question arises here. If the Romantics deny that we can know about unitary being, then how can they legitimately claim that unitary being exists and is, specifically, unitary? Or – as Frank puts it – since the Romantics' account of knowledge means that 'we [do not] possess the possibility of securing this [monistic] ontological presupposition through cognitive means', how is Romantic monism defensible? (2004: 56) Romantic monism would be defensible if it were supported by some kind of apprehension of reality as a unity, where this kind of apprehension nonetheless lacks the status of knowledge. Accordingly, Frank argues, the Romantics hold that we *sense* or *feel* unitary being but do not thereby know about it. The Romantics, including Novalis, believe that feeling (*Gefühl*), whereby things are given to us or sensed by us, forms a component in all experience (*FS* #17, 14). Since everything that we feel

has this character of being given, givenness constitutes a general character which pervades all these felt things. This single, all-pervasive, character is the unitary being of these things – their sheer ‘thereness’, registered in feeling, and which is unitary just insofar as it pertains to the fact ‘that’ things are rather than ‘what’ they are as ‘what’ is identified under discriminating concepts.⁶ Here we do not comprehend being through predicative judgements, but simply apprehend being, through our feeling, as non-finite and unitary.

Confirming Frank’s interpretation, Novalis in the *Fichte Studies* maintains that, although we cannot know about being, we do have a feeling of it (*FS* #15–19, 13–16; #556, 165–66). This motivates us to try to grasp being cognitively. But, Novalis writes, we can cognitively access being only in the ‘illusory’ form of a plurality of distinct objects (*FS* #234, 77–78). Any attempt to grasp being cognitively merely results in the acquisition of items of finite, predicative knowledge. Novalis argues, though, that reflection can make us aware that our knowledge of finite entities does not amount to knowledge of being. This recognition compels us into fresh attempts to know being, attempts that inevitably fail and must endlessly be repeated. Novalis concludes that we must acknowledge that our intellectual endeavours, including philosophy, are implicated in what he calls this ‘unending activity’ of striving to know being (*FS* #566, 167).

Novalis’s idea of ‘unending activity’ is bound up with what Frank characterises as his anti-foundationalist epistemology. Indeed, Frank avers that the Romantics generally endorse anti-foundationalism; namely, the view that there are no certain principles from which the rest of our knowledge can be derived (Frank 2004: 30).⁷ For the Romantics, any knowledge-claims which form the starting point of a philosophy can only ever be tentative and corrigible, liable to refutation or amendment in light of subsequent arguments and discoveries. The justification for a belief therefore increases in proportion as it coheres with all the other beliefs we have formed. Nonetheless, the Romantics deny that we can ascend to certain knowledge by systematically, progressively correcting our errors. Although we endlessly strive to integrate our beliefs, these can never be definitively systematised due to our constant acquisition of new beliefs, which impact upon the entire fabric. For example, in Novalis’s version of this anti-foundationalist position, we cannot cease striving to know being, but this striving generates endless new finite judgements, each of which must be integrated into our existing body of judgements.

Novalis takes being, or unitary substance, to precondition not only the subject/object distinction but also the subject’s consciousness of itself, as Frank shows with reference to the *Fichte Studies*. On Frank’s reading, Novalis criticises Fichte’s idea that we each have immediate self-consciousness: an immediate apprehension of the unity of the self, preceding reflective self-consciousness. Novalis accepts that we have this immedi-

ate self-acquaintance, but he denies that it constitutes a form of self-consciousness. For self-consciousness is a mode of *consciousness* – specifically, consciousness of the self – and all consciousness is reflective; that is, it attends to objects which it represents over against itself (FS #2, 5); in this case, the self as subject represents itself as object, so that these two are not immediately identical. Our original self-acquaintance must instead consist in self-feeling, *Selbstgefühl*, because in feelings something is given to us, not reflectively grasped (FS #15, 12–13). That which is given to my ‘self-feeling’, Novalis adds, is being. It might seem that, since this feeling is, precisely, my *Selbstgefühl*, the unitary ‘being’ that I feel is simply my own unitary self.⁸ Against this, Frank maintains that Novalis uses the notion of ‘self-feeling’ to denote not the feeling of a pre-existing self but ‘the feeling of a dependence on *being*’, ‘which is not at all graspable under the description I’ (Frank 2002: 34, 37; my emphasis). I depend on being to be a self in the sense that before I come under the concept ‘self’ which characterises what I am, I must first be at all – and as such I participate in the unity of being. Nonetheless, insofar as my self-feeling makes my reflective self-consciousness possible, it is called *self-feeling*. Further, self-feeling makes self-consciousness possible because the subject-self can only recognise the object-self to be identical with itself if it feels that they have something in common. But since this common element must precede the subject/object division, it must be the undifferentiated unity of being, in which I share. (See also Frank 1996: 128–29; 2004: 107).

Having sketched the main features of Frank’s interpretation, we can proceed to Beiser’s, according to which the Romantics believe that what Frank calls ‘being’, but what Beiser prefers to call ‘the absolute’, *can* be known. On Beiser’s view, the Romantics conceive the absolute as a unitary, self-sufficient substance which develops organically into the world’s various finite subjects and objects, all existing as different stages in the absolute’s self-realisation. Because the absolute develops, it follows a plan and therefore constitutes a comprehensible and rational structure which pervades all that exists. So while Beiser agrees with Frank that there is a unitary, mind-independent source of all reality, he differs from Frank in holding that this unitary source is rational and knowable (specifically, we can know it to be a developing organic whole). However, Beiser makes two significant qualifications. First, he admits that he simplifies when saying that the Romantics take the absolute to exist independently of mind; for them, the absolute necessarily develops into mind, or subjectivity, as its fullest realisation (2002: 356). It is more accurate, then, to say that the absolute exists prior to the subjects that manifest or realise it, although, because the absolute necessarily realises itself *as* these subjects, it cannot exist independently of them. Second, Beiser contends that for the Romantics the absolute, because it is a whole, cannot be known through discursive understanding – which is conceptual, predicative and inferential – but only through an intuitive form of reason which is identi-

cal to aesthetic perception, taking the latter to be perception of wholes (2004: 62).

To show that Novalis is committed to the idea that the absolute develops organically and comprehensibly, Beiser focuses primarily on Novalis's most substantial philosophical text after the *Fichte Studies*, the *Allgemeine Brouillon*. Here Novalis insists that nature is visible spirit and spirit invisible nature (S 3: 252, #69). That is, both nature and spirit are levels of a single, self-organising reality. Confirming that Novalis thinks that reality organises itself in a comprehensible way, he also suggests in the *Brouillon* that we can rationally intuit the organising principles behind nature and scientific knowledge (S 3: 448, #934). In contrast to Beiser, Frank's reading of Novalis draws principally on the *Fichte Studies*, and he dismisses the *Brouillon* as 'genuinely fragmentary, in the bad sense' that it remained unfinished (1997: 25). Some other scholars agree with Frank that the *Brouillon* represents a retrograde step for Novalis in virtue of its contention that the absolute develops such that it can be known.⁹ In fairness, though, we must ask whether Novalis has any good reasons to move from construing being as unknowable to thinking that being can be known to be an organic, self-developing whole.

I now want to argue that Novalis does have a good reason for this move: his earlier denial that we can know about the absolute conflicts with his concern to 're-enchant' nature, a concern which is present from the earliest stages of his thought.¹⁰ This conflict forces Novalis to revise his philosophical views. By re-examining Novalis's writings in relation to the theme of enchantment and disenchantment, then, we will be able to confirm that his philosophical position changes between the *Fichte Studies* and the *Allgemeine Brouillon*. In particular, he increasingly comes to believe that being can be known to be an organic, self-developing whole. However, the emphasis on the unknowability of being which Frank rightly identifies in Novalis's earlier work persists in his later works in a way that Beiser overlooks. For the later Novalis, the absolute develops in an irreducibly spontaneous way, and therefore we cannot fully understand its development: necessarily, the absolute must remain partly incomprehensible to us.

II. ROMANTICISM AND THE RE-ENCHANTMENT OF NATURE: NOVALIS'S EARLY VIEW

Let me begin my reconstruction of Novalis's philosophical development by, first, explaining in what sense he is concerned to 're-enchant' natural phenomena. Second, I'll trace how this concern informs the epistemological and aesthetic views that he presents in his earlier work – that is, in his *Fichte Studies* and some of his notebooks from 1798.

Although, as I remarked above, the disenchantment of nature always concerned Novalis, his most explicit statement of this concern is his late essay *Christendom or Europa*, from 1799. *Europa* offers a schematic history of European civilisation which unfavourably contrasts modern, enlightened culture to an idealised version of the Catholic Middle Ages. *Europa* particularly laments the rise of mechanistic science, secularism and the Enlightenment commitment to rational explanation. Embedded in this lament is Novalis's unhappiness that our 'modern way of thinking' denies that nature is poetic, sacred, animate or mysterious (S 3: 515; PW 144). This way of thinking, he adds, has 'turned the infinite, creative music of the universe into the uniform clattering of a monstrous mill, driven by the stream of chance'. *Europa* thus portrays the disenchantment of nature as a multi-faceted historical phenomenon, involving our loss of any sense that nature is divine, alive and mysterious.

The elements of *Europa's* picture of disenchantment are already contained in earlier writings of Novalis's, especially his notes on Goethe (of late 1798), but also his mixed fragment collections from mid-1798. He claims that the ancients were animists, who perceived souls (*Seelen*) and spirits (*Geistern*) in trees, landscapes and stones (S 2: 648, #476; PW 117). But as civilisation has progressed, we have abandoned the ancient belief that objects are inherently sacred (S 2: 645, #466; PW 115). Indeed: 'The age has passed when the spirit of God was intelligible [*verständlich*]. The meaning [*Sinn*] of the world is lost' (S 2: 594, #316; PW 81). Based on these comments, we can see that, for Novalis, 'disenchantment' has involved a threefold intellectual shift whereby we have ceased to see natural phenomena as (1) having intrinsic meaning (*Sinn* or *Bedeutung*), (2) embodying spirit(s), and (3) being mysterious. Hence, *Europa* tells us, the characteristically modern view is that the earth is meaningless (*unbedeutend*) and that natural things are neither 'incomprehensible' nor 'deserving of wonder' (S 3: 516, 508; PW 138, 145). These three central dimensions of disenchantment are interwoven: if one takes natural things to embody spirits, then one will find these things meaningful, in that they signify or indicate the presence of spiritual beings. But these spiritual beings, Novalis assumes, are free – in the sense that they can initiate actions independently of any prior conditions. Consequently, the actions of these spirits are not wholly predictable or explicable. The spirits' mystery and unpredictability carry over into the natural things that embody and manifest them. Thus, when modern scientists take natural things to be exclusively material, they are simultaneously denying that these things are at all 'strange' (S 2: 646, #468; PW 116). Novalis objects to the disenchanted view of nature, at least in part, because it induces humanity to 'scorn' natural things instead of responding to them with wonder and respect as they deserve (S 3: 508; PW 138). Thus, he objects to disenchantment because its inevitable consequence is that we devalue nature. Novalis therefore tries to ascertain how our culture could be transformed so that we

could again find natural things enchanted – meaningful, inspired and mysterious.

However, surely modern natural scientists *are* trying to discover what natural things mean in the sense of seeing how they work, fit together and affect one another? In part, Novalis will indeed come to concede that the natural scientific pursuit of meaning need not be opposed to enchantment. But at this point in his thought, his response is more that science pursues the wrong kind of meaning, which in part does not really constitute ‘meaning’ in the sense that concerns him at all.¹¹ ‘Meaning’ and ‘mystery’ are to that extent intrinsically linked. Things have meaning, or the right kind of meaning, when they point beyond what they immediately present themselves as, towards something else that can only be glimpsed and not fully comprehended – contrary to the scientific ambition of achieving total comprehension and the concomitant assumption that that comprehension is in principle possible.

The concern to re-enchant nature implicitly informs Novalis’s reflections in the *Fichte Studies*, including his rethinking of knowing as an ‘unending activity’ (with which the text concludes). As we have seen, in the *Fichte Studies* Novalis argues that our awareness of depending on being drives us to try to know about being, but that each such attempt only results in knowledge of some particular, limited phenomenon. He sums up: ‘Everywhere we *seek* the unconditioned, and *find* only things’ (S 2: #1, 412; PW 23). In sections 5 and 6 of the *Fichte Studies* he starts to draw out how these epistemological claims bear on poetry. Novalis stresses that, whenever we attempt to know the absolute, we only end up *imagining* it. He refers to ‘the element of imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] . . . of the one and only absolute anticipated . . . through the negation of everything absolute’ (FS #568, 171). More specifically: if we acknowledge (as we should) that our items of knowledge about finite things do *not* confer knowledge of the absolute, then, simultaneously, we begin to experience these finite things differently, as indications – or signs (*Zeichen*) – that the absolute remains unknown, lying beyond their finite sphere. When we thus experience perceptible items as signs of the absolute, we are imagining the absolute, because we are recasting the finite things that are given to us as images (*Bilder*) or indications of something other than themselves – namely, inaccessible being.¹²

The *Fichte Studies* implies that, if we become rightly self-conscious of the endlessness of our quest to know being, then we will acquire a poetic experience of the phenomenal world as a realm of images, a ‘symbolic picture’ (S 2: 600, #349; PW 105). Poetic activity, then, is any activity which brings about such experience of finite entities as images. Since philosophy, too, should become conscious of its status as ‘unending activity’, it should become combined with poetic activity in this sense. Any poetic (or philosophical-poetic) productions which result from this activity are ‘Romantic’, according to Novalis’s famous definition of ‘Romanti-

cisation': 'By endowing the commonplace with a higher meaning, the ordinary with mysterious aspect, the known with the dignity of the unknown, the finite with the appearance of the infinite, I romanticise it' (S 2: 545, #105; *PW* 60). He adds: 'The operation for the higher, unknown, mystical, infinite is the reverse – this undergoes a logarithmic change through this connection – It takes on an ordinary form of expression'. That is, just as we come to experience ordinary things as images, simultaneously we imagine being or the absolute, and form an (avowedly inadequate) picture of it, through these ordinary things. Incidentally, here we also see Novalis connect mystery and meaning through the idea of 'higher' meaning.

Novalis affirms the desirability of a Romantic culture, in which poetic experience of the world would be widespread due to encouragement from Romantic forms of philosophy, literature, art, religion and even politics. He sees this culture as desirable partly because it would re-enchant nature, as well as restoring enchantment generally. It might be objected that Novalis cannot simply associate Romantic culture with re-enchantment, because, according to the second half of his definition of Romanticism, the Romantic depicts the absolute as mundane and finite. Therefore, we might think, Romantic culture *disenchants* the absolute, picturing it in terms of finite items that are non-mysterious and materially perceptible. However, this operation of 'logarithmising' the absolute presupposes our acknowledgement that the finite things in terms of which we picture being are its mere images and do not adequately represent it. Through this acknowledgement, we retain the insight that being itself is infinite and unknowable: 'completely spiritual . . . infinite . . . mysterious' (*FS* #556, 166). Romantic culture, then, would uphold an enchanted view of being alongside its re-enchantment of natural phenomena.

Novalis believes that we cannot return to the ancient view that divinities populate the world, but that, in a Romantic culture, we could at least perceive natural things to be signs of the absolute. This conception of Romantic re-enchantment rests on the philosophical position which Frank identifies in Novalis: that unitary being underlies all existents but that we cannot know about unitary being. Because the absolute exists, we can come to experience particular natural things as pointing to it; but because the absolute is unknowable, we can only ever experience these things as indicating that the absolute lies beyond our ken. However, there is a crucial problem with Novalis's early conception of re-enchantment, I will now argue.

III. PROBLEMS WITH NOVALIS'S CONCEPTION OF RE-ENCHANTMENT

The problem with Novalis's early conception is that he presupposes that we originally experience natural things as disenchanting (entirely material, conditioned and fully intelligible), *prior* to reflecting on our cognitive limitations and in that light coming to re-experience nature poetically. Given that we are conscious only of what we conceptually discriminate and judge, our original and basic experience is necessarily of a world of separate, mutually conditioning, knowable objects.¹³ Insofar as these things are natural, in our original mode of experience we treat as merely a concatenation of conditioned material things. Although we can learn to perceive nature differently, as containing mysterious meaning, this is only possible because we first have knowledge of finite things which we can, through self-reflection, come to recognise as insufficient for knowledge of the absolute.¹⁴

A number of fragments expose Novalis's presupposition that we originally find natural things disenchanting. In a fragment from early 1798, he writes that:

[I]t is *only* spirit that *poeticises* objects and changes of material, and . . . the beautiful . . . cannot be found *already present* in phenomena . . . All the sounds which nature produces are rough – and devoid of spirit – only the musical soul finds the rustling of the forest . . . the babbling of the brook melodious and meaningful [*bedeutsam*]. (S 2: 543–44, #226; PW 71; my emphases)

Painters, the passage continues, may appear merely to imitate natural phenomena but really they 'see actively', actively imparting meaning to these initially meaningless phenomena. In his notes on Goethe, Novalis likens natural phenomena to relics from classical antiquity on the grounds that both are only 'bod[ies] which first receive meaning through the eyes of spirit' (S 2: 640, #445; PW 111–12). And in a fragment from mid-1798, he maintains that we must actively 'posit nature as incomplete, [in order] to reach an unknown variable' within it – namely, being (S 2: 559, #151; PW 65). We do not originally find in natural phenomena any reference to being; we have to posit this reference, by striving to know being then reflecting that we have only gained finite knowledge. But this further suggests that even a Romantic culture could never completely overcome disenchantment, since the disenchanting view of nature will necessarily remain basic to every individual, each of whom must learn to transform their experience.

Novalis does not overtly acknowledge these problems, but over the course of 1798 he revises his conception of the poetry/nature relation in ways that recognisably address this problem. In general, to solve this problem, he needs to adopt a revised epistemology, according to which

we can (at least given appropriate cultural conditions) originally and directly find natural things meaningful and inspirited, without having to first transform an initially antithetical mode of experience. Novalis might be seen to be moving towards this solution with his much-maligned doctrine of 'magical Idealism' (*magischer Idealismus*), which features repeatedly in his various fragment collections from early to mid 1798, and recurs at intervals in the *Allgemeine Brouillon*. According to his main formulations of the doctrine of magical Idealism, we should learn to develop our control over our 'external' senses, the senses through which we receive stimuli from the outer world. If we could control our outer senses fully, then we could perceive the outer world as we choose, unconstrained by external events. Someone with such self-control 'will compel his senses to *produce* for him the shape he demands – and he will be able to live in *his* world' (S 3: 583, #247). Such a person would be a 'magical Idealist', so-called because 'magic is the art of using the senses at will [*willkürlich*]' (S 2: 546, #109) to create impressions which depend for their existence only upon the self and not the external world.

Readers have often dismissed Novalis's magical Idealism as fantastic, but we can appreciate that the doctrine does, to a degree, respond to the problem that affected his account of re-enchantment.¹⁵ One element of the doctrine is its injunction that we should free ourselves from being constrained to perceive those natural effects that would ordinarily follow when their conditions are given. For example, should I see a bird's egg break open, I should be able to see a dog emerge, or perhaps a human being or any other entity that I choose – the 'natural world' would thus become 'a wonder-world', Novalis writes (S 2: 548, #112). He also states that in becoming 'independent of the actual world of the senses' we would 'become accustomed to the *world of signs*' (S 2: 549–50, #117). We would choose to perceive those effects which strike us as having mysterious significance, and so as pointing to the unity of being beyond the finite sphere. An important element of magical Idealism, then, is its prescription that we should raise ourselves to a psycho-physical state in which our primary experience of the world is no longer that of a meaningless chain of conditions, but, rather, that of a directly significant and mysterious realm. With this doctrine, Novalis apparently succeeds in identifying a way in which we could overcome disenchantment fully – by transforming our basic mode of representation and the sensory functions with which it is entwined. Whereas under Novalis's account of re-enchantment we can temporarily recast and revisit our experiences as imbued with higher meaning, under his account of magical Idealism we can *permanently* transform our immediate mode of experience by bringing it under volitional control, making any further need to recast and revisit experiences redundant.

Unfortunately, there is a tension in Novalis's doctrine of magical Idealism and one that parallels the preceding problem with his view of

re-enchantment. The doctrine presupposes a disenchanted understanding of nature as the totality of material bodies interacting in causally determined ways. In particular, it assumes that the sentient body is part of the world's nexus of conditions and determinations: 'the body . . . is dependent on external stimuli, whose essence we call nature or the external world' (S 2: 546, #111; PW 61). Our aim is to lift our outer senses clear of this nexus and bring them under the control of the free mind. But to gain control of the outer senses we must control the body, through concrete medical and psychological practices. Novalis takes it, then, that the self can freely choose to engage in physical practices which transform the body and bring it, and the outer senses, under the self's control. Here Novalis presumes that subjectivity is free (the self chooses to engage in self-transforming practices, it chooses what sensory impressions it wants to receive), while physical nature is completely determined. As Novalis says, 'Freedom is only thinkable in opposition to a world' (FS #647, 186). Thus, magical Idealism is premised on the belief that nature is purely material, wholly conditioned and intelligible: that is, on a disenchanted view of nature. So although magical Idealism seemed set to resolve the problems with Novalis's previous account of re-enchantment, it actually reproduces and even deepens them. As a result, Novalis continues to need a genuinely improved account of re-enchantment. In the next section I will argue that he develops such an account in the *Allgemeine Brouillon*.

IV. NOVALIS'S SCIENTIFIC STUDIES: THE SELF-ORGANISING NATURAL WORLD

The position Novalis reaches in the *Brouillon* is that every natural phenomenon refers, meaningfully, to an infinite range of similarly structured phenomena, so that the quality of mysterious meaningfulness really exists in natural things, prior to our experience of them: meaningfulness, through their references to other phenomena; mystery, through the infinite extent of these sets of references. Science as *Wissenschaft*, systematically organised knowledge along multiple branches, can make us aware of these qualities by helping us to see the vast range of parallels and comparisons amongst parts of nature. Thus, science and poetry can work hand in hand; moreover, they help us to appreciate qualities of enchantment that are there in nature *anyway* – independently of us, by virtue of the complex structure of the world – rather than enchantment arising solely from *our* poetising activity.

The *Brouillon* comprises a series of notes towards what Novalis calls an 'encyclopaedistic' of the sciences – a preliminary plan of the relations between the different sciences, providing the basis on which a full encyclopaedia could be constructed.¹⁶ The *Brouillon* draws on the extensive

scientific studies which Novalis conducted at Freiberg from summer 1798 to spring 1799. These studies convinced Novalis that there are series of correspondences between the processes with which the various sciences deal. Specifically, he became convinced: (1) that every science primarily studies relations, processes and interactions, since individual entities of all kinds are as they are only because of their multiple relations to other things (S 3: 254, #79; 3: 261, #113); (2) that correspondences – ‘relations – similarities – identities’ – obtain between these diverse processes and entities (S 3: 280, #233). For instance, he says that youth corresponds to fluidity, age to rigidity; that women correspond to oxygen, men to flame; and that sensing recapitulates the process of devouring food at a higher, more psychical level (S 3: 258, #97; 3: 262, #117; 3: 288–89, #273). Correspondences also obtain between the principles of the different sciences, since their objects of study correspond. In virtue of their manifold correspondences, natural processes and phenomena are intrinsically meaningful, each one pointing to an infinite variety of similarly structured processes. Novalis therefore refers to the ‘*mutual representation of the universe*’ and states that ‘the universe also *speaks*’ (S 3: 246, #137; 3: 267–68, #143; PW 125). Based on his now-deepened acquaintance with scientific accounts of these relations, he concludes that they find meaningful references in the internal structures of each natural thing.

At this point, Novalis finds himself obliged to provide an explanation for the *prima facie* surprising level of interrelation and systematic integration which he has discerned among the various processes of nature. He says, for example: ‘Every phenomenon is a limb in an immeasurable chain – which comprehends *all phenomena* as limbs. The theory of nature must become . . . (a continuum) a *history* – an organic growth’ (S 3: 574, #140). That is, he thinks that the interrelations within nature would not obtain so systematically (embracing all phenomena as ‘limbs’) unless these interrelations derived from some self-organising, growing agency. To conceptualise this organising activity, Novalis draws on some implications of his idea of unitary being, implications which he had hitherto left unexplored. These implications surface on occasions in the *Fichte Studies* when he equates unitary being with nature. He has strong philosophical reasons for doing this. Ultimately, neither finite selves nor finite objects can be separate from being, otherwise being would not be entirely unitary and all-encompassing. Being must therefore create differentiation *within* itself – structuring itself into different finite subjects and different finite objects.¹⁷ That being gives itself this complex articulation means that it operates in the manner of a self-structuring organism. To Novalis, then, it makes sense to equate being with a kind of large-scale organism, or with nature considered as a whole, self-organising system.

Novalis introduces this connotation of nature in the *Fichte Studies* in a note which lists nature’s four meanings: (1) the essence of a thing; (2) ‘all things as such’ – the totality of finite objects; (3) ‘everything that is not-

person' – the totality of specifically non-human objects; (4) 'the state of a thing that comes into being for its own sake without subjective causality' (FS #247, 85). That is, by (4), anything is natural that emerges or develops spontaneously without being artificially and intentionally produced by human agents. By (4), then, something is natural when it is *self-forming*, *self-producing* – in sum, *organic*, so that even inanimate natural things must somehow be derivative approximations to the organic or must participate in a broader organic structure. But since nature in sense (2) – the totality of finite things – itself exists spontaneously, not as an effect of human production, this totality is itself 'natural' in sense (4) – that is, *self-producing* – and so must be viewed as one large-scale organism, within which all entities are interrelated as members. As this large-scale organism, nature can be equated with *self-organising being*. This absolutely unitary being/nature – 'the whole nature' as Novalis calls it (S 3: 419, #776), or 'Nature' – is not reducible to the totality of finite material objects – Novalis's 'actual nature' or 'nature'. Rather, unitary nature precedes, and structures itself into, this totality.

In the *Brouillon*, Novalis draws out this implication that being is organic nature, investigating how the absolute structures itself into the myriad levels of nature, as well as the many subjects who observe and conceptualise the processes occurring at each level.¹⁸ 'One can rightly call the complete system of nature a complete individual'; namely, the 'world-structure – world-*organism*' (S 3: 334, #460; 3: 352, #503). The *Brouillon* sketches a complex account of the universe as an organism. On this account, at every level in nature we detect organised systems of organised processes, and the interlocking of these organised systems derives from the activity of the whole in organising itself.

Each individual life-process is determined by the universal life-process, the natural system of an individual is determined both by the other individual natural systems and by the higher, universal system – ultimately by the natural system of the universe, insofar as this equally determines both of the former. (S 3: 334, #460)

As that which organises all of nature, this whole system is also the 'world-soul' – 'The world is the *macroanthropos* . . . there is a world-soul' – for the soul, according to Novalis, just is the form of organisation of a material body or, in this case, of the material world (S 3: 316, #407; PW 128). It follows that, since all natural processes and phenomena exhibit at least some level of organisation, they too have souls, and are microcosms of the world-soul.

Do natural processes and things embody not only life and soul but also spirit? Novalis vacillates over this, sometimes saying that spirit is the highest level of organisation of a body and is found only in humans. Spirit is unique to humans because we are inherently disunified (containing various conflicting psychological elements), and we produce unified per-

sonalities in ourselves artificially, through conscious activity (S 3: 250–51, #63; 3: 253, #76). This makes human organisation the highest because it knits together the greatest amount of diversity. However, Novalis claims that the organisation of natural processes is never complete either; rather, these processes constantly strive to make themselves more completely formed and organised. Consequently, he sometimes – and most consistently – says that all natural processes and phenomena have ‘spirit’ too: they strain to render themselves more completely organised (a striving which must manifest an activity of the world-soul within them, endeavouring to articulate itself more tightly). Each natural phenomenon embodies spirit, understood as the striving for organisation, and so each is a ‘You. (Instead of non-self – You.):’ each is another self, as is each human being (S 3: 430, #820; PW 135). The spirit within human individuals is only a higher manifestation of the same kind of spirit which is contained in every natural thing – higher presumably because it results from humans’ distinctively conscious pursuit of unification.

Novalis maintains that, because the whole organises itself, it is self-determining: it gives itself determinate structure, and it does this freely: ‘Life is freedom of nature’ (S 3: 271, #172). He offers no single, definitive explanation of what he means by ‘freedom’. Rather, two different understandings of freedom operate in different places in his work. The first dates from the *Fichte Studies*, in which – discussing the contrast between determinate objects (*Gegenstände*) and their indeterminate ‘opposite’ (*Gegensatz*) – namely, being – Novalis states: ‘The *opposite* of all determination is *freedom*. The *absolute* opposite is freedom’ (FS #284, 99). On this view, freedom consists in the absence of determination; hence the absolute’s self-organising activity is free because it is the source of all determinacy, and therefore no determinations pre-exist it to condition it. Unlike any activities of finite, conditioned processes, the activity of the absolute is wholly without ground, and in this sense is purely spontaneous. On the other hand, Novalis understands the whole’s self-organising activity to be free because the whole develops unconstrained by any exterior pressures, following its *own* plan: ‘nature [is] at once *independent* and *self-modifying*’ (S 3: 247, #50; PW 122). Nature exercises organic force, manifesting itself in various processes and drawing them into relations. Here nature is not following any particular, finite plan but just developing as any organism, *qua* organic, must: differentiating itself into determinate entities occupying definite relations to one another. Novalis’s two understandings of nature’s freedom seem opposed – if nature must unfold in the way characteristic of anything organic as such, then how can it consistently be held that the absolute develops wholly spontaneously; that is, that there is no explanation at all for why it develops as it does? Yet Novalis thinks that these two types of freedom can co-exist: he says in his notes on physics from late 1799 that nature *both* follows laws – that is, develops according to regular and predictable (organic) patterns – and

acts from spontaneous 'will' (*Wille*) (S 3: 601, #291; PW 157). One way that this co-existence is possible is if nature exerts spontaneity with respect to the *particular* sets of things, processes and relations into which it organically arranges itself. Supporting this, Novalis adds that nature both has 'no will' – it must develop organically – and has 'a particular will' – it exerts will or spontaneity in developing into particular things and processes and not others.

How does Novalis's emergent account of self-organising nature improve on his earlier conception of Romantic re-enchantment? He now claims that finite natural things are, through their interconnections, meaningful and 'inspired', prior to our experience of them. It is therefore possible that we can directly experience natural things as meaningful and inspired, including by virtue of science making us aware of these qualities within nature. Since each natural thing refers to an infinite number of related things and processes, we can never exhaustively decipher its meaning, and so, if we come to recognise that natural things are meaningful, then we will find them mysterious as well. Plainly, Novalis now allocates science a central role in restoring a culture of enchantment. But this science, he emphasises, must not be the traditional, mechanistic science which 'cleans[ed] the earth . . . of poetry' (S 3: 516; PW 144). Rather, the science in question must be poetic, precisely because it discloses myriad inter-relations within nature. Fortunately, science is actually becoming increasingly poetic, Novalis contends: he has in mind such then-burgeoning fields as chemistry, geology, and mineralogy, whose complex systems for classifying different substances were (he thought) revealing unexpected and infinite series of relationships between these substances.¹⁹

To explain how we can overcome disenchantment, Novalis has had to affirm that qualities of meaning and spirit are intrinsic to nature. But to explain how natural things enter into the complex organisation that gives them these qualities, he must in turn appeal to the idea that unitary being is all-encompassing nature, arranging itself into the system of natural processes. With this, Novalis has become obliged to claim knowledge about the absolute: specifically, knowledge that the absolute structures itself organically, following certain characteristically organic, comprehensible patterns of development. This seems to contradict his earlier position that we can only ever seek, but not find, the whole. Moreover, he apparently presents his knowledge about the absolute in a series of inferentially related propositions – including those that I have excerpted from the *Brouillon*. So, does Novalis now take discursive knowledge about the absolute to be possible? In section V, I will argue that he indeed thinks that the general pattern of nature's development can be known – discursively – but that, because nature exercises spontaneity in pursuing particular courses of development, we can never understand or explain why it assumes the particular forms that it does.

V. THE KNOWABLE AND THE UNKNOWABLE IN NATURE

The *Brouillon* makes a range of seemingly incompatible claims regarding whether the absolute can be known. Sometimes, Novalis reiterates that we can only gain knowledge of finite things, which falls short of knowledge of 'nature [which] is *per se* inconceivable' (S 3: 302, #342). Elsewhere, though, he claims that the absolute must somehow be seen as both unknowable and knowable: 'The universe is the absolute subject . . . In this its *immeasurable* [*unermesslich*] and at the same time *measurable* organization is already contained' (S 3: 381, #633; PW 130; my emphases). How nature organises itself both can be measured or known, and also defies measurement and cannot be known. One reading of this latter passage suggests itself when we also consider Novalis's claim that 'we can hope to explain it [i.e., the "highest substance"] through the complete working-out of all the single physical limbs' (S 3: 371, #596). Together, these claims appear to suggest that the world's organisation is in principle completely understandable, and that our knowledge of it would be completed were we to gain exhaustive understanding of all the processes in which the absolute manifests itself. But since there are too many such manifestations for anyone to exhaustively understand them all, in practice the organisation of the absolute can only be partially, not completely, deciphered.

Actually, though, Novalis thinks that there are not only practical but also stronger, principled limits on how far we can know about nature and its self-organisation. In principle, we can never know why nature organises itself into just these processes and phenomena, because there *is* no explanatory ground of this fact. That nature manifests itself in these particular phenomena is the effect of nature's sheer spontaneity. *Qua* spontaneous, nature is not rationally intelligible, for its spontaneous activity is devoid of any ground at all. Novalis muses: 'Has nature always *followed laws* . . . '? (S 3: 430, #827). Yet he had already concluded that nature is both law- (or rule-) governed and free of law, in that latter respect being incomprehensible and a source of wonder: 'Connection of the wonder- and natural world. . . . Wonder- and natural world are . . . one. (Rule and non-rule.) Non-rule is . . . arbitrary rule [*Willkürregel*] – chance – wonder-rule. *Rule* – *direct* law – *indirect*, (crooked) rule = *unrule*' (S 3: 409, #730). From Novalis's perspective, we can know that nature develops organically and regularly, and that, as a result, all particular phenomena and processes are interrelated, incorporating references to one another and exhibiting internal organisation. But we cannot know, for example, why just these chemical substances are the ones that exist and why they combine in these specific ways – although we can know that these substances must, in general, exhibit complex interrelations and be capable of combining and interacting. Nature's organisation is partly knowable (at least in principle), in respect of its generally organic, interrelated structure, but

partly unknowable, in respect of the spontaneity which guides nature into specific forms of organisation. Novalis therefore insists that all items or fields of knowledge are simultaneously 'non-knowledges' and that: 'Whoever produces a science, must also . . . produce a non-science – whoever knows how to make something comprehensible, must also know how to make it incomprehensible – The teacher must be able to produce knowledge and ignorance' (S 3: 375–76, #612). Our ignorance stems not merely from our practical inability to exhaustively decipher nature's organisation, but also from the fact that this organisation is shot through with unfathomable spontaneity. Moreover, since each particular phenomenon is a microcosm of nature as a whole, each phenomenon must contain some spontaneity such that no amount of study can afford us complete knowledge of it. Hence, Novalis maintains: 'nature is a whole – in which each part in itself can never be wholly understood' (S 3: 603, #302; PW 157).

The idea that we cannot know about nature's spontaneity – nor understand nature's organisation insofar as it issues from and reflects this spontaneity – may seem self-undermining. Does Novalis not claim, precisely, to know that nature has (in part) the character of spontaneity and that this spontaneity consists in activity that is groundless? However, to say that nature is spontaneous is only to mark that there is an aspect of nature's self-organising activity about which we cannot know, because it just is not rationally explicable. By marking the existence of this aspect, we do not thereby achieve positive knowledge about it; rather, we know that our knowledge about nature, and our understanding of its organisation, reach their limits at this point.

Further evidence that Novalis holds that nature is in principle only partly knowable comes from his unfinished novella *The Novices at Saïs*, largely written in 1798. In this, a succession of individuals outlines their perspectives upon nature or expound on others' perspectives: the views considered include scientific and poetic views, mythic and early metaphysical views that nature is composed of the elements, and Fichte's view that nature is the not-self in need of overcoming. Some interlocutors even present aspects of Novalis's own (mature) view of nature: for one speaker, nature has its own spirit – or, 'what is the same thing', it is 'a single whole . . . bound together in a history' (N 85/99). Another speaker adds that each natural thing is a 'unique You' (N 89/100). The implication of this miscellany of claims is that no single claim or perspective exhausts or adequately captures the reality of nature. As O'Brien observes: 'The composition of *Saïs* out of so many discontinuous narratives stresses the insufficiency of each: there is no single truth, and no privileged discourse, about nature' (1995: 207).

One might argue (following Beiser's interpretive lead) that *Saïs* only asserts the inadequacy to nature of discursive knowledge-claims, while showing that there is an aesthetic mode of knowledge which is more

adequate to nature. According to this argument, our reading about the multiplicity of human perspectives on nature gives us an aesthetic intuition of nature as the source of this multiplicity, and as the whole ramifying into the infinite multiplicity of finite phenomena and perspectives. Indeed, one of *Saïs's* closing speeches comes from a youth who articulates just this insight into the multiplicity and creativity of nature – ‘its infinite variety, its inexhaustible joy’ and its ‘fluidity’ with which ‘only poets should deal’ (*N* 107–8/105). Yet the very existence of this speech implies that the content of our aesthetic insight into creative nature can be restated propositionally. Thus, even if *Saïs* suggests that we can have an aesthetic intuition into the wholeness of nature, *Saïs* also suggests that this knowledge can be re-articulated propositionally so that nature becomes discursively knowable. Then again, *Saïs's* broader thrust seems to qualify this last suggestion, as it suggests that even those propositions by the youth which articulate the character of self-organising, generative nature are inadequate to the infinity of nature, just as are all the other proposed views. So *Saïs* suggests partly that nature can be known only aesthetically, partly that it can also be known discursively, and partly that it cannot be known at all. But this makes sense if Novalis takes nature to be unknowable in certain respects – its spontaneity – and knowable in others – aesthetically, as a whole, and to a degree discursively insofar we try to fill out our aesthetic intuition through scientific knowledge and the articulation of its general import.

Let me review my reading of Novalis’s intellectual trajectory and clarify how it bears on the interpretation of Early German Romanticism more broadly. In his *Fichte Studies* and earlier fragments, Novalis believes that the unitary being underlying the finite objects of our consciousness cannot be known. This belief supports his idea that Romantic poetry re-enchants natural things by portraying them as ciphers of unknowable being, an idea which attracts Novalis because he wants to see how we could overcome the disenchanting experience of nature which prevails today. Yet because his idea of Romantic re-enchantment presupposes that we originally – pre-poetically – find natural things disenchanting, this idea also implies, troublingly, that we can never wholly escape disenchantment. Novalis therefore adopts the revised view that, in a poetically scientific culture, we could appreciate the meaningful correspondences and spiritual agency within natural things, both characteristics being already present in natural things for us to experience directly. In turn, he explains that the organisation and agency in natural things derive from the spontaneous self-organisation of being as nature.

My interpretation bears out Beiser’s insofar as it shows, firstly, that Novalis increasingly comes to understand the absolute as a self-organising whole, and, secondly, that this is his strongest understanding of the absolute, because it allows the possibility of fully overcoming disenchantment. However, Frank’s emphasis on the limits to our knowledge

remains worthwhile, not only because it accurately characterises Novalis's earlier writings but also because it highlights that even the mature Novalis takes our knowledge of nature to be necessarily limited by nature's spontaneity.

NOTES

1. As Dennis Mahoney says, 'The chief characteristic of Novalis's work [is] the attempt to counteract the demystified character of the modern, technical world' (1994: 125).

2. Saying that Novalis opposes disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) might sound anachronistic, but the concept, if not the term, is present in his thought. The antithetical term *Bezauberung* is present (see, e.g., S 2: 601, #355; PW 27).

3. Novalis's transition to this view is not clear-cut – his earlier writings sometimes anticipate his later organicism, while the later writings regularly reiterate or re-examine preceding themes. Nonetheless, certain tendencies dominate at each phase of Novalis's thought.

4. Frank (2004) is a translation not of all of Frank (1997) but of a manuscript that later became the third part of that book. Frank states that 'ontological' and 'epistemological' realism together make up Romantic 'realism' (2004: 28). He understands Romantic realism in opposition to 'idealism', which he takes to be the view that reality depends on our minds (1997: 27), such that we can know it exhaustively. Some would object to Frank's definition of 'epistemological realism', which Kenneth Westphal, for example, defines by contrast as the view that 'there is a way the world is which does not depend on our cognitive or linguistic activity; and . . . we *can* know the way the world is' (1989: 3; emphasis added). Frank's definition is also a potential source of confusion because Beiser also describes Romanticism under his quite different interpretation as 'realist'. For Beiser, though, Romanticism is both realist and Idealist: Realist in holding that reality exists mind-independently, but Idealist in holding that reality is independently rational (and so can be known). Thus, Beiser admits the possibility of 'objective' Idealism (2002: 11–13) – a position that he ascribes to the Romantics – whereas Frank restricts 'idealism' to the thesis that reality is mind-dependent. Since the divergences between Frank's and Beiser's understandings of 'idealism' and 'realism' threaten to obscure rather than illuminate their substantive disagreements, I will generally avoid these labels. Moreover, any application of these labels within a discussion of Novalis would raise the question of how Novalis understands 'idealism' and 'realism', but although he refers to these positions and proposes to synthesise them (S 3: 384, #634; PW 131), he never explains what he takes them to consist in.

5. Frank therefore also characterises Romanticism as 'a combination of ontological monism and epistemological realism' (2004: 56).

6. According to Frank, the Romantics advance various versions of this argument, all descending from arguments made by Jacobi in the second – 1789 – edition of his *Spinoza Letters*. Jacobi's argument presupposes his reading of Kant on judgements of being. Kant discusses these when criticising the ontological argument for the existence of God. As Jacobi reads Kant, predicative judgements 'posit' their predicates relatively, in relation to their subjects, whereas judgements of existence 'posit' their subjects absolutely, without relation to anything else. We can only legitimately posit something absolutely if it is given to us in sense-experience. Now, for Jacobi, this 'absolute'/'relative' distinction implies that the absolute kind of positing is basic, because it is just positing *simpliciter*, without the additional establishing of a relation (Frank 2004: 61–62). Jacobi infers that the basic sense of 'is' is existential, and that whatever is, it is in the same basic sense; namely, it is given to our senses. From this, he reasons that the character of givenness which pervades all sensible things is their (unitary) being (Frank 2004: 69–71; Jacobi 1994b: 194). Jacobi's argument has problems – can he legiti-

mately move from the claim that there is one basic sense of 'is' to the claim that being is one single phenomenon? Nonetheless, he opens up a line of thinking which is decisive for the Romantics.

7. Here, Frank calls 'foundationalist' those 'philosophies that start from the certainty of a highest and immediately evident fundamental proposition from which our valid beliefs can be derived as logical implications'.

8. So argue Charles Larmore (2000: 154) and Géza von Molnár (1970: 39). However, as Molnár himself shows, the absolute as unity cannot directly be the self; although Novalis sometimes calls it the self, this is only because he is considering it from the perspective of the self's endeavor to grasp the unity that lies at its own basis (44).

9. O'Brien accuses the *Brouillon* of harboring a 'nostalgic desire for transcendent knowledge' (1995: 204). See also Derrida (1981: 50–53).

10. For example, in his essay 'On Inspiration', written between 1788 and 1790, Novalis claims that in prehistoric times 'Oriental' people directly experienced nature as the embodiment of the divine and as the inspiration for poetic language (S 2: 22–23). Pervading this essay is a favourable contrast between this 'enchanted' view of nature and the modern European experience of it. For discussion, see Pfefferkorn (1988: 61–62).

11. My thanks to Elizabeth Millán for pressing me on this point.

12. Earlier in the *Fichte Studies*, Novalis had defined the imagination as the power to connect sensible materials to concepts of the understanding (FS #219, 67); now, he claims that the imagination presents the sensible as spiritual (as pointing to that which lies beyond it but cannot be sensed) while, reciprocally, presenting the spiritual as sensible (indicated by its finite image) (FS #633, 182).

13. One might think that surely, insofar as we feel being, we must be conscious of it and not only of finite things. But, for Novalis, consciousness is inherently cognitive, while feeling is non-cognitive and hence is not strictly an instance of consciousness (Frank designates feeling 'an ideal limiting case of consciousness'; 2004: 171).

14. As Richard Hannah explains, 'Even though the subject's real-world experience is fixed in necessary ways, nothing prevents the subject from reformulating that experience in a poetic fashion' (1981: 97).

15. In partial defense of magical Idealism, Beiser (2002: 425) and Neubauer (1971: 63–67) argue that it also involves cultivating the outer senses to perceive meanings that nature antecedently contains.

16. On the *Brouillon*, see also: Haering (1954: ch. 13); Neubauer (1980: ch. 3); Uerlings (1997). Uerlings construes the *Brouillon* consistently with Novalis's earlier work, as striving for but never reaching knowledge of nature as a whole (1997: 11–12). Against Uerlings, I take the *Brouillon's* incompleteness and fragmentation to reflect Novalis's new convictions that we can have knowledge of nature as a whole, but that this is limited (1) in practice and (2) in principle, because of nature's spontaneity.

17. As Frank writes, the Romantics could not have 'a philosophy of *absolute* identity, if its absolute did not contain within itself that which it is not: relativity, the difference of separate essential tendencies. . . . The structure of the absolute is thus connected with that of the organism' and of 'nature as a thoroughly organized being' (2004: 123, 122).

18. Perhaps Novalis left this implication undeveloped in the *Fichte Studies* because it amounts to a claim to know about being (in its self-structuration, self-organisation, etc.), a claim which conflicts with his earlier denial that being can be known. (Beiser notes some other points in the *Fichte Studies* where Novalis breaches his own strictures and ventures some knowledge-claims about the absolute; 2002: 416–17.)

19. Novalis stresses scientists' central preoccupation with classification (S 3: 256, #87; 3: 363, #559 – a preoccupation through which, *Europa* tells us, scientists have become 'the first who [have] once more recognized and heralded the sacredness of nature' (S 3: 520; PW 148).

FIVE

Alienation from Nature and Early German Romanticism

In this chapter I ask how fruitful the concept of alienation can be for thinking critically about the nature and causes of the contemporary environmental crisis. On one level, this crisis – problems of global warming, deforestation, degradation of the oceans, species loss and so on – is the unintended by-product of industrial development. But for many environmental philosophers, the crisis is at a deeper level ‘caused by our intellectual relationship with the world and the practices that stem from it’ (Dobson 1995: 39) – by our having, in modernity, adopted an intellectual relationship with the world that is problematic. This problematic relationship can be characterised in various ways: for Heidegger in ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ (1954) and those informed by him, in terms of the technological view of the world as a stock of resources; for some self-professed postmodern environmental ethicists, in terms of the ‘modernist’ conviction that nature can be completely known through and practically appropriated through science and technology (Oelschlager 1995: 3); or, for some ecofeminists (e.g., Salleh 1984, Plumwood 1993), in terms of a worldview that sharply divides culture from nature, humans from world. The concept of alienation can potentially help us to articulate the nature of this modern intellectual division of humanity from the world, as a division by virtue of which we have become alienated or estranged from nature with damaging practical consequences.¹

However, as the concept of alienation is elaborated by Hegel and Marx – arguably the central figures to articulate the concept – we can only overcome our alienation from nature by thoroughly humanising the natural world, transforming it by our labour so that it entirely reflects the human self. Here, far from challenging the conceptual opposition between humanity and nature, the concept of alienation seems to presup-

pose that very opposition, presuming that nature is the material ‘other’ that is subordinate to and must be continually overcome by the human ‘self’ – a view that for ecofeminist Val Plumwood undergirds the Western notion of progress and with it ‘the problematic features of the west’s treatment of nature which underlie the environmental crisis’ (Plumwood 1993: 3). However, in the same period in post-Kantian German philosophy when Hegel was articulating his concept of alienation, an alternative conception of it was developed by the Early German Romantics, particularly Schlegel and Novalis. In their view human beings are dependent upon the world as a unified whole: that is, upon nature. They developed this idea in opposition to the ideal of complete human autonomy and mastery over nature then advanced by Fichte. Yet although human/nature relations hold this central place within Romanticism, it has received little attention from environmental philosophers.²

Here I want to correct this oversight by returning to the Early German Romantic conception of alienation. Schlegel and Novalis suggest that human beings in modernity have become estranged from nature, and that ideally we are to overcome this condition of alienation by accepting that humanity depends upon and is part of nature rather than standing outside it. In thus accepting that we depend on and are part of nature, we are to accept that nature is a whole greater than us, which exceeds us – such that as merely finite beings we can never fully comprehend nature as a whole. For the Romantics, then, the ideal condition of being reconciled with nature would *include*, amongst its integral elements, a level of alienation from nature – in the form of appreciation that nature is and must remain other to and profoundly unlike us. So this is a conception of reconciliation with nature as including a level of alienation. But it is a kind of alienation that the Romantics valorise positively, as stemming from our acknowledgement that we belong within and depend upon nature, far from existing “‘outside” nature’ (Plumwood 1993: 3). This Romantic conception of alienation, I will argue, unlike that of Hegel and Marx, goes some way to challenging the human/nature opposition that is, plausibly, a significant factor in the ecological crisis.

I. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

Let me begin by expanding on the potential advantages of the concept of alienation for reflecting on the sources of the environmental crisis. The concept of alienation enables us to maintain that in modernity human beings have become alienated or estranged from the natural world: that we have come to understand and experience the natural world as something alien or strange to us as human beings, and reciprocally to understand and experience ourselves as strangers to – disembedded from – our

natural surroundings. On this view, modern human beings have come to understand and experience themselves to be separate from and opposed to nature. Plausibly, this understanding derives from Cartesian and Enlightenment contrasts between mind and matter, reason and nature, with human autonomy opposed to nature as a realm of causal determination (a contrast drawn by Kant, for instance). The effect of these contrasts has been to 'make impossible the notion of a relational, ecological self . . . [a] self [that] is not an isolated, immaterial Cartesian ego . . . but is constituted by its relationships with others' (Warren 2009: 231).

Insofar as we adhere to this modern understanding of ourselves as separate from nature, such a view plausibly disposes us to behave towards our natural environments in heedless and destructive ways. Heedless, because we feel too far removed from the natural environment to attend to, anticipate or imagine the potential consequences of our actions upon it. Since we do not regard ourselves as part of nature, we struggle to appreciate how our actions and practices are embedded in ecological processes and causal chains. And destructive, because the conceptual contrasts that generate and express our alienation (those of mind/body, humanity/nature, etc.) are generally hierarchical, encouraging us to see ourselves as superior to nature just insofar as we think that we are separate from and stand apart from nature. This primes us to think that we are entitled to use natural beings and processes however they best suit us – superior to nature as we are, we are thus its rightful masters.

Arguably, then, our alienation from nature is a major source of the environmental crisis, and overcoming that crisis requires our alienation to be overcome: that is, requires that we achieve *reconciliation* with nature. Reconciliation – which Hegel conceives as the antithesis of alienation – normally means both the state of non-alienation to be achieved and the process of achieving that state. To suppose ourselves alienated from nature is thus to suppose that, ideally, we would inhabit a contrasting state of being reconciled with nature, at one or at peace with it.

This concept of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) has been articulated philosophically by Hegel above all. As Michael Hardimon points out, reconciliation is the 'main goal and central organizing category of Hegel's philosophy as a whole' (Hardimon 1994: 3). For Hegel, the overarching aim of philosophical reason (*Vernunft*) is to reconcile opposed categories of thought – mind and body, reason and emotion – and opposed dimensions of practical social life – individuality and community membership, self-interest and commitment to the common good (see Taylor 1975: ch. 1). Hegel's goal is to bring us to reconceive these categories and aspects of life as intertwined, not opposed to one another. Reason, Hegel says, 'shows that the terms that appear initially to be bound together are not in fact alien [*fremd*] to one another; instead, they are only moments of *one* whole, each of which, being related to the other, is at home with itself,

and goes together with itself' (EL §158A, 232). A mode of social life that embodied this reconception would be one of reconciliation.

Unlike many after him including Marx, Hegel does not believe that achieving reconciliation requires radical social transformation. For Hegel, modern European society, stratified into the spheres of family, civil society and state, is already so organised that in principle, given some liberal reforms, we can be reconciled with it. Unfortunately, though, our potential for reconciliation is blocked by our entrenched habits of thinking in terms of opposed categories – what Hegel calls *Verstand*, abstract understanding – and living in ways imbued with this abstract understanding. The result is a widespread modern experience of alienation or *Entfremdung* (Hardimon 1994: 20, 121).³

For Hegel, the reconciliation that we are ideally to achieve, through philosophical reason, is with not merely modern society but the world at its broadest, the totality of all that is. This totality encompasses several regions for Hegel: non-human nature; human culture, history, and society; and the basic ontological forms and structures (such as causality, negativity and difference) that are instantiated in both nature and culture. Ultimately, we are to be reconciled with all these dimensions of existence, and thereby come to be *in der Beziehung auf das andere bei sich selbst* – with oneself, or at home with oneself, within the relation to the other (EL §158A, 232). The world that initially appears to be outside us, other to us, would cease to seem alien just in case we found ourselves reflected back to ourselves everywhere within it, as if in looking out at the world we were looking in a mirror. For Hegel, our ideal condition is constant presence-with-self, reflection-back-to-oneself from the other.

What of reconciliation with *nature*, for Hegel? We are to be-with-ourselves within nature, experiencing nature as mirroring us transparently back to ourselves. In part, for Hegel, we attain this when we comprehend theoretically that nature is not alien to us. He aims in his philosophy of nature to demonstrate that nature is a rationally ordered whole which, as such, reflects back to us our own nature *qua* rationally organised beings (EN §246A, 1: 198–99). In part too, for Hegel, we achieve reconciliation with nature by practically making nature into our home, transforming it to reflect us back to ourselves. In doing so we simultaneously 'externalise' ourselves within the world: by practically transforming the natural items around us, we impose upon them our plans and more generally our rationality, which they now mirror back to us. For Hegel, the concrete form that this practical modification of nature takes is that of our appropriation, use and transformation of natural objects as individual private property – hence his conviction that reconciliation is possible within modern liberal society (PR §§41–71, 73–104).

For Hegel, the ideal of reconciliation with nature licenses and, more than that, prescribes human activity to re-make the world. The early Marx adopts a similar stance when he re-appropriates Hegel's concept of

alienation for a distinctly anti-Hegelian purpose: criticising capitalism for inflicting alienation upon the labouring class (and, albeit less so, upon the non-labourers). Enumerating the aspects of alienated labour within his 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx includes amongst them alienation from nature. The fact of having to undertake alienated labour, he says, makes nature alien to us – ‘*die entfremdete Arbeit dem Menschen . . . die Natur entfremdet*’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 516).⁴ In non-alienated productive activity, the human being lives from nature, which is the ‘inorganic body’ (*unorganische Leib*) of the human individual, the extended body upon which the individual depends for their survival. But nature is not only the source through which I survive. It is also ‘the matter [*Stoff*] in which labour realises itself, in which my labour is active, out of which and through which it produces’ (Marx 1977: 79). Thus, ideally, nature is *my* extended body because, through my work upon it, nature comes to embody and provide an external realisation of my productive activity, just as my individual body is the material vehicle through which I exercise my agency. Moreover, since in the ideal non-alienated condition I imagine, choose and plan the character (and the intended product) of my productive activity, nature also provides an external embodiment of my self *qua* choosing, creative, and conscious. Nature is, ideally, the outer body of the human individual as a free producer. To be reconciled with nature would be to experience it as my external embodiment in this way, due to my productive activity being non-alienated and under my control and direction. In conditions of alienated labour, though, I lose control over my own productive activity. In these conditions, I experience the parts of nature upon which I work as embodying not *my* agency but that of the powers external to me which control my work – the powers of capitalists, managers and market forces. Nature becomes an embodiment of alien forces rather than a vehicle of my self-realisation.

Like Hegel, then, Marx envisions reconciliation with nature as a condition in which we practically transform and remodel nature so that it reflects us back to ourselves.⁵ In this Hegelian-Marxian articulation, the concepts of alienation and reconciliation suggest that there should be no limits to our efforts to re-make the world after our own model. Adorno objects to this position in *Negative Dialectics*:

Even the theory of alienation (*Entfremdung*) . . . confuses the need to come near to the . . . irrational world – to be ‘at home everywhere’ as Novalis put it («*überall zu Hause zu sein*») – with the archaic barbarism that it is beyond the . . . subject to love the alien (*Fremde*), that which is other; with the craving for incorporation (*Einverleibung*) and persecution. (Adorno [1966] 1973: 172)

Here Adorno points out the double-edged sword that is the ‘theory’ of alienation. Positively, this ‘theory’ suggests that we should not set ourselves apart from or above the non-rational (that is, natural) world, but

should embrace our proximity to and embeddedness within this world, thereby becoming reconciled with it. Negatively, though, the concept of alienation suggests that we are to achieve this state of reconciliation by first making nature a vehicle for the expression of the human self – thereby incorporating nature into ourselves (or making it into our extended body), stripping it of its otherness so that we can find it unthreatening and homely. Adorno objects that this embodies a profoundly unethical, even barbaric, urge to incorporate what is different into the self.

Yet Adorno does not want to abandon all reference to alienation. Rather, he goes on to say – apparently paradoxically – that: ‘If the alien were no longer ostracised, there would be no more alienation’ (172). He means that, ideally, we need to achieve a kind of reconciliation with nature – a state in which there is ‘no more alienation’ – which *includes* positive acceptance and not ostracism of the alien *as* alien, positive acceptance of nature’s otherness to us. He makes this explicit later: ‘The reconciled condition [*der versöhnte Zustand*] would not annex the alien with philosophical imperialism, but would find happiness in the fact that the alien remains that which is distant [*das Ferne*] and different [*Verschiedene*] in the nearness granted to it’ (191).

Is this idea of a reconciled condition that includes alienation coherent? Or is it the incoherent ideal of an absence of alienation in which some alienation yet remains present? There is a way to articulate reconciliation-with-alienation as a coherent ideal, a way taken by the early German Romantics.

II. ROMANTICISM AND ALIENATION

The Early German Romantics developed their particular philosophical orientation out of a concern to overcome the conceptual oppositions that had become entrenched in thought and practice with the Enlightenment (Taylor 1975: ch. 1). These were oppositions between individual and society, mind and matter, soul and body, reason and intuition, and between free humanity and causally determined nature. The Romantics found these oppositions problematic partly on theoretical grounds, as leaving the intellect in a divided and uncomfortable position, but also partly on practical grounds – for in everyday life adherence to these oppositions causes us to experience mind and body, individual and society, and more, as opposed. This condition is one of alienation from one or other side of each opposition (or from both sides at different times): alienation from our own bodies experienced as burdens or encumbrances, or from our societies experienced as hostile or indifferent to our needs.

The last of these oppositions – between human agents who determine their actions according to rational principles, and natural objects the behaviour of which is causally determined – took on particular importance

for the Romantics, as well as for others of their time such as Hegel, because of its central place in Kant's Critical philosophy. As we shall see in a little more detail in subsequent chapters, according to Kant in his theoretical philosophy we are obliged to think of ourselves as free subjects, but we cannot know whether or not we really are free in the sense of having the power to initiate actions out of pure spontaneity. This ignorance creates space for Kant to argue in his practical philosophy that, given the fact of our subjection to moral obligations, we are justified in assuming that we really are free, rational subjects (*CPrR* 79–80/97–98). Under this assumption, which we must make as a matter of practical necessity, human agents are ultimately separate from nature, as free agents who stand out from the realm of causal determination. Overcoming this belief in human separateness from nature was central to the German Romantic project of overcoming entrenched conceptual oppositions.

There were two principal routes along which the humanity/nature opposition could be broken down (Gardner 2011: 90). First, humanity could be absorbed back into nature, as it was in what became the dominant approach in the later nineteenth century: scientific materialism, according to which nature is a vast causal chain and human beings are causally – biologically, psychologically, socially – determined links in this chain. Second and alternatively, nature could be re-absorbed into, or derived from, free and autonomous human subjectivity, as it was in different ways by the German Idealists. A first version of this latter programme was announced by Fichte in his 1797 First Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Here he rejected 'dogmatism', the belief in determinate things (*Sachen*) given independently of the intellect and by which the intellect is to be oriented – an approach that anticipates scientific materialism. Against that approach, Fichte advocated Idealism, centred on faith in the autonomy of the human intellect (*EE* 11/188). But how could Idealists derive nature from autonomous human subjectivity?

Let us look at Fichte's endeavour to make that derivation in his political philosophy, specifically his 1797 *Foundations of Natural Right*. Here he offers us an elaborate transcendental argument: it is a necessary condition for the possibility of conscious experience that the subject perform various activities; but since we do in fact have conscious experience, the condition must be met and the subject must perform these activities.⁶ These activities include that of transforming the natural world in our own image.

Fichte begins as follows. With Kant, Fichte holds that we are active in knowing and experiencing, actively unifying the materials of sensation under concepts (a 'rational being', Fichte insists, is one that *acts*; *FNR* 3/1). It is therefore a condition of possibility of experience that we impose its organisation upon it. But it is a condition of possibility of our imposing this organisation that we ascribe to ourselves the status of *agents* who

impose it: *'a rational being . . . must ascribe to itself an activity whose ultimate ground lies purely and simply within itself'* (18/17). This is because, to perform any action as an intelligent, intentional action, one must tacitly take oneself to be doing so, and thus make tacit reference to oneself as the one doing this performance.⁷ A level of self-consciousness is therefore the necessary condition of conscious experience.

Fichte further reasons that we can only be self-conscious if we are conscious of ourselves as *finite*, determinate, bounded and individuated selves. For to ascribe myself the status of an agent (to 'posit myself') who imposes unified order on sensation, I must ascribe myself the status of a *unified* agent. But I cannot ascribe unity to myself unless I distinguish myself from something else that I identify as not-I. Therefore, conscious experience presupposes my self-awareness as a finite self: 'The rational being presented here is a *finite* rational being' (18/17). To ascribe myself finite status, I must identify an external world outside me (19/18). Is Fichte claiming merely that I must frame the thought of a world external to me? No; for Fichte, if I merely thought of an external world, it would exist merely in my representation and would provide no real limit or contrast to my self. To ascribe myself finite status as a self against the outer world, I must, more strongly, *apprehend* – or 'intuit' (*anschauen*) – a world outside me; I must *feel* this outer world checking or limiting me.⁸ For this to be possible the world must be there, outside me, to exert this check (5/3).⁹

Amongst the preconditions of conscious experience, then, are that I must ascribe myself the status of a free, self-determining agent and that I must always-already inhabit a world outside me, which limits or checks my freedom, imposing upon me sensations that I do not choose to have. Yet for the world to limit my freedom in this way but not destroy it, I must practically act back upon this world to transform it. If my agency is not to be swamped, I must reassert it against the check imposed by the world.

But the activity we are seeking can [only] be posited by the rational being in opposition to the world, which would then limit the activity; and the rational being can produce this activity in order to be able to posit it in opposition to the world (19/18).

Since objects in the world must continue to limit our agency, though, our practical activity can never definitively transform them into mere vehicles of the self. For then the limits that they impose, and with them the possibility of conscious experience, would evaporate. Consequently, our practical activity upon objects must be something that we undertake endlessly, without completion. Moreover, Fichte establishes a moral or practical imperative here. Since constant work on natural things is a condition of the possibility of the experience that we do in fact have, we must undertake this work on rational grounds; reason obliges it. Further, rea-

son obliges us to undertake this work without restraining ourselves, since the transformation of nature must continue *ad infinitum*. Impelling our work is an ideal of removing the check that nature imposes and converting it into our vehicle. The ideal can never be realised; but, for the same reason, it can never cease to inform our efforts. Fichte expresses this ideal in his popular essay 'The Vocation of Man':

nature must gradually enter a condition which . . . keeps its force steady in a definite relation with the power which is destined to control it – the power of man. . . . Cultivated lands shall animate and moderate the inert and hostile atmosphere of primeval forests, deserts, and swamps. . . . nature is to become ever more transparent to us until we can see into its most secret core, and human power . . . shall control it without effort and peacefully maintain any conquest once it is made. (VM 83/268)

The Romantics pitted themselves against this position. Representative of their stance are the objections made to Fichte by Schelling, who belonged to the Jena and Berlin Romantic circles between 1798 and 1800:

I am thoroughly aware of how small a region of consciousness nature must fall into, according to your concept of it. For you nature has no speculative significance at all, but only a teleological one [that is, it is there to serve human purposes]. But are you really of the opinion, for example, that light is only there so that rational beings can also see and hear each other when they talk with one another? (Schelling, letter to Fichte of 3 October 1801, in Schulz 1968: 140)

Nonetheless, the Romantics were not entirely anti-Fichtean. On the contrary, Schlegel and Novalis (like Schelling) were initially attracted to Fichte's ideas, especially their liberatory promise, reflected in Fichte championing the French Revolution. But as we have seen in previous chapters, Schlegel and Novalis turned against Fichte and formulated their own independent philosophical positions (see Beiser 2002: 437–44). The question of nature contributed to motivating this turn. For the metaphysical view that the Romantics adopted, against Fichte, is that human beings depend on nature because it is an all-encompassing whole which develops into manifold articulations, including humankind, which as such is merely one part of the natural world. This whole, Novalis writes, is the '*all . . . in whom we live, breathe and have our being*' (FS #462, 147).

Likewise, for Schlegel in the *Dialogue on Poetry*, 'we, too, are part and flower' of the earth (DP 285). And:

[T]he formless and unconscious poetry which reigns in the plant, radiates in the light . . . is first, original, without it there could certainly be no poetry of words . . . All the holy plays of art are only distant imitations of the infinite play of the world, the eternally self-forming artwork. (DP 285)

All human activities, including that of creating artworks, are part of and derivative of the prior, more all-encompassing creativity of nature (the unconscious realm that produces plants and light). Nature as this unconsciously creative realm is equated with the 'infinite play of the world' – the same world that Schlegel describes as a plant, growing, unfolding through multiple articulations, in the manner of a plant. Novalis, more broadly, understands the world as an organism (AB #503, 90).

It is not obvious, though, that the world as a whole (the absolute or the infinite) is identical to nature. Hegel regarded nature merely as one region *within* the wider world. The Romantics, though, often equate nature with the absolute, and both with the entire world. One reason for this is their conviction that humanity is dependent on, derivative of, and part of nature. For if humanity is part of nature, then humanity and nature are not discrete regions of being as they are for Hegel, but rather nature encompasses humanity. Consequently, too, the basic ontological structures that for Hegel unite and cut across nature *and* mind are for the Romantics structures within nature and within mind *as* a region of nature, and which therefore are in all cases embodied within nature, and do not exist outside it.

In adopting this view, the Romantics are not simply absorbing humanity into nature understood naturalistically. Instead they absorb humanity into a nature that already organises itself and thus prefigures human freedom. Nature or the absolute, for them, is an all-inclusive whole that includes all the varieties of finite things within it. '*Only the All is absolute*', Novalis writes (AB #454, 147). Yet finite things also differ from this whole because they are finite and different from one another, whereas the whole is unitary. If finite things are to differ from nature but also be contained within it, then nature must be self-differentiating, coming out of its unity into differences and then re-uniting them into the higher-level unity of a system. And so, 'Every phenomenon is a limb in an immeasurable chain – which comprehends *all phenomena* as limbs' (S 3: #140, 574). In organising itself, giving itself determinate shape from within itself, nature or the whole prefigures human powers of self-determination, which realise nature's powers of self-organisation at a higher level. 'Thinking . . . is surely nothing else but the finest *evolution* of the plastic forces – it is simply the general force of nature raised to the *nth dignity*' (AB #114, 189). Humanity is re-absorbed into nature, but not in a way that reduces human beings to causally determined things. Our human autonomy does not separate us from the realm of natural determination but just is nature's highest-level realisation, because nature is already a self-organising whole.

How does this bear upon alienation from nature? For Schlegel, modern human individuals are typically alienated from nature, living in an artificial (*künstlich*) culture, and divided (*zerspaltet*) from nature and within ourselves owing to our adherence to the conceptual oppositions pro-

moted by the abstract understanding. But the reality is that we are not separate from nature but a dependent part of it, and we need to overcome our feelings of alienation by acknowledging this reality. However, there are ambiguities within this Romantic view of alienation and its overcoming. On the one hand, the Romantic view is that we are to admit our dependence on nature and correspondingly admit that we are profoundly limited beings, limited compared to nature as parts are to the whole. We can create and achieve little compared to nature (hence Schlegel's adverse comparison between human and natural poetry). To be reconciled with nature, then, we need to revise our self-estimation downwards, becoming more humble about our own powers and more respectful of nature as a greater whole whose powers surpass our own and invite our admiration.

On the other hand, the Romantic view is also that in recognising nature to be a self-organising whole we are finding ourselves everywhere: the whole of nature is already a prototype of the free human self. Novalis dramatises this idea in his famous fairy tale of Hyacinth and Rose-Blossom, contained in his unfinished novel *The Novices of Saïs* (N 53–68/91–95). Friends since childhood, Hyacinth and Rose-Blossom become lovers, but Hyacinth is miserable and dissatisfied with life – a classic alienated adolescent – until his family is visited by a stranger who enthral him with stories of foreign places. Hyacinth sets off to travel the entire world, looking for the Goddess Isis, but as he nears her he falls into a dream of a place that seems strangely familiar. Lifting Isis's veil, he finds – Rose-Blossom. The story ends with the pair living happily ever after in their home town. After all Hyacinth's travels in quest of the alien, what he had wrongly taken to be most alien to him (Isis behind her veil) proves to have been his own home all along. 'Wo gehen wir denn hin'? Novalis also asks in his novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, written in 1800 – 'Where are we going?' 'Immer nach Hause', always home (see Novalis [1800] (1964): 159). The Hyacinth fairy tale has more bearing upon nature than it might seem, for in the traditional image of the veil of Isis, Isis stands for nature, the secrets of which cannot be penetrated by the human mind – just as the veil of this fertile, many-breasted goddess may not be lifted (see Hadot 2006). That which Hyacinth thought most alien and foreign was nature; and nature, it transpires, was all along his home, was the place in which he remains together with himself.

The story is revealing about one side of Romantic metaphysics. If we are the highest realisation of nature's self-organising powers (the 'finest evolution' of nature's general force, as Novalis has it), then the entire natural cosmos leads up to us: we stand at its centre and summit. Wherever we look in nature we find our privileged status and supreme powers of self-determination confirmed, since all that we encounter approximates to and leads back to us. Like Hyacinth, we find nothing fun-

damentally strange, mysterious or different; that which appeared strange only leads us back to ourselves.

The Romantic ideal of reconciliation now seems to license the quest to make oneself at home everywhere, to reshape the world in one's own image, just as that ideal did in Hegel and Marx. Indeed, Adorno actually makes his criticism of the theory of alienation in *Negative Dialectics* with reference to Novalis's ideal of being everywhere at home. Both connotations – depending on nature *and* standing at the summit of nature – appear to be part of the Romantic vision.

At their best, however, the Romantics interpret alienation and reconciliation differently. And after all, despite implicitly criticising Novalis, Adorno also refers his own reconception of reconciliation back to the notion of the 'beautiful alien' (*Schöne Fremde*) that he finds in the later German Romantic poet, the Baron von Eichendorff.¹⁰ By implication, then, Adorno takes his ideal of reconciliation with alienation from the German Romantic tradition. So let us re-examine, once more, early German Romantic thought concerning nature and alienation.

III. RECONCILIATION WITH ALIENATION

nature is a whole. How do we apprehend this fact? For the Romantics, we do so via *intuition*, *Anschauung*, and not discursive cognition, which is not equipped to perceive wholes but only manifolds to be synthesised under concepts. In intuition, on the other hand, we are receptive: not imposing unity through concepts, but immediately detecting a unity that is already infused into the component elements of what we intuit.

In the preceding chapters I've considered the vexed question of whether intuition, in this Romantic sense, counts as knowledge. It is not knowledge proper, for, again, 'Knowing already means a *conditioned* knowing. The unknowability of the Absolute is therefore an identical triviality' (*KFSA* 18: #64, 511). But in intuition we do apprehend the whole, and this apprehension has something of a cognitive character. Thus, intuition has the peculiar status of being ambiguous between knowledge and non-knowledge. Intuition constitutes a level of knowledge, since in it we apprehend a really existing unity; but intuition falls short of meeting the discursive conditions for knowledge proper. For this reason, the Romantics hold, we strive to convert our intuition into knowledge proper; that is, discursive knowledge – to translate our intuitive apprehension that nature is a whole into rational claims: that nature is self-differentiating, self-organising, and more. We are rationally obliged to make this translation, but in doing so we inescapably lose sight of the very whole about which we are trying to gain knowledge. We start to treat it as something more like a part, one finite existent amongst others. Yet the uneasy epistemic status of the intuition itself constantly re-kindles

the effort to render it into knowledge. We strive endlessly to know nature as a whole, to regain the unity of intuition in the shape of discursive reason, without ever reaching this goal.

Do human beings still count here as nature's highest realisation? In a sense, yes. Because we intuit the unity of nature as a whole, we are the part of nature in which its unity rises to a level of self-awareness and self-apprehension. We realise nature by intuiting its unity. *But* this intuitive mode of awareness is self-contradictory, propelling us endlessly to strive for discursive knowledge. Just when we might have seemed to bring the self-organising unity of nature to its fullest realisation by intuiting this unity as such, we only succeed in bringing nature's unity into a state of *division*. This division applies both within intuition – between its status as knowledge and its status as non-knowledge – and within our epistemic efforts generally, which are split between unified intuition and the disunified discursive knowledge into which we strive, unsuccessfully, to translate intuition. We are left in a state of dissatisfaction and restless striving, found nowhere else in the natural world. As Friedrich Hölderlin puts it in his epistolary novel *Hyperion*, we are fated to be cast out of the peace, unity and harmony of nature (*H* 4/586). We cannot straightforwardly be identified as nature's highest realisation, because just when we (almost) realise nature's unity we break that unity apart.

To go back to alienation: In the ideal, reconciled condition, we appreciate that we depend on nature, recognising it as the whole that encompasses us as one of its parts. The root of this appreciation is our intuition of the whole. Yet this intuitive apprehension of the whole, and so too of our dependence on the whole, is not fully cognitive, and however much we strive to render this apprehension into knowledge proper, we cannot. Thus, just when we apprehend nature as the whole on which we depend, we are also obliged to admit that this whole of nature is greater than we can understand or comprehend, an admission that should arouse our respect and awe towards nature as well as a sense of humility. We are also obliged to admit that nature has a unity of which we can only ever fall short and which we can only ever try, endlessly, to regain.

Here we have an elaboration of the ideal of reconciliation in which it *includes* a dimension of alienation. We have reconciliation, in that we appreciate and affirm our dependence on nature and our status as parts of nature rather than separate beings. Yet we also have alienation, because we appreciate that the nature on which we depend is profoundly unlike us and remains out of the reach of any human attempt to comprehend its unity.

These considerations might seem far too abstract to speak meaningfully to our contemporary situation of environmental crisis. But I submit, it is *because* the Romantic reconception of alienation and reconciliation is couched at an abstract, theoretical level that this reconception is able to address and unseat our deep-rooted understandings of the self and na-

ture. These understandings – the ideas that the human self is detached from nature, able to stand outside and comprehensively survey and master nature – are a major strand of the modern, Enlightenment tradition of thought and are entangled with the mainstream of modern science. These ideas are also plausibly regarded as one source of the contemporary ecological crisis (as I indicated earlier). To that extent, if we are to address and respond to this crisis adequately then we need to re-orient ourselves intellectually, and to rethink and reimagine what it would be to be reconciled with the natural world, in the far-reaching way that the Romantics attempt.

NOTES

1. Surprisingly, though, there has been relatively little explicit, thematic discussion of alienation by environmental philosophers. One exception is Biro (2005), who distinguishes between basic human alienation from nature, which he regards as necessary for human social and productive life, and surplus alienation, which for him is a concomitant of social relations of domination. This position has affinities with the Romantic view that I will be exploring here, which distinguishes between a damaging form of alienation (where humanity is conceived as *separate* from nature) and a positive form of alienation (which is part of the acknowledgement of human *dependency* on and *belonging* to nature).

2. There has, however, been considerable discussion of the ecological dimensions of English Romanticism; see, e.g., Bate (1991).

3. Hegel's term *Entfremdung*, deriving from the German word *fremd*, 'alien', is also sometimes translated as 'estrangement'; for example, by Baillie in his 1910/1931 translation of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Whether rendered as 'alienation' or 'estrangement', *Entfremdung* is for Hegel distinct from *Entäußerung*, which, deriving from the word *ausser* ('outer' or 'external'), can be translated either as (again) 'alienation' or as 'externalisation' – the latter the usual preference of A. V. Miller in his 1977 translation of the *Phenomenology*. *Entäußerung* is not commonly used in German; more usual is *Veräußerung*, meaning the action of relinquishing ownership of some thing or power through a contract, such as a sale. Hegel uses *Entäußerung* to mean the embodiment of the self in some external object or existent (see, especially, *PhG* ##484-526, 294–320). For Hegel this activity of self-externalisation need not *per se* involve alienation or estrangement, as long as one learns to recognise oneself in one's external embodiment. In contrast, Marx, writing on alienated labour (*entfremdete Arbeit*) in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, takes it that *Entäußerung* (externalisation of the self in the product of labour) does involve *Entfremdung*, the alienation of that self in its product and in its productive activity (see Marx [1844] (1977): 77–87). In history hitherto, labouring has generally been carried out under social conditions of class division, therefore in a form that inflicts alienation upon the labourer. Hence Marx uses *Entäußerung* and *Entfremdung* interchangeably, distinguishing them both from what he treats as their value-neutral counterpart, objectification: *Vergegenständlichung* (from *Gegenstand*, 'object'). See Arthur (1986: 147–49).

4. In English: 'alienated labour alienates . . . nature from man' (Marx [1844] 1977: 81); here McLellan translates *Entfremdung* as alienation and *Entäußerung* as externalisation. Others translate *Entfremdung* in Marx as estrangement and *Entäußerung* as alienation: for example, Benton in Marx (1975).

5. Isaac Balbus made the even stronger claim that Marx's notion of production is the 'ultimate possible expression' of 'the hubris of domination' over nature (Balbus 1982: 269). In contrast, for some other Marx scholars, Marx rightly emphasises that

human beings depend upon nature – so that, for Marx, rather than the self being separate from nature, the self is intrinsically constituted by its location in and relations with nature (see, e.g., Ollman 1977: 27–28). Nonetheless, I believe that Marx's *ideal* is for us progressively to restructure these relations so that nature becomes shaped by human labour.

6. 'The philosopher's task is to show that [a certain] determinate action is a condition of self-consciousness, and showing this constitutes the [transcendental] deduction of that concept' – its necessity and application (FNR 9/8).

7. As Robert Pippin reconstructs this reasoning: 'Consciousness of objects is implicitly reflexive because . . . whenever I am conscious of any object, I can also be said to "apperceive" implicitly my being *thus* conscious. In any remembering, thinking or imagining, . . . I am also potentially aware *as* I intend that what I am doing *is* an act of remembering, thinking, or imagining' (Pippin 1989: 21).

8. As Fichte puts it: '*Its activity in intuiting the world [in der Weltanschauung] cannot be posited by the rational being as such, for this world-intuiting activity, by its very concept, is not supposed to revert into the intuiiter; it is not supposed to have the intuiiter as its object, but rather something outside and opposed to the intuiiter; namely, a world*' (FNR 19/18).

9. Thus, the traditional view of Fichte, according to which he believes that the self posits the external world merely to check and thereby enable its own thinking, is misguided. His point is rather that conscious experience is ultimately only possible because the self is already embedded within a given world that it apprehends. Thus, Günter Zöller rightly points out that Fichte's Idealism includes a measure of realism (Zöller 2000: 201–3).

10. For the poem of this name, see Eichendorff (1841: 39). Adorno's passage, omitted from Ashton's English translation of *Negative Dialectics*, reads: 'Beyond Romanticism, which felt itself as the pain of the world, suffering from alienation, rises Eichendorff's saying "Beautiful Alien"' (Adorno 1966: 192).

SIX

Hölderlin on Nature

In his theoretical writings and his literary and poetic works, Friedrich Hölderlin's guiding idea is that of the unity of being, or nature: an absolute unity encompassing all that is, all finite human subjects and all finite objects. Hölderlin did not develop a comprehensive theory of being-cum-nature as a unity. Rather, his ideas about nature thread through his thinking about a range of other issues: the scope and limits of human knowledge; the fundamentally uneven, 'ex-centric' course of human existence; the nature of tragedy; and the course of Western history, especially the shift between the ancient and the modern epochs. Hölderlin explores how nature's unity manifolds itself in or unfolds through these various dimensions of life.

In this chapter I set out Hölderlin's unification-philosophy (*Vereinigungsphilosophie*), as I call it following Dieter Henrich (Henrich 1997: 131), and explain how nature figures into it. I then clarify how I locate Hölderlin regarding Early German Romanticism and German Idealism. Thereafter I discuss how Hölderlin addresses human-nature relations and how his position bears in a unique way on the contemporary environmental crisis.

I. HÖLDERLIN'S UNIFICATION-PHILOSOPHY

Hölderlin's core idea is that there is an original unity of all that exists, but that this unity has separated into subjects ranged against objects; the unity has divided. We subjects are products of this division of being, and as a result we cannot completely know being; *qua* unitary whole, it is inaccessible to our mode of cognition. Nevertheless, we feel the presence of this unity, and this feeling prompts us to try to know being, to bring it within our compass. But we cannot fully achieve this goal, and so we

continue to feel the loss of being as a whole; we feel our estrangement from its unity. This drives us to try to gain (or regain) unity, to return into the original unity of all that is: to dissolve the boundaries that individuate us as finite subjects and merge into 'the all'.

The grounds of this position are set out in Hölderlin's fragment, 'Judgement and Being' (*Urteil und Sein*), probably written in April 1795.¹ Its key claims are these (see *EL* 231–32/*SW* 17: 149–53). There is an original absolute unity of subject and object: *being* (*Sein*). This unity should not be confused with the self's identity with itself, the 'I am I'. The original unity is apprehended in 'intellectual intuition' (*intellektualen Anschauung*). But the unity of subject and object in intuition is broken in judgement (*Urteil*), which rests on the original separation (*Ur-teilung*) of these two. The judgement 'I am I' (*Ich bin Ich*), far from constituting an original unity, is in fact an instance of judgement, which presupposes an original separation (*Trennung*).

To decipher these claims, let's bear in mind that 'I am I' refers to Fichte.² So we should briefly recapitulate this Fichtean background, as it arises out of Kant.³ Amongst the many concerns that Kant's immediate successors had about his Critical project, one concerned systematic unity. For Kant, as we know, we must practically assume that we're free, although we know theoretically that, as empirical agents, we're not. For Kant, there is no conflict here, because it's a matter not of two different worlds – one that includes free agents and one composed exclusively of causally determined objects – but of two *perspectives* from which we must look at the world, only 'as if' it were bifurcated. Under the practical-moral perspective we must regard ourselves as free agents, under the theoretical-scientific perspective we must regard everything as causally determined. However, this dual-perspectives view seemed to some of Kant's immediate successors to conflict with what Kant himself saw as a basic intellectual requirement; namely, that our knowledge should be systematically ordered into a coherently unified whole (*CPR* A645/B673, 534). In the name of reason's unity, it seemed, we may not remain content with dual perspectives but must seek to integrate those perspectives and their deliverances into a single whole of knowledge.

This demand for unity led Fichte's Jena predecessor, Karl Leonhard Reinhold, to set out to reconstruct Kantian Idealism on the basis of a first principle from which all its major elements were systematically derived to constitute a coherently unified whole. Rather than assuming discrete faculties of sensibility, understanding and reason, Reinhold sought to deduce our mental capacities from one single 'fact of consciousness' in his *Elementarphilosophie* (*Philosophy of the Elements*) of 1789 to 1794.⁴ The 'fact' is that in consciousness the subject both *relates to* and *differentiates itself from* its representations and their objects (*FPK* 70/78). This fact is stated in the fundamental principle (*Grundsatz*) of the 'concept of representation' (*Begriff von Vorstellung*). This principle, for Reinhold, is infal-

libile, because it is not derived from any other beliefs but is 'drawn only from the *consciousness of a fact*' (70/77), the fact of consciousness of which the principle is the direct conveyance. With the principle of consciousness, Reinhold pares Kant's idea of the unity of apperception down to its most basic structure: to have any conscious experience, one must relate oneself to the objects that one represents and simultaneously represent oneself as a representing subject different from these same objects and one's representations of them. With his account of the transcendental unity of apperception, though, Kant was only specifying how the mind must be thought if we are to make sense of how it can have experience. Reinhold, however, claims more strongly that his principle of consciousness describes the immediately given, factual reality of the mind, where that reality confers certainty on the description.

In his 'Review of *Aenesidimus*' of 1793, Fichte maintains that what Reinhold sees as basic to the mind and knowledge – representation – is not and cannot be basic, even according to Reinhold's own theory of mind.⁵ The reasons are as follows (see Martin 1997: 71--72). As Reinhold says, one element of representation is the subject's self-consciousness, but for Reinhold all consciousness involves the triangle subject-object-representation. So, it seems, to represent anything at all the subject must first represent itself, in self-consciousness. But to be self-conscious it must represent itself in a triangulated way by distinguishing this representation of itself from itself. But to be able to do that – to represent itself – it must, as with all representations, be self-conscious. But to do that it must represent itself in a triangulated way . . . and so on in an infinite regress.

Fichte thinks that the regress can be avoided if self-consciousness is *pre-representational*, simple and immediate:

Aenesidimus continues: 'That distinguishing and relating which is required for representation is itself an act of representing' . . . Both distinguishing and relating can become objects of representation . . . However, they are not originally representations, but [are] only the ways in which the mind necessarily must be thought to act if it is to produce a representation. *But of course it undeniably follows from this that representation is not the highest concept for every conceivable action of our minds.* (AR 64–65/9; emphases mine)

In this case we would have a first principle that expresses not the 'fact of consciousness' but the nature of self-consciousness as something absolutely simple and non-representational, the simplicity of which is immediately given in any experience. It would then be this simple unity of self-consciousness that is the foundation of all knowledge and experience. Now, Fichte did not necessarily take this view.⁶ But if he did – and he can be so interpreted – then he was continuing in Reinhold's foundationalist footsteps. And that, at key junctures, is how Hölderlin, Novalis and Schlegel took Fichte, so that version of Fichte – the foundationalist one –

matters for our purposes; that is, deciphering how Early German Romanticism and Idealism took shape.

Hölderlin sketches his criticisms of the Fichtean view to Hegel in a letter of January 1795 ('allegedly Fichtean', perhaps, but for simplicity I'll just say 'Fichtean' without qualification). Hölderlin informs Hegel that Fichte is putting forward a new first principle, but that Fichte's

absolute I (= Spinoza's substance) contains all reality; it is everything, and outside it there is nothing; therefore for this absolute I there is no object, for otherwise all reality would not be in it; but a consciousness without object is not thinkable, and if I myself am this object, then I am necessarily limited, . . . therefore not absolute; therefore, no consciousness is thinkable within the absolute I, as absolute I I have no consciousness. (EL 48/SW 19: 212)

In essence, then, Hölderlin agrees with Fichte that knowledge and experience are possible only on the basis of an immediate, intuitive, distinctionless unity. But Hölderlin's concern is that Fichte's description of this unity is wrong and one-sided because it identifies the unity as a *subject*, something set over against the realm of objects. Relatedly, if this unitary 'self-consciousness' is merely intuitive and abstains from making distinctions of the kind drawn within the field of judgement, then how can this unity even be identified as consciousness of a *self* and not a not-self? We should therefore subtract the idea that the original unity is that of a subject. We are then left with the thought that for human experience to be possible, there must prior to cognitive experience be a sheer, immediate unity of being. This unity is not the unity of the self with itself (the Fichtean I am I), since no discrimination of self from non-self can yet obtain here. There is just an immediate unity, *simpliciter*. Within this unity the one intuiting imposes no discriminations; it simply intuits itself as an absolute, undivided whole. Indeed, it does not divide itself *qua* intuiting from itself *qua* intuited; it is simply one whole – pure being, from which all discrimination and negation are absent. 'Being, – expresses the combination of subject and object. Where subject and object are absolutely, not only partly, united . . . there and nowhere else can there be talk of *being as such*' (EL 231/ SW 17: 149).

One puzzle here is this. If there must be this intuitive unity, 'being as such', in order to make conscious experience possible, then the reason for believing in this intuitive unity is that it is a necessary condition of conscious experience. But if the intuitive unity is not an intuitive *self*-awareness, then how does it make possible conscious experience on the part of the *self*? (And if the intuitive unity is not subjective such that it makes experience possible, then why should we even believe in it?)

In 'Judgement and Being' Hölderlin's answer is that the intuitive unity *is* the ground of possibility for experience, which is necessarily conscious experience of objects on the part of the subject. But to make

experience possible *and* be originally non-subjective, the intuitive unity must self-divide into subject-consciousness and objects-of-consciousness. The intuitive unity makes cognitive experience possible by dividing into these two realms, that of subjects who judge and that of objects subject to judgement. Indeed, the unity must be such that it necessarily self-divides. It *judges*. Hölderlin plays here on the word *judgement* (*Urteil*), mistakenly thinking that the word originally meant 'primal division' (*Ur-teilen*). This does not damage his metaphysical point, which is that there is a 'primal separation [*ursprüngliche Trennung*] . . . by which object and subject first become possible, the original division [*Ur-teilung*]' (EL 231/SW 17: 153). However, since being is not originally a subject, its judging activity is not primarily an intellectual process but a metaphysical or ontological one, that of actually splitting (*trennen*) into subjects over against objects, so constituting both sorts of existent.

Hölderlin thus champions a monistic metaphysics on which there is a fundamental unity of all that is, which divides to generate manifold finite subjects and objects. *Contra* Fichte, the self is not the ground of the experienced world. Rather, the self is made *by* being and it depends upon the original unity of being out of which it emerges. The self is a dependent, not an independent, existent. It was important to Hölderlin so to recast the self as dependent, not sovereign. For him, Fichte had inflated the self in a way that tied in with the damaging modern trend towards humankind's practical mastery of nature. Fichte had, after all, sought to defend the Enlightenment, as did Reinhold and Kant: their common project was to shore up the Enlightenment by putting it on sound bases. But in defending the Enlightenment theoretically, Fichte had defended not only its positive, emancipatory dimension but also its negative dimension, the extension of human dominion over nature. The Romantic response – in which Hölderlin shares – was to retain the modern conception of the subject, as an agent that structures its own experience and has autonomous agency, while recasting that subject as finite, dependent on and beholden to the greater whole of the world. In this way the Romantics hoped to retrieve the positive side of the Enlightenment from its negative side.

II. UNITY AND DIFFERENCE

What is the relation between *Sein* and the finite subjects and objects that it preconditions? In places, Hölderlin suggests that when being divides, its unity is lost and it ceases to exist *as* being. As it is no more, we can only seek it endlessly without regaining it. 'We, with nature, are fallen, and what once . . . was one, now struggles against itself', he writes in the preface to the penultimate draft of *Hyperion* (SW 10: 162). We are cast out of the plenitude of being, just as after the Fall humankind was evicted

from Eden, and just as the modern Europeans – ‘Hesperians’ in Hölderlin’s term – have lost contact with the gods of Greece and with Jesus Christ, divinities who used to embody a last residue – a lingering trace on earth – of the original whole.

However, if finite existents indeed differ from being, then this seems to compromise being’s absolute unity. If being once existed but now is not, then the whole development of the world after its division falls outside of being. But if being does not encompass everything, either structurally or temporal-historically, then being is after all not the absolute unity of all that is. This puzzle is central to Hölderlin’s thought, as it is more broadly to the formation of both Early German Romantic metaphysics and the German Idealist systems of Schelling and Hegel. Schlegel, Novalis, Hölderlin, Schelling and Hegel all hold that the world is an absolute unity, yet they also accept that the world contains manifold finite objects and finite subjects. The challenge is to explain how these are compatible.

Schelling adopts one solution in his Identity-Philosophy phase, which began in 1800: he simply denies the reality of finite subjects and objects. If the absolute is truly one, then it *cannot* differentiate itself – it cannot come forth out of itself (*aus sich selbst herausgehen*) – for then it would not be absolutely one (according to his 1803 to 1804 Würzburg lectures on his *System of Philosophy in General*: SPG 163/171). Subjects and objects and all particulars, Schelling maintains at this point, merely *appear* real to us when we view the world through the prism of the analytical, divisive mode of thought that he calls reflection (*Reflexion*).

This solution has flaws. Since finite subjects are amongst the particulars that are not truly real, the one who is engaged in understanding the world cannot really be any finite subject but can only be the absolute itself. Schelling concurs: ‘*This one that knows and is known is necessarily the identical One in all possible situations of knowledge and being known*’ (SPG 143/140–41). The underlying reality of any subject knowing any object is that the absolute knows itself. But then the illusion that there are differences arises, after all, not because *we* use reflection, but because the absolute applies reflection to itself in knowing itself. The absolute knows itself not truly or authentically, but only approximately. Yet again, according to Schelling’s identity-philosophy the difference between genuine and approximate knowledge, like all differences, can only be apparent, not real. So it can only *appear* to the absolute that it knows itself approximately rather than authentically. But this appearance can only arise if the absolute knows its own self-knowing merely approximately – which, again, can only be an appearance. In short, an infinite regress of levels of appearance opens up. The source of this regress is the conflict between Schelling’s denial that any differences are real and his need to explain the appearance that there are differences by differentiating between reality and appearance. If reality and appearance differ, then at least one difference is real.

Another alternative is to accept that finite subjects and objects really are *differentiae* that being produces within itself, but by dividing not such that it disappears in place of them but such that it becomes internally differentiated *into* them. That is, if being is to be wholly unitary then it must incorporate all differences, so that they do not fall outside it and compromise its unity. At the same time, the differences must remain fully real, otherwise being would not truly have differentiated itself and would not be a unity sufficiently powerful to accommodate real differences. So Hölderlin suggests in a 1798 letter: it is clear

how intimately every individual part is bound up with the whole and that together they make up just one living whole which, however, is individualized through and through and consists of parts which are utterly independent but at the same intimately and indissolubly interconnected. (EL 118/SW 19: 343)

All-encompassing as being is, it can still be the case that human subjects are cast out of being and are in eternal exile. Hölderlin can think of being as self-differentiating and still adopt his elegiac view of human existence. For the differences into which being unfolds are *real*. To be sure, we human individuals are part of being – but, just because we are *mere* parts and not the whole, we are different from the whole and can never fully know it fully. Hence Hölderlin says that being ‘goes under’ into the world (EL 271/SW 14: 136), not so that it ceases to exist but so that it is now divided into parts that feel their exile from the whole as such.

One might object that if being is an absolute unity, then ultimately human subjects must remain held within being and *cannot* be in exile from it. Hölderlin rejoins that we feel estranged from being precisely because we *are* held within it. As parts of being, we are dependent on the whole and we feel our dependency, as we feel the whole on which we depend. To apprehend (*empfinden*) the world as we do, dissolved into its parts, we must also feel it as the whole that runs through them all (EL 271–72/SW 14: 140), the ‘ether’ that gathers everything together (DE V1 li. 419). But in feeling the presence of the whole, we feel that this whole goes beyond us, is greater than us, an all-pervasive presence but one that we cannot fully comprehend. Thus, estrangement is a fundamental structuring feature of the human condition.

In being estranged from the whole, we are equally estranged from nature. Hölderlin’s character Hyperion laments that ‘a moment of thought throws me down. I think, and . . . the world that is eternally one [*die ewigeinige Welt*] is gone; nature closes her arms, and I stand like an alien [*Fremdling*] before her and do not understand [*verstehe*] her’ (H 4/ 586). Empedocles, too, mourns that in sinning against being, he has sinned against nature. He reminisces:

openly my heart, / . . . gave itself unto the earnest earth / The suffering one, and oft in holy night / I swore . . . / To love with fearless faith the

fateful one / And not to scorn a single one of all her mysteries. / The winds then wafted otherwise within my grove, / The mountain springs were gurgling tenderly, / And on the flowers' mild yet fiery breaths / O earth! came gently to me your more reposeful life. (DE V1 li. 384–93).

Before I explore the grounds for this equation of being and nature, let's pause to consider what the preceding suggests about Hölderlin's placement between German Romanticism and Idealism.

III. LOCATING HÖLDERLIN

Is Hölderlin a German Romantic, Idealist, or neither? Heidegger denies that Hölderlin properly belongs within the orbit of post-Kantian German philosophy at all. Indeed, for Heidegger, Hölderlin broke not merely from German Idealism but also from Western metaphysics, returning to a pre-Socratic poetic form of thinking. Hölderlin was certainly heavily influenced by the pre-Socratics, above all Empedocles.⁷ But Heidegger's interpretation presupposes his general view that the Western tradition has proceeded through Plato's break with the temporal, sensible world in favour of eternal, ideal forms, up to the modern stress on subjectivity as the source of the world's order and intelligibility, always privileging what is eternal and ideal but increasingly locating its source in the thinking subject. For Heidegger, therefore, when Hölderlin dethrones the subject in favour of being and denies that the subject can fully know the being that is its ground, Hölderlin must be breaking with the West's entire subject-oriented trajectory (see, for instance, Heidegger [1984] 1996: 47, 165–67). But that conclusion need not follow if we recognise that there have always been varieties of Western philosophy that do not make the subject their centrepiece.

Dieter Henrich sets his reading of Hölderlin against Heidegger's (e.g., Henrich 1996). For Henrich, Hölderlin's view that the unity of being precedes reflective consciousness arose not against but *from* German philosophy after Kant, and this view was fundamental in shaping German Idealism, according to which the absolute precedes subjectivity. In Hegel's version of this view, the absolute idea precedes the human spirit – 'idea' meaning nothing subjective but a unified rational structure composed of all universals and constituting reality. According to Henrich, Hölderlin decisively steered Hegel in this direction (they were very close interlocutors first in Tübingen then Frankfurt). Henrich locates Hölderlin with Idealism, then, not Romanticism: 'Hölderlin was never a romantic, and we would err seriously if we subsumed him under that designation' (Henrich 2003: 227).

Henrich says this on three further grounds. (1) Biographically, Hölderlin was not part of the Jena or Berlin Romantic circles that centred around Friedrich and August Schlegel. Hölderlin's circles instead in-

cluded first his Tübingen co-students Schelling and Hegel, then, in Frankfurt in 1797, Hegel again, the radical Jacobin Isaac von Sinclair and Jakob Zwilling (Sinclair and Zwilling having also studied with Fichte in 1794 to 1795). Circle membership is not conclusive, though, for there *was* an important meeting between Novalis, Hölderlin, Fichte and Niethammer in May 1795,⁸ and Hölderlin's close associate Schelling did join the Schlegel circle. (2) Hölderlin didn't subscribe to the Romantic programme of writing fragmentary, ironic literature, showcased in the *Athenaeum*. Instead, Hölderlin 'advocated perfection in the formal composition of poems' (Henrich 2003: 227). He composed odes and hymns modelled on those of Pindar; he translated *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*; and he drafted his own tragedy *The Death of Empedocles*. (3) Finally, for Henrich, Schlegel and Novalis accepted one fundamental Fichtean conviction: that 'the ultimate reality . . . reveals itself in the life of the mind' so that we seek 'the ultimate on the inward path' (Henrich 2003: 224, 227). As Henrich interprets Novalis and Schlegel, the 'unity of being' for which we strive is the unity of all our possible subjective experiences and activities, which we strive to integrate over time, so that *pace* Fichte (or, at least, *pace* Fichte taken foundationalistically) this 'absolute I am I' is a regulative ideal rather than a foundational starting point. Thus, Romanticism, for Henrich, remains indebted to Fichte and weighted towards subjectivity.

Manfred Frank counters that Hölderlin *was* a Romantic (2004: 27–28) because Hölderlin endorsed (what for Frank is) the key Romantic position that there is a unity of being that cannot be fully known but only felt or intuited, and that grounds subject and object, so that our ground is impenetrable to us but we strive to know it intellectually. According to Frank, Novalis holds this position, and he is clearly a Romantic. So, as Hölderlin holds the same position, he too should be so classified.

In sum, for Heidegger, Hölderlin's emphasis on being's priority to the subject places him outside Western metaphysics. For Henrich, it places him within metaphysics, specifically that of German Idealism, but outside Romanticism because the latter is subject-centred. For Frank, that same emphasis again identifies Hölderlin *as* a Romantic, because Romanticism is actually not subject-centred but being-centred; whatever Hölderlin's biographical and poetic differences from Novalis and Schlegel, he shares their basic philosophical stance.

Overall I agree with Frank that Hölderlin's thought aligns and belongs with that of Novalis and Schlegel. But for Frank, the corollary of Hölderlin being a Romantic is that he is an anti-Idealist (2004: 28). Romanticism and Idealism are opposed outlooks, in Frank's view. For Henrich, in contrast, Hölderlin originates the core of absolute Idealism: 'an idealism that is not founded on an analysis of the structure of the mental' but that describes the self-differentiating structure of reality which precedes and unfolds into the mental realm (Henrich 2003: 292). But as Hegel elaborates this view, the real structure unfolds in a way that is *rational*, so

that we as rational beings can fully know about this structure. The structure culminates in our rational existence and, being of the real that is rational, we can also know that real rationally.

I take a middle route between these views of Hölderlin as Romantic anti-Idealist (Frank) and proto-Absolute Idealist (Henrich). For Hölderlin, the unity of being, *qua* whole and unitary, cannot be adequately grasped under discursive, conceptual knowledge but can only be apprehended in its real wholeness in feeling and intuition. This sets Hölderlin apart from Hegel and places him in the Romantic camp, with Novalis and Schlegel, with whom he agrees that our feeling and our attempted theoretical knowledge of the whole can never perfectly coincide. Yet for Hegel, the absolute is rational and rationally knowable, but for all that is not as such mental in character; it precedes and preconditions mind as just one of its realisations. To this extent Hölderlin and Hegel share common ground. For Hölderlin agrees that being precedes and preconditions subjectivity, and while being cannot be adequately known discursively, it is not altogether unknowable. We apprehend its presence intuitively, we know that it is the ground of subjectivity, and our apprehension drives our process of trying endlessly, asymptotically, to recapture at a discursive level what it tells us intuitively.

IV. BEING, NATURE AND CULTURE

Hölderlin equates being and nature. Perhaps he is simply taking nature to be all that is – reality as a whole – rather than specifically that part of reality that is non-artificial or takes shape ‘without the agency, or without the voluntary and intentional agency, of man’ (Mill 1969: 375). Yet when Hölderlin’s characters Hyperion and Empedocles celebrate the peaceful times when they intuited the unity of nature, they recall enjoying gentle breezes and winds, gurgling streams, flowing rivers, the sunlight, blossoms, birdsong, mountain vistas and sea views. Hyperion and Empedocles feel the unity of the whole in phenomena (breezes, rivers, etc.), which *are* natural in that they are not products of human agency; they are non-artificial. To that extent Hölderlin does seem to equate nature with all that exists non-artificially.

Moreover, these phenomena – breezes, rivers, and more – are described as giving us intuitive access to nature as *life*. This middle term *life* shows why Hölderlin equates nature and being. When being divides itself into the plurality of things, it is acting as living organisms do, for an organism is a unity that self-organises into a system of different, functionally interrelated organs – for Hölderlin, following Kant.⁹ For Kant, we must regard organisms as purposive wholes, as if each has an internal purpose explaining why all its parts arise and interrelate as they do (*CJ* §67, 257–58/378–79). For Kant too, we must approach nature as a whole as

if it were organised upon an overarching plan. Dropping Kant's epistemic restrictions, for Hölderlin, being really is a whole that self-divides; that is, a large-scale organism. Further, because being is all reality as self-organising, it is all reality *as non-artificial* – i.e. natural – because its organisation comes from itself, not being imposed by any human agents.

Hölderlin also equates being with nature because he relies on an ancient Greek understanding of nature as *physis*; that is, that which 'loves to hide' or 'likes to dissimulate itself' in Heraclitus's words. Because being is always disappearing, receding behind its self-differentiation into objects and subjects, being can be said to 'love to hide', and so can be identified with nature as *physis*.¹⁰ Ultimately, then, these meanings of *nature* converge: to love to hide is to disperse and self-differentiate, which is to operate organically and non-artificially.

This idea that nature hides itself bears, too, on Hölderlin's claim that the 'blessed unity, being in the true sense of the word, is lost to us and we must lose it . . . We tear ourselves out of the peaceful *hen kai pan* of the world in order to reconstruct it [*herzustellen*] for ourselves' (SW 10: 277). As knowing subjects, we reconstruct the order of being, but insofar as we do so using our intellects, making conceptual discriminations and judgments, we cannot regain an awareness of being in its pure unity, which remains lost to us. But if despite our reconstructive endeavours we cannot ever gain adequate knowledge of being, then how do we know that it even exists? The answer, for Hölderlin, is that we intuit its presence:

The unremitting demand that must be made of any system, the unification of subject and object in an absolute . . . although possible aesthetically, in an act of intellectual intuition [*intellektualen Anschauung*], is theoretically possible only through infinite approximation, like the approximation of a square to a circle. (EL 62/SW 19: 231)

Aesthetically, we intuit the absolute whole, and theory can only ever try to catch up. Life 'is present only in feeling [*im Gefühle*] and not for knowledge [*Erkenntnis*]' (EL 261/SW 13: 844).¹¹ Or 'the infinite [*die Unendliche*] . . . cannot . . . be grasped [*gefaßt*] other than from an askew perspective [*aus linkischem Gesichtspunkt*]' (EL 332/SW 16: 421). And Hölderlin's references to mountains, rivers, seas, and more indicate that we intuit the unity of nature particularly directly in these harmonious and beautiful natural phenomena.

How can Hölderlin consistently claim that we issue from and are part of nature *and* are estranged from it, its unity lost to us? Surely if we are part of nature, this estrangement cannot be real? Hölderlin, however, insists that nature really self-divides even as it remains whole, so that consequently human subjects are both estranged from the whole and its parts. For nature to remain absolutely whole, it must remain whole across its own real self-divisions. A contrast, we saw, is with Schelling's identity philosophy on which the absolute alone is real and differences

are merely apparent. For Hegel instead, with Hölderlin, true identity is the identity of identity and difference; unless identity includes real difference, it is not truly identity at all because the differences lie outside it (see Nassar 2011). Where Hegel differs from Hölderlin, though, is in equating what is absolutely self-identical with reason, rather than – as for Hölderlin – with life, nature and *physis*. These terms are all indicative that for Hölderlin we can never adequately comprehend how the whole self-differentiates and remains one with itself in doing so. Its way of moving is not that of the human intellect.

Our curious position as human beings, inside nature yet estranged from it, leads us to produce culture: different cultures embody different ways of negotiating our ambivalent position vis-à-vis nature. Or, as Hölderlin prefaces the penultimate draft of *Hyperion*, different cultures balance in different ways our two basic drives (*Triebe*): to unite with nature and to remain outside it. The first is to ‘merge ourselves into nature, with the one infinite whole, that is the goal of all our strivings’ (SW 10: 277); to cease to be estranged and find unity. The second drive is to remain outside nature’s unity: after all, we are finite subjects; to reunite with nature would be to die, to dissolve into the all. Or:

When the beautiful world began for us, then we came to consciousness, then we were finite. Now we feel deeply the limitation of our being, and yet there is in us something that gladly holds onto these chains – for [otherwise] . . . we would know of nothing outside ourselves, and so also nothing of ourselves, and to know nothing of oneself, not to feel [*fühlen*] oneself, and to be annihilated, is for us the same thing. (SW 10: 106–7)

While *Hyperion* traces the individual protagonist’s efforts to balance these two impulses, Hölderlin also thinks that ancient and modern cultures strike different balances.¹² One might hold – as Schlegel did in his classicist phase – that modernity is unfavourable to poetry and intellectually oriented, and that the moderns feel the division between their intellects and their feelings, struggling to unite these as poetry demands. The moderns have lost the beautiful harmony of the ancient Greeks. If so, then the moderns would have a heightened drive towards separateness from nature. However, in his drafts of *The Death of Empedocles* from 1797 onwards, Hölderlin adopts only a qualified version of that classicist-type position. Ancient Greek tragedies, he suggests, depict a hero or heroine striving to regain unity with nature within the setting of a culture that is highly separated from nature, highly artificial, in which ‘Youthful, forceful nature [has] slumped and died / Beneath [the] scythe’ (DE V1 li 1343–44). The hero or heroine strives to overcome this opposition and reunite culture with nature, restoring the unity of being. Empedocles urges his people to throw off their artificial customs and refound their way of life on nature (DE V1 li 1502–25). He performs miraculous heal-

ing, in touch with the powers of nature as he is. His harmony with his nature gives him power and charisma. It seems, then, that the Greeks too had a heightened drive towards separateness, which Empedocles opposed. And yet Empedocles has been urging his people to reform their culture, and he has been leading them – in both ways acting artistically or *artificially* towards his people and culture, trying to reshape what exists in line with ideals. Empedocles has thereby come, despite himself, to embody culture in its *antagonism* to nature, not in unity with it as he sought. He has been seeking to master nature, not to respect it (*DE* V1 li 474–80).

In Hölderlin's first version of the tragedy, Empedocles sees a last, but self-destructive, self-dissolving way to unite with nature by flinging himself into Mount Etna. In the second version, he immolates himself in the crater not in a final attempt to achieve unity but in order to atone for having sinned by trying to bring about unity artificially. In the third version, Empedocles is confronted by an antagonist called Manes, who embodies the fate that is to befall the Greeks and who anticipates the post-Greco-European outlook on life.¹³ In this antagonist Manes, 'the subjective . . . assumes the passive shape of suffering, of enduring, of holding firm' (*EL* 270/SW 13: 862). That is, Manes – unlike Empedocles – accepts the suffering incumbent on estrangement from nature; Manes endures estrangement from nature rather than striving for unity with it. Estrangement endured will also be the way of life of the post-Greek Europeans, the 'Hesperians': that is, our drive to unite with nature is more steadily, habitually and instinctively repressed than that drive was in the Greeks.¹⁴

The Greeks, though, only desired unity with nature because they too were estranged from it – estranged, as we all are *qua* finite subjects. Yet, Hölderlin reasons, the Greeks nonetheless had a very strong drive to unite with nature (Empedocles embodies this). Constantly risking being overpowered by this drive, they imposed upon their artistic products an excessively severe and austere form, not allowing the drive to unity to find cultural expression for fear that it would overwhelm and derail them. The Greeks, then, distanced themselves from nature artistically only *because* they were so driven towards it in the first place. Here is Hölderlin's version of the thought that the Greeks were 'closer to nature' than the moderns: the former had a stronger *drive* towards unity with nature.¹⁵

In contrast, in the Hesperians the classical effort to achieve distance from nature has become habitual and ingrained, making our drive to unite with nature comparatively weak and our drive towards separateness comparatively strong. But the benefit is that we can tolerate artistic works that are much less restrained than classical works – more uninhibited in their expression of passion, their physical and visceral concreteness, their proximity to natural forces and to the orgiastic exuberance of the 'aorgic' (*aorgisch*: that which forms itself dynamically and is wild,

chaotic and productive; *EL* 261/SW 13: 844; see also *EL* 207/SW 19: 492).¹⁶ We moderns can be relatively relaxed about giving our drive to unite with nature rein, since this drive is not as powerful or threatening to our cultural life as it was in the Greeks.

Consequently, too, we moderns can translate the ancient tragedies in a way that releases from within them the ‘sacred fire’ that the Greeks repressed excessively severely. We thereby correct the artistic mistakes (*Kunstfehler*) of the originals (*EL* 215/SW 19: 502). Hölderlin attempted this in his Sophocles translations, for instance, notoriously, having Ismene ask Antigone: ‘What’s happening? You seem to dye your word red’ (*Du scheinst ein rotes Wort zu färben*) (*HS* 71/SW 16: 267) – in contrast to the measured and much less literal Victorian version of Richard Claverhouse Jebb: ‘What is it? ’Tis plain that thou art brooding on some dark tidings’ (Jebb [1900] 2004:13).¹⁷ Overall, then, Hölderlin does agree with Schlegel that modern Europeans are more distanced from nature than the ancient Greeks were – but under several qualifications and with intriguing complications.

On the one hand, for Hölderlin, estrangement from being’s unity is part of our universal existential condition insofar as we are mere parts of a whole that is lost to us. On the other hand, our attachment to the estranged side of our condition is especially accentuated in modernity. Yet paradoxically, this attachment to estrangement gives us safe space to indulge nature’s aorgic powers and channel them artistically. To put this differently: *because* the Enlightenment entrenches reason and artifice so deeply in the human psyche and culture, the Enlightenment creates a safe space for their antitheses – passion and nature – to re-emerge more vitally. Romanticism as a poetry of nature and passion thus emerges from and is enabled by the Enlightenment; it was not available to the Greeks. Romanticism has become possible only by the Enlightenment so intensifying the rule of reason that it yet creates an opening onto what is other to reason.

V. HÖLDERLIN’S ENVIRONMENTAL QUIETISM

I now turn to some practical implications of Hölderlin’s views. To locate these, let’s begin by noting a dilemma that arises if we say that modern societies are in environmental crisis because their members are cut off, alienated or separated from nature. On this view, feeling alienated from nature is undesirable, and we ought to feel at one with nature. The latter is desirable, presumably, because really we *are* one with nature so that in thinking, feeling and acting otherwise we nonetheless actually damage nature. For as we are tightly bound up with nature in reality, our actions cannot avoid affecting nature through-and-through, even when we do not acknowledge this because we wrongly assume that we are separate

from nature. Thus, feeling estranged from nature hinders us from acknowledging the effects on nature of our actions and our responsibility for these effects (for bringing about climate change, for example). However, if we really are one with nature all along, then all our culture-making activities must express our naturalness, and all the cultures we create must be expressions and outgrowths of nature – even, say, motorways or nuclear power stations (Vogel 1998: 171). Indeed, Freya Mathews has suggested that because even bulldozers and missiles are part of the natural order, we ought to respect them and hold them sacred (Mathews 1994: 164–65). The dilemma, then, is this: arguably our estrangement from nature has, at least, contributed to environmental crisis; but if we acknowledge instead that we inescapably *are* part of nature, then we seem to have no grounds for distinguishing normatively between more and less natural ways of life or criticising environmentally damaging practices and institutions as embodying a damaging estrangement from nature. For in reality there *is* no separateness; separateness has only ever been an illusion.

Hölderlin's unification-philosophy provides a way to think past this dilemma. From his perspective, some cultures can be more estranged from nature than others, as the expressions and products of human beings who are more estranged (or whose drive to separateness is more ingrained). Insofar as Hesperian culture is particularly entrenched in its separation from nature, it is perhaps unsurprising that this culture is especially environmentally destructive. At the same time, this culture, like all cultures, is part of nature, which after all is all-encompassing. Nonetheless, since nature's unity includes real differences, Hesperian culture can be separated from nature while also remaining a part of it.

However, Hölderlin's unification-philosophy also seems to imply that our best response to environmental crisis is to adopt a quietist stance: to do nothing. This implication arises as follows. For Hölderlin, all cultures are ways of working out our relations to nature. These cultures embody different degrees of estrangement from nature, but where that estrangement itself is part of our existential condition, arising inherently out of our ambiguous position within the whole of being. As such, estrangement from nature is neither our fault nor the result of our activities or ways of thinking. Rather, the estrangement arises from nature itself as it self-divides. If we, human subjects, interpret ourselves as being responsible for our estrangement from nature and the environmentally harmful actions that follow from it, then we are falsely presuming that we are the authors of our own estranged stance. In reality, though, 'all the . . . rivers of human activity flow into . . . nature, just as they start out from it' (*EL* 136/SW 19: 376).

From Hölderlin's perspective, then, to blame ourselves for being alienated from nature is to make falsely anthropocentric assumptions. Equally, it would be inappropriate to try by our own voluntary action to

overcome our separation from nature. To suppose that we can do so is falsely to assume that *we* can act, independently of nature, to undo the division it has created within itself. But in reality we have become separated from nature by *its* power, so it is not in *our* power to undo separation. Hölderlin conveys this point in his poem 'As on a holiday . . .', where the poet attempts to precipitate reconciliation with nature on his own initiative and is cast down, humiliated, by the gods in punishment for this hubris (*PF* 399/122–24). There is a historical dimension to these thoughts: that the classical Greeks, or their iconic figures such as Empedocles, did commit this hubris, and that post-classical Europe represents a progression just insofar as it adopts the more modest stance personified by Manes.

To the extent that he thus endorses the Hesperian attitude, Hölderlin appears to embrace estrangement and its practical manifestations. What then are we to 'do' in the face of the resulting environmental crisis? From Hölderlin's perspective, the only appropriate response is to recognise our dependence on nature, hence that it is nature that has separated in and through us, hence that as dependent parts of separated nature we can only endure this separation – and its expression in destructiveness towards the natural environment. To be sure, the same separation creates the opening for us to express passions and the aorgic as the Greeks could not. But since that opening arises only within our separation, it cannot constitute a lasting way of overcoming the separation.

Perhaps we can only hope that nature may change its mode of being – may, at some point, enter into a different and renewed kind of unity with itself, although this might spell the end of our own existence, at least the kind of human existence we have known so far. We can only wait, patiently and hopefully, until such an epochal event may occur. Hölderlin sees this waiting in terms of our need to accept the suffering that falls to us, our exile from the original 'peace' of nature. To try to act to restore that peace through our own efforts would be to make the anthropocentric assumption that we have sovereign authority over our own conduct towards nature, as we do not. Apparently, then, we should adopt a quietist stance in the face of environmental crisis.

These claims should be qualified, though, for Hölderlin allows that we can valuably prepare ourselves for a possible change in nature's mode of being. Poets play a key role here. The poet helps to prepare us for this possible event by evoking nature's original unity of nature and lamenting its passing and – its index – the disappearance of the gods from the world, a symptom of our deepened alienation: we no longer find nature divine. The poet can also celebrate in hymns an imagined future reconciliation between humanity and nature and anticipate a time when human domination over nature will be submerged by nature as it re-attains unity. In these ways the poet puts us in an appropriate frame of mind to receive a change in nature's mode of being, should one occur.

With this qualification in mind, is Hölderlin's quietism totally unhelpful regarding environmental crisis? Perhaps not *totally*. First, he anticipates recent worries that seeking a 'technological fix' (say, in geo-engineering) perpetuates the same mind-set and set of assumptions about sovereign human agency which has led to environmental crisis in the first place. Second, our preparation for a possible re-unification of being might include mundane activities usually seen as mitigating environmental crisis (composting, recycling, walking more and driving less, etc.). Ordinarily, these activities are justified by their expected causal consequences, as being likely to alleviate or at least not worsen environmental crisis; from Hölderlin's standpoint, they would instead be justified insofar as they express a state of preparedness for nature to change. Third, and most importantly, Hölderlin's quietism is motivated by considerations that count as proto-environmentalist: namely, his concern to re-emphasise that human subjects cannot act independently of the whole of nature of which they are part. Subjects depend on nature, not the other way around.

NOTES

1. The fragment was published in 1961 by Friedrich Beißner, who edited the *Großer Stuttgart Ausgabe* of Hölderlin's works; Beißner named the fragment 'Judgement and Being'. A reordered version of the fragment appeared in the Frankfurt edition of Hölderlin's works edited by Sattler and others, renamed 'Sein Urteil Möglichkeit' ('Being Judgement Possibility'). 'Judgement and Being' has been variously dated to early 1795, after 5 April 1795, and up until the end of May 1795 (see *EL* 376, n. 11). I've retained the name 'Judgement and Being' because it is the best known.

2. As Hölderlin told Hegel in 1795 (*EL* 48/SW 19: 212), he read Fichte's *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* in summer 1794 when it was published. He attended Fichte's lectures in Jena later that year, lauding Fichte as 'the soul of Jena' (*EL* 36/SW 19: 200).

3. That Fichte's project took a foundationalist direction in response to Reinhold and Kant has become a repeated refrain in recent Anglophone scholarship. Those who regard him as a foundationalist and criticise him for it include Frank (2004), Ameriks (2006: 217), and Millán-Zaibert (2007: 137–38). Tom Rockmore (e.g., 1994, 2009) objects that Fichte is not a foundationalist, that 'I am I' is not a certain foundation but only a regulative ideal. If so, then for some that would bring Fichte closer to the Romantics (as, e.g., Dieter Henrich construes them; see section III). For purposes here of reconstructing Romanticism's genesis, however, I treat Fichte as foundationalist, while acknowledging that the foundationalist strand does not exhaust his work.

4. The works are Reinhold's 1789 *Essay on a New Theory of the Human Power of Representation*, the two-volume *Contributions to the Correction of Previous Misunderstandings of Philosophers* of 1790 and 1794, and the 1791 *Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge*. Reinhold's chief previous publication had been his popular exposition of Kant in the *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* (see Reinhold 2006), which propelled both Reinhold and Kant to fame.

5. *Aenesidimus* was published anonymously in 1792 by G. E. Schulze, who criticised Reinhold's philosophy from a Humean sceptical viewpoint. In late 1792 Fichte studied Reinhold and came under his influence (Breazeale 1988: 11). But when Fichte

reviewed *Aenesidimus* in late 1793 he became convinced that ‘even after the labors of Kant and Reinhold, philosophy is still not a science’ (14).

6. I bracket here the above-noted question of whether Fichte is fairly interpreted as a foundationalist.

7. Hölderlin learnt about Empedocles and other pre-Socratics from various sources (see Krell 2008: 11), above all Diogenes Laertius’s *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers*, which Hölderlin read in late 1798.

8. The meeting is known only from Niethammer’s frustratingly short diary entry: ‘Spoke much about religion and revelation and in this regard many questions remain open for philosophy’ (NS 4: 588).

9. Hölderlin read the Third *Critique* early in 1792 (EL 29/SW 19: 190); see Schmidt (2001: 126). I am using the term *organic* here differently than Hölderlin does when he contrasts *organic* and *aorgic* as meaning, essentially, ‘artificial’ and ‘non-artificial’: see note 16.

10. Heidegger says, ‘The essence of Holderlin’s word “nature” resounds . . . following the concealed truth of the primordial fundamental word *physis*’ (Heidegger 2000: 79). See also Dastur (2000: 87).

11. The adjective *intellectual* notwithstanding, Hölderlin sees this kind of intuition as non-conceptual, drawing on one strand of Kant’s view of (God’s) intellectual intuition as the direct apprehension of a whole *as whole*, all at once, whereas the finite human intellect can only ever ascend to a grasp of wholes *from* discrete parts that it puts together. Thus, in intellectual intuition for Hölderlin, we apprehend the whole all as one just because this is pure intuition, unmediated by discriminating concepts. The term *intellectual* merely indicates that this is the kind of apprehension of the whole available to God because, not accessing the world through any bodily senses, he does not have to ascend to the whole by successive syntheses. On Kant’s several senses of intellectual intuition – as divine, synthetic, realistic and productive – see Gram (1981).

12. For fuller accounts of Hölderlin’s interest in poetry, culture, tragedy and the Greek/modern difference, see *inter alia* Fóti (2007) and Schmidt (2001).

13. Manes is the latest form of the ruler, called Critias in version 1 and Mecades in version 2, whose power has been undermined by the charismatic leader Empedocles.

14. The same contrast between the Greeks and the later Europeans is drawn in Hölderlin’s 1803 ‘Remarks on Antigone’. Here he says that the Hesperians inhabit a culture that is regulated by the ‘more actual Zeus . . . who . . . *more decidedly forces down to earth* the process of nature which is eternally hostile to humanity’ (EL 330/SW 16: 418). This ‘more actual Zeus’ is the one God of monotheism.

15. See Hölderlin’s letter to Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff of December 1801: ‘[T]he Greeks have less mastery [than we moderns do] of the sacred pathos [i.e., of the aorgic], because it was inborn in them; on the other hand they are exceptional in their gift for presentation [*Darstellung*], from Homer on, because this extraordinary man . . . [was able] to capture the occidental *Junonian sobriety* [sober distance from nature] for his Apollonian realm, and so truly to appropriate what is foreign’ (EL 207/SW 19: 492). That is, Homer used artistic form (presentation, the Apollonian) to effect the distance from nature that became second nature to later Europeans. Thus, the Greek appearance of serene harmony masks a deeper rift between the Greeks’ overwhelming, visceral drive to merge into the oneness of nature (what Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* would call the Dionysian impulse) and a need to escape from the sway of that drive into separateness, which Homer satisfied by yoking it to the realm of the plastic (what Nietzsche would call the Apollonian impulse; [1872] 1999. On Hölderlin’s influence on Nietzsche, see Babich 2006).

16. This opposition between the ‘organic’ (*organisch*) and the ‘aorgic’ (*aorgisch*) is not between the living and the non-living but between ‘the organized, reflected principle of the spirit and of art . . . [and] the unreflexive, unrepresented, disorganizing manifestation of nature’ (Pfau in Hölderlin 1988: 168). That is, the ‘organic’ is culturally organised by conscious human activity, while the ‘aorgic’ is purely natural and has not succumbed to this organising activity. In effect, ‘organic’ means artificial, ‘aorgic’

means natural. As noted above, in reconstructing Hölderlin's equation of being and nature I've used 'organic' differently from how it figures into this *organisch/aorgisch* contrast.

17. Hölderlin's efforts were sadly ridiculed. But George Steiner argues that they have etymological support (1984: 88), and Kathrin Rosenfield (1999) points out that those who ridiculed his translations, such as Voß, simply assumed that the Greek mind-set encapsulated clarity and reason – precisely the view of the Greeks that Hölderlin was challenging in favour of a more proto-Nietzscheian view.

Part Two

Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature

SEVEN

Philosophy of Nature

I. THE RISE OF PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE

Philosophy of nature (*Naturphilosophie*) was a distinctive approach to the study of the natural world which flourished amongst numerous philosophers, scientists and writers – especially, but not only, German speakers – in the first half of the nineteenth century, before losing popularity later in the century. The general idea of philosophy of nature began to emerge in the later 1790s amongst various post-Kantian and early Romantic thinkers.¹ But it was above all the German Idealist philosopher Schelling who gave this idea its first and most influential articulation in a series of his works from this time.

Schelling's central ideas in these works are that nature is a unified, self-organising and organic whole, and that particular natural objects and processes are situated within this whole and must be understood in terms of their place within it. For Schelling, far from organic life being reducible to underlying mechanical interactions amongst units of matter, mechanical processes actually belong within the large-scale organism of the whole of nature. He believed, too, that empirical inquiry should be conducted, and empirical findings interpreted, in light of the a priori insight that nature is a self-organising whole – so that the study of nature should never be exclusively empirical.

On this basis, we can identify the approach distinctive of *Naturphilosophie* by two fundamental elements. First, in metaphysics, philosophers of nature hold that nature is not reducible to the sum total of the interactions amongst bits of matter in motion. Rather, nature is at a more fundamental level self-organising, dynamic, creative, vital, organic and/or a living whole. Different thinkers highlight different qualities from this list and interpret these qualities in varying ways. Second, in epistemology,

philosophers of nature take it that insofar as nature has this vital, self-organising or holistic dimension, it must be understood using tools proper to philosophy as well as those of empirical science. For instance, for Schelling, to comprehend nature as a large-scale organism we must ‘ascend to philosophical axioms [*Grundsätzen*]’ that we know a priori (*IPN* 172/209). To comprehend nature we must study it not only empirically but also philosophically. This is because, whatever exactly philosophy’s methods are taken to be, they are taken to differ from those of empirical science in ways that make them appropriate for comprehending nature as more than merely a mechanical aggregate.²

Schelling’s articulation of this new philosophical approach to nature (which I discuss in section II) helped the approach to take rapid hold in the first decades of the nineteenth century amongst many thinkers, writers and practicing researchers into nature (*Naturforscher*), such as Lorenz Oken and Henrik Steffens, who began to undertake empirical science with Schellingian hypotheses as their starting point (see Richards 2002). Supporters of the approach included Schelling’s one-time collaborator Hegel, who developed *Naturphilosophie* in his own direction, stressing that nature is rational (see section III). Even the arch-opponent of German Idealism, Arthur Schopenhauer, elaborated a philosophy of nature, re-interpreting various natural phenomena as manifestations of the ultimate reality of one single purposeless, non-rational, and unsatisfiable cosmic will. Schelling had regarded nature as *both* organising itself in a rational way *and* embodying a pure upsurge of creative energy. That combined emphasis upon reason and creative energy fell apart in the work of his successors: Hegel stresses reason against creative energy, whereas Schopenhauer stresses creative energy against reason.

In denying that reality and nature are rational, Schopenhauer anticipates the naturalistic, harder-headed outlook on nature that gained ground in the mid-to-late nineteenth century (discussed in section IV). The proponents of this outlook endorsed varying combinations of empiricism and mechanistic materialism; amongst them, *Naturphilosophie* fell out of favour. Nonetheless, significant aspects of *Naturphilosophie* persisted into the later century – in Alexander von Humboldt’s *Kosmos* of 1845 to 1862, for instance. Indeed, there are ways in which philosophy of nature remains relevant today, as I will note in conclusion.

II. SCHELLING’S PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE

Schelling took the lead in defining the philosophy of nature in works including the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* of 1797 (hereafter *Ideas*), *On the World-Soul* of 1798, and the *First Outline of a System of Philosophy of Nature* of 1799 (hereafter *Outline*).³ Schelling was motivated to write these works by problems in both science and in philosophy – fields, after all,

that were not sharply demarcated in his time. Regarding science, Schelling believed that magnetic, chemical, electrical and biological processes could not be satisfactorily explained in mechanistic terms, by reduction to underlying mechanical interactions amongst their component parts – as had been the explanatory program of the Enlightenment materialists. Schelling believed that understanding these processes required understanding their connections with one another (connections that he thought had been demonstrated by the phenomenon of galvanism), and thus required recognition of the priority of the whole of nature over its parts.

In the *Ideas*, Schelling criticised various mechanistic theories, above all the accounts of universal gravitation and attraction championed by the materialist Georges-Louis le Sage and his followers.⁴ For le Sage, all bodies are constantly being impinged upon from all sides by a torrent of atomic particles or corpuscles. But when two bodies partially screen one another from these surrounding currents (as if casting a shadow upon one another), an imbalance results in the forces acting on each body, so that they are drawn together as a result. This mechanism is the basis of universal gravitation and of chemical attraction, which le Sage explains from the different degrees to which different sorts of material particles are permeable by the impinging corpuscles. For example, two particles of water or of oil attract one another – unlike oil and water – because they are porous to the same degree (see Rowlinson 2003).

Schelling rejected as an arbitrary postulate le Sage's basic hypothesis of a universal ether composed of atomic particles (*IPN* 161/197). To Schelling, this was just one instance of the inadequacy of mechanism generally to explain the complex interrelations amongst natural bodies. He therefore sought to provide a non-mechanistic framework within which to make sense of these processes.

The particular non-mechanistic framework that Schelling evolved reflected his philosophical concerns. Along with many others at the time, Schelling was dissatisfied with what he saw as the unresolved dualisms in Kant's philosophy – between intuition and understanding, theoretical and practical reason, and in particular between the freedom of human agents and the causal determination of nature. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), Kant had argued that ordered experience and knowledge are only possible if the subject of experience applies categories, centrally including that of causality, to the materials of sensation. Under these categories we necessarily experience nature – including ourselves insofar as we are part of nature – as a realm of objects whose interactions are causally determined in the manner theorised by Newtonian physics. Yet to be able to apply the categories and therefore bring unity to what we experience, Kant argued, one must be able to attribute all their elements to the same one thinker. One must be able to think of all these elements that *I* think them: unity in the objects of experience flows out from unity in the thinker. To have knowledge and experience, one must

be tacitly conscious of oneself as a unitary agent. Moreover, to be able to think of myself in this way I must implicitly do so under a particular description (Carr 1999: 36–37). For Kant, I must grasp myself as *thinking* (of the objects the materials of which I synthesise) – that is, as intelligent. Also, I must grasp myself as *autonomous* or spontaneous – for, since judging is active rather than receptive, in judging I must be acting not from natural causality but from norms for how one must think to have experience. For Kant, then, the precondition of conscious experience is that I implicitly conceive myself as a *subject*, a unitary agent both intelligent and autonomous.

For Kant in his theoretical philosophy, we are obliged to think of ourselves as free subjects, but we cannot know whether we really are so; equally, we cannot know that we are not. This ignorance created the space for Kant to argue in his *Critique of Practical Reason* that, given the fact of our subjection to moral obligations, we are justified in assuming (*annehmen*) that we really are free, rational subjects (CPrR 79/94). Under this assumption, which for Kant we must make as a matter of practical necessity, human agents are ultimately separate from nature, as free agents who stand out from the realm of causal determination. Thus, Kant maintained in the Introduction to his *Critique of Judgment* that ‘an immeasurable gulf is fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible . . . just as if they were two different worlds’ (CJ 14–15/175–76).

This gulf left Schelling dissatisfied.⁵ On the one hand, we are to assume that we are free; on the other hand, we know that everything in nature is causally determined, including all the movements of our own bodies and all that we do as empirically existing entities. So how can we justifiably believe that we really are free? Schelling reasons that our free agency in the midst of nature is only possible if nature *already* exhibits a form of freedom that foreshadows human agency. In that case, our belonging to nature will not threaten but, precisely, enable our free agency.

The idea that nature exhibits a form of freedom may seem strange, and its meaning is not immediately clear. It is not obvious that there is any nature as a whole, over and above all the myriad particular kinds of natural things – plants, animals, stones, chemical processes, electrical reactions, and more. It also seems clear that (except perhaps for some animal species) none of these determine how they act on the basis of rational principles. Yet self-determination from rational principles is the sort of freedom with which Schelling, following Kant, is concerned. This leaves it uncertain in what sense nature can exhibit freedom. Nonetheless, Schelling sets himself to provide a comprehensive account of nature as a realm in which freedom is present in a form that prefigures rational human self-determination – in which the ‘universal life of nature reveals itself in manifold forms, in progressive [*stufenmäßigen*] developments, in gradual approximations to freedom’ (IPN 36/100).

One might think that this project of understanding nature as a realm of freedom is so unpromising that it is better simply to accept a gulf between two perspectives from which we must look at the world: a practical-moral perspective under which we are free agents, and a theoretical-scientific perspective under which all is causally determined. But for Schelling, this acceptance conflicts with (what Kant himself had recognised to be) a basic requirement of our intellect: that our knowledge should be systematically ordered and unified (*CPR* A645/B673, 534).

Yet the demand that our knowledge must form a systematically ordered whole need not lead us towards the philosophy of nature. That demand could lead elsewhere – as it did for Fichte, motivating him to reconstruct Idealism based on a first principle from which all knowledge could be systematically derived. His principle was that ‘I am I’, the self knows itself – according to the successive versions of his *Wissenschaftslehre* of the 1790s. Since Schelling was for a time enamored of Fichte and retained important ideas from him, we must briefly reconsider Fichte’s Idealism.

For Fichte, the single principle underlying all knowledge is that the self knows itself (*WL* §1/91–92). For in any knowing, the self also implicitly knows *itself* to be engaged in this knowing, tacitly conceiving itself *as* the agent doing the knowing. This, for Fichte, is a necessary precondition of all knowledge, and of all conscious experience insofar as in having experience one is in a cognitive state. Moreover, for Fichte, it is only *by* knowing itself that the self *is* a self: for a necessary condition of being a self, not an object, is that one be self-conscious or self-knowing. Thus, in knowing itself, the self *makes* itself into the very self it knows itself to be: it produces (or ‘posits’, *setzt*) itself, and it only exists as a self insofar as it continuously does this self-positing.

Now, the self cannot know itself in this way, as it must if it is to know anything at all, unless it is able to grasp itself as a *finite* – determinate and limited – agent (*FNR* 18/17). So the self can only know itself if it is situated within an outer, surrounding world of objects that limits or checks it. Equally, the self-knowing self is necessarily an agent, so the world must limit its agency but not reduce it to nothing. The self, therefore, must assert its agency *against* the limits imposed by objects, by striving to transform those objects so that they embody the self’s agency (20/19). Thus, the self must inhabit a world of objects that it seeks to remodel in its own image – for only on condition of this exercise of practical efficacy is any experience possible.

In sum, Fichte attempted to overcome the Kantian gulf between theoretical and practical reason by reconstructing all knowledge from one principle ($I = I$) that enshrines the unity of knowledge and practical freedom (I know what I make). Fichte also sought to bring together freedom and nature by maintaining that human freedom is only possible *within* a natural world that opposes it – but thus also on condition that human

agents constantly strive to remodel the natural world. The insistence that we must practically transform nature is thus integral to Fichte's philosophy.

Troubled by this insistence, Schelling wrote to Fichte in October 1801 that: 'It is sufficiently known to me in what small region of consciousness nature must fall according to your concept of it. It has for you no speculative significance at all, only a teleological one' (Fichte and Schelling 2012: 64). Schelling believes, *pace* Fichte, that if mind and agency really depend on nature, then this dependency must be understood in non-oppositional terms, such that nature does not merely limit but rather prefigures and enables human agency – thus occupying a very extensive region of consciousness: its entire set of background preconditions.

Nevertheless, Schelling retained some extremely important lessons from Fichte. Above all, Schelling retained the idea that self-knowledge is the paradigm of knowledge. I can know myself, Schelling believes, because in this case knower and known are identical. This gives us the following principle: for me to be able to know something, it must be identical to me (*SPG* 141/137). I can know nature, then, only if it has an identical structure to that of knowing human subjectivity: 'so long as I myself am *identical* with nature, I understand what a living nature is as well as I understand my own life' (*IPN* 36/100). Moreover, we *can* and do know about nature, as evidenced by the dramatic increase in scientific knowledge in the modern era. Since this knowledge is only possible if nature is identical to the knower, it must be the case that nature really does have an identical structure to the knowing subject: 'nature . . . *itself* . . . must not only *express*, but *realize itself*, the laws of our mind' (41–42/107). Even if this identity of structure is not immediately apparent, it must really exist. This sets a task for the philosopher of nature: to re-examine scientific findings and bring out the evidence of underlying identity of structure which these findings provide, which will often require re-interpretation of these findings.

This line of thought informs Schelling's *Ideas*. Surveying the sciences of his time, he concludes from them that all natural forms and processes are constituted by a polar opposition between two forces of attraction and repulsion. He criticises Newtonian atomism, arguing that even supposedly basic units of matter are 'originally a product of [these] opposed forces' (*IPN* 221/252).

Dynamic chemistry . . . admits no *original* matter whatever – no matter, that is, from which everything else would have arisen by composition [as in Newtonian atomism]. On the contrary, since it considers all matter originally as a product of opposed forces (*entgegengesetzter Kräfte*), the greatest possible diversity of matter is still nothing else but a diversity in the relationship of these forces. (221/252)

By 'diversity of matter', he means the whole array of complicated forms into which matter is structured. Vast as this array is, there are discernible parallels between all the natural forms – between gravitational attraction, magnetism and chemical affinity, for example. The parallels do not arise because all these processes take place within the same ether of minute corpuscles, as for le Sage. Rather, for Schelling, the parallels arise because all these processes manifest the same basic structure – opposition between polar forces – at different levels. Nature is composed not from material atoms but polar forces.

Methodologically, Schelling does not proceed in the *Ideas* by stipulating that these polar forces exist then trying to deduce empirical natural forms from them. Rather, he takes empirical findings as his starting point and concludes that to understand these findings adequately, we must recognise that polar forces pervade nature. Schelling is not advancing a purely speculative account of nature but setting out an interpretive framework in which to make sense of empirical findings. Insofar as these findings can be made sense of within his framework (better sense, he hopes, than rival mechanistic frameworks permit), this justifies the overall view that polar forces structure the natural world.

Now, this scientific evidence of polarity also provides evidence that nature has the same structure as subjectivity – for subjectivity, Schelling argues, exhibits a version of the polarity of attraction and repulsion (*IPN* 176–77/214–15). The subject first expands outwards to know about objects in the world outside it. Yet in doing so, the subject must also tacitly know itself as the one doing the knowing. To that extent, the subject equally pulls back inwards upon itself. When contemporary science shows that nature is structured by polar forces, then, it equally shows that nature observes the same polarity as the subject does. Nature shares the structure of the mind, which confirms in turn that we can know nature as it really, objectively, is: 'The system of nature is at the same time the system of our mind' (30/93).

What Schelling had begun to believe in the *Ideas*, though, was not only that nature is composed of polar forces, but also that there are manifold levels of nature each embodying a particular level of realisation of these two forces. Their polarity at one level gives us gravitation, at the next level magnetism, then electrical affinity, and so on. Thus, nature is a hierarchy in which its more developed manifestations exhibit more dynamic antagonism between their component forces (as opposed to mechanical inertia).

Apparently, then, nature is composed of one single fundamental structure – the interdependence of opposed forces – that elaborates itself at different levels of realisation. By implication, nature is one vast self-organising whole – as Schelling concluded in his next work, *On the World-Soul* of 1798. For it is the nature of an organism – as Schelling took from Kant – to organise itself, on the basis of its original concept or principle,

into a whole ensemble of differentiated yet interlocking members that collectively realise that concept. Insofar as nature organises itself, it exists as a whole over and above its parts – that is, the various everyday natural things with which we are familiar in experience. Hence Schelling claims that nature as a whole exhibits freedom, ordering itself in line with its concept in a way that approximates to human self-determination.⁶

Schelling re-organised his approach to nature once again in his *Outline*. This time, he argues on a priori grounds that nature must originally be pure productive activity – it must be so if any natural items are to come to exist, to be produced, at all. But to get from this pure productivity to any determinate natural objects, productive force must limit or fixate itself to constitute these things (FO 32/98). This is only possible if productivity is limited by an opposing force that inhibits it; otherwise pure productivity would ‘dissipate itself at infinite speed’ (Bowie 1993: 36). To use Schelling’s own analogy, a river only forms eddies when its flow encounters resistance. Necessarily, then, all natural forms are composed from varying proportions of productive and inhibiting force.

A whole gamut of natural forms then arises, because productive force always bursts beyond any form in which it becomes confined. The outcome is, again, that nature is a hierarchy, ‘a dynamically graded series [*Reihe*] of stages in nature’ (FO 141/210). Since productive force reasserts itself more forcefully each time it bursts beyond its former boundaries, natural forms arise in which productivity increasingly prevails over inhibition, which therefore are increasingly dynamic and alive. At the highest level of this hierarchy, productive force passes over into human agency: the highest level of nature is simultaneously the lowest level of mind.

The overall vision that emerges from these works by Schelling is that nature is an organic, self-organising whole. Nature organises itself by dividing itself into polar forces that interact antagonistically to produce a hierarchy of kinds of natural product. Although Schelling now (in the *Outline*) advances his idea of these opposed forces on a priori grounds, he does not attempt to deduce from this idea what natural forms exist. Rather, he uses this a priori idea as a basis for reviewing and reinterpreting scientific findings. Inasmuch as this idea enables him to reinterpret scientific findings so that they make good sense and cohere as a whole, this provides further, empirical warrant for his a priori claims. Reciprocally, his re-interpretation of scientific findings gives them further non-empirical justification: a priori and empirical considerations thus work together (FO 198–99/276).

In this as in other respects, there is a marked optimism in Schelling’s approach to nature. We can understand nature, and nature in itself is such that we can understand it. Because ‘the system of nature is the system of our mind’ we find ourselves everywhere in nature – we are at home in it. And nature makes possible our own freedom: although we depend on nature, this dependency is the source of our very capacity for

rational self-determination. This optimism reflects the way that Schelling regards nature at once as energetically creative *and* rational. Because it is structured by polar forces (creative energies), nature shares the (rational) structure of the human mind, so that we can know it. And in structuring itself into polar forces, nature is doing what it rationally must do to realise its purpose – which is to be productive. nature thus organises itself in a way that is at once rational and embodies productive energy. This emphasis that nature is rational was taken further by Hegel.

III. HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE

Hegel's mature, definitive view of the natural world is presented in his *Philosophy of Nature*. This is the middle volume of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, published in outline first in 1817 then, with revisions, in 1827 and 1830.

Hegel's philosophy of nature — like Schelling's — has two fundamental elements, epistemological and metaphysical. Epistemologically, Hegel maintains that the philosopher of nature must take up empirical scientific findings and re-establish them on an a priori basis. In its 'origin and formation', he says, philosophy of nature depends upon empirical science, but it then reconstructs scientific findings on the new basis of 'the necessity of the concept':

The philosophy of nature takes up the material which physics has prepared for it from experience, at the point to which physics has brought it, and reconstitutes it, without putting experience as its final justification [*Bewährung*]. Physics must therefore work into the hands of philosophy, so that the latter can translate into the concept the abstract [*verständige*] universal transmitted to it, by showing how this universal, as an intrinsically necessary whole, proceeds from the concept. (*EN* §246A, 1: 201)

What science transmits to philosophy is the 'abstract universal': by this, Hegel means some universal form, such as a natural kind or a natural law underlying appearances, under its scientific description. Here Hegel explicitly denies that science is a purely empirical discipline, insisting that theory and conceptualisation always inform scientific experimentation and observation (*EN* 1: 193). Philosophers of nature 'take up' each natural form already theorised by scientists and 'reconstitute' these forms into an 'intrinsically necessary whole'. That is, philosophers study how each of these natural forms *derives from* ('proceeds from', *hervorgeht*) the others and fits with them into an organised whole. By showing how each natural form derives from the others, philosophers are reconstructing the necessity of these forms on the basis of the concept – that is, on the basis of a priori reasoning. By this means, scientific findings about these forms receive further non-empirical justification.

The method of philosophy of nature, then, is to subject scientific accounts of natural forms to a rational reconstruction. In the course of this reconstruction, scientific accounts will often need to be re-interpreted. For just as science always involves theory, so it always involves metaphysical assumptions: 'the diamond-net into which we bring everything to make it intelligible' (EN §246A, 1: 202). But the assumptions adopted by scientists may well be inadequate: scientists of Hegel's time regularly espoused mechanistic materialism, for instance. Often, then, the philosopher must provide a more satisfactory re-interpretation of nature as scientists have described it, informed by the philosopher's more adequate metaphysics. And when there are scientific claims that do not admit of such re-interpretation, such as (Hegel thinks) Newton's theory of colour, they just have to be discarded.

But in what sense might natural forms derive from one another? To understand this, we must look at the actual metaphysics of the natural world that Hegel puts forward based on his reconstruction of the science of his time. Nature, he writes, comprises a 'series of stages' or *Stufengang* (EN §251, 1: 216), of which there are chiefly three: mechanical, physical and organic.

In the first, the mechanical stage, nature exists in the guise of units of matter that have little or no unifying organisation. The reigning principle is that of *Außereinander*, being-outside-one-another: matter as bare *partes extra partes* (§252, 1: 217). During the mechanical stage, though, nature advances from its original existence as space – sheer undifferentiated extension – to existence as increasingly structured and interrelated sets of material bodies (ultimately in the guise of the bodies composing the solar system).

In the second, physical stage, Hegel finds material bodies that are partly, but still not fully, integrated with one another. They are related to one another and affected by these relations, but still not completely so. For Hegel this is the hallmark of magnetism, electricity, and above all chemistry, in which distinct substances react to and transform one another, but without becoming bound together into a permanently self-renewing whole.

This is only achieved in organic life, nature's third stage. Animals, plants and even the entire earth as a system of interacting elements all realise the inherent nature of an organism to varying degrees; namely, to have material parts that are as they are entirely because of their places within the organic whole. A heart, for instance, is as it is wholly because of its function in pumping the blood. The material parts or members (*Glieder*) of organisms are thus shaped by their unifying forms or concepts. As Schelling did, Hegel relies here on Kant's view that in an organism the plan – or purpose or concept – of the whole must be regarded as organising and assigning roles to all the material parts.

Now, for Hegel, the foregoing succession of natural stages constitutes a *progression* (*Fortbildung*) – not in time, but a logical progression (*EN* §249R, 1: 212). Organisms are more advanced than chemical processes and the latter in turn than electrical processes (and so on), because by virtue of their internal structure organisms resolve tensions (or contradictions) within other – less advanced – natural forms. Chemical bodies, specifically, are partly related together and partly independent of one another, thereby embodying a kind of tension. Organisms avoid this tension by having material parts that are fully shaped by the whole. Nature thus exhibits a progression in that each of its forms resolves tensions within other forms, the most advanced forms being those that maximally resolve all the preceding tensions.

The philosopher does not identify these tensions and their resolutions on a purely speculative basis. He or she first examines the accounts of natural forms provided by scientists, then discerns the tensions within these forms so described, and on this basis rearranges these forms into a sequence from most to least tension ridden. By doing so, the philosopher of nature is simultaneously deriving each form from its predecessor by a priori reasoning: having first learnt about the structure of organisms from scientists, he or she can now re-establish on a priori grounds that organisms must exist in this form to resolve the tension within chemical processes.

An example may help to explain this. Hegel begins his *Philosophy of Nature* by discussing space and time. He takes up accounts of space and time given by scientists (including Euclid), and, drawing on these accounts, Hegel tries to show space and time fit together by tracing how time derives from space. He does this by identifying a tension within the structure of space as scientists have understood it. Space is divisible into a manifold of points. As such space is *partes extra partes* – it consists of parts outside other parts. Yet these parts of space have no qualities by which they can be individuated from one another. There is nothing to differentiate these parts from one another, and so they prove after all to be identical with each other. Thus, after all, space is pure, distinctionless homogeneity (*EN* §254, 1: 222). Space contains an internal tension; indeed, it is self-contradictory: it is pure difference *and* pure lack of difference.

For Hegel, time embodies a step towards resolving this tension within space. Basing his account of time on that of Aristotle, Hegel maintains that time consists of a series of moments – an unending stream of ‘nows’, each existing only momentarily. As each ‘now’ momentarily stands out into existence, it divides the past from the future. This makes the ‘now’ akin to a point that divides two parts of a line (Aristotle 1996: 102–3; *EN* §257, 1: 229). Yet each moment disappears immediately it has come into existence. It exists so fleetingly that it has no positive existence at all. Hegel concludes that temporal moments are nothing more than a mani-

festation of negating force, a power to negate the past and future. Once that negation is done, there is nothing more to the moment and it disappears. Nonetheless, in virtue of their negating force, moments differ from one another more fully than spatial points do. For moments at least set themselves *against* everything else, even if only momentarily. For Hegel, then, difference is more firmly realised in temporal moments than in spatial parts. In this way, time embodies an advance towards resolution of the tension within space.

Peculiar as this view of space and time may seem, we can now clarify what method Hegel has followed in constructing it. He has not worked this view of space and time out entirely on his own, through armchair reasoning. Rather, he begins by taking up accounts of space and time given by theoretically inclined natural scientists (Euclid, Aristotle and others). Based on these accounts, Hegel then finds a way to understand time as deriving from space.

In doing this, Hegel is reconstructing how time derives from space on an a priori basis. He does not look for any empirical evidence that time derives from space; instead he uses reason to establish this derivation. Although the scientific accounts of space and time on which Hegel draws have an empirical dimension, his rational reconstruction of how time follows from space does not. By reconstructing in this way how each natural form derives from another (as time derives from space), Hegel assembles all these forms into a chain in which each resolves tensions within the forms that precede it.

But why should anyone think that tensions within given natural forms must be resolved, so that other natural forms must exist that resolve them? Like Schelling, Hegel takes it that we can know about nature only on condition that nature exhibits a form of rationality. Unless nature were rational, we could not know about it using reason: nature would not be adapted to the human intellect and would defy comprehension. To be sure, natural beings do not engage in conscious reasoning or entertain rational thoughts. Nonetheless, for Hegel, nature has an overall rational organisation that foreshadows the rational order that the conscious human mind gives to itself. Moreover, this a priori insight that nature must be rational is confirmed by scientific findings about the character of organisms, chemical processes, electrical interactions, and more. These findings show that organisms are such that they resolve the tensions within chemical processes, that chemical processes are such that they resolve the tensions within electrical processes, and so on. This can only be possible if nature has some kind of inner drive to resolve tensions within it – tensions that are contra-rational, so that nature is acting rationally in structuring itself so as to reduce and ultimately overcome these tensions.

Hegel thus regards nature as a rationally organised realm in which matter gradually becomes shaped and organised by 'the concept', in the

process assuming organic form. In that nature exhibits this progression towards organism, all natural forms approximate to organic status to varying degrees (down to a vanishingly low degree in mechanism). Moreover, nature is also organic in that it is a self-organising whole, the stages of which are rationally ordered and are as they are because of their places within the whole (*EN* §251, 1: 216).

Hegel retains much of the basic structure that Schelling imparted to *Naturphilosophie*. Hegel, too, reinterprets scientific findings on an a priori basis and regards nature as a self-organising whole such that it prefigures the human mind and can be known by us. However, the concept of force that was so central for Schelling plays no role in Hegel's account of nature. For Hegel, instead, reason is the crucial notion: Nature organises itself on the basis of its internal, albeit implicit and non-conscious, rationality. Nature is driven to restructure and reshape itself again and again not because it consists in productive force but just because it is rational, so that Hegel considers any appeal to productive force in the explanation of natural organisation to be redundant.

IV. THE DECLINE AND SURVIVAL OF PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE

Working out his ideas at very much the same time as Hegel, Arthur Schopenhauer took his own philosophy of nature in the reverse direction to that of Hegel, emphasising the *non*-rational will in nature. Schopenhauer did so in *The World as Will and Representation* of 1818/1844 and his 1836 essay *On the Will in Nature*. Despite his anti-rationalist emphasis on the will and his hostility to German Idealism generally, Schopenhauer in fact continues the basic project of philosophy of nature, both in epistemology and in metaphysics.

In epistemology, Schopenhauer believes that we can achieve philosophical insight into the fundamental metaphysical reality of one single vast will by extrapolating from my awareness of the primary reality of will in my own case. This insight allows us not merely to infer that the ultimate reality of all natural beings must be will but actually to directly apprehend this reality of will within the phenomena. Some 'specially acute' empirical scientists have apprehended this too – and done so in their own terms, Schopenhauer maintains, without his needing to 'twist and strain' scientific findings to adapt them to his metaphysics, as he claims other *Naturphilosophen* (Schelling, Hegel) have done ([1836] 1889: 216). These scientists have recognised the will by observation, as Schopenhauer has on a priori grounds: two groups of investigators meeting from opposite directions (219).

In metaphysics, Schopenhauer vehemently opposes 'crude materialism' ([1818/1844] 1966: vol. 1: 123), denying that nature is reducible to a mechanical aggregate of causally interacting spatio-temporal objects. To

be sure, nature so appears to us given our mode of representation. But if we have grasped the reality of will – either explicitly, by way of Schopenhauerian metaphysics, or implicitly, if we are acute *Naturforscher* – then we can also recognise this reality underlying nature's phenomena. In all organic nature, we can observe striving (to survive, to reproduce; to eat, digest, excrete), growth, formation. Even in non-organic processes we can observe processes of formation (as in crystallisation), magnetic and electrical attraction, movement under the action of forces: all the forces operative here are simply the single cosmic will (1: 117–19). That is, all these beings and their particular strivings or movements are merely individualised ways that the will appears to us. Thus, once we grasp that nature is will, what initially appeared as a mere mechanical aggregate shows itself to be quite different – the plural and antagonistic appearance of one ever-dynamic will: 'the will . . . fills every thing and manifests itself immediately in each – thus showing each thing to be its phenomenon' (1889: 258).

The will manifested in natural things is non-rational, for Schopenhauer. It has no consciousness and no goal and can find no satisfaction; intellect is only its subordinate tool. The will is an empty, endless striving, so that nature is not a purposive whole but a realm of unceasing conflict and suffering. For Schelling, nature was dynamic *and* rational: to recognise nature's self-organising power was to recognise a forerunner of human reason and autonomy, and thereby to feel at home in a rational world. For Schopenhauer, the study of nature in its dynamism only confirms the truth of pessimism, that the world has no meaning. His view thus contributed to a historical process that Odo Marquard calls the 'disenchantment of Romantic nature', in which nature progressively lost 'the attributes of harmony . . . and purposiveness' over the nineteenth century (Marquard 1987: 199, quoted in Göttdé 2011: 209).

So far I have discussed only philosophers, but in the early nineteenth century *Naturphilosophie* was popular with many practicing scientists. Its partisans included Hans Christian Oersted and Johann Wilhelm Ritter, who respectively discovered electromagnetism and electrochemistry. They made these discoveries by starting from theoretical assumptions drawn from *Naturphilosophie*. The idea that different natural processes manifest a common structure at varying levels led Oersted, Ritter and others to look for and find parallels and connections amongst electricity, magnetism and chemistry. Indeed, Thomas Kuhn (1957) argued that the same philosophical belief in the fundamental unity of nature contributed to the simultaneous discovery of energy conservation by a number of nineteenth-century scientists.

Despite these ways that *Naturphilosophie* helped to advance scientific knowledge in the early nineteenth century, it was above all advances in science that discredited *Naturphilosophie* in many eyes. For as the nineteenth century unfolded, scientists gradually found ways to provide a unified mechanistic explanation of hitherto puzzling chemical, electrical,

magnetic and biological processes. Moreover, these advances in understanding were often thought to be due to a renewed adherence to the methods of observation and experiment. The scientific-philosophical outlook that became increasingly dominant from the mid-century onwards thus combined empiricist method with mechanistic materialism. In many ways, this outlook was the polar opposite of *Naturphilosophie*. Its advocates insisted *both* that inquiry into nature must be wholly or primarily empirical, eschewing any speculative philosophical contribution, *and* that nature ultimately consists of units of matter in motion and causal interaction. Hermann von Helmholtz, for example – the leading scientist in later-nineteenth-century Germany – insisted that science must be based on experiment, observation and induction (Cahan 1993: 564–65) and that nature is to be explained by being reduced to interacting units of matter.⁷

In this context *Naturphilosophie* was increasingly viewed as having obstructed and retarded scientific inquiry – even as having been ‘the pestilence and black death of the century’, according to the influential chemist Justus Liebig.⁸ Supposedly, *Naturphilosophie* had had such disastrous effects because its entire program rested upon a basic mistake. Its practitioners had abandoned empirical method and the mechanistic paradigm rather than patiently working out how to explain electricity, chemistry, life, and more within empirical and mechanistic terms.

An 1843 attack on Schelling and Hegel by Matthias Jakob Schleiden represented the rising line of thought. For Schleiden, the only legitimate scientific method is to start with exact observation then infer to the laws that best explain the observed facts; there is no place for philosophical speculation. Those who indulge in it – Schelling, Hegel – try to deduce knowledge of nature a priori and inevitably traduce many empirical facts in the process (Schleiden [1843] 1988). In reality, *contra* Schleiden, Schelling and Hegel thought that the empirical and the a priori could work together. But for Schleiden and others they could not, and a priori speculation could ever only damage scientific inquiry. From this perspective, Schleiden and others could not even see that Schelling and Hegel adopted a mixed approach, and wrongly assumed that their method was purely a priori.

Despite these criticisms of *Naturphilosophie*, significant residues of it persisted throughout the nineteenth century – even in the work of some German scientists. So, although the

union of idealist philosophy and a posteriori enquiry into nature did not endure . . . [we must] get this fact into focus. Romantic ideas about nature did not disappear or lose currency abruptly or at any clearly determinable point. They remained strongly influential, to such an extent that [in] many nineteenth-century figures – Alexander von Humboldt, Theodor Fechner and Haeckel provide examples – the elements of their thought that we would consider genuinely ‘scientific’ join inseparably with those that we would call ‘romantic’. (Gardner 2011: 92)

Consider Humboldt, the leading German scientist of the first half of the nineteenth century. In his multi-volume *Kosmos*, he offered a total picture (or 'general view', *generelle Ansicht*) of nature and the overall development of scientific knowledge. In his view, nature was no mere aggregate but, precisely, a 'cosmos' – an ordered, harmonious arrangement. This position reflected Humboldt's overall approach to inquiry into nature. Humboldt sought to avoid what he called 'vicious empiricism' by conducting his empirical investigations – measuring and categorising geological and geographical phenomena, travelling the globe to document its climatic, mineral, botanical and other variations – informed by a 'higher standpoint' (Humboldt [1849] 1997: 36). This standpoint is that of aesthetic experience, in which we apprehend nature as a whole, the parts of which interconnect completely. From this aesthetic standpoint 'all the organisms and forces of nature may be seen as one living active whole, animated by one single impulse'. Beginning with an overall aesthetic view, we descend to detailed empirical research that gives definiteness and precision to what we merely intimate (*ahnen*) aesthetically. We then rise back, by putting together the results of various branches of research, to a fully elaborated version of our original intuition (17).⁹

Here Humboldt remained largely faithful to the programme of Romantic science as Robert Richards interprets it (2002). In this program, empirical investigation is informed and guided from the outset by aesthetic intuition of the whole in which the empirical particulars are located; study of the particulars then rounds out our original intuition. Thus, the aim of Romantic science, as of philosophy of nature, was to contextualise scientific detail within a broader insight into the character of nature as a whole. Romantic science and philosophy of nature may seem to differ in that the former gained its insight into the unity of nature aesthetically, the latter philosophically. But the divide was not sharp. For Schelling, philosophical reason recaptures the unity of intuition at a higher, more articulated level; whilst for scientists such as Humboldt, aesthetic experience is already implicitly rational: 'nature considered *rationally*, . . . is a unity in diversity of phenomena, . . . one great whole animated by the breath of life' (1997: 2–3). Aesthetic experience, in fact, provides one source of rational insight into the unity of nature, so that Romantic science is continuous with philosophy of nature.¹⁰

Advancing to the twentieth century, *Naturphilosophie* still did not die out. To take just one example, French this time, Émile Bergson was a paradigmatic philosopher of nature. Rejecting mechanistic materialism, Bergson thought that nature was unified by its *élan vital*: the spontaneous and unpredictable creativity of matter itself, in virtue of which matter grows, unfolds and organises itself in ever-evolving ways. For Bergson, this *élan* can only be grasped in intuition, in the light of which scientific accounts of natural forms and phenomena must be reinterpreted – as he did in *Creative Evolution* ([1907] 1960).

Nevertheless, the persistence of *Naturphilosophie* throughout the nineteenth century and in some twentieth-century figures is only one qualifying factor in the broader historical picture: that of its long-term decline as a living research program. This decline might suggest that the ideas of philosophers of nature can only hold historical interest for us today and can no longer be taken seriously. That verdict would be premature. The last twenty years have witnessed significant regrowth of interest in *Naturphilosophie*, prompted especially by the spread of environmental problems.

Plausibly, one source of these problems is that we moderns are prone to adopt a mistaken image of ourselves as separate from, rather than embedded in and dependent upon, nature. Plausibly, too, we have regularly failed to appreciate the ways in which nature is an interconnected whole, such that events affecting one part of it (for example, emissions of chemicals into the atmosphere in one place) have ramifications for others (when these chemicals react with atmospheric components and climatic patterns to generate acid rain in another place). Yet philosophers of nature in their several ways regard nature as an interconnected whole: as one organism or cosmos (Schelling, Humboldt) or as united in its rationality or will or *élan vital* (Hegel, Schopenhauer, Bergson). In their several ways, too, these philosophers regard human beings as an outgrowth of nature: as a realisation of self-organising or rational nature, or a manifestation of the omnipresent will.

Philosophy of nature can thus give us an improved appreciation both of how nature is an interconnected whole and of the dependent place that we occupy within this whole – an appreciation that can help to motivate us to practice more environmentally sustainable ways of life. Old as many of the principal writings in the tradition of philosophy of nature are, then, they still address contemporary problems. This makes it important for us to revisit and revitalise the tradition of *Naturphilosophie* in the present day.

NOTES

1. For instance, as we saw in chapter 4, Novalis worked on his *Allgemeine Brouillon* mapping the parallels between different natural and mental phenomena. A major influence on many early contributors to *Naturphilosophie* was Goethe: Goethe championed empirical investigation of nature, yet he held that we can directly observe the fundamental shaping forms and structures – the *Urphänomene* – within natural appearances. See Goethe (1995: esp. 307).

2. This formulation may suggest that philosophy of nature is inherently opposed to naturalism, if naturalism is defined as the view that the methods of philosophical inquiry should be continuous with those of the empirical sciences. But it all depends on how ‘continuity’ is interpreted. For Schelling and Hegel, philosophers of nature should use a priori reasoning, but it can be continuous with empirical inquiry in the sense that the two can work together.

3. Although Schelling continued to write on nature after 1801, he did so within the new framework of his identity-philosophy (from which he later moved away). I regard his 1790s works as giving his 'classic' formulations of the project of philosophy of nature and its initial aims and scope.

4. Le Sage wrote a prize-winning 1758 *Essai de chimie mécanique*, to which Schelling refers, as to the 1788 essay *De l'origine des forces magnétique* by Le Sage's disciple Pierre Prévost. See *IPN* bk. 2, ch. 3.

5. On the relation of Schelling's project to that of Kant see, amongst others, Beiser (2002: part 4), Bowie (1993), di Giovanni (1979) and Richards (2002: esp. 128–45).

6. In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant argued that organisms must be understood not exclusively mechanistically but as if they were purposive wholes, in which the internal purpose (or plan or principle) of the whole, which specifies its functions, explains why all its parts arise and interconnect as they do. He says that this purpose must be thought of as analogous to a concept (*Begriff*), yet cannot really *be* a concept for natural things do not have intentions (*CJ* §68, 263–64/383–84). Schelling goes further: 'Every organic product carries the ground of its existence in *itself* . . . Thus a *concept* lies at the basis of every organisation, for where there is a necessary relation of the whole to the part and of the part to the whole, there is *concept*. But this concept lives in the *organization itself* . . . [which] *organizes itself*, unlike an artwork, which has its concept outside it in the intellect of the artist (*IPN* 31/94). But whereas for Kant we cannot know whether or not organisms really are self-organising, for Schelling organisms, including the organism of the whole of nature, really organise themselves, and we can know this. Although they do not organise themselves intentionally, it is nonetheless concepts – that is, non-material plans – that direct their organisation.

7. In 1847 in *Über die Erhaltung der Kraft*, Helmholtz wrote: 'The phenomena of nature are to be reduced to movements of bits of matter with unalterable moving forces that depend only on their spatial relations'; as quoted in Heidelberger (1993: 464).

8. Liebig, as quoted in Beiser (2002: 507). The source of the quotation is Liebig (1874: 24).

9. On Humboldt's view of nature, see also Millán-Zaibert (2009).

10. Consequently, Humboldt was willing to affiliate himself with Philosophy of nature, in a letter of 1836 (see 1997: xvi), provided that this meant arranging data in light of rational ideas, not vainly trying to deduce data from ideas.

EIGHT

Hegel, Naturalism and the Philosophy of Nature

In this chapter I consider whether Hegel is a naturalist or an anti-naturalist with regards to his philosophy of nature. Rather than approaching Hegel on the assumption that naturalism and anti-naturalism are polar opposites, I suggest that we can make better sense of Hegel's view of nature by adopting a cluster-based approach to naturalism. On this approach, positions are more or less naturalistic depending how many strands of the cluster *naturalism* they exemplify, and how thoroughly they exemplify these strands. Following Finn Spicer, I suggest that the strands of the cluster *naturalism* include belief that philosophy is continuous with the sciences and denial of the existence of any supernatural entities or processes. I assess Hegel's position with respect to these two strands.

As I will explain, methodologically, Hegel maintains that philosophy of nature is continuous with the empirical sciences insofar as philosophers of nature begin by learning from scientists about natural forms. Philosophers of nature then reconstruct scientific accounts of these natural forms on an a priori basis, thereby establishing how these natural forms are organised into a rationally connected chain. In the process, though, philosophers of nature also reinterpret these natural forms in light of a metaphysics according to which nature is a rational whole. Hegel explicitly says that this metaphysics is distinct from that of empirical science. Even so, Hegel also thinks that this metaphysics only makes explicit a presupposition – that nature is an organised whole admitting of rational comprehension – that scientists implicitly hold all along, and must hold if their inquiries are to have any motivation. Methodologically, then, Hegel regards philosophy of nature and empirical science neither as discontinuous from nor entirely continuous with one another, but some-

where between the two. In terms of his stance on the philosophy-science relation, he belongs in the middle of the spectrum that runs from the most naturalistic to the most anti-naturalistic positions.

Turning to rejection of supernatural entities and processes, we can again identify a spectrum of positions here. At the naturalistic end of the spectrum, mechanistic materialists regard nature as composed entirely of units of matter in efficient-causal relations. Somewhat less naturalistic, Kant maintains that we may legitimately postulate final and formal causes within nature – specifically in the form of the ground-plans that animate purposive wholes – as long as we do not ascribe real, mind-independent existence to these ground-plans or purposes. Less naturalistic again, Schelling maintains that we may legitimately postulate really existing final and formal causes in nature as long as we do so in ways that recognise the pervasiveness of mechanism in nature and that encourage and underwrite, rather than discourage, empirical research into efficient-causal relations in nature. Yet Schelling conceives of nature’s dimension of final and formal causality in terms of productive force, a force that remains to a significant extent mysterious. Hegel jettisons this notion of productive force and replaces it with a notion of universal forms that exist throughout nature. With this rejection of productive force, Hegel adopts a position more naturalistic than Schelling’s but less naturalistic than Kant’s. This, too, places Hegel around the middle of the naturalism/anti-naturalism spectrum.¹

I. INTERPRETING HEGEL, GERMAN IDEALISM AND THEIR RELATIONS TO NATURALISM

First let us reconsider the debate about naturalism amongst contemporary interpreters of Hegel. Some, notably including Frederick Beiser, see Hegel and the German Idealists as naturalists, while others, including Sebastian Gardner, see Hegel and the Idealists as anti-naturalists. On inspection, the nature of this interpretive division will turn out to be more nuanced than it initially appears. This points us towards a less polarised way of considering how Hegel stands vis-à-vis naturalism.

In numerous works including *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism* (2002) and *Hegel* (2005), Beiser numbers Hegel – together with Hölderlin, Schlegel, Novalis and Schelling – amongst the ‘Absolute Idealists’, and Beiser identifies Absolute Idealism, including Hegel’s version of it, as a naturalist position (see Beiser 2005: 80). Absolute Idealism for Beiser is the view that reality as a whole is organically structured, developing through self-differentiation and self-articulation into the manifold of entities. In that it develops organically, reality takes shape in regular, law-governed ways that are rationally intelligible to us, so that reality as a whole is rational. Within this general position, Beiser main-

tains, the Idealists regard nature as a self-organising whole, and in this they accept the naturalist thesis that ‘everything in nature happens according to laws . . . of necessity’, and they also accept that nature is pervaded by mechanism. They merely reject ‘a naturalism that claims everything is explicable *only* according to mechanical laws . . . a radical or narrow mechanism’ (69).

That is, the Absolute Idealists reject the mechanistic materialism championed by such late eighteenth-century thinkers as the Baron d’Holbach, Diderot, and de la Mettrie, for whom: ‘The universe, that vast assemblage of every thing that exists, presents only matter and motion: the whole offers to our contemplation nothing but an immense, an uninterrupted succession of causes and effects’ (d’Holbach 1835: 15). D’Holbach further maintains that: ‘A cause is a being which puts another in motion, or which produces some change in it. The effect is the change produced in one body by the motion or presence of another’ (16) – that all causation is efficient causation involving the mechanical transmission of motion. Thus, nature is equated with units of matter in relations of efficient causation. This form of naturalism is ‘narrower’, for Beiser, than that of the German Idealists. In other words, mechanistic materialists are much more restrictive about what counts as natural: specifically, they do not admit formal or final causes. In contrast, the German Idealists do admit these forms of causation into nature: they attribute generative, causal power to the non-material wholes or principles that they take to regulate organic processes and the overall development of nature as an organic whole. The Idealists nonetheless remain naturalists, for Beiser, insofar as they believe that organic processes unfold in structured, rationally intelligible, necessary ways – governed by the laws peculiar to organic processes, laws of self-differentiation and self-articulation.

Thus, for Beiser, the Absolute Idealists subscribe to a form of naturalism broader than that which came to prevail later in the nineteenth century, when scientific materialists and empiricists came to pursue a programme that directly continued that of the eighteenth-century mechanistic materialists. This programme drew support from nineteenth-century scientific advances in accounting for life and evolution in mechanistic terms. Nonetheless, for Beiser, the materialist programme that came to prominence in the mid-nineteenth century is merely one, narrowly mechanistic and reductive, form of naturalism, which should not be equated with naturalism *tout court*.

In apparent contrast to Beiser, Sebastian Gardner describes the Idealist position as anti-naturalist. He traces its development to Kant’s opposition between freedom and nature, the ‘immense gulf . . . fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible’ (CJ 14–15/175–76). If we take it, as the Idealists did, that this opposition must be resolved, and freedom and nature reconceived as parts of a unified reality, then this can be done

in two main ways – either by deriving human freedom from (and perhaps reducing it to) the operations of nature, or, conversely, by deriving the organisation of nature from human freedom. For Gardner, the scientific materialist currents that became prominent in the later nineteenth century took the former route, the Idealists the latter. The Idealists thought that ‘subjectivity . . . supplies the grounds, if not ontological then at least conceptual, of nature’ (Gardner 2011: 90). That is, for the Idealists, nature must be understood on the model of free human subjectivity, hence as a self-organising whole.

This, though, is the *same* view of nature that Beiser attributed to the Absolute Idealists. Yet Beiser counted that position as naturalist, whereas Gardner identifies the same position as anti-naturalist. Gardner explains that while the Idealists saw themselves as pursuing a naturalist project – taking naturalism in a broad and non-mechanistic sense (as Beiser also does) – their position was ‘historically revealed to be not “genuinely naturalistic” after all’, but to be supernaturalistic by later standards (Gardner 2007: 46). In the later nineteenth century the meaning of ‘naturalism’ contracted, so that majority opinion came to be that broad naturalism such as that of the Idealists was not truly naturalistic.² When Gardner describes Idealist organicism as anti-naturalistic or even supernaturalistic (46), then, he means that this position diverges from the narrower form of naturalism that has come to be generally accepted.

Despite their apparent disagreement, actually Beiser and Gardner agree that the Idealists did espouse a form of naturalism, but an organicist form broader than what we typically understand by naturalism today. So we can advance beyond the assumption that Hegel and other Idealists must be either naturalistic *or* anti-naturalistic and instead say that their views *are* naturalistic in a broad, organicist sense but not in a narrow, mechanistic materialist, sense. The substantive philosophical question remains: *Is* broad naturalism genuinely naturalistic? Has our historical understanding shifted towards a *correct* recognition that Idealist organicism is not truly naturalistic and is on the contrary supernaturalistic – or is this a mistaken restriction of what can count as naturalism?

I suggest that it is mistaken, and that the difference between broad and narrow naturalism is one of degree and not kind. The organicist conception of nature held by the German Idealists may be *less* naturalistic than more narrowly naturalist views such as mechanistic materialism, but this does not mean that the Idealist view ceases to be naturalistic altogether and degenerates into supernaturalism. To support these claims, I suggest that we should understand naturalism as a cluster concept, as Finn Spicer (2011) has proposed with respect to contemporary philosophical naturalism. That is: naturalism has various strands, so that any particular philosopher might incline towards naturalism along one or several strands of the cluster but not others. Spicer includes the following strands, amongst others: 1. Rejection of the idea of first philosophy; 2.

Belief that philosophy is continuous with the sciences; 3. Disbelief in supernatural entities/processes; 4. Physicalism about the mind; 5. Opposition to non-naturalism about ethics/values; 6. Rejection of a priorism. If a philosopher can incline towards naturalism along some strands of the cluster but not others, then how naturalistic or anti-naturalistic a philosophy is is not an absolute matter but one of degree. Having said that, some strands of the cluster may well support one another so that they tend to occur together. But naturalism is also a matter of degree in that, for each strand of the cluster *naturalism* that a philosophy exhibits, it will exhibit that strand to greater or lesser degrees: for instance, one might uphold the continuity of science and philosophy in stronger and weaker forms. So, rather than a sharp divide between naturalism and anti-naturalism, there is a spectrum of more and less naturalistic positions, with supernaturalism (whatever that is – I will address this later) at one extreme, mechanistic materialism at the other, and Idealist forms of organicism around the middle, so that their being less naturalistic than mechanistic materialism does not automatically place them at the extreme of supernaturalism.

However, one might object, the idealists do not belong in the middle but are actually quite far along towards the supernaturalistic end of the spectrum. To support my suggestion that German Idealist views of nature, and specifically that of Hegel, belong in or at least near the middle of this spectrum, I want to consider two particular strands of the cluster *naturalism*. First we must ask where Hegel stood with respect to a priorism and the continuity of philosophy and science (section II), since there has been such long-standing controversy over the place of a priori reasoning in his approach to nature. Then we should ask where Hegel stands on belief in supernatural entities and processes (section III). I hope that my discussion of these issues will substantiate my suggestion that his view of nature, while broader than mechanistic materialism in what it includes within nature, nevertheless differs clearly from supernaturalism – enough so to place this view around the middle of the spectrum. It might still be objected that, if Hegel's view of nature indeed belongs midway between the extremes of naturalism and anti-naturalism, then that view may be categorised as broadly naturalist but might equally well be categorised as moderately anti- or supernaturalist. Later I will provide reasons why 'broad naturalism' remains the best description.

II. HEGEL, THE A PRIORI AND EMPIRICAL SCIENCE

Reading Hegel's introduction to his encyclopaedia *Philosophy of Nature*, he might at first seem to regard philosophy of nature and empirical science as discontinuous. He maintains that:

to determine what the philosophy of nature is, it is best that we *separate* [*abscheiden*] it from the subject-matter *against* which it is determined [*bestimmt*]; for all determining requires two terms. In the first place we find it in a peculiar relationship to natural science [*Naturwissenschaft*] in general, that is, to physics, natural history, physiology; it is itself physics, but *rational physics*. It is at this point in particular that we have to grasp it, and in particular to clarify its relationship to physics. (EN 1: 193)

It sounds as if Hegel believes that philosophy of nature and natural science (which he often simply calls ‘physics’, *Physik*) approach nature using contrasting or even separate methods. He notes, though, that their separation (*Trennung*) has occurred only in the early modern period; both methods co-existed in, for instance, Aristotle’s *Physics* and other works of pre-modern ‘natural philosophy’. Hegel also clarifies that both methods are primarily theoretical and not practical methods of studying nature. What, then, does separate them?

Physics and natural history are said to be the eminently empirical sciences, and they profess to belong exclusively to perception [*Wahrnehmung*] and experience [*Erfahrung*], and in this way to be opposed [*entgegengesetzt*] to the philosophy of nature, the knowledge of nature by thought. (EN 1: 193)

Crucially, however, Hegel is not saying here that physics and the natural sciences in general *are* purely empirical, but he is reporting that many scientists and non-scientists regard them as such. That is, the scientific method was widely thought to consist in observation and experiment and in collating, comparing and tabulating data about what has been observed. But, Hegel objects, ‘empirical physics . . . has in it much more thought than it admits or knows’. In reality, natural scientific inquiry is not purely empirical and does not remain with the collection of endless empirical facts. Rather, Hegel says, scientists draw general conclusions from their data, generalising from repeated occurrences to universal laws and classifying particulars under natural kinds. So, Hegel concludes, ‘Physics and the philosophy of nature therefore distinguish themselves [*unterscheiden sich*] not as perception and thought, but only *by the kind and manner of their thought*; they are both a thinking knowledge of nature’. Physics involves thought insofar as scientists *ascend* from empirical observations to generalisations – presumably by induction and/or inference to the laws that best explain the observed data. So:

Physics . . . is a theoretical and thinking observation of nature . . . [which] aim[s] at comprehending that which is universal [Allgemeinen] in nature, a universal which is also determined within itself . . . [as] forces [Kräfte], laws [Gesetze] and genera [Gattungen]. (EN §246, 1: 196–97)

In saying this, Hegel seems to accept that the scientific method is to make observations then to ascend from them by induction or abduction.

Yet scientists never make pure observations that are not already informed by theory. Rather, scientists set out to make observations that will confirm or tell against particular theories and hypotheses. These theories inform and guide, all along, how scientists perceive and classify what they observe, how they construct experiments, and therefore what observations they obtain. Elsewhere Hegel agrees that theoretical understanding always precedes observation. In the chapter on 'sense-certainty' in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel famously argues that sense-perception is always informed by categories of thought. In his *Philosophy of nature*, then, Hegel should have said that science involves thought in that theories and theoretical categories always inform the observations that scientists make and the experiments they conduct. Nonetheless (he should have said), science remains empirical because it tests these theories and categories against observations and experimental results.

However exactly we characterise it, though, it is the empirical dimension of science that for Hegel distinguishes science from philosophy of nature. He thus elaborates on their distinction as follows: Whereas scientists identify and discuss universals within nature on an empirical basis, philosophers of nature take each universal already identified and conceptualised by scientists and reconstruct on a priori grounds how each universal derives from the others and fits with them into an organised whole. Hegel therefore says – as we saw in chapter 7 – that in its *origin and formation* (*Entstehung* and *Bildung*) philosophy of nature depends on empirical scientific findings, but its method is to reconstruct these findings on a new basis, that of 'the necessity of the concept' (*EN* §246R, 1: 197). Philosophers reconstruct the complete set of connections amongst the natural universals already identified by scientists, and in doing so comprehend nature as an organised and ordered whole.

Hegel, then, did not set out to produce his own theory of nature to rival or replace empirical scientific knowledge. Actually, he bases his theory of nature on the empirical science of his own time – science that he assesses, reinterprets and reconstructs. Unfortunately, in the process Hegel sometimes rejects particular scientific hypotheses that have since become well established, such as evolutionary theory; and he sometimes defends hypotheses that have been discredited, such as Goethe's anti-Newtonian account of colour.

Even so, as Hegel actually understands the distinction between physics and philosophy of nature, then, this is less sharp than it initially appeared. Hegel does not draw a sharp line between empirical and a priori approaches. Rather, for him, scientific method has a more empirical element – gathering observations and data – *and* a mixed empirical-and-conceptual element in which general hypotheses and theories are formed. For its part, the method of philosophy of nature is both a priori *and* has a more empirical element in which the philosopher learns from scientists – learns *both* about observed data *and* about universals, laws, and more.

The philosopher then reconstructs on a priori grounds the links between these universals identified by scientists, to varying degrees reinterpreting the nature of those universals in the process. Sometimes, too, this leads the philosopher to reinterpret empirical data – to conceive them from a new perspective.

This means that for Hegel there is continuity between philosophy and science: philosophy of nature draws out, extends and realises the dimension of ordering thought that is already operative in empirical science. By doing so, philosophy of nature imparts a new level of organisation to scientific hypotheses and theories and thereby rises to understand nature as an ordered whole. Hegel conceives this as a continuation and extension, not a rejection, of the scientific programme of understanding nature on an empirical basis (*EN* §246A, 1: 201).

Nonetheless, Hegel understands this continuity in a less narrowly naturalistic way than some other possible understandings. For he not only reorganises but also *reinterprets* the natural forms identified by scientists in light of the metaphysics by which, he says, philosophy of nature *distinguishes* itself from (*sich unterscheidet von*) science (*EN* §246A, 1: 202). What is this metaphysics? Taking up the accounts of natural universals provided by science, Hegel tries to show how each natural universal derives from another by resolving an internal contradiction within it (or by advancing towards a resolution of that contradiction). He also describes philosophy of nature as ‘rational physics’, so we may infer that he takes as the core of this distinguishing metaphysics the idea that nature *is rational* – not merely that nature is susceptible of rational comprehension by us, but that nature in itself conforms to rational norms (insofar as it is so structured as to resolve a succession of internal contradictions within natural forms).

Having said this, for Hegel this ‘rational metaphysics’ merely makes explicit the presuppositions that scientists already make, often unknowingly – insofar as scientific inquiry is conducted on the presupposition that nature is an organised and intelligible whole, not merely admitting of being organised by us but really having organisation in itself. Hegel takes himself merely to have elaborated this presupposition of ordinary scientific consciousness in full and explicitly. So, while Hegel’s approach to the philosophy-science relation is less naturalistic than some other possible approaches, his approach is not wholly non-naturalistic, for he is not positing a complete discontinuity between philosophy and science. While he thinks that its metaphysics *distinguishes* the philosophy of nature from science, he also thinks that this metaphysics does not rest upon a break from science but rather *realises* presuppositions that are already implicit in science all along. Philosophy of nature takes the assumptions about natural order that underlie science and develops those assumptions into what they always implicitly were – yet this requires that these assumptions be transformed out of their initial, implicit, intra-scientific

shape. As such, philosophy of nature and science are neither completely discontinuous nor completely continuous, but somewhere between the two.

III. SUPERNATURAL NATURE?

The next strand of the cluster *naturalism* to which I turn is rejection of belief in supernatural entities and processes. On this point, naturalism is typically set against various modes of pre-modern belief in supernatural entities – God, the devil, angels, demons, spirits of the forest; elements and humours; relations of sympathy and communication between ostensibly very different natural things, such as diseased bodily organs and particular plants; Platonic or Aristotelian forms or essences that particular empirical things instantiate. Yet perhaps pre-modern people regarded all these kinds of entities as not supernatural but natural: after all, pre-moderns took these entities to organise, populate and pervade the *natural* world. Even so, pre-moderns thus viewed nature itself as a supernatural realm, one structured internally by supernatural forces and powers. In what sense, though, are these various forces and powers supernatural?

Charles Taylor discusses this issue in his book *A Secular Age*. He maintains that in the modern disenchanted world, the ‘only locus of thoughts, feelings, spiritual *élan* is what we call minds [and] the only minds in the cosmos are those of humans’ (2007: 30). In contrast, people experienced the enchanted pre-modern world to be populated by ‘spirits, demons, and moral forces’ (26). Forces were felt to reside directly in things – for example, the curative agency attributed to relics of the saints, or the sacramental power of the Host. Meanings, too, were taken to reside in things, independent of and exterior to our minds. These objectively existing meanings could be communicated across things or imposed on us, as could the sacred power that transmits itself if we touch a saint’s garment. Taylor infers that no sharp line was drawn between ‘personal agency and impersonal force’ (32). He further claims that the kind of influence that an item such as a saint’s relic was thought able to exercise was not efficient causation. Taylor claims, for example, that in the medical theory of four humours black bile was not seen as the efficient cause of melancholy but rather as *embodying* melancholy, where this relation of embodiment, he says, was not a causal relation.

However, perhaps the relation *was* causal if we admit other kinds of causation beyond efficient causation. Perhaps black bile and psychical melancholy both instantiate a higher-level form or meaning common to them both: melancholy in a general, not exclusively physical or psychical, form. Or perhaps black bile realises, at a more concrete bodily level, melancholia in the psyche. On either view there are *forms* in nature which different things instantiate, embody and realise to varying degrees. These

forms include meanings that are sometimes common to superficially different things, so that (for example) the flower lungwort can cure diseased lungs because both participate in a common field of lung-related meaning. Underlying this pre-modern way of thinking is acceptance of *final* and *formal* causes. The cause of something's being as it is (the spleen over-full of black bile) is the form (melancholia) that the spleen instantiates. Here the form of any natural thing is the *telos* guiding its development so that it realises this form as fully as possible, and this remains true even for the disordered spleen, which is disordered because it is realising a disturbed form.

What makes this mode of thought supernaturalistic? For some, such as the mechanistic materialists (d'Holbach et al.), it is supernaturalistic to believe in formal or final causes at all, because forms and purposes are not material. Kant does not straightforwardly take that view, but he does say that if one believes in real non-material concepts or plans that really affect and regulate material processes then one is postulating a special kind of supernatural cause (*übernatürliche Ursache*; *CJ* §68, 263/383).³ However, even if (as I will suggest) belief in real forms need not just as such be supernaturalistic, the medieval worldview is arguably still supernaturalistic in several ways. First, in this worldview, final and formal causation pervade nature and are its dominant forms of causation. Second, as a result, there is relatively little interest in investigating empirically into relations of efficient causation. Third, as a result again, a myriad of particular formal and final causal relations are invoked to explain events usually without no account (or no credible, empirically warranted account) of any efficient causal relations that support these final and formal relations and enable them to take place. For example, we have had no account of any efficient-causal mechanisms by which lungwort leaves might have curative effects on diseased lungs. In the absence of support from efficient-causal mechanisms, the supposed formal and final causal relations become mysterious and magical, and in that sense supernatural, even if they would necessarily not be so if we knew of efficient-causal mechanisms supporting and enabling them. On these three counts, we can place the medieval worldview at the supernaturalistic end of the spectrum.

Now, in Hegel's time, many biologists were reintroducing belief in final and formal causes, and they saw this as fully consistent with — indeed, required by — their inquiries into efficient causation. Kant provided a justification for this practice in his Third Critique, on condition that belief in final and formal causes remain regulative. For Kant, we cannot understand organisms in exclusively mechanical terms (*CJ* §61, 236/360). We must understand organisms with reference to their purposes, because the parts of organisms are reciprocally means and ends for each other — each supporting the others in its functioning — so that the whole system of means and ends must be regarded as having come about

so as to realise these functions. Thus, organisms must be seen as purposive wholes, where the internal concept (or the plan or purpose) of the whole explains why all its parts arise and interrelate as they do. But for Kant these are merely regulative judgements that we are obliged to make about organisms. That is, we are obliged to think of organisms *as if* they had purposes – and, more generally, to regard the whole of nature *as if* it were suitable for our intellects: as if nature were organised on a plan such that we can understand it through our classificatory and ordering schemes and, thus, as if nature were an ordered whole.

For Kant, though, we cannot know whether organisms or nature as a whole are really purposively organised in these ways. This is because, in the nature of the scientific project, we also have to study nature and organisms on the assumption that their component interactions are entirely mechanical – for ‘without mechanism’, Kant says, ‘we cannot gain insight into the nature of things’ (§78, 295/410). If nature and organisms really were entirely mechanical, though, *and* were really purposively organised, then we would have a contradiction. The solution (to this ‘antinomy of teleological judgement’) is that both assumptions – that nature and organisms are purposive wholes and that their processes are entirely mechanical – must be made in a merely regulative, non-realist spirit. As Daniel Dahlstrom sums up, for Kant:

There is nothing contradictory about attempting to explain natural phenomena ‘according to mechanical laws alone’, insofar as that can be done, and at the same time allowing . . . that for some combinations of things in nature ‘a causality distinct from mechanism . . .’ must be entertained. (Dahlstrom 1998: 170)

For Kant, then, to be legitimate, our assumption that organisms behave as if they had guiding purposes must be made in a merely methodological and heuristic way, so that it does not contradict but works together with the converse assumption of mechanism, and therefore does not impede but advances empirical inquiry into efficient-causal mechanisms.

Moreover, for Kant, we are ultimately obliged to make this assumption about organisms as a reflection of the needs of our mental apparatus. For the aim of our understanding is to synthesise, to rise in steps to grasp things as a whole. It therefore suits our understanding to approach organisms as items whose parts flow out of their concepts holistically. More broadly, it suits us to regard nature as a whole that is so organised that in principle we can completely understand it through science as an ordered system. Again, then, the regulative assumption that there is order in nature motivates empirical inquiry – for we would find it pointless to investigate nature if we did not assume that we can understand it and that our investigations are going to add up.

As a whole, Kant is arguing that we should (re)introduce assumptions about organic relations and natural order because, made in a purely regu-

lative way, these assumptions *further* empirical scientific inquiry. In their content, the assumptions are not naturalistic, because they make reference to *non*-natural concepts or ground-plans within organisms and within nature as a whole (and because these assumptions reflect the requirements of our intellect, which Kant also construes non-naturalistically). But as long as these assumptions remain regulative, they do not mark a damaging return to medieval supernaturalism.

Many scientists of the period immediately following Kant, though, treated the *Lebenskräfte* or *Gestaltungskräfte* of which they spoke not merely as heuristic postulates (although they sometimes did just that) but as real causes of the organisation of organisms and species (see Lenoir 1982: 159; his examples include Kiehmeyer and Johannes Müller). Were these unfortunate throwbacks to belief in really existing supernatural forces? Not necessarily. Schelling provided a theoretical justification for the further step to reintroduce belief in real forces (as a realist, not merely regulative, kind of belief).

Across all the stages in his thought, Schelling starts from the question: How is knowledge possible? He answers that we can know only what is mind-like, what conforms in its structure (at least to some extent) to the structure of our own minds.⁴ Moreover, he argues that insofar as natural scientists are advancing our knowledge, this must be because nature really is mind-like, 'the visible organism of our understanding' (IFO 194/272). It is not merely that we must assume that nature is suited to our understanding. Nature must really *be* suited to our understanding in virtue of having a mind-like organisation in itself. 'It is *not* . . . that WE KNOW nature as *a priori*, but nature IS *a priori*; that is, everything individual in it is predetermined by the whole' (198/279). Unless nature really were thus organised and suited to our comprehension, modern scientists would not have been able to make the strides in understanding that they have.⁵ Thus, we have grounds to claim that nature really is objectively ordered and, this admitted for nature as a whole, it would be incongruous to deny that organisms too are objectively organised by their inner forms or plans. Organisms, then, really exhibit final and formal as well as efficient causation, as does nature as a whole. This is in the sense that organisms really are purposive wholes and that nature really is a large-scale purposive whole (it has a 'world-soul').

For Schelling, recognising these realities need not preclude or deter empirical inquiry. On the contrary, their recognition *motivates* empirical inquiry, in several ways. (1) It gives researchers confidence that nature really is an ordered whole such that they can know about this whole and can build up a complete system of knowledge of it. (2) It directs empirical researchers to look for the efficient-causal mechanisms within organisms that enable their purposive functionings to occur. (3) It directs empirical researchers to look for the efficient-causal relations that obtain in non-organic nature, in the confidence that these have an ordered place within

the larger whole. Effectively, Schelling takes Kant's arguments in defence of regulative assumptions about purposiveness and adapts those arguments in a realist direction. Thus, in *On the World-Soul* of 1798, Schelling declares that:

It is an old illusion that organisation and life cannot be explained from natural principles. [That is, that they are supernatural and external to nature conceived as an exclusively mechanical realm.] – If it were thus to be said: the *first* origins of organic nature are *physically* inscrutable, then this *unproven* assertion serves only to discourage investigators. (WS 348)

That is: if we abandon life and organisation as 'inscrutable' and if we therefore conceive nature as purely mechanical, then this actually discourages scientific inquiry, because researchers need to believe that nature is an organised whole to give their inquiries a point. Researchers may try to meet that need by merely adopting the heuristic assumption that nature is a whole, but if they cannot have confidence that this assumption has the status of real knowledge, then they are bound to become discouraged.

However, if nature is an organic order, the parts of which flow from the whole, then why can we not deduce the parts from the concept of the whole without needing to study nature empirically? Moreover, if all the regions of nature are organised by its overall concept (thus, organically), then how is it that there *is* any non-organic nature – indeed, how is it that the majority of natural processes are mechanical rather than organic? Schelling needs to answer these questions to differentiate his philosophy of nature from medieval supernaturalism.⁶ He addresses both questions together.

Most of nature is inorganic (*anorganisch*), Schelling maintains in the *Outline*, because nature alienates itself, in an act of 'original diremption [*ursprüngliche Entzweiung*] in nature itself' (IFO 205/288). Nature is at base organic, but it divides within itself so that whole regions of nature become mechanical, as do subordinate aspects of the region of nature that remains properly organic. Consequently, we cannot deduce nature's parts from its whole, because these parts (to varying degrees in different regions of nature) have really become independent of and not directly organised by the whole. The parts remain ultimately derivative of the whole, since it is through its self-alienation that they arise. But because they arise through the whole's self-alienation, the parts fall outside that whole and must be grasped in their own terms; namely, those of mechanism; they must therefore be studied empirically.

How does organic nature alienate itself? Crucially, Schelling provides an account of this act of self-alienation by reconceiving organic purposiveness in terms of productive force. Originally, he maintains, there exists a pure productive, active, generative force – Schelling's equivalent of the vital force or *Bildungskraft* (formative force) postulated by various

biologists of the period. After all, in any organism a concept – something non-material – generates material organisation. This generative yet non-material power Schelling reconceives as productive force. Yet as we have seen before, productive force cannot generate anything determinate unless it is constrained by a second, inhibiting force. Productive force must therefore divide, into itself in its original productiveness and the second, constraining force of inhibition. This division is the self-alienation of productive force, and thus at the same time of nature as originally organic. While the interaction of both forces is necessary for any production, the forces can combine in different proportions, out of which various combinations the gamut of particular natural entities results (FO 35/101–2). The more inhibiting force prevails, the more mechanical the product – the less it is organised into a whole by the productive force. Conversely, the more the productive force predominates, the more organic the product.

By reintroducing real polar forces, has Schelling returned to medieval supernaturalism? He would see matters differently. In his view, belief in real organism and real natural order enable and stimulate empirical inquiry. Indeed, if we rightly understand the way in which nature is really an organism, then we grasp the necessity of empirical inquiry into its constituent efficient-causal relations. For nature cannot exist as an organic realm, organised by productive force, unless that force limits itself such that all of nature must be to varying degrees mechanical, and therefore such that the parts of nature cannot be deduced from nature's concept but must be studied, and their connections pieced together, empirically. So Schelling does not intend to return to the old supernaturalism that postulated final causes throughout nature that were unsupported by efficient-causal mechanisms. Rather, for Schelling, nature is a pervasively mechanical realm and must be studied in the ways appropriate to that – which means that every aspect of nature must be studied empirically (IFO 195–96/274–75). There nevertheless remains a key role for a priori reasoning in reconstructing how the various empirical products of nature derive from productive force (197/276–77). Moreover, for Schelling *every* aspect of nature must be studied empirically in this way: even the organic part of nature is necessarily full of mechanical interactions, because productive force is invariably coupled with a degree of inhibiting force.

Having said all this, Schelling grasps *how* nature is pervaded by mechanism with reference to the polarity of productive and retarding forces. And the worry remains that these polar forces are really rather mysterious. Productive force is simply pure, brute creativity; it is not something we can fully rationally understand. Not surprisingly therefore, for Schelling in his 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*, the highest realisation of productive force is in human creative artistry, which likewise transcends rational understanding (Schelling [1800] 1978: 217). Even though Schelling has departed considerably from medieval supernaturalism, he takes a significant step back towards supernaturalism with his appeal to produc-

tive force. For he explicitly conceives this force as lying beyond rational comprehension and as being the prior condition of any operation of natural laws – a force that transcends these laws just as it makes them possible.

The same problem does not arise for Hegel, because the idea of productive and retarding forces plays no role in his philosophy of nature. He agrees with Schelling that nature is an ordered, organised whole and that the kind of organisation that nature exhibits is most fully realised in the self-organisation of organic beings. But Hegel understands these matters without reference to polar forces. Instead Hegel regards living beings as organised by their concepts, the universal forms within them. These forms are really within these beings, not merely thought by us – he likens these forms to Platonic forms (*EN* §246A, 1: 200) – and the unitary nature of these forms is such that they manifest themselves throughout and bind together the manifold material parts of these beings so that they become holistically organised and, thus, living.

Moreover, Hegel construes the relations *between* all the natural universals as organic, in that each universal is a fuller realisation of the one that precedes it. For instance, time advances towards a successful resolution of the contradiction within space and, by doing so, time realises more fully than space the ontological structure – that of differentiation into multiple units – which was already immanent in space (see chapter 7 for more detail). As a whole, therefore, nature's organising structure is organic, and nature is '*in itself* a living whole' (*EN* §251, 1: 216), although philosophers can only reconstruct this organisation by first learning from scientists about natural universals (e.g., about the structure of time) *then* reconstructing a priori how one given universal realises more fully the structure of some other universal. Once again, we can understand this organic structure of nature without needing to make reference to productive and retarding forces. We understand this structure on rational grounds, using reason, rather than postulating these essentially mysterious forces. Furthermore, because nature is organic in structure, organisms must be situated on a priori grounds as the highest-level realisation of nature as a whole. Thus, Hegel organises the forms theorised by scientists into a hierarchy, with the organic forms at the summit and the most mechanical, the most devoid of organic structure – including space and time as *partes extra partes* – at the base.

Hegel's departure from Schelling over productive and retarding forces leads Hegel to reconceive the way in which nature is the idea outside itself. While Schelling, too, saw mechanism as the self-alienated form of organism, he grasped this self-alienation in terms of original productive force dividing into two. Hegel again jettisons the reference to productive force. Instead, for Hegel, nature is the idea outside itself simply in the sense that, within nature, no particulars ever completely realise their universals (*EN* §247, 1: 205). Constitutively, nature is divided be-

tween matter and universal form. This is the ultimate reason why philosophers of nature cannot begin with natural universals and deduce particular details from them – because the particulars invariably go their own way (§248, 1: 208). These particulars must therefore first be investigated empirically, and the starting point for the formation of philosophy of nature must be empirical science. Moreover, most of nature is non-organic, so that most natural universals are the universal forms of certain sets of mechanically related particulars. Time and space, for instance, are the forms of particulars – spatial parts, temporal moments – that stand to one another (albeit imperfectly) in relations of external difference. As such, it is only possible to gain an initial understanding of these universals by examining the particulars empirically and discerning how a universal form is operating, imperfectly, within them. Here too, the formation of philosophy of nature must be conditioned by science.

This remains true even for the study of organic beings. On the one hand, within these beings mechanical causal relations are incorporated into final causal relations to become the conditions that enable organisms to achieve their purposive functions. But organic beings never perfectly succeed in subordinating their parts and their efficient-causal relations to the whole. This, Hegel submits, is why organisms are subject to illness, accident, violence, and ultimately are destined to die when the unstable dominance of their whole over their parts breaks down (*EN* §375, 3: 209). Thus, although organisms are really organised by their purposes, we cannot derive the operations of the parts from the purposes because the purposes have not completely mastered those parts. Philosophers therefore cannot understand organisms properly without first learning about organisms from empirical researchers.

We can now return to Hegel's relation to naturalism and specifically to the naturalist rejection of supernatural entities and processes. Here one of the most (narrowly) naturalistic positions possible is that of mechanistic materialists such as la Mettrie, who repugn any final or formal causes and regard nature as entirely composed of matter in efficient-causal relations. A less naturalistic position is Kant's; for him, reference to (non-material) final causes – organic purposes – can be legitimate as long as these purposes are not treated as real existents. Still less naturalistic is Schelling's view that we may legitimately claim that final causes really exist, as long as we elaborate this claim in ways that (1) recognise the pervasiveness of mechanism in nature and thereby also (2) encourage empirical research into efficient causal relations in nature and (3) identify efficient-causal mechanisms that enable organic relations to unfold. Hegel agrees with Schelling on these points, but he adds (4) that nature's dimension of final and formal causality must be conceived in ways that make it rationally intelligible, without recourse to any mysterious productive force.

Compared to Schelling, Hegel's rejection of productive force marks a step back away from the supernaturalist end of the spectrum. At the same time, Hegel is closer to supernaturalism than Kant or the mechanistic materialists because he admits the real existence of conceptual, non-material forms throughout nature. Yet this does not make Hegel a supernaturalist *tout court*. For his position stands at several specifiable removes – specified in points 1 through 4 above – from the most supernaturalistic position that we have identified, that of medieval cosmology. Since Hegel is removed on these several counts from the most supernaturalistic position, he is rightly located in, or at least towards, the middle of the spectrum from naturalism to supernaturalism. As such we can characterise Hegel's position on nature as broadly naturalistic – broader than what is generally understood by naturalism today, but not simply supernaturalist.

It might be objected that if Hegel is a broad naturalist in this sense then he is equally a moderate supernaturalist – one who affirms the objective reality of organising, universal, non-material forms within nature, something that more resolutely naturalistic positions deny. Yet my examination of Schelling's and Hegel's differences over nature suggests that it is Schelling who is appropriately described as a moderate supernaturalist, in that he rejects the medieval worldview but nonetheless affirms the reality of mysterious productive force. Since Hegel denies the reality of this same force, it is most helpful to mark his difference from Schelling on this point by not calling Hegel a moderate supernaturalist. 'Broad naturalism' remains the best description of Hegel's position on nature.

NOTES

1. I understand the concepts of formal and final causation to be generic concepts that can be interpreted in a range of ways. Kant interprets them in terms of purposive wholes; Schelling reinterprets them in terms of productive force; Hegel reinterprets them again in terms of universal forms. Some scientists of the German Idealist period interpreted these concepts in terms of vital or formative force (see below).

2. Gardner refers to Alexander-Göde von Äsch's *Natural Science in German Romanticism*. For Äsch, the Early German Romantic view is that 'science and poetry [are] integral parts of [a] higher entity which current usage would call neither science nor poetry yet which embraces both' (Äsch 1941: 21). That is, the Romantics aspired and contributed to the creation of a form of science that was simultaneously poetic and aesthetic – as Robert Richards (2002: 12) has more recently argued, where aesthetic intuition into the wholeness of nature can motivate, inform and aid rather than obstruct scientific inquiry. But, Äsch stresses, this enterprise does not count as scientific by the more recent standards that became established during the nineteenth century. From this later perspective, science investigates nature merely with a view to instrumental control over natural phenomena, therefore understanding nature mechanistically through the 'elaborat[ion] of unailing rules of prediction for the behavior of natural phenomena' (Äsch 1941: 24).

3. Final causation has at times been accused of being supernaturalistic on the grounds that it entails acceptance of backwards causation, but I take it that it need not do so.

4. Thus, in his 1804 *System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular*, Schelling states: 'The first presupposition of all knowledge is that the knower and that which is known are the same' (SPG 141/137).

5. Kant on occasion seems to anticipate Schelling, saying in the first *Critique* that to give point to empirical enquiry we must proceed not merely by treating nature as if it had order but by assuming that *there is* order in nature (CPR A650/B678, 537).

6. As Schelling seeks to do: he condemns as 'meaningless' 'the old teleological modes of explanation, and the introduction of a universal reference to final causes into the science of nature, which was adulterated as a result' (IFO 195/273).

NINE

Hegel, Nature and Ethics

In this chapter I examine Hegel's philosophy of nature and explore its implications regarding the ethics of human relations with the non-human natural world.¹ As we have seen in chapters 7 and 8, the Hegelian philosopher uses a priori reasoning to find ways in which each of the natural forms identified by science derives from the others, and so builds up an overall theory of the natural world. In constructing this theory, the philosopher of nature has drawn on scientific accounts, but has then reconstituted and reinterpreted them. In this chapter I aim to see what actual theory of the natural world Hegel gives us on this basis. In section I, then, I reconstruct Hegel's actual account of the ordered whole of nature: he treats its component forms as a hierarchy progressing from the most mechanical kinds of entity to the most organic. For Hegel, this is equally a progression in which the material parts of natural entities become increasingly organised by their conceptual forms. Even the most mechanical entities, though, exhibit self-organisation to a minimal degree for Hegel: nature's hierarchy is one of increasing self-organisation, eventually reaching up to the level of free self-determination that characterises human agents.

With this theoretical background established, I turn in section II to ethical questions. We might expect that because Hegel regards all natural beings as being self-organising to at least some degree, he would conclude that we should give these beings moral consideration on that account, just as, he believes, we should respect other human agents on account of their capacity for self-determination. Yet Hegel instead maintains in his political philosophy that human agents can and indeed should transform natural beings at will, in the context of appropriating these beings as private property, an institution that Hegel considers to be necessary to realise human freedom. I argue that Hegel is inconsistent

here. Regarding other human agents, he holds that we must learn to respect their freedom alongside our own, a respect that limits and complicates the initial setting of unbridled appropriation. Consistently, he should say something similar of nature: that we should learn to temper our interest in realising our own freedom in view of the self-organising powers of natural beings and processes. Indeed, Hegel had ample scope to accommodate such an ethical position within the structure of his socio-political theory as presented in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. He failed to develop the intellectual resources provided by his own philosophy; fortunately, however, those resources remain available to us today. This means that readers today have reasons to interest themselves in his theory in light of imminent environmental crisis.

I. THE HIERARCHY OF NATURE: MECHANICS, PHYSICS, ORGANICS

Hegel connects and re-interprets scientific accounts so as to build up a particular conception of the natural world. On this conception, nature is the realm in which matter gradually comes to be shaped and organised by what Hegel calls ‘the concept’. Nature advances in this way through a ‘series of stages consisting of many moments, the exposition of which constitutes the philosophy of nature’ (*EM* §381A, 13). What, according to Hegel, are these stages?

In its first stages, nature exists as units of matter with little or no unifying organisation to tie them together. Hegel examines these stages in the first part of his philosophy of nature, the ‘Mechanics’. In this mechanical region of nature, all that exists is ‘singular individual’ entities. They have ‘the determination’ – that is, the defining attribute – of ‘extrinsicity’: *Außereinander*, which literally means being-outside-one-another (*EN* §252, 1: 217). This is the realm of matter as bare *partes extra partes*.

At first, these parts-outside-parts exist as space. Here, as we have seen in chapter 7, Hegel believes that spatial parts both differ and fail to differ from one another. Temporal moments also fail, insofar as they only attain differentiated existence for fleeting moments. After space and time Hegel discusses material bodies, in the subsection ‘Finite Mechanics’. Each material body achieves a level of difference from all other material bodies by having a particular mass that distinguishes it. This mass is comprised of a particular quantity of spatial parts. So, Hegel writes: ‘Matter [now] has . . . a quantitative difference, and is particularized into different quanta or masses’ (*EN* §263, 1: 244).

However, Hegel continues, material bodies are still not adequately differentiated from one another. Why not? Because the units of space that bodies possess so as to achieve difference remain self-contradictory entities that are not genuinely different from one another. Bodies, as it were,

are attempting to achieve difference by using lower-level entities – spatial parts – that are not themselves differentiated, and this cannot work. The contradiction of space instead infects material bodies.

As a result, Hegel claims, these bodies collapse back into identity with one another: ‘The singularities, which are repelled from each other, all merely constitute a unit [*Eins*] of many units [*Eins*]; they are identical with each other. The unit [*Eins*] only repels itself from itself, and this is the sublating [i.e., overcoming] of the separation of being-for-itself: i.e., attraction’ (*EN* §262A, 1: 243). That is, the tendency of material bodies to collapse together takes the form of their being attracted towards one another. Broadly, this is how Hegel reinterprets Newton’s account of the subjection of material bodies to gravity. Hegel writes: ‘Matter possesses gravity in so far as the drive towards a middle point is in it; it is essentially composite, and consists of sheer singular parts which all strive for the middle point. . . . [it] seeks its unity’ (*RH* 48/55).

Insofar as material bodies nonetheless have achieved a level of difference – albeit imperfect – these bodies do not simply coalesce but also repel one another. And in turn, in that bodies are subject to *both* attraction and repulsion, they revolve around a centre into which they strive to, but cannot, unite. This gives us the solar system as a system of bodies organised in motion around their centre the sun, which Hegel discusses in the ‘Absolute Mechanics’, the final sub-section of the ‘Mechanics’.

Hegel now moves on to the second main natural stage, that of ‘Physical nature’ (as he calls it). Here nature has the form of material items that are partly, but still only incompletely, integrated together in systematic relations to one another. We have already seen in the solar system a first such case. Here we have material bodies (the planets) integrated into a system by their shared orientation around a centre (the sun). This therefore brings us to the next stage of nature. As this Physical stage unfolds, we encounter sets of material items integrated together at increasingly deep levels.

We begin with what Hegel calls ‘immediate physical qualities’ – light and darkness, density and cohesion, sound, and heat. What unites these phenomena is that they exist insofar as the mass of material bodies acquires particular qualities (of density, degree of heat, etc.), through which these bodies become more firmly differentiated from one another. Why does this happen? Hegel’s initial thought is that within the solar system, different bodies acquire different qualities because of their places within that system. Location within a system causes bodies to occupy distinct roles within that system, and their matter acquires corresponding qualities (for instance, that of pure light in the case of the sun, Hegel maintains). The same applies to material bodies *within* the earth, for by being integrated as a planet the earth is now the system of all the material bodies that comprise it. These bodies, then, begin to acquire distinct qualities too.

Hegel now proceeds to three kinds of relational processes amongst bodies: magnetism, electricity and chemistry. In all these processes, different bodies are drawn to coalesce together. For they have acquired distinct qualities, and yet these qualifications are imposed on the more basic quantities of mass that bodies possess. These differences of mass, as we saw, are unstable and not fully established. To that extent, bodies are still not properly differentiated from one another, and they coalesce together.² Once again, however, bodies do not entirely lack difference, so they not only coalesce but also repel one another, and regenerate their differences after having combined.

The paradigm of this is the chemical process, in which two substances (two bodies with different qualities) react together (combine) to produce new substances as a result (difference is regenerated). However, this process has an important result. Through it, what emerges is a set of bodies with different qualities, bodies that have assumed these qualities that differentiate them *through* their interaction, their uniting and then separating. The bodies have taken up their different qualities *in relation* to one another. That is, body A has acquired quality B and body C has acquired quality D because A and C have been subjected together to a chemical process within which they have come to occupy different roles. In effect, these bodies are now differentiated by their distinct places within an organised system.³

This brings us to the third and final main sphere of nature, that of organic life, described by Hegel in the section 'Organic Physics'. According to him, this sphere contains organic beings – plants and animals – the material parts of which are completely pervaded and organised by the forms that unify them. As a result, the material parts of these beings are completely integrated together with one another. Hegel is relying on Kant's account of organisms in his *Critique of Judgement*. Here Kant argues that living organisms must be regarded as having two distinguishing characteristics. First, within any organism all its parts are reciprocally means and ends for one another: each organ functions in ways that enable the others to function, those in turn enabling the first organ as well as one another to function. Second, in enabling each other to exist and operate in this way, the parts belong within an organised system that effectively assigns roles to each of them, so that the whole has organising power with respect to its parts (*CJ* §65, 251-52/372-73).

In an organism, then, each part is as it is because of its place within the whole – so Hegel takes it. Its place completely shapes the part's character, so that if removed from the whole it would cease to exist:

The single members of the body are what they are only through their unity and in relation to it. So, for instance, a hand that has been hewn from the body is a hand in name only, but not in actual fact, as Aristotle has already remarked. (*EL* §216A, 291)

Indeed, this means that the parts of a living body are not rightly described as mere parts but as limbs and organs – fully integrated members of an organised system.

Having said this, Hegel believes that only animal organisms fully realise this character of living wholes. The first organic form that he considers is the earth as an integrated totality of magnetically, electrically and chemically interacting constituents. Yet the earth is not alive: it has merely brought us to the very brink of life. The second organic form, plants, are genuinely alive, yet are deficient in that their organs can, if cut from the whole, assume new functions and thereby generate new plants (as when we take cuttings). Thus, the organs of a plant are still not so fully governed by the whole as those of an animal. The animal, then, brings the chain of natural progression to its summit and completion.

To sum up: for Hegel, nature has the initial form of matter that is not organised by any unifying form but comprises mere *partes extra partes*. Nature then advances to the form of material bodies that are located in systems of relations to one another, yet that still retain an aspect of bare mass, bare material parts-outside-parts. Finally, nature progresses to the form of the organic body, the material parts of which are completely shaped by their places in the whole. Matter has gone from being unshaped by any form, to being partially shaped by organising form, to being completely shaped by organic form.

What does Hegel mean by claiming that nature *progresses* through these stages? He interprets nature as a *hierarchy*: its most advanced forms, the organic ones, are the most perfect. This indicates the nature of the progression: the most perfect natural forms are so because they best succeed at resolving the contradictions that (Hegel thinks) obtained in nature in its earliest stages. In turn, those earliest stages are the earliest in the chain of natural progression because they are least perfect: least successful at resolving those same contradictions.

Take space, the very first natural form. As we saw, for Hegel space embodies a contradiction between difference and lack of difference. Time is more advanced – more perfect – than space, since time advances towards resolving this contradiction, in that temporal moments achieve greater difference from one another than spatial parts did. But the improvement made here is small, since temporal moments are only transitory. In the rest of mechanical nature, the parts of matter cohere into material bodies that achieve greater difference from one another by virtue of their distinguishing quantities of mass. Here we see an advance towards resolution of the contradiction from which space initially suffered. The further we advance towards complete resolution of the contradiction, the more perfect are the kinds of natural form that we get. Nature does not progress temporally, then, but in what Hegel calls a ‘logical’ sense, under which natural forms count as more advanced the less internally contradictory they are. (Moreover, the contradictions in question really exist in

the natural world, for Hegel. Space as it really exists has antithetical features, so that it is objectively internally contradictory.)⁴

Hegel also regards nature as progressing from pure matter to its final existence as matter fully organised by 'the concept'. While the concept is also a technical term in Hegel's Logic, in the context of his philosophy of nature he understands the concept as follows. This concept is not an idea in the mind; it is something existing, external to our minds, really embodied in the material natural world. It can best be understood with reference to living organisms. As we have seen, for Hegel, the parts of an organism are shaped by the whole and its purposes. For Hegel these are above all the purposes of sensation, irritability (the power to react to external stimulants), and reproduction. The whole and its purposes are not directly material entities, but they shape how the matter of an organism develops. They organise matter and are embodied in it, but they are not material themselves. Insofar as the whole and its purposes are not material, they can be described instead as conceptual. In the same way, for Hegel, whatever shapes and organises a whole set of material items counts as conceptual, or as a concept. Thus, as nature advances to forms of matter that are more and more systematically organised and integrated, its matter is becoming more and more pervaded by 'the concept'.

Overall, Hegel has crafted a unique theory of nature as the realm in which matter gradually becomes shaped and organised by the concept, becoming organic in the process. I have not explained how this theory of nature relates to the scientific accounts of natural phenomena on which Hegel draws. My aim in this section has been to abstract from how Hegel draws on and reinterprets those scientific accounts, so as to highlight the overall theory of nature that results from these reinterpretations. Nonetheless, as we have seen in earlier chapters, in fact Hegel did not craft this theory of nature independently of science. But let us now turn to the ethical implications of his account.

II. HEGEL AND THE ETHICS OF HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONS

How far can anyone today accept Hegel's actual theory of nature as a hierarchically ordered whole? Only to a limited extent: scientific understanding of nature has advanced considerably, and its content has changed dramatically, since Hegel's time. Hegel's theory of nature gives no place to evolution by natural selection, genes, subatomic particles, or many other entities the existence of which scientists now generally accept. Perhaps Hegel's theory of nature could be revised to incorporate these entities. But it is not clear that this revision is worth undertaking. For what remains of interest in Hegel's theory of nature, plausibly, is not its substantial details. Rather, what remains of interest is his overall *re-*

interpretation of what nature essentially *is*, an interpretation that cuts across all the specific details of his theory.

In Hegel's interpretation, nature is a hierarchical order of forms ranging from most to least contradictory, and from the most purely material through to the most organic and conceptually organised. What reasons are there to give serious consideration to this interpretation of nature? Let me note one reason: an environmental one. In our time, environmental crisis is imminent, if not already upon us. The causes of this crisis are complex. But as we saw in chapter 5, some historians maintain that one causal factor is the new way of thinking about nature that took hold during the Scientific Revolution in the seventeenth century (see, especially, Merchant 1982). This was the mechanistic view of nature – pioneered by Descartes amongst others – as a set of units of matter interacting causally with one another. On this view, no natural beings have any real inner purposes or life; even complex forms such as organisms can be reduced to sets of mechanical interactions. This is why, infamously, Descartes found vivisection morally unproblematic: after all, for him, animals are mere mechanisms. As this exemplifies, the mechanistic view of nature has tended to support and fuel human efforts to control interactions within nature for our own benefit. For if natural beings have no real purposes of their own, then we human beings need not disregard or restrict our own needs and purposes for the sake of allowing natural beings to fulfil their purposes: they have none.

The mechanistic assumptions that informed the Scientific Revolution, then, contributed to making the use of nature for human benefit into an entrenched part of modern life. To be sure, few scientists today would straightforwardly accept a mechanistic view of nature. Yet the use of nature for human purposes, without regard to any purposes that nature itself may have, remains fundamental to industrialised society, which – at least as it has existed so far – depends upon the ruthless exploitation of natural resources.

Hegel challenges the mechanistic view of nature. For him, only the most inferior aspects of nature operate in purely mechanical ways. Living organisms of all kinds are not mere mechanisms; they have their own guiding purposes. Even chemical, electrical and magnetic processes are not merely mechanical; they already have a level of systematic self-organisation that places them midway between organism and mechanism. To understand nature properly, Hegel believes, we must recognise that virtually all the concrete natural bodies and processes that surround us have at least some aspects of purposive self-organisation. And even those natural beings that come the closest to being mechanical – bodies with mass in gravitational relations to one another – still in fact have to be understood in relation to other more self-organised natural forms of which they are a precursor. Bare mechanism is the minimum case of self-organisation, rather than self-organisation being reducible to bare mechanism.

What follows from this view, ethically? We might think that surely it follows from Hegel's view that we ought to *act* towards natural bodies and processes in ways that recognise their self-organising aspects. That is not to say that we should always put the purposes of natural beings above our own. But we should take their purposes *into consideration* in deciding what to do and how to live. In many cases, this will mean finding trade-offs between our own purposes and those of other natural beings. This conclusion – that the purposes of natural beings merit consideration – properly follows from Hegel's interpretation of nature, or so we might readily conclude.

Matters are complicated, though, by the fact that Hegel draws no such conclusion himself. In his philosophy of nature he doesn't say anything explicit about our treatment of natural beings from an ethical point of view, but he does talk about this in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Hegel discusses human treatment of natural beings within his account of private property, which is near the start of the *Philosophy of Right*, after Hegel has introduced free will at the very beginning of the text. Hegel remarks here that free will is a datum that is familiar to each of us from our own experience (*PR* §4, 37). But what does 'free will' mean? Schematically, Hegel claims that free will can be initially taken to be the ability to choose which to pursue from the set of one's individual desires or of the available courses of action (§11, 45). Ultimately, Hegel will argue across the course of the *Philosophy of Right* that this is an inadequate understanding of free will, to which he proposes successive revisions and refinements. Nonetheless, these refinements incorporate the initial understanding of free will rather than rejecting it absolutely. Thus, for Hegel, free will in the sense of free choice remains a necessary aspect of freedom, although only an aspect that should not be mistakenly equated with the whole.

Now, the condition of an individual's exercising this ability to choose amongst her desires or possible courses of action, for Hegel, is that she own private property – enjoying rights over a range of material objects with respect to which she can embody and realise her freedom of choice. I need to be surrounded by a domain of objects that provide tangible evidence of my freedom and in which 'I regard myself as free' (*LNR* §18, 224). My ownership of these objects means that I can mould, use, and mark them in ways that I freely choose, so that these objects then give me back signs of the freedom that I have exercised with respect to them. But property ownership is only possible if different individuals recognise and respect one another's property (*PR* §71, 102). In turn, this mutual recognition and respect amongst property owners can only reliably be achieved if they respect one another not merely when it benefits them to do so but out of genuine respect for the rights of others – this being necessary to avert the otherwise ever-imminent prospect of crime. That

step takes Hegel from property (or 'abstract right') to morality, and from there he will move on to morality made concrete in ethical life.

Nature figures into 'abstract right' because Hegel maintains that private property requires that individuals exercise and realise their freedom by taking possession of *natural* objects and then using, marking and transforming them. By transforming something I put my will into it – I make it into something that manifests my freedom in that it is visibly the way it is because of my free actions upon it. And this manifestation of my will within the thing, Hegel says, 'occurs through my conferring upon the thing a purpose other than that which it immediately possessed . . . a soul other than that which it previously had' (PR §44A, 76). In place of the object's own 'soul', my soul is implanted into it. Hegel specifies that it is wrong to treat other human individuals in this way – as objects that I treat as my private property. This wrong has been committed at times – notably in the institution of slavery – but that occurred in times, as Hegel puts it, when a wrong was still regarded as being right (§57A, 88). Basically, Hegel takes it along broadly Kantian lines, human agents are ends in themselves: their free agency deserves to be recognised and respected. This is not the case, Hegel believes, for natural beings. Indeed, for Hegel, it's not merely the case that we are free to transform natural beings as we please; more strongly, we *ought* to so transform them in order to give reality to our freedom, and because we are under this obligation, we must have the right to act so as to fulfil it. Hence the 'absolute *right of appropriation* which human beings have over all things' (§44, 75).

We might think that these claims of Hegel's are in tension with the implications of his theory of nature. For on that theory all natural beings exhibit at least some level of self-organisation; that is, they shape themselves in light of their own purposes. It is this same self-shaping capacity which ultimately becomes developed to a higher and fuller degree in human self-determination – as Hegel portrays matters in the *Philosophy of Mind*, in which he treats human agency as a higher-level development of the approximations to that agency that already exist in the natural world. The human capacity for self-determination is so important, Hegel takes it, that each of us not only can but also ought to transform natural beings so as to realise this capacity. But if self-determination has this importance in human beings, then mustn't its approximate natural form as self-organisation *also* have a level of importance, such that the purposes of natural beings deserve to receive at least some moral consideration?

Hegel doesn't draw that conclusion. Here there is a marked difference from what he says about the necessity of each individual property owner coming to recognise and respect other human agents. Initially, he maintains, we are liable in the name of realising our own individual freedom to try to steal other agents' property, the things that they have already appropriated for their own. But we must come to recognise that such behaviour is wrong – not merely on the grounds that I need others to

recognise *my* property, which they can only do if I recognise *them* to be property owners in turn. That is *part* of the story for Hegel, but only part; if I remained at that standpoint I would still be recognising others only as an indirect way of furthering my individual self-interest. I need to come to recognise that others in their own right deserve to own property – hence Hegel proceeds from property to a treatment of morality in a fairly Kantian sense, as involving amongst other things the recognition of other human agents as ends in themselves. Although he subsequently maintains that this Kantian kind of standpoint too has limitations and must be superseded, it isn't abandoned, but rather incorporated into the higher level of 'ethical life'. Hegel sums up this difference in the respective standpoints that we should take towards human agents and natural beings by saying that nature does not 'have the end in itself in such a way that we have to respect it, as the individual human has this end in himself and hence is to be respected' (*LHP* 3: 185/20: 87).

When it comes to natural beings, then, Hegel *could* have said that we start off with an inadequate standpoint in which we try to use and transform natural things so as to manifest our individual freedom in them. But, his reasoning might have continued, actually those things have purposes of their own, and we need to come to recognise the validity of these things pursuing their purposes. We therefore need to learn to limit our pursuit of our own individual freedom, he could have concluded, and to balance our concern for this freedom with recognition of the independent purposes of natural beings. And then – Hegel could have said in turn – our coming to learn this lesson requires us to be situated within social institutions that educate us in this lesson and in acting in the ways that embody and instil it. That would be parallel to the way that we must be situated within the institutions of ethical life so that we can be educated in acting morally towards other human individuals – so that moral action becomes second nature to us and does not remain a burdensome imposition. Hegel did not say any of these things. But his *Philosophy of Right* provides a framework within which he could have made these claims, by unfolding a series of arguments regarding human-nature relations which parallel those that he does in fact advance regarding inter-human relations. Moreover, he *should* have unfolded those arguments, to be faithful to the implications of his own account of nature.

NOTES

1. Other accounts of Hegel's Philosophy of Nature include those in Houlgate (1998) and that of Rand (2007). The bearing of Hegel's philosophy of nature on the ethics of human-nature relations was for a long time a topic rather neglected by scholars (as, indeed, was Hegel's Philosophy of nature as a whole). But recently there has been growing attention to the former issue: e.g., Mowad (2012), Kisner (2009), and Bates (2014).

2. Hegel puts this as follows: in this 'part of physics . . . matter becomes determined by immanent form, and yet in accordance with the nature of spatiality. Primarily this gives rise to a *relationship* between the two, i.e., between spatial determinacy as such and the matter belonging to it' (EN §290, 2: 55).

3. My formulation is indebted to Goethe's *Elective Affinities* (*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*) ([1809] 2008), in which the married couple Eduard (A) and Charlotte (B) as an experiment invite Otilie (C) and the Captain (D) to visit them; the result is that Eduard and Otilie form a relationship, as do Charlotte and the Captain.

4. Hegel's idea that natural entities contain real contradictions is puzzling because it is not clear how something that is internally contradictory can possibly exist. One solution, which I've adopted at times in this book, is to interpret Hegel as speaking of 'contradiction' to mean merely tension or conflict.

Part Three

Hegel, Gender and Race

TEN

Sexual Polarity in Schelling and Hegel

In this chapter I examine the accounts of sexual difference given by Schelling in his *First Outline of a System of Philosophy of Nature* and by Hegel in his *Encyclopedia Philosophy of Nature*. To understand these accounts, we must situate them within the broader approaches to nature which Schelling and Hegel adopted in these works. Schelling approaches nature in terms of a fundamental polarity of two forces of productivity and inhibition, a polarity that manifests itself at successive levels throughout the range of natural forms; he considers sexual difference to be the culminating form of this polarity. According to Schelling, the two sexes seek to overcome their polar opposition by reproducing, but they only succeed in generating more finite, sexually differentiated individuals, so that polarity persists in nature indefinitely. For his part, as we've seen in previous chapters, Hegel approaches nature in terms of a fundamental opposition between the concept and matter. For Hegel, nature gradually overcomes this opposition through the range of phenomena from mechanical to chemical to organic. Again understanding sexual difference in relation to reproduction, Hegel thinks that the sexes reproduce in the effort to realise the (conceptual) unity of their species, but that they only produce another finite, embodied individual. Hegel explicitly aligns the female and male sexes with the material and conceptual sides of the sexual opposition respectively, while Schelling more tacitly aligns the female sex with inhibition and the male sex with productivity. After reconstructing Schelling's and Hegel's approaches to sexual difference as polarity, I draw some conclusions about the relations between conceptions of sexual difference and the early nineteenth-century project of philosophy of nature (*Naturphilosophie*). First, philosophy of nature as Schelling, Hegel, and others conceived it made possible a novel conception of sexual difference as the manifestation of fundamental polarities or oppo-

sitions within nature. Second, in Hegel's case, his philosophy of nature also allowed him to establish systematic parallels and distinctions between sexual difference and the supposed natural racial differences which he considers in his *Philosophy of Mind*. Third, Schelling's and Hegel's conceptions of sexual difference are ambiguous between the 'one-sex' and 'two-sex' models identified by historian of science Thomas Laqueur (1990). Schelling and Hegel treat the sexes as polar opposites, yet in such a way that the female pole is only the negative of the male pole, not a positive term in its own right. As such, philosophy of nature is indirectly implicated in the broader nineteenth-century trend to confine women to the private sphere. Nonetheless, feminists can potentially reclaim the philosophy of nature so as to re-emphasise the importance and inescapability of sexual difference.

I. SCHELLING'S POLARISATION: PRODUCTION AND INHIBITION

In the *Outline*, Schelling situates sexual difference as the culminating manifestation of the polarity of two basic forces (*Kräfte*) structuring all of nature – the productive force and inhibiting force. Moreover, he tacitly understands these two basic forces in sexualised terms, aligning the productive force with the male sex and the inhibiting force with the female sex. To make sense of this, we need to recall the character of his project of philosophy of nature in the *Outline*. In turn, this requires briefly reminding ourselves how that project took shape in the 1790s, since in the *Outline* Schelling was re-working (for the third time) the project of philosophy of nature first sketched in his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*.

As we saw in chapter 7, Schelling conceived this project in response to Kant's opposition of subjectivity and nature and argued instead that nature already exhibits a form of spontaneity that approximates to the freedom of human agents. 'To philosophise about nature', Schelling states, 'means to lift it out of dead mechanism . . . to animate it with freedom and to set it into its own free development' (FO 14/79). Kant had claimed, however, that ordered experience requires not that we can know that we actually *are* free but only that we must assume that we are free. In the *Critique of Judgment*, he suggested that this requires us also to think of organisms and of nature as an organised totality as if they were 'purposive' – self-organising in ways that prefigure the mind's freedom to order its own experience under rational norms. Nevertheless, for Kant this was only a way of thinking about nature. We cannot know whether or not nature in itself, independently of how we represent it, really is purposive (CJ §§65-67, 251–57/372–78). Thus, for Kant, our judgements of purposiveness are only *regulative*, not *constitutive* (§67, 259/379). Schelling, in contrast, believes that we as subjects of experience must really *be* free and that this freedom is only possible if nature really is spontaneous as well –

a natural spontaneity that we can therefore know to really exist, independently of our minds. For Schelling, 'The purposiveness of natural products dwells in themselves . . . it is *objective* and *real*' (IPN 32/96). He thus aims to describe nature as it objectively, mind-independently is (Bowie 1993: 31).

As we saw in chapter 7, in his *Ideas* Schelling further argues that because in general nature must anticipate human self-determination, we can know about the particular composition of the natural world insofar as we can find its forms and processes to anticipate the self-determining human mind. They do so specifically insofar as they are polarised between the two forces of attraction and repulsion, anticipating the dual structure of human subjectivity as it is oriented both outwards towards objects in the external world and inwards towards itself *qua* the one related to these objects, however implicitly. Nature is structured in the same way as the subject, prefiguring its freedom. Thus, Schelling came to conceive of nature as fundamentally organised by two forces: attraction, which is outward-oriented and expansive; and repulsion, which is inward-oriented and withdrawing. These forces have tacit sexual connotations, which become relatively explicit when Schelling subsequently reconceives the forces as those of production and inhibition in the *Outline*.

Male Production – Female Inhibition

Schelling's premise in the *Outline* is that nature is originally productive. Nature originally consists in sheer, unlimited, productive activity (*unendliche productive Tätigkeit*). This productivity 'limits' (or 'fixates', *fixirt*) itself to constitute the various particular products and processes that make up the natural world. These products, Schelling insists, are not permanently fixed entities but are only transitory resting points within nature's unending productivity, like eddies in a stream (FO 32/98). According to Schelling, the mistake of much mechanistic empirical science is to overlook the underlying productivity that first makes these products possible, 'the inner driving activity [*Triebwerk*]' (IFO 196/32). His aim in the *Outline*, then, is to analyse nature's free productivity and trace how it develops, and in this light to re-interpret the various finite natural products studied by the sciences.

The key question that Schelling confronts is *how* nature's productivity becomes confined in particular products. Infinitely active as it is, nature's productivity would pass through an endless array of products infinitely quickly, destroying each product as quickly as it had been created, unless that productivity encountered some 'retarding' force (FO 187/266).¹ The distinction between productivity and products must be explained by a prior *Dualität* of underlying forces in nature – a duality of productivity and another force opposing it. He infers that a force of inhibition (*Hemmung*) must oppose nature's productivity so that particular products

arise through the resulting conflict of productive and inhibiting forces. Each product or process reflects a particular level of equilibrium between these opposed forces: 'Each formation is itself only the . . . appearance of a determinate proportion which nature achieves between opposed, mutually limiting actions' (FO 35/101). Each natural product is structured by a polarity: it reflects at once a given level of productivity and a given level of inhibition. We recognise these two forces as the latest version of the forces of attraction and repulsion – attraction that expands outwards in ever-new activities and repulsion that pulls the first force back into the determinate shape of a product.

Schelling proceeds to re-interpret scientific accounts of physiology, magnetism, electricity and chemistry to see how processes in each of these domains manifest the polarity of forces. In his view, this array of manifestations of polarity arises because natural productivity bursts beyond each polar product in which it becomes confined. Being infinitely productive, it must always transcend its limitations (FO 140/209). But then productivity must become inhibited again so that a whole series of products results. For Schelling, sexual difference, *Geschlechtsverschiedenheit*, is at the apex of this series. It is a difference found, beyond humanity, throughout the entire organic realm of animals and plants, albeit in different forms and not always distributed across different individuals: 'Throughout the whole of [organic] nature absolute sexlessness is nowhere demonstrable' (36/102).

This must be because sexual difference is necessary for reproduction, Schelling infers. In turn, he can make sense of this necessity in terms of his basic conception of nature. Difference, polarisation into two forces, makes possible nature's productivity as a whole – nature can be creative, generative, only on condition of being divided into two polar forces. Likewise, then, organic individuals must be able to regenerate only on the condition of succumbing to the same polar division. As Schelling puts it, 'The separation into different sexes is just the separation which we have furnished as the ground of inhibition in the productions of nature' (39/105).

The division of organic beings into two sexes, then, arises so that they can reproduce. But why do organic beings seek to reproduce? Their urge to do so manifests the productive force within them, which drives them to try to pass beyond their finite boundaries in a creative way (34/100). Insofar as organic beings seek to reproduce so as to overcome their finite boundaries, then, they must also seek by reproducing to overcome the division into two sexes within which they have become confined. It is in this respect that nature 'hates' sex, Schelling writes (IFO 231/74). This is also why Schelling maintains that living beings seek by reproducing to realise the unity of their entire species – their *Gattung*, to be realised in reproduction as *Begattung*. The productive force that these finite individuals seek to realise takes the form, at this point in nature, of the species as

a trans-individual unity into which these individuals endeavour to submerge their differences.

However, Schelling maintains, reproductive activity never succeeds. It only ever issues in new finite products: the couple's offspring – finite both in body and in being sexed. This failure reflects the fact that natural productivity can never get free of inhibitive force. Whenever productivity tries to release itself, it necessarily becomes inhibited again. The offspring, then, must remain finite and sexed and they cannot embody the resolution of the opposition of natural forces; otherwise, their appearance would put an end to all the striving and activity in nature (231/74).

Schelling has given sexual difference central importance within nature as the culminating manifestation of nature's basic polarity. He does not, however, elaborate on the nature of the two opposed sexes. Yet his broader contrast between the forces of productivity and inhibition inescapably takes on tacit gendered connotations, given the entire history of gendered philosophical contrasts against the background from which Schelling writes. Productivity – which he also calls nature's 'subjectivity' (202/41) – is symbolically male in virtue of its connections with activity, mind and power; inhibition is symbolically female in virtue of its connections with withdrawal, passivity and interiority. These contrasts become relatively explicit at one point in his *First Outline* when Schelling interprets sexual difference in terms of the difference between 'receptivity' and 'irritability'. He is referring to John Brown's medical theory, according to which disease arises from a mismatch between an individual's inherent level of 'irritability' and the level of stimulation impinging upon them from the environment. Schelling interprets irritability as a form of productive force and receptivity as a form of inhibiting force. In his view, children are highly susceptible to stimulation – highly receptive – but are correspondingly lacking in irritability; that is, in terms of his broader account of nature, in children the inhibiting force predominates over the productive force. He adds here:

If the organic power of resistance increases, the movements become more forceful, more energetic too – in equal proportion to the sinking sensibility. – Or, one might observe the difference of the sexes, or the climatic differences of peoples, or finally the increase of the forces directed outwardly in nature, which also happen in a certain (inverse) relation to sensibility. (FO 169/240–41)

Sexual difference, then, is taken to exemplify how sensibility (inhibition) may predominate over irritability (productivity) and, equally, how irritability may reassert itself against sensibility. Schelling does not say which sex embodies which possibility, but we can assume that for him the female sex embodies a predominance of sensibility and the male embodies the reassertion of irritability.

We can also see that Schelling's productive and inhibiting forces have this gendered significance by recalling how much he was influenced by his 1794 readings of Plato's cosmological dialogue the *Timaeus* (Schelling [1794] 1994).² For Plato, the construction of the cosmos depends on the existence of the formless, primal, material space that he calls *chora* and explicitly describes in feminine terms, as the receptacle and nurse of generation. The *chora* corresponds to the inhibiting, withdrawing, contracting force that Schelling later identifies within nature – a force that carries over the *chora's* feminine connotations. Indeed, when he subsequently reformulates the idea of the withdrawing force in his 1809 essay on human freedom, Schelling equates it with the 'maternal body . . . the obscurity of that which is without understanding . . . the mother of knowledge' (WMF 29/32–33).

These gendered contrasts imply that the male function in reproduction is actively to initiate sex and reproduction and to embody the striving of natural productivity beyond the fixed forms into which it has become confined. In contrast, the female function is to subject this expansive, productive force to renewed inhibition, presumably by confining the unity of the species within the finite form of embodied individual offspring. The male creates the active, formative principle of the offspring, while the female encloses and puts flesh on this male creation. These ideas remain only implicit in Schelling, however. Hegel theorised the respective natures of the male and female sexes more systematically.

II. HEGEL'S POLARISATION: CONCEPT AND MATTER

Hegel discusses reproduction – the 'species-process' (*Gattungsprozess*) – in §§368–69 of his *Philosophy of Nature*. In the two main paragraphs he does not refer to sexual difference, which he considers only in the 'addition' to §368. Hegel's editor Jules Michelet assembled this, as with all the additions to the *Philosophy of Nature*, from various sources including student transcripts, Hegel's Heidelberg and Berlin lecture notes on nature spanning 1819 to 1830, and his Jena lecture notes on nature and mind dating back to 1805 to 1806. It is from the Heidelberg, Berlin and, above all, Jena notes that Michelet drew Hegel's account of sexual difference (for the latter, see Hegel 1987: 160–61).

It might seem that we cannot wisely interpret Hegel's mature conception of sexual difference based on passages largely composed of material dating back to 1805 to 1806. After all, he did not see fit to include an account of sexual difference in the main paragraphs of his mature *Philosophy of Nature*, and he did not in his maturity give sexual difference the same prominence as he did at the time of his Jena drafts (for instance, sexual difference is only mentioned very briefly in the transcript of Hegel's 1823 to 1824 nature lectures made by K. G. J. von Griesheim). Howev-

er, this does not necessarily mean that Hegel had ceased to be concerned about the nature of sexual difference or to uphold broadly the same account of it that he first sketched in Jena. It is notable that in his 1821 *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel appeals to his *Philosophy of Nature* to support his claims about the proper social roles of men and women. He argues that it is through their division between roles in the family and civil society respectively that: 'The *natural* determinacy of the two sexes acquires an *intellectual* and *ethical* significance' (PR §165, 206). What is this 'natural determinacy' of the sexes? Hegel tells us that it arises out of 'life in its totality, . . . as the actuality of the *species* and its process' (§161, 200), thereby referring us to his discussion of the species-process in §368–69 of his *Philosophy of Nature*. Clearly, then, Hegel understood his account of reproduction in those paragraphs to identify and explain the distinct natures of the two sexes and so to provide a basis for his socio-political division of gender roles. This suggests that Hegel essentially retained the account of sexual difference he had first worked out in Jena, an account that ties in with his treatment of women in the *Philosophy of Right*. The addition to §368 may therefore be treated as presenting Hegel's considered and ongoing understanding of sexual difference.

The context of this view is Hegel's account of 'sexual relationships' (*Geschlechtsverhältnisse*) – by which he means the reproductive activities of animals, including human beings considered solely in respect of the characteristics they share with animals. Sexual relationships arise when one animal encounters another of the same species. These encounters are the first case that Hegel finds within nature, in which one subject enters into relationship with another. Each animal senses that the two are both 'identical' – insofar as they belong to the same species – and 'different' – as individuals. Each animal senses a tension between the identity and the difference: it '*feels* this deficiency [or tension]. Consequently, the species [*Gattung*] is present in the individual as a straining against the inadequacy of its single actuality' (EN §368, 3: 173). Each animal therefore acquires an urge to realise the identity of the two by copulating with the other and producing offspring in which this identity will be embodied. 'In the natural state the identity of the sexes is . . . a third, that is *produced*, in which both sexes intuit their identity as a natural actuality' (LNR §75, 139).

As we can see, Hegel has retained Schelling's view that reproduction strives to realise the species as a unity opposed to the individuality of the reproducing animals. Ultimately, though, Hegel argues – again like Schelling – that reproduction always fails. The offspring are still individual animals, who differ from their parents as yet more individuals, and who become compelled to pass through the same reproductive process, as will their own offspring, and so on *ad infinitum*.

To see how Hegel's account of sexual difference derives from this theory of reproduction, we must spell out certain assumptions that Hegel makes here – assumptions that he does not make explicit, but which we

may impute to Hegel insofar as, by doing so, we can make intelligible his approach to sexual difference. Hegel assumes that in any reproductive process the two participant animals must play different roles. Reproduction is a process with a *telos* or purpose, which produces a third entity that incarnates the identity of the two animals that contribute to it. Just as each organism *qua* purposive whole must articulate itself into specialised sub-systems,³ likewise, the two individuals carrying out the purposive activity of reproduction must assume specialised roles within it. The entity to be produced must be a 'third', different from the parents, so one parent must have the role of producing the child as a distinct individual. Yet the offspring is also to be nothing more than an embodiment of the identity between the parents. In this respect, the offspring must be identical with the parent(s). It falls to the second parent to produce the offspring as something identical with the parent(s).

Each parent animal develops a specific reproductive anatomy that enables it to play one or the other of these roles. 'The *formation* [*Bildung*; that is, the anatomical shape] of the different sexes must be different, their determination against each other which is posited by the concept [that is, which is logically required] must exist' (EN §368A, 3: 174). Regarding male (*männliche*) animals, Hegel states that by lying on the body's exterior, their genitals embody 'the sundered element [or moment] of opposition [*das Entzweite*]' (§368A, 3: 174). It is distinctive of male genitals that they are primarily located on the outside of the body. Generally, Hegel believes that 'external' organs and limbs enable animals to engage and interact with items in the external world. He holds that the outward development of an animal's anatomical shape reflects its 'relation to an other outside it' (EN §355A, 3: 131). The 'other' to which male animals are related in the reproductive process is the species as-it-is-to-be embodied in the offspring. Thus, male genitals have the form they do because these genitals enable the animal to play the role of relating to its offspring as to something that is other to (or different from) it. This anatomy enables male animals to contribute to the offspring in a way that treats it as something different from the male parent – by expelling it outside that parent's body, in the shape of semen.

For Hegel, those animals whose role is to produce the offspring as something identical with them develop a female (*weibliche*) anatomy. Characteristic of the female genitals is that they are located on the inside of the body. 'The male testicle remains enclosed in the ovary in the female, fails to emerge into opposition' (EN §368A, 3: 175). Their internal anatomy allows females to contribute to their offspring in a way that treats the offspring as something identical to them – a part of their own bodies. Their anatomy allows females to retain their offspring in their wombs, within their own bodies, as part of their own bodily processes. Thus, 'the female remains in her undeveloped unity'.

Hegel sums up: 'In one or other of these genitals, one or the other part is essential; in the female this is necessarily the undifferentiated element [*das Indifferente*], while in the male it is the sundered element of opposition'. Hegel's idea is that female bodies are organised by a principle of self/other unity. Female anatomy reflects and realises a reproductive role in which the mother and her offspring form an undifferentiated unity, with no firm boundary between the mother's body and that of her offspring. The female body embodies immediate unity between self and other; the male body, in contrast, embodies difference between self and other.

Whereas Schelling tacitly associated inhibition with the female and productivity with the male, Hegel instead associates the female with lack of difference and the male with difference. Nonetheless, like Schelling, he regards this sexual opposition as one of the highest-level manifestations of an opposition that has structured the entirety of nature. As we would expect, for Hegel this is no longer an opposition of productive and inhibiting forces. Indeed, Hegel abandons the terminology of forces and instead understands nature to be organised by two dimensions or aspects – the concept and matter. To see this, we need to briefly revisit the overall course of his philosophy of nature.

III. THE SEXUALISATION OF CONCEPT AND MATTER

Hegel begins the Philosophy of nature by presupposing that nature has emerged from the 'idea', itself understood as the highest form of the 'concept' – which is the whole rationally interconnected sequence of basic ontological principles and forms (being, nothingness, becoming, determinacy, etc.), the development of which is narrated in Hegel's Logic. The Hegelian concept, then, is nothing subjective but is, rather, 'the truth, objectivity, and actual being of things themselves. It is like the Platonic Ideas, which . . . exist in individual things as their substantial kinds' (*EN* §246A, 1: 200). At the end of Hegel's Logic, the idea comes out of itself, or externalises itself, to constitute nature. As the product of the idea's self-externalisation, nature initially exists as sheer 'externality', *partes extra partes* – that is, pure matter. Because the idea becomes absolutely other to itself, assuming a character utterly other to its inherent character of pure rationality and articulated unity, the idea enters into the shape of matter, that which is utterly non-rational and is a pure manifold of mutually indifferent elements.

Hegel then traces how the matter of which nature initially consists becomes permeated by the concept in a series of stages, as we have seen in preceding chapters. First, the concept re-emerges within nature in the form of unifying principles that hold portions of matter together into individual bodies. Second, the concept increasingly reshapes matter into

forms that express and reflect it, so that material bodies acquire increasingly complex properties – first mechanical, then electrical, then chemical – in respect of which their matter progressively comes to manifest the complex, articulated character of the concept. At the pinnacle of nature’s hierarchy stand animals, whose bodies are completely conceptually permeated: ‘The whole [of the animal’s body] is so pervaded by its unity that . . . in the animal body the complete untruth of [material] being-outside-one-another is revealed’ (EM §389A, 10).

Now, all along, Hegel understands matter to be symbolically female, a symbolic equation that surfaces explicitly in several places. One is the following passage from the ‘Introduction’ to the *Philosophy of Nature*:

The study of nature is . . . the liberation of nature, which in itself is reason . . . Spirit has the certainty which Adam had when he beheld Eve, ‘This is flesh of my flesh, this is bone of my bones’. Nature is, so to speak, the bride which spirit weds. (EN §246A, 1: 204)

By tracing how nature’s material side becomes increasingly permeated by its conceptual side, eventually to the point where the concept assumes the form of spirit or mind, we the Hegelian philosophers ‘liberate’ nature. At the same time, we confirm that the nature that we are studying is of the same ‘flesh’ as us: nature is not pure matter standing over against ourselves as beings of pure mind; rather, we are composed of concept-permeated matter and so is nature. This places nature in the same relation to human beings as Eve to Adam in the book of Genesis: Eve and nature share in the concept-permeated materiality of Adam and humankind. Nonetheless, nature remains *relatively* material compared to humanity – for, in much of nature, the concept struggles to express itself within matter. By implication, Eve too is relatively material compared to Adam. As a female, Eve is more material than Adam and, implicitly, her greater materiality is what *makes* her female and not merely another man. Matter is symbolically female, so that those individuals who are more material are thereby qualified as female.

But in what sense can some individuals possibly be more ‘material’ than others? An answer is provided by Hegel’s account of reproduction and sexual difference. Having described male and female reproductive anatomies to be organised respectively around difference and its absence, he adds that female and male individuals respectively contribute ‘the material element’ and the ‘subjectivity’ to their offspring.

Conception must not be regarded as consisting of nothing but the ovary and the male semen, as if the new formation were merely a composition of the forms or parts of both sides, for the female in fact contains the material element, while the male contains the subjectivity. (EN §368A, 3: 175)

Because the female retains the fetus within her own body, as part of her own flesh, she exchanges bodily materials with the fetus on an ongoing basis, in that respect contributing to the fetus materially. In contrast, the male expels semen; having done so, he has no further material, corporeal relationship with the fetus. How is the male thereby bestowing subjectivity upon the fetus? Hegel explains: 'The seed is . . . [a] simple representation . . . it is a quite *single* point, as are its name and its entire self'. Because the male's contribution to the fetus takes the form of one single emission of semen (rather than many material exchanges over time), the male is providing matter in a shape suited to represent the individuality of the fetus: the single emission of semen 'represents' the child-to-be as a single individual. As such, the material shape of the emission of semen reflects the concept: the matter that the male provides towards the fetus is concept-permeated. Hegel can therefore extrapolate that the male bestows upon the fetus subjectivity or mind in latent form. Meanwhile, the female contributes matter that does not reflect the same principle of subjective unity but remains dispersed in a multiplicity. She contributes matter in a form that is less reflective of (and permeated by) the concept. In her contribution to the fetus, matter predominates; in the male contribution, the concept predominates.

Hegel tacitly equated matter with the female and the concept with the male throughout his account of nature. It is unsurprising, then, that when he theorises sexual difference, he maps male/female difference onto that of concept and matter. Ultimately, for Hegel, sexual difference manifests the opposition of concept and matter that has organised all nature. Whereas for Schelling, sexual difference manifested the opposition of two basic forces, for Hegel it manifests the opposition of nature's two organising dimensions. For both thinkers, sexual difference reflects nature's fundamental constitutive opposition.

IV. SEXUAL AND RACIAL DIFFERENCE

Hegel's reconception of sexual difference in terms of the dynamic conflict between concept and matter also allowed him to place sexual and racial difference systematically in relation to one another. He discusses racial difference within his *Philosophy of Mind* under the heading of 'Physical Qualities' of the 'Physical Soul', as Wallace translates it – or, more accurately, 'Natural Qualities', *natürliche Qualitäten*, of the 'Natural Soul', *natürliche Seele* (EM §§392–93, 36–45). The soul is the first form of spirit in Hegel's architectonic. Advancing beyond animal life, in the (human) soul the unity of the concept returns to itself within its material body, whereby we have the beginnings of mind (§§390–91, 34–35). Yet at first the content of this conceptual unity is completely given by the material body out of which the conceptual unity returns to itself as mind. The mind

does not yet re-shape this matter after its own model, as it will come to do at more advanced stages by thinking, speaking, generating moral and intellectual principles, reasoning, and so on. As yet, the mind as soul remains immersed in its material body and surroundings; namely, the physical earth and environment in which each body is located. Here Hegel infers that:

The universal planetary life of the nature-governed mind [*Naturgeistes*] particularises itself according to the concrete differences of the earth and breaks up into the particular nature-governed minds [*besonderen Naturgeister*], which give expression to the nature of the geographical continents and constitute *racial diversity* [*Rassenverschiedenheit*]. (§393, 40)

The difference between the human races is still a natural difference; that is, a difference which immediately concerns the natural soul. As such, the difference is connected with the geographical differences of those parts of world where human beings are gathered together in masses. These different parts are what we call continents (§393A, 41).

Hegel proceeds to identify three principal races: the Negroes of the African continent, allegedly marked by childish *naïveté* – in effect, they remain in immediate unity with nature; the Mongols of the Asian continent, who rise to form a concept of spirit, of the divine that lies beyond nature, but who remain limited by treating the divine as exclusively beyond and opposed to nature; and the Caucasians of the European continent, who progress to recognise that divine spirit also exhibits itself within nature, and who thereby attain to a concept of spirit as self-determining – in turn becoming able to exercise practical self-determination and so make world history, as the other races cannot (not at all in the case of Negroes, and only very imperfectly in the case of Mongols).⁴

Deeply problematic as this explicitly hierarchical classification of the races is, here, I merely want to draw out the set of systematic connections and distinctions that Hegel establishes between racial and sexual difference. For him, as we have seen, sexual difference arises just where nature attempts to overcome its constitutive opposition (as Schelling likewise thought). As such, for Hegel as for Schelling, sexual difference is a dynamic opposition, one that is constituted by the attempt to overcome itself, even though it fails in this attempt. In contrast, for Hegel, racial difference is a difference to which the human soul becomes subject insofar as it remains immersed within its natural surroundings in an immediate way. Racial difference is not a dynamic, self-transcending opposition but a form of diversity to which the concept (in its highest form, the human mind) succumbs insofar as it has *failed* in its attempt to transcend its opposition to matter by remodeling matter after its own image. For Hegel, nature in general is a realm of material multiplicity – a realm in which the concept does not fully predominate over matter but is endless-

ly dispersed into the manifold materials in which it only imperfectly manifests itself. The same is true of the material environment of the earth: *qua* natural and material, it contains a manifold of differences in that they have not been subordinated to the articulated unity of the concept. These differences in turn infect the human soul, rendering it racially differentiated.

In fact, there is a systematic parallel between racial difference and the division of animal kinds (*Gattungen*) into manifold species (*Arten*), with which Hegel deals in §370 of the *Philosophy of Nature*. Having outlined how reproduction fails to overcome differences between the sexes and between animals as embodied individuals, Hegel now explains that, because animals inevitably remain embodied, they can never realize their kinds perfectly. Instead animals become subject to multiple variations, owing to ‘the manifold conditions and circumstances of external nature’ (*EN* §370R, 3: 179). Indeed, these differences infect animal kinds themselves so that these become sub-divided into species. At the conceptual level, the division of species results from the concept’s failure to master matter in reproduction.

Differences between species parallel the racial differences that, for Hegel, arise later in the systematic development of the concept and mind. Whereas sexual difference manifests the unsuccessful effort of the concept to overcome its opposition to matter through reproduction, species difference manifests the reality that this opposition cannot be overcome within nature, so that the concept always remains subject to material diversity. Likewise, racial difference reflects the fact that the opposition of concept (now existing as mind) and matter still cannot be overcome at the level of the natural soul, so that mind as natural soul remains subject to the material diversity that prevailed within nature.

V. SEXUAL DIFFERENCE AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE

Peter Hanns Reill has argued that the *Naturphilosophen* generally gave sexual difference an important place within their theories of nature because they took nature to be organised by polar oppositions and because sexual difference could readily be interpreted in terms of these kinds of oppositions, so that it could be construed as epitomising, and confirming the pervasive operation of, natural polarity (Reill 2005: 220–35). We have seen this with regard to both Schelling and Hegel. Likewise, Philippe Huneman has observed that a ‘*leitmotif* of the hermeneutics of nature is that of gender (*Geschlecht*) as a major sign of nature’s finitude – as nature’s attempt and failure to overcome such a finitude’ (Huneman 2011: 82). Gender, or sexual difference, arises where nature attempts and fails to overcome its constitutive polar opposition by way of reproduction.

The interpretation of nature as organised by polar oppositions, then, meant that sexual difference assumed new importance for the philosophers of nature. Its existence appeared to provide one source of empirical confirmation of their view that polar oppositions pervade nature. Moreover, their view of nature led the *Naturphilosophen* not only to highlight the importance of sexual difference but also to understand it in new ways, in terms of the various kinds of polar opposition that each thinker took to underlie nature – between productivity and inhibition for Schelling, concept and matter for Hegel. Sexual difference became understood as an opposition reflecting and condensing the dynamic and conflictual structure of the whole natural world.

By interpreting sexual difference as a polar opposition, Schelling and Hegel re-conceived it in a way that was peculiarly appropriate to their time. This was a time when, as Thomas Laqueur has shown, the ‘one-sex’ model of sexual difference that had prevailed in the West ever since the classical period was becoming supplanted by a new ‘two-sex’ model, a biological model on which the sexes were radically and completely different. This conceptual transformation began in the late eighteenth century, as Laqueur and Londa Schiebinger (1989) show. On the ‘one-sex’ model, female genitals are essentially the same as the male’s except that they are on the inside of the body. The vagina counts as an internal penis; the uterus, an internal scrotum. According to the Aristotelian biology that had prevailed for centuries, women have these internal male organs because their bodies have less heat with which to expel their organs outward. In the late eighteenth century, scientists began to reconceive the female body as radically different from the male body, every element of female anatomy manifesting this radical difference. Female anatomical structures were given their own names, and the first anatomical drawings of the female skeleton in its sexual specificity were made.

These conceptual changes reflected the *political* upheavals of the day. In the wake of the epoch-making event of the French Revolution, long-standing assumptions about divinely ordained metaphysical and social hierarchies could no longer be taken for granted. On those old assumptions, women’s metaphysical and social status as men’s inferiors is reflected anatomically in that the female body is merely an inferior, inadequately developed and exteriorised version of the male body. Because the French Revolution had discredited these old ways of thinking, Schiebinger argues, new justifications for patriarchy were sought. It is within this context that scientists – then almost entirely male – sought to show that the radical difference of the female body disqualified women from public life. Female skeletons were depicted with large pelvises suiting them for child-bearing and family life.

As we might expect from their historical location, Schelling and Hegel understand the sexes in ways ambiguous between the one- and two-sex models. To be sure, it might seem that Schelling regards the sexes as

radically different, insofar as he maps male and female onto productivity and inhibition as two basic forces, each irreducible to the other. However, in the *First Outline* Schelling equivocates on whether these forces are equally basic, as David Krell (2002) shows. Sometimes Schelling claims that there is an *original* diremption (*Entzweiung*) into two forces within nature (FO 185/263) – an *original opposition* (184/262). At other times, he regards inhibition as secondary – merely the form taken by productivity when it turns against and restricts itself as it must, if it is not to dissipate and squander its own creative activity (158/230; this was the side of Schelling I highlighted in chapter 8). At these latter points Schelling sees inhibition merely as the negative, inverted form of original productivity – just as, on the one-sex model, the female sex was regarded as merely the inverted negative of the male. Ultimately, then, Schelling is ambiguous about whether female inhibition is radically different or whether it is merely the negative form of male productivity.

Hegel appears to subscribe more clearly to a one-sex model, stating that female organs are merely inner versions of male organs (EN §368A, 3: 174). For him, both sexed anatomies are organised by the shared purpose of realising the genus in material shape, but male anatomy is oriented towards difference, hence outwards; while female anatomy is oriented towards unity, hence inwards. However, as we see here, Hegel draws these one-sex conclusions from a view much closer to the two-sex model of radical difference, on which female anatomy is entirely organised by a principle of unity with the species, whereas male anatomy is organised by individual difference from the species. On this view, every detail of the sexes' respective anatomies reflects this fundamental difference in their purposive natures. After all, then, Hegel thinks – as on the two-sex model – that a radical difference in organising principles manifests itself in every facet of sexed anatomy and embodiment. Like Schelling, he equivocates between the one- and two-sex models.

Either way, the conceptions of sexual difference made available by German Idealist philosophy of nature might appear to hold little appeal for contemporary feminists. These conceptions combine features of the one-sex and two-sex models, both of which, in different ways, justify women's social subordination to men. Hegel's conception is also intricately connected with his racial hierarchy. Even so, I believe that there are ways in which it is worthwhile for feminists today to think with the philosophy of nature and its conceptions of sexual difference. In particular, as we have seen, sexual difference assumed central importance within the philosophy of nature. The idea that polar forces, or basic oppositions, organise nature meant that sexual difference could be seen as nature's culminating manifestation. However, for some critics such as Reill (2005: 234–35), this makes *Naturphilosophie* complicit with the nineteenth-century insistence upon sexual opposition as a justification for confining women to the private sphere. Reill refers especially to the accounts of

sexual opposition given by the late *Naturphilosoph* Carl Gustav Carus and the follower of Schelling Lorenz Oken. Oken effectively materialised Schelling's polarisation of productivity and inhibition, translating these forces into empirical entities: the productive male polyp that impregnates the receptive female plant. Reill further suggests that *Naturphilosophie* reacted against a late eighteenth-century move to valorise androgyny and sexual mixing, an intellectual move that corresponded to the rise of relatively relaxed and sexually mixed modes of social intercourse which enabled notable women of the time such as Rahel Varnhagen, Caroline Schlegel-Schelling, and Dorothea Veit to rise to prominence.

Yet in fact these ideals of androgyny and mixing were not unequivocally favourable to women. These ideals relied on a conceptual contrast between the male and female principles that the most fully developed human character is supposed to combine and mix – and according to this contrast, the male generally is active, productive or intellectual whereas the female is passive, receptive or emotive.⁵ Although according to these ideals empirical women can and should incorporate male traits, the underpinning symbolic contrast between male and female elements still places the female in negative opposition to the male. But since women *qua* women are necessarily linked to what is symbolically female, women remain in an inferior position in this scheme – culturally and, in consequence, socially. In this respect the late-eighteenth-century notion of androgyny is not so sharply differentiated from the *Naturphilosophisch* emphasis on sexual polarity as Reill suggests.

In any case, an emphasis upon sexual difference need not be reactionary but can support the work of contemporary feminist theorists who likewise stress the importance of sexual difference. As Elizabeth Grosz (1990) amongst others has insisted, we do not think, reason, or act as sex-neutral beings, much as we may try to do so. We are sexually differentiated beings, and the attempt to escape or transcend this reality in thought or practice can only ever be deluded. This feminist insight, as articulated by Grosz and others, has generated the important project of tracing how sexual difference has left its mark on our intellectual and cultural productions – and how, in particular, these have often been marked by the male sex of their creators. An equally important feminist project is that of creating new bodies of thought, knowledge and practice out of women's sexually specific forms of embodiment. Because the philosophy of nature makes sexual difference central within nature, it can provide a justification for this feminist insistence on the constitutive force of sexual difference. It can also provide us with fresh perspectives on how our sexually differentiated forms of embodiment inescapably shape our thinking and activities, insofar as the mind is always a mind within nature.

NOTES

1. See also Bowie (1993: 36).
2. See also Baum (2000) and Sallis (1999).
3. So Hegel always takes it. See *EM* §381A, 9–10.
4. As Sara Figal notes (2014), Hegel further distinguishes within the Caucasian race between the inferior Asiatics and the superior Europeans, thus moving the Caucasian character away from the actual Caucasus.
5. For instance, while Friedrich Schlegel celebrates the chemical mixing of the sexes in his *Athenaeum Fragments*, he says that women can only intuit the infinite but have no sense for abstractions (*AF* #102, 30) – that is, women are intuitive, men intellectual.

ELEVEN

Matter and Form

Hegel, Organicism and the Difference between Women and Men

Infamously, Hegel in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* maintains that it is an essential feature of modern European societies – and in accordance with the principles of right – that women are confined to the family, excluded from the public spheres of work and politics.

Man [*der Mann*] . . . has his actual substantial life in the state, in science, etc., and otherwise in work and struggle . . . so that it is only through his division that he fights his way to self-sufficient unity with himself. In the family, he has a peaceful intuition of this unity, and an emotive and subjective ethical life. Woman, however, has her substantial vocation in the family, and her ethical disposition consists in this *piety*. (PR §166, 206)

Feminist scholars have offered a range of interpretations of Hegel's philosophical rationale for making these claims. For instance, according to Carole Pateman in *The Sexual Contract*, Hegel makes these claims because he retains classical social contract theory's male-defined conception of the civil individual.¹ Others see these claims as rooted in Hegel's philosophical system more broadly. Genevieve Lloyd (1984) thinks that his relegation of women to the family reflects a hierarchical opposition between life (gendered female) and self-consciousness (gendered male) which structures his whole Philosophy of Mind. Even more broadly, Luce Irigaray [1992] (1996) thinks that Hegel's claims about women and family reflect the nature of his dialectic: he places whatever is oppositional and other to (male) subjectivity at the service of that self-same male subjectivity, thus having women serve men within the family.

In this chapter I put forward my own reconstruction of Hegel's reasons for confining women to the family, drawing on Frederick Neuhouser's argument that Hegel endorses a form of political organicism. According to this organicist position, the modern state (in the sense of politically organised society as a whole) is subdivided into three functional spheres: the family, embodying the principle of 'immediate unity' or 'undifferentiated unity' between its members; civil society, embodying the principle of 'difference' between its members; and the strictly political state, embodying the principle of 'differentiated unity' (Neuhouser 2003: 133). Since, in his philosophies of nature and mind, Hegel also holds that the female body is organised upon a principle of 'immediate unity' between the female individual and the species, especially as embodied in the child, the essential principles that organise the female body and the family correspond to one another, so that for Hegel women are pre-eminently suited to family life. In sections I to III, I elucidate these Hegelian views.

Moreover, as I examine in section IV, Hegel's interpretation of the female body as organised by a principle of self/other indistinction, and of the male body as organised by a principle of self/other difference, forms part of a broader set of symbolic equations at work in his *Philosophy of Nature*. As we know, Hegel conceives of nature as consisting of two basic elements, matter and concept, which exist in an initial opposition that is progressively overcome. Following a philosophical tradition that goes back to Plato, Hegel symbolises matter as female and the concept as male. Moreover, since he identifies matter as the being-outside-itself of the concept, he implicitly understands the female as the being-outside-itself of the male – as an inverted and inferior form of the male, rather than as a sexuate identity in its own right.² Given that Hegel symbolises matter as female, it is unsurprising that in his account of sex difference he reciprocally identifies females as comparatively 'material': in his view, the lack of self/other difference characteristic of the female sex represents a form of relationship to the species which is relatively 'material', compared to the more 'spiritual' relationship to the species that distinguishes the male sex.

Given Hegel's sexual symbolism, the process he narrates in his *Philosophy of Nature* – whereby the concept re-emerges from matter and progressively remodels matter in its own image – amounts to a progressive mastery of the female by the male. The *Philosophy of Mind* – which includes Hegel's political philosophy – narrates the continuation of this process once the concept has assumed the form of mind. Thus, the progression of male citizens beyond the family, and their entrance into spheres of economic and political life from which they exercise jurisdiction over the family, represents a culminating stage in this progressive domination of (female) matter by (male) mind. Ultimately, then, Hegel's exclusion of women from civil and political existence reflects hierarchical, gendered oppositions that are fundamental to his system – as Lloyd and

Irigaray suggested. But unlike Lloyd and Irigaray, I think that the key opposition that structures Hegel's system of nature and mind is not between self-consciousness and life or subjectivity and alterity, but between concept and matter, as I will try to show.

I. HEGEL'S POLITICAL ORGANICISM

For Hegel, modern states are rightly organised into functionally differentiated sub-systems in the same way that organisms are. In his *Philosophy of Right* Hegel defends this *prima facie* unfashionable position through an immanent critique of contractarian views which derive the legitimacy of states from the consent actually or hypothetically given them by free individuals. Hegel begins from the contractarian premise that individuals have free will in the sense of the capacity to choose between options, including between their own desires (*PR* §4, 37; §11, 45). He then argues that freedom requires private-property ownership, through which the individual embodies and realises his or her freedom in material things, something that in turn requires contractual relations in which property owners recognise and respect one another as persons of equal standing (§71, 102). Yet since property owners will whenever possible try to obtain recognition without conferring it upon others, relations of right (*Rechtsverhältnisse*) are ever-labile to degenerate into crime (§82, 115–16). Overcoming this problem requires that individuals learn to be moral – to heed the interests of others for their own sake – which depends on individuals being morally educated by an appropriate set of social institutions (§153, 196); namely, the family, civil society, and the state – collectively, 'ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit*) or 'ethical substance' (*sittliche Substantialität*).

Within the family, individuals relinquish their sense of having purely individual interests and identify their good with the common good of the entire family. Individuals experience their identification with the family's common good in the form of love for their family members. The family thus instils in individuals a direct concern with the interests of others, in the form of the interests of the whole family as a whole. However, this kind of immediate identification with the common good is possible only in small-scale, emotionally intense communities – such as nuclear families – whereas modern societies are large and complex. Civil society, then, plays a crucial role in educating individuals to pursue their personal economic interests in ways that profit the common weal. The strictly political state is necessary, in turn, because it educates citizens to consciously identify their interests with those of the whole community and to see themselves as essentially members of society.

For Hegel, this family/civil society/state constellation, found more or less fully realised in modern European societies,³ accords with right be-

cause it provides the conditions for secure contractual relations, therefore secure property ownership, and therefore individual freedom. Immanently criticising contract theory, then, Hegel has established that voluntary relations between individuals (and, *a fortiori*, between individuals and states) can only be coherently maintained if those individuals already belong to and are educated by certain social institutions, institutions to which those individuals must therefore belong *non-voluntarily*.⁴ Ultimately then, for Hegel, individuals can only have freedom of choice if they also have what Neuhausser calls 'social freedom': the freedom to act in accordance with social roles and positions – for example, the role of a family member – which they embrace as essential to their identities (2003: 33).

Moreover, for Hegel, individuals can attain social freedom only if the social order is structured into the interlocking set of basic institutions – family, civil society, state – which he finds to be present, or at least emergent, in modern European societies. A social order that is structured into these distinct but mutually supporting spheres is organised *organically*, for Hegel. Here Hegel takes it that an organism is an entity which has its own purposes (above all, it aims to reproduce itself) and which articulates itself into specialised sub-systems (e.g., the digestive system, the reproductive organs) which support one another so that they collectively realise the organism's purposes (*EM* §381A, 9–10). Hegel also thinks that every organism is self-determining – that is, free – in the sense that it develops and articulates itself in accordance with its *own*, inbuilt, purpose or plan. For Hegel, then, individuals cannot have freedom of choice unless they first have social freedom, and they can only achieve social freedom within a social order that is *itself* free in the sense of being organically articulated. Societies ordered in this way are to be found more or less fully developed in modern European countries.

When Hegel describes the elements of the modern social order within the *Philosophy of Right*, he takes it that this kind of social order is a living system: 'As living spirit, the state exists only as an organised whole, differentiated into particular functions which proceed from the *single* concept . . . of the rational will and continually produce it as their result' (*PR* §539, 265). Hegel is using the word *state* here, as he sometimes does, to mean a structured social order as a whole.⁵ The overall purpose of the modern social order is to reconcile people's sense of having individual interests – and, correspondingly, their sense of being different from one another as individuals – with concern for others and commitment to the collective good, corresponding to a sense of 'unity' with others. As a purposive entity, the social order must be subdivided into specialised spheres, each with a function and character which flow out of the purpose of the social order as a whole. Specifically, then, the social order must be subdivided – as in modern European states – into one sphere that fosters a strong sense of unity between people (the family); one

sphere that fosters a strong sense of difference between people (civil society); and another sphere that reconciles the two (the state).

Hegel's organicist conception of modern society seems to imply that individuals should have access to all three spheres, because each sphere represents an essential aspect of membership in a modern society. But Hegel instead declares that women may participate only in the familial sphere. This is because, as Allen Wood explains, for Hegel 'differentiated institutions require a social differentiation among individuals. Each principle [that is, each sphere] must have its proper representative and guardian' (1990: 244). Given specialised institutions, certain individuals must be permanently based in and responsible for each of them. This conclusion follows from Hegel's idea that modern societies are rightly structured like organisms. Each of the functionally specialised sub-systems within an organism is realised by a specific range of organs: for instance, the stomach, bowels, and more realise the digestive system; the gonads, genitals, and others realise the reproductive system. Certain material parts of the organism are taken over by the purposes of the organism as a whole and shaped in their very material configuration so that they serve those purposes. What would otherwise be formless, undifferentiated matter becomes a range of functionally organised, highly differentiated and specialised organs. Similarly, Hegel assumes that each social sub-system must be populated and maintained by a dedicated set of people who serve as its 'organs' or functionaries. What would otherwise be a formless, undifferentiated mass of individuals (a mere aggregate) is subdivided into distinct classes of specialised functionaries each with a determinate social role.

However, even if we accept Hegel's position that there must be some people who are permanently based in and responsible for their families, it does not automatically follow that those people must always be women. Why should it be contrary to right for men to play this role in some families and women in others, depending on individual preferences? To answer this, Hegel introduces the further idea that women as a sex must play the familial role because their bodily and psychical nature uniquely suits them to do so. 'The *natural* determinacy of the two sexes acquires an *intellectual* and *ethical* significance' (PR §165, 206). In particular, this 'natural determinacy' is that women's nature is to embody an 'immediate unity' of self and other, both corporeally and psychically, while men's nature is to embody 'difference' between self and other. Hegel expands on this in his *Philosophy of Nature*, to which I now turn.⁶ We can subsequently return to clarify exactly how natural sex difference becomes translated into a socio-political differentiation in roles.

II. HEGEL ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SEXES

In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel indicates that the ‘natural determinacy of the two sexes’ arises out of ‘life in its totality . . . as the actuality of the species and its process’ (PR §161, 200), thereby referring us to his discussion of the ‘species-process’ (*Gattungsprozess*) – that is, reproduction – within §§368–69 of his *Philosophy of Nature*. As we saw in chapter 10, for Hegel, animals – including human beings in their animal dimension – try unsuccessfully, by reproducing, to realise their unity and the identity of their species. Within this context he understands sex difference in the following way (to recapitulate from chapter 10). Reproduction is a process with the purpose of producing a third entity that incarnates the identity of the two animals contributing to it. Just as every purposive organism must articulate itself into specialised sub-systems, likewise the two individuals who are carrying out the purposive activity of reproduction must assume specialised roles within that process. The entity to be produced must be a ‘third’, different from the parents, and so one parent must be responsible for producing the child as a distinct individual. Yet the offspring is also to be nothing more than an embodiment of the identity between the parents. In this respect, the offspring must itself be identical with the parent(s). It falls to the second parent to produce the offspring as something that is identical with the parent(s). Each parent animal develops a specific reproductive anatomy that enables it to play one or the other of these roles (EN §368A, 3: 174). Notably, then, Hegel does not think that different animals play different roles in reproduction because they have different anatomies. He thinks that there are different roles in reproduction, of which each animal must assume one, and that the anatomy of each animal develops accordingly. Sex difference is not primarily a biological difference, for Hegel. Rather, it is primarily a difference in reproductive role, where reproduction (*Begattung*) is conceived in metaphysical rather than narrowly biological terms, as the process of resolving the difference between individual and species (*Gattung*) by producing a third in whom this difference is – temporarily, imperfectly – overcome. Since reproduction is this metaphysical process of joining the individual and the universal, sex difference too, for Hegel, is ultimately a metaphysical difference and is only secondarily anatomical.

The genitals of male animals, by lying on the body’s exterior, embody ‘the element of opposition’ (§368A, 3: 174). They have this form because the animal is thereby enabled to play the role of relating to its offspring as to something that is other to, or different from, it. Thus, it is not that males so relate to their offspring – as something different from them – because their anatomy causes them to adopt certain attitudes. Rather, for Hegel, it is in the nature of any reproductive process that one of its participants must relate to its offspring as to a different individual, and

these participants develop male reproductive anatomy as the necessary expression and realisation of their reproductive role.

On the other hand, those animals whose role is to produce the offspring as something identical with them develop female (*weibliche*) genitals, located on the inside of the body. This allows females to contribute to their offspring in a way that treats the offspring as something identical to them – a part of their own bodies. Female anatomy reflects and realises a reproductive role in which the mother and her offspring form an undifferentiated unity. The female body embodies immediate unity between self and other; the male body embodies difference between self and other.

Moreover, since the other to whom both animals are related is, as well as being a distinct individual, the species, the self/other unity around which the female body is organised is simultaneously a unity of individual and species. This implies that for Hegel the female body is placed at the service of the species in a way that the male body is not – interestingly, a position which survives in Simone de Beauvoir's Hegel-inspired account of woman's alterity: 'Woman [undergoes] subordination to the species . . . in no other [mammalian female] is enslavement of the organism to reproduction more imperious' (Beauvoir [1949] 1953: 64).⁷

Hegel's account of sex difference in the *Philosophy of Nature* feeds through into his *Philosophy of Mind*. He holds, now with respect specifically to human beings as the unique bearers of mind, that female embodiment transmutes into a specific maternal-female form of psychological organisation in which no firm distinction exists between the mother's self and the self of her foetus or child. Hegel discusses this in the section of his *Philosophy of Mind* on the 'feeling soul' (*EM* §§403–6, 92–122). The condition of being a 'feeling soul' (*fühlende Seele*) is one through which each individual human being must pass at an extremely early stage in his or her life. As a feeling soul, one is overwhelmed by the flux of one's sensations, not yet having the cognitive and conceptual skills to organise and comprehend these sensations. As a feeling soul, one is not yet conscious, having not yet developed the capacity to take one's sensations to be one's own – to attach these sensations to oneself as a subject, a capacity that is a precondition of being able to organise and comprehend those sensations (and therefore to be conscious, taking it that someone is conscious if they have experience as a specifically cognitive state).

According to Hegel, other subjects and, above all, the individual's mother are principal sources of these sensations that overwhelm the feeling soul. In fact, Hegel suggests that this condition of being swamped by sensations that emanate from the mother begins while the child is still a foetus in the womb. At this time 'opposition is completely absent' and the foetus is utterly 'dominated' by its mother, who is the source of all its sensations.⁸ A trace of this domination continues after birth, with the psyche of each young child being fundamentally imprinted by sensations that are simultaneously the sensations of its mother too. 'The mother'

(*Mutter*), Hegel says, 'is the genius of the child' (EM §405, 95) – the presiding spirit who fundamentally stamps the child's personality. Unable to distinguish its own sensations from those of others, the child is in a state where the sensations of others – particularly those of the mother with whom the child's life is so entwined – can be literally transmitted into the child. 'The child is . . . infected in a preponderantly *immediate* manner by the mind of the adults it sees around it', chiefly its mother (§405A, 97). Hegel concludes that in any child's early life there is a lack of psychical opposition between the child and its mother, prolonging the physical indistinction that obtained when the child was still in the womb.

Evidently, Hegel has described the psychical mother/child relationship from the child's perspective, but we may extrapolate that his point applies to mothers as well. Just as in pregnancy no firm physical boundary demarcates the child from its mother's body, in the early stages of the child's life no firm psychical boundary demarcates the sensations of the mother from those of the child. This psychical indistinction recapitulates the physical lack of distinction that obtained during pregnancy. For Hegel, the self/other fusion that expressed itself in women's anatomy during reproduction transmutes, post-natally, into the psychical form of a self/other fusion at the level of sensations. Although the mother, unlike the very young child, is conscious, it seems that in her relationship with the child she undergoes a kind of regression to an infantile state of indistinction (Hegel remarks that individuals may 'relapse' from higher to lower stages of mind) (§405A, 96).

The essence of the female body and of the maternal-female psyche – Hegel draws no distinction between maternal and female here – is immediate self/other unity and, simultaneously, immediate individual/species unity. Let us now see how these Hegelian claims inform his relegation of women to the family in the *Philosophy of Right*.

III. POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SEX DIFFERENCE

As we saw in section I, Hegel believes that modern European states are becoming increasingly organically structured, and rightly so. These states are on their way to being articulated into three sub-systems or social spheres: the 'immediate unity' of the family; the 'difference' of civil society; and the 'mediated unity' of the political state (Neuhouser 2003: 133). Hegel also believes that some people must be permanently based in each of the earlier spheres – that is, in the family and in civil society – and that it is, and should be, women who always remain in the family. For Hegel this lot falls to women because, corporeally and psychically, to be female is to draw no self/other, individual/species distinction – women are suited to a familial role because their bodies and psyches are organised by the same principle of 'immediate unity' which regulates the family. How

precisely does Hegel think that this (ostensible) fact about what it is to be female equips women for the familial role?

Contrary to what one might initially assume from his reference to the 'natural determinacy of the sexes', Hegel's form of argument is importantly different from that of biological determinism. Biological determinist arguments take the following form: women's and men's biological traits – perhaps their hormones or energy levels – predispose them towards certain kinds of activities and away from others – towards the domestic realm and away from the public realm in women's case, and vice versa for men. Women and men should therefore (the biological determinist claims) stick to the activities for which they are each predisposed, and society should be so arranged as to encourage men and women to do this, because anything else would be futile, would lead to frustration and unhappiness for men and women, and would be damagingly inefficient for society.

Actually, though, Hegel's approach to sex difference differs from a biological determinist approach, firstly because he does not understand the 'natural' difference between the sexes to be biological in the standard modern sense. That sense, which became current following the French revolution, is that differences in their anatomy, gonads, and more causes men and women to think and act differently (Schiebinger 1989). Hegel, though, believes that men's and women's different biological traits reflect and realise a difference in reproductive roles which is required by the metaphysical character of reproduction. Because the two sexes are defined by their different ways of relating species and individual, universal and particular, the natures of the two sexes are primarily metaphysical rather than biological. If Hegel is an essentialist with respect to sex, he is a metaphysical rather than a biological essentialist.⁹

Secondly, Hegel's approach departs from biological determinism because he does not think that women must remain in the family because their nature causally predisposes them to do so, by disposing them to prefer family-focused activities or to perform poorly in the public world. Instead, Hegel's view is that women's bodily organisation around 'immediate unity' *corresponds* to the organisation of the family around the principle of 'immediate unity'. He writes:

The *natural* determinacy of the two sexes acquires an *intellectual* and *ethical* significance by virtue of its rationality. This significance is determined by the difference into which the ethical substantiality, as the concept in itself, divides itself up in order that its vitality may thereby achieve a concrete unity. (PR §165, 206)

To paraphrase: the 'ethical substance' of society subdivides itself into family, civil society and state because this substance is a 'vital' – that is, organic – whole. The resulting difference between family and public sphere (the latter encompassing both civil society and state) gives ethical

meaning – a socio-political dimension – to natural sex difference. Once arisen, the higher-level, more spiritual, difference between the social spheres of immediate unity and difference imparts a new layer of meaning to the lower-level, more natural, difference between bodies organised by immediate unity and difference. On the one hand, then, when sexually differentiated human beings find themselves living within (modern European) societies that are organically subdifferentiated, their natural sex difference becomes enfolded within the higher-level domestic/public difference. On the other hand, the natural sex difference *should* be enfolded by the domestic/public division in this way, because, through this enfolding, that which is more spiritual – the social order – takes up what is more material – bodily sex difference – and renders this material functional for its own ends, thereby imparting to this material an enhanced level of rationality.

As a result of this enfolding, men's and women's different natures take on a new significance, with male 'difference' assuming the form of 'personal self-sufficiency' and female 'immediate unity' assuming the form of 'spirituality which maintains itself in unity as knowledge and volition of the substantial in the form of concrete *individuality* and *feeling*' (PR §166, 206). Naturally, women's bodies are not differentiated from those of their offspring, and psychically women-mothers experience sensations which are indeterminately those of their offspring too. These characteristics now gain added spiritual significance by being rendered into the basis for women's familial role of identifying their interests with those of their families – where women, unlike men, do not re-emerge from this identification into the renewed individualism of civil society. Thus, the enfolding of the natural sex difference into the social domestic/public difference gives women's natural fusion with their children and with the species a new socio-political function. Equally, women's female (*weibliche*) nature is made into the basis of the socio-political identity of woman-as-wife-and-mother (*Frau*). Hegel's position here is not that women's bodily and psychical fusion with their children directly *causes* them to identify their interests with those of their families at the political level. Rather, women's natural character of bodily and psychical fusion 'acquires' (*erhält*), or 'receives' (§165, 206), the further character of domestic identity when that natural character is enfolded into the social sphere of the family.

Hegel's rationale for excluding women from the public world lies in his theory of nature, then, but this does not mean that his is a biological determinist mode of argument. Rather, his argument is that women's nature corresponds – at a lower, relatively natural, level – to the more spiritual structure of the family, and that as part of the process of spiritualising what is natural, women's nature should (and in modern Europe largely does) assume the further spiritual form of a domestic identity. As Kimberly Hutchings has noted, then, Hegel joins together his accounts of

women's place in social life (the family) and of mind's emergence from nature (an emergence that he nonetheless insists is non-natural, because mind 'overgrasps' nature, enfolding nature into its own higher-level functioning). Woman becomes the hinge where this enfolding of material nature by mind takes place, so that for Hegel 'women only [ever] appear at a point of mediation or transition between natural and spiritual existence' (Hutchings 2003: 45).

My reconstruction of Hegel's rationale for consigning women to the family is not yet complete, however. His account of sex difference in the *Philosophy of Nature* emerges out of, and represents the culmination of, a broader pattern of sexual symbolism which informs his entire theory of nature – a pattern in which matter is symbolically female while the concept and mind are symbolically male. Over the course of its progression, nature advances from existing as the pure externality of matter to existing as organisms whose bodies are completely conceptually permeated. This presages the emergence of mind within human beings, an emergence which represents the concept's completed return-to-itself from its self-externalisation in the multiplicity of material nature. We have already seen how Hegel associates nature with Eve and the philosopher studying nature with Adam, where both Adam and Eve have minded bodies but Eve is relatively material *qua* female, just as nature is relatively material compared to the philosopher in whom the concept has returned to itself, out of matter, and thus exists as consciousness (EN §246A, 1: 204). Pursuing the same train of associations, Hegel writes, 'The inscription on the veil of Isis, "I am what was, is, and shall be, and no mortal has lifted my veil", melts before thought' (§246A, 1: 200–1). Once again, his point is that when we recognise that nature is conceptually permeated we remove the illusory appearance that nature is merely material, which corresponds to the philosopher's lifting of the veil of Isis – his symbolic marrying of Isis, whereby (according to Hegel's account of marriage) he identifies with what they have in common – the status of being concept-permeated matter. But the fact that Hegel figures nature as Isis – a quintessentially *female* goddess, traditionally depicted as many-breasted¹⁰ – reflects his view that nature remains *relatively* material compared to the human inquirer, and so this figuration confirms that he associates matter with the female.

The same associations emerge when Hegel claims that traditional Christian doctrine offers a merely 'representational' grasp of the relations between nature, concept and matter – that is, a grasp of these relations which partially attains to the level of conceptual thought but remains infected with pictorial, imaginary thinking. The process by which the idea, at the end of Hegel's *Logic*, transforms or inverts itself into pure matter corresponds to God's creation of the world (EN §247A, 205). The stage at which the concept has returned to itself from matter and has assumed the form of mind corresponds to the appearance of Christ. Nature, Hegel writes, corresponds to 'the Son of God, but not as the son, but

as abiding in otherness . . . nature is self-alienated spirit; into nature, spirit has merely let itself loose, a Bacchantic god free of restraint' (§247A, 1: 206). Nature corresponds, then, to a dead, dismembered, Dionysian God – in other words, to the concept dispersed in materiality. Insofar as Christ is born from out of this materiality of nature, this materiality occupies the symbolic place of Christ's mother Mary – so, once more, of the female. Interestingly, in a fragment from his Bern period (1793–1797) Hegel suggests that Bacchanalian festivals existed to satisfy 'female temperaments' (2002: 98). He implies that the condition of God's being dismembered in matter is a peculiarly 'female' condition, so that the cult of the dismembered God would have appealed especially to women – perhaps alluding to Euripides' tragedy *The Bacchae* (1970) in which it is female revellers who, possessed by the Dionysian spirit, tear apart king Pentheus.

Since Hegel symbolises matter as female, and since Hegel also considers matter to be the being-outside-itself of the concept ('nature . . . [is] the idea in the form of *otherness* [*Andersseins*']; EN §247A, 1: 205), he implicitly understands the female to be the being-outside-itself of the male. The female ranks as an inadequate, self-alienated form of the male, rather than being a sexuate identity in its own right. Moreover, the progression that occurs in nature whereby the concept re-emerges and progressively reshapes matter is a progression whereby that which is symbolically male re-emerges and increasingly converts the symbolically female into the vehicle of its own self-expression.

One might wonder whether this sexuate symbolism is inessential to Hegel's philosophical thought, and whether his basic claims regarding matter, the concept and nature can be (re)stated independently of this symbolism, permitting Hegel's latter-day readers to retain those claims while discarding their symbolic wrapping. That is, one might suspect that Hegel's symbolism is merely superficial, not deep – not constitutive of the substance of his theories. Yet the historical character of Hegel's thought militates against ready classification of his sexuate symbolism as either deep or superficial. Hegel's philosophical system is explicitly formed as a working-through of previous philosophies. But throughout the history of philosophy, as feminist philosophers have documented, matter has been symbolised as female – from Plato's idea of the maternal *chora* (χωρα) or 'receptacle' in his *Timeaus* through to Descartes's theoretical reconstitution of the living, maternal cosmos of medieval times as bare extended matter (Plato 1971: 67–73).¹¹ Because Hegel draws openly on this heritage of thinking about matter, structuring his own account of matter/concept relations as corrective of the deficiencies within this heritage, he necessarily imports the tradition's sexuate symbolism into his system. So, regardless of whether the metaphor of matter-as-female is deep or superficial in Plato, Descartes and other philosophers, the fact that this metaphor has become historically sedimented means that that

metaphor inescapably becomes embedded in Hegel's thought, since this thought is constituted *as* a reworking of the history of philosophy. Sexuate symbolism might not be necessary to Hegel's account of matter and the concept if it is considered in abstraction from its historical provenance and precursors, but that symbolism *is* necessary to Hegel's account when it is considered – as he intended it to be – in its historical concreteness.

Since Hegel has tacitly equated matter with the female and the concept with the male throughout his system, it is unsurprising that when he comes to theorise sex difference he maps the male/female difference onto the concept/matter opposition. And since the progressive domination of the concept over matter is, symbolically, a progressive domination of male over female, it is equally unsurprising that, when this process of spiritualisation of matter continues through the *Philosophy of Mind* into the *Philosophy of Right*, this process results in women being placed in subservience to men. As we have seen, women are – rightly in Hegel's estimation – confined to the family because their immediately unified nature corresponds, at a lower, more material, level to the immediately unified structure of the family, which enfolds women's nature into its own higher-level functioning. This enfolding of women's nature by the family is part of the broader process of the spiritualisation of matter: the process whereby the (symbolically male) concept renders matter into forms that express and reflect the concept's sovereignty. Since the concept is symbolically male, the spiritualisation of women's nature simultaneously renders that nature into a vehicle of service to male citizens. Spiritualised, women's nature becomes the wellspring of women's devotion to the reproduction and tending of the male citizens who exercise economic power and legal jurisdiction over the family and its female inhabitants. Women's spiritualised nature thus expresses and reflects the mastery exercised by the male citizens for whom that nature has been made functional: so that, as Hegel concludes in one of his Jena drafts, '[t]he sexes are plainly in a [hierarchical] relation to one another, one the universal, the other the particular; they are not absolutely equal' (Hegel 1979: 110).

The deeply gendered structure of Hegel's philosophy that I have described is hardly likely to enhance the appeal of his philosophy to feminist readers. Nonetheless, it is important for we feminist readers of Hegel to acknowledge that his thought does have this deeply gendered structure, and for our efforts to use and reconstruct Hegelian ideas to be informed by this acknowledgement. Otherwise we run the risk of inadvertently reproducing in our own thinking the very gendered schemata that we aim, as feminists, to expose and challenge. Arguably, for instance, Simone de Beauvoir does this in *The Second Sex* when she takes up Hegel's master/slave dialectic as a way of understanding the relations between men and women. She argues that women's oppression has its historical roots in hunter-gatherer conditions when women's reproduc-

tive burden prevented them from participating in the struggle for recognition by risking life. She does not ask whether Hegel's master/slave dialectic was conceived all along as a struggle between men – as Lloyd argues, suggesting that Hegel conceives the struggle to risk and transcend life *as* a struggle to transcend the feminine (1984: 92). Because Beauvoir ignores this and simply takes over the value of transcendence, she concludes that those things that seem most 'female' and life-related about women – reproduction, mothering, menstruation, and more – are inherent obstacles to transcendence (as we saw earlier, she regards women as 'alienated' from their own projects in the service of the species). Thus, unhelpfully, she attributes part of the blame for women's oppression to women's own biology, rather than to what society has made of that biology. By attending to the gendered structure of Hegel's philosophy we can avoid simply reproducing it as Beauvoir ends up doing.

Understanding this gendered structure need not make it impossible for feminists to use parts of Hegel's philosophy, but it suggests that if we do so then we need simultaneously to reconstruct and reinterpret that philosophy, or the parts of it that we are using, in a more gender-egalitarian form. An example of this kind of simultaneous use-and-reinterpretation is Irigaray's position in *I Love to You* that each sex should have its own dialectic – rather than only the male sex undergoing a dialectical development in which it enfolds and incorporates the female. In particular for Irigaray, both sexes should undergo a negative dialectic, whereby they learn to limit themselves out of respect for the alterity of the other sex. If, like Irigaray, we want to transform rather than reproduce Hegel's gendered schemata when we use his ideas, we need first to identify how those schemata are at work within his thought, as I have tried to do here.

NOTES

1. Pateman sees Hegel as criticising contract theory by putting forward his conception of marriage as a contract to transcend the standpoint of contract (Pateman 1988: 174). But she notes that he allocates women just enough civil personality to make the marital contracts whereby they relinquish any (further) civil personality. This, she argues, is because Hegel inherits from classical contract theory a conception of the contracting individual as someone who owns their own body. But because women have uncertain bodily boundaries (emblematically in pregnancy) they cannot unproblematically own their own bodies, so that the contracting individual is implicitly male – for Hegel as for classical contractarians. I find Pateman's interpretation unconvincing because Hegel criticises the individualism of classical contractarianism, reconceiving property ownership as predicated on social relations of mutual recognition rather than on sovereign self-ownership. Thus, he reconceives the status of the contracting individual in a way that renders this status potentially compatible with being female. His reasons for consigning women to the family must lie elsewhere.

2. Here Hegel's view of sexuate difference exemplifies what Irigaray sees as the pattern in Western philosophy whereby '[t]he "female" is always described as deficiency, atrophy, lack of the sex that has a monopoly on value: the male sex' (Irigaray 1985b: 69).

3. Hegel is not offering a prescriptive account of the right form of society as (for instance) Plato does in the *Republic*. As Michael Hardimon (1994) has made clear, Hegel is describing what he sees as the essential tendencies within modern European societies in a way that is intended to bring out the rationality of these tendencies (hence Hegel's notorious equation of the actual with the rational) and so reconcile us (modern Europeans) to the societies we live in.

4. On this anti-contractarian argument of Hegel's, see Cornell et al. (1991: x–xi).

5. On this use by Hegel of the term *state*, see Pelczynski (1971: 14).

6. Surprisingly there has been very little sustained examination of Hegel's theory of natural sex difference at all, although feminist thinkers have regularly mentioned it: see Irigaray ([1974] (1985a): 214–26), Beauvoir ([1949] (1953): 40–41), and Chanter (1995: 82–84). None of these three authors situates this theory of sex difference in the *Philosophy of nature* more broadly.

7. As Kimberly Hutchings explains, 'Beauvoir follows Hegel's analysis of sexual difference in his *Philosophy of Nature*, in which male sexual and reproductive roles are associated with a principle of activity and individuation and female sexual and reproductive roles with passivity and species identification. Moreover, Beauvoir argues that the individual/species alienation is carried into the lives of women as an experienced reality' (2003: 66).

8. So Eric O. Clarke puts it on Hegel's behalf (1996: 158).

9. I take the distinction between biological and metaphysical essentialism from Heyes (2000: ch. 1).

10. For a history of the long-standing figuration of nature as Isis, see Hadot (2006).

11. For this interpretation of Descartes, see Bordo (1987).

TWELVE

Gender, the Family and the Organic State in Hegel's Political Thought

I. WOMEN'S PLACE IN THE HEGELIAN STATE

In his discussion of the family in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel effectively denies equality to women in a number of respects. Women are not to undertake paid work in the public sphere; rather, in each family the husband is the head of household who is 'primarily responsible for external acquisition and for caring for the family's needs' (PR §171, 209). As each new generation comes to maturity, only sons leave their families to enter civil society. Although women (daughters) do have enough civil personality to enter into marriages, the nature of the marriage 'contract' – which is no ordinary kind of contract but one that 'begin[s] from the point of view of contract . . . in order to supersede it' (§163, 203) – is that the two marriage partners renounce their independent legal personalities to form a common unit. The husband, however, is the rightful representative of this unit: 'The family as a legal person in relation to others must be represented by the husband as its head' (§171, 209) – so that in fact it is only women who renounce legal autonomy upon marrying, whilst men retain it under their new guise as heads of household. Consequently, wives also relinquish their maiden names; and although family property is owned in common, only the husband administers it (LNR §82, 150–51). Finally, not being rightful participants in civil society, women are not rightly to participate in political activities or processes either, since for Hegel political participation is properly mediated through participation in economic and civil activity.

Hegel is not simply prescribing how gender roles ought to be divided but is describing the kind of family he saw taking shape in nineteenth-century Europe: the nuclear heterosexual family as a domain not of pro-

duction but of intimate personal relations, structured by what Carole Pateman (1988) calls the 'patriarchal marriage contract'. This peculiar kind of contract effectively recognises women's freedom (presupposed in their freedoms to marry and to choose their spouse) only to take that freedom away again by slotting women – and men – into roles pre-assigned according by sex. These are the roles respectively of (male) head of household *versus* that of (female) caregiver primarily occupied with the needs of others, especially children. This kind of family structure persists to varying degrees today, at least as an ideal. But as many feminists have shown, this structure has inherent deficiencies. The economic and psychological dependency in which it places women makes them vulnerable to various forms of abuse, while the whole structure is arguably premised on women's economic exploitation insofar as their caregiving work is unpaid and largely unvalued and unrecognised.

Hegel admits that things can go wrong within the patriarchal family – for instance, he notes that the husband's right to manage the family property can conflict with its common ownership. Moreover, he recognises that this possibility is built into the structure of the family – although for him this is not because that structure is patriarchal, but because, in his words, 'the ethical disposition of the family is still immediate and exposed to particularization and contingency' (*PR* §171, 209). That is, family members are disposed to embrace and act on behalf of their common good on the basis of their immediate feelings of mutual love. Hence, if love dies, spouses (in practice, husbands) may lose the motivation to serve the family's common good and may lapse into pursuing their self-interest at other family members' expense. Still, although the patriarchal family is not flawless in Hegel's view, on the whole he deems it rational, because the 'immediate unity' of its members which the family embodies – their direct identification with their common good based in immediate loving feeling – is one essential aspect of modern social life, despite the potential problems that can result from this immediacy. Hegel, then, is not offering a value-neutral description of the gender division of labour as it was crystallising in modern Europe, but a normative redescription of that emerging division, a redescription in which this division and the family structure bound up with it form essential aspects of reason's progressive self-actualisation in the modern social world.

Hegel's account of the family is one of the parts of the *Philosophy of Right* least discussed by commentators – not surprisingly, because commentators understandably tend to look for what is true and insightful in Hegel's work, and *prima facie* his account of the family is neither true nor insightful but merely a 'remnant of his era' (Halper 2001: 817). Yet the fact remains that Hegel saw the nuclear family as one of the three fundamental spheres of modern society and as rightly structured by a rigid, hierarchical, division of sex roles. He saw no legitimate room for 'non-traditional' family arrangements: unmarried couples, single-parent fami-

lies, homosexual families, all fail to conform to rational family structure (see Brooks 2007: 70–75). Unappealing as these views are today (to many of us, anyway), we cannot fully understand Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* without confronting his view of the family and sex roles. Having said this, feminist and feminist-informed interpreters have debated whether the division of sex roles that Hegel describes as rational really should count as rational by the standards of his own philosophy. Perhaps, despite what Hegel actually says, 'the logic of his system should have led him to conclusions very close to recognising women's equal rights in social, economic, and political spheres', as Jean-Philippe Deranty puts it (2000: 145; for similar views see Mills 1996, Ravven 1988). On this view, Hegel's own ideal of individual freedom, and his support for (what he regards as) the Christian principle that all human beings are free, imply that all individuals of both sexes should be able to realise their freedom; Hegel simply failed to pursue this implication because he succumbed to the prejudices of his time.

In partial agreement with this interpretation, I will argue that Hegel's view of women is indeed in tension with one particular implication of his political philosophy: that all citizens should be able to participate in *every* key sphere of modern society – family, civil society and state – because each sphere gives them access to an essential aspect of modern social membership. This latter idea follows from Hegel's organic conception of the state, according to which family, civil society and government are the necessary articulations of politically ordered society as a whole, so that participation in all three spheres, and self-identification as a member of every one of these spheres, is essential to social membership and to feeling and being at home in modern society. However, this same organic conception of the state implies that each social sphere must have its proper class of representatives, with the family represented by women. Thus, Hegel's organic conception of the state does not simply point towards gender equality but has egalitarian and anti-egalitarian implications which are in some tension with one another, and where Hegel on the whole – especially in regards to women – pursues the latter. I argue, then, that Hegel's view of women is not merely a contingent result of prejudice on his part but follows from a core element of his political philosophy; namely, his organic conception of the state. But this does not mean that Hegel's philosophy is simply irremediably sexist and must be left behind, since that philosophy – and indeed the very same element within it, the organic view of the state – also has inherent egalitarian implications.

In connecting Hegel's patriarchal views on women to his organic conception of the state, I may seem to be lending support to the many previous critics of that conception, of whom Karl Popper is perhaps the most (in)famous. The worry is that the organic conception of the state is proto-totalitarian, allocating individuals to fixed 'stations' within the social whole and so denying them liberty and equality. I do not endorse this

criticism; rather, Hegel's organic conception points both towards *and* away from equality (particularly but not only in respect of gender). Moreover, these tensions are internal not to the organic *concept* of the state as such but to Hegel's specific *conception* of the political organism on the model of the animal organism. In his *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel affirms the superiority of animal to plant nature on the grounds that it is only in animal organisms that all parts are fully subordinated to the whole. In contrast, he maintains that in plant organisms each part directly reproduces or contains the whole within itself, rather than being decisively subordinated to playing one specific role within the whole. If we reverse Hegel's natural hierarchy and take plant nature as our model, then we can re-imagine political society in more thoroughly egalitarian – and gender-egalitarian – terms than Hegel does. I will explore this by turning to the political use that the Early German Romantics made of the plant model.

My aim, then, is neither to discredit the organic concept of the state nor to suggest that Hegel's particular organic conception should automatically be dismissed. Instead, I wish to open up discussion about the political meanings and merits of different organic conceptions, which are not necessarily illiberal. Moreover, by reflecting on this issue we can illuminate one way in which Hegel's political thought is systematically connected to his *Philosophy of nature* – something almost entirely neglected in Hegel scholarship.

II. THE ORGANIC STATE AND INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

Critics of Hegel, such as Popper in *The Open Society*, have seen him as the arch-proponent of an organic and totalitarian state. Supposedly, he values only the freedom of the state as a whole and not of individuals, whom he subordinates to the state, allocating to each individual a fixed place in a range of 'stations' chosen by the state according to its needs. At the same time Hegel allegedly misdescribes individuals as attaining freedom through this subordination, on the grounds that this subordination makes individuals into the parts of an organic political whole, a whole that is free *qua* organic, and from which freedom flows down into the parts – so that individuals become free just by taking up their social stations. The doctrine of the organic state is, then, supposedly merely the mystifying wrapping around a totalitarian core. (I take it that this is the core of Popper's complaint against Hegel – to the extent that one can discern a coherent argument in his invective. See Popper 1945: vol. 2, esp. 31–45.)

That the totalitarian picture of Hegel is wrong has been abundantly shown by scores of interpreters, who have established that individual freedom – in multiple aspects – is one of the fundamental values on

which Hegel's political philosophy is based. The *rechtliche Staat*, for Hegel, is one that realises individual freedom. Yet so much emphasis recently has fallen on Hegel's liberal commitment to individual freedom that the ways in which he does nonetheless regard the rational state as organic – something manifested in the abundant references to the state as organism which pepper the *Philosophy of Right*¹ – have come to be largely ignored. In turn, some scholars, including Frederick Neuhouser (2003) and Nathan Ross (2008), have begun to correct this,² arguing that Hegel conceives of the organic state in a way that is compatible with his commitment to individual freedom.³

How, then, does Hegel reconcile these commitments? Very schematically: Hegel begins the *Philosophy of Right* by taking free will to be the ability to choose which to pursue from the set of one's individual desires or of the available courses of action (*PR* §11, 45). The condition of an individual's exercising this ability, for Hegel, is that s/he own private property – enjoying rights over a range of material objects in respect of which s/he can embody and realise his or her freedom. But property ownership is only possible if different individuals recognise and respect one another's property (§71, 102). This mutual recognition and respect amongst property owners can only reliably be achieved if they respect one another not merely when it benefits them to do so but out of genuine respect for the rights of others. That is, individual freedom in Hegel's first sense – which Neuhouser calls 'personal freedom' – requires that individuals be moral subjects, capable of recognising and acting on moral principles and obligations: personal freedom requires the further *moral* freedom to legislate moral principles to oneself (Neuhouser 2008: 205–6). However, the latter will not constitute a form of freedom if it is experienced as mere subjection to moral law: moral *freedom* can only be such if it is reconciled with personal freedom; that is, in case individuals desire to do what morality demands. This requires that they undergo a moral education, by virtue of living amongst appropriate social institutions which cultivate their emotional and practical dispositions to align with moral requirements (§153/196) – so that individuals want what is in the common good as well as their own individual goods.

These educative institutions, which make up *Sittlichkeit*, are the family, civil society and the strictly political state – what Michael Wolff calls the 'constitutionally organised set of political powers' to legislate, execute and decide (Wolff [1974] 2007: 298). The family educates us to renounce our exclusively individual interests entirely and to embrace the whole family's common good; the family does this by drawing out the rational, universal dimensions that are embodied in individuals' immediate feelings of love. Civil society continues the educative work by leading citizens to embrace the common purposes pursued by legal and public authorities and by the corporations – although generally these are still seen as common in a deficient sense, either as being common merely to all

individuals as single agents or as being common only to those with a shared economic vocation. The state completes the educative work by bringing us to embrace the common good in the genuine sense and by regulating and organising the family and civil society so that they lead us towards and not away from this embrace of the common good. In this respect the state overarches family and civil society so as to produce politically organised society as a whole. Thus, nested within one another, these three spheres educate us to want what morality requires, and they thereby provide the conditions of our individual (moral and personal) freedom.

However, this reconstruction, as in chapter 11, presents *Sittlichkeit* as merely instrumental for individual freedom. But for Hegel, securing the conditions for individual freedom *transforms* the kinds of freedom that individuals enjoy and appreciate. It gives them a further freedom: to participate in, and to reproduce through their own activity, social institutions that flow out of and reflect the particular identities that they have acquired *as* members of those institutions; that is, as family members, *Bürger*, and citizens. Personal and moral freedom are only possible within this new form of freedom. But what makes this a form of *freedom* at all? As Michael Hardimon (1994: ch. 3) has shown, in a society that only enabled individuals to be free as individuals, what Hegel regards as a fundamental need of individuals would remain unfulfilled; namely, their need to feel (as well as to be) at home in the social world. For this, individuals need to be able to participate in social institutions, to act according to the roles available within those institutions, and to affirm these roles as both constituting and expressing their own self-identities, rather than experiencing them as externally constraining or burdensome. This form of freedom – ‘subjective social freedom’, as Neuhausser calls it (2008: 214) – is a fundamental part of freedom, of being self-determining rather than acting from externally imposed constraints.

Now, Hegel further maintains that the rational state as a whole must *itself* be free and self-determining, and that for this it must be organically structured. How does he reach these seemingly bizarre conclusions? For him, the overall purpose of political society is to reconcile people’s sense of having individual interests (of individual difference) with commitment to the collective good and the good of others (a sense of unity with others or of universality). This is the internal end or *telos* of political society. But to fulfil its purpose, the social order must be differentiated into family, civil society and the political powers that overarch and organise these, because each of these *differentiae* corresponds to or embodies a distinct ‘moment’ of the individual-universal spectrum, the extremes of which are to be reconciled. The family embodies and fosters ‘immediate unity’ between individuals; civil society embodies and fosters individual ‘difference’; and the political state reconciles the two by embodying and fostering ‘mediated unity’ between individuals (Neuhausser 2003: 133;

this terminology derives from Taylor 1975). Why are exactly *these* three moments those through which the reconciliation of the poles must be achieved? Because Hegel's general method of overcoming oppositions, or of reconciling their poles, is not to deny the existence of the opposed poles but to show that each pole requires the other as the necessary condition of its own existence, so that the two prove to be united within a broader structure that encompasses them both. Thus, for the individual-universal opposition to be resolved, there must be a sphere embodying sheer universality (the family, in which all commitment to isolated individual interests is abandoned), another sphere embodying sheer difference (the apparent free-for-all of civil society), and a third sphere reconciling and overarching the previous two.

Politically organised society thus differentiates itself into distinct sub-systems in accordance with its intrinsic purpose. As Charles Taylor puts it, this state articulates itself according to a necessary plan (1975: 438). It self-determines. In so doing, it simultaneously organises itself organically: it unfolds into a coherent system in accordance with its *own*, inbuilt, purpose or plan. And so Hegel declares that, as we saw in chapter 11: 'As living spirit, the state exists only as an organised whole, differentiated into particular functions which proceed from the single concept . . . of the rational will and continually produce it as their result' (§539, 265).

In describing the state as an organised whole, Hegel is not simply taking the organism to furnish a handy metaphor for the state. He believes that the rightly organised state *really has* the structure of an organism: self-differentiation into articulations each serving a function within the whole. 'The state *is* an organism, i.e., the development of the Idea in its differences' (PR §269A, 290; my emphasis. On the non-metaphorical status of Hegel's organic language, see also Wolff [1974] (2007): 312). This idea that states can really be organisms may seem strange, but it relies on Hegel's particular understanding of organisms as self-organising systems (which descends from Kant's third *Critique*, especially his conception at §65 of that work of a *Naturzweck* – a purposively organised natural system).

These metaphysical beliefs of Hegel's feed into his political philosophy. But they do not contradict his support for individual freedom. Rather, for Hegel, the organic state acts from the purpose of reconciling individual freedom (in its various forms) with social membership, so that a commitment to individual freedom is built into this state – even as it incorporates individual freedom into social freedom, the freedom to be a social member and to be at home in society. This incorporation is intended to preserve individual freedom whilst also satisfying our need for reconciliation with the social world. But we might still wonder whether this scheme allows for individual freedom to be fully realised. This question arises particularly in relation to Hegel's treatment of women.

III. TENSIONS IN THE ORGANIC MODEL: FOR AND AGAINST SEX EQUALITY

On the face of it, the organic conception of society seems to imply that everyone ought to be permitted to participate in all three spheres of modern *Sittlichkeit*, because each sphere gives its participants access to an essential aspect of membership in a modern society. Neuhausser spells this implication out very clearly:

[T]he idea of [an organic] social world not only specifies the necessary internal structure of the three basic institutions . . . but also gives an account of the different kinds of *identities* required of individuals if they are to participate freely in such institutions. Focusing on the latter point suggests that Hegel's demonstration of the [organic] structure of *Sittlichkeit* includes the claim that the modern social world is rational (in part) because it allows its members to develop and express different, complementary types of identities, each of which is indispensable to realizing the complete range of relations to others (and to self) that are . . . worthy of achieving. On this view, then, to lack membership in any of the three basic institutions would be to miss out on an important part of what it is to be a fully realized (individual) self. (2003: 140)

Apparently, then, the organic view of society entails that women *and* men alike ought to be able to participate fully in family, civil society and state.

Admittedly, merely formally opening civil society and state up to women is not enough to ensure that they can really participate in these realms as fully as men, as has become apparent in our own time. If within the family women remain the presumptive caregivers while men remain the presumptive breadwinners, then women's caregiving role will continue informally to limit their possibilities for participation in paid work and politics, and will impose on women a double burden of caregiving and paid work. A necessary condition of real sex equality is a complete redistribution of caregiving work. And we might think that it is another logical consequence of Hegel's organic conception that this redistribution ought to take place. For if each individual ought to be able to participate fully in all spheres of social life, then men ought, as well as having access to civil society and state, also to participate in the family just as fully as women: that is, men ought to embrace the communal spirit of family life as a vocation (although not the only one) and so to undertake an equal share of domestic responsibilities. More precisely, as Edward Halper (2001) explains: as Hegel divides up the roles of husband and wife, husbands will the family unity primarily as a 'universal' – as an individual case of marriage in its general concept, understood to be rational and necessary – while wives will that unity primarily as an 'individual'; that is, they will this particular instance of marriage (albeit implicitly as an instance of the general type). Each party also wills the material activities necessary to sustain the marriage under the particular mode in which

they will it: thus, wives do the material work of caring for the constituent members of the family, while husbands act on behalf of the family unit (as a unit) within the wider world. But if in fact Hegel's organic vision implies that each party ought to have access to both dimensions of participation in family life, then both wives and husbands ought to will and materially support the family in both respects.

Hegel, of course, draws no such inference. On one view, this is just because the prejudices he inherited from his time prevented him from thinking through the sex-egalitarian implications of his own ideas. Deranty defends this view. He emphasises that, according to Hegel, women are free individuals and all persons are fundamentally equal. Yet, Deranty objects, Hegel illogically restricts women's freedom, dividing sex roles on the basis of (1) biology – when on his own terms society ought to be structured in accordance with the concept, not nature – and (2) experience, empirical acquaintance with the patriarchal division of gender roles (Deranty 2000: 155) – when on Hegel's own terms society ought to be structured by reason, not by sheer empirical givens.

Perhaps, then, his organic conception should have directed Hegel to support sex equality. Yet other considerations suggest (*pace* Deranty for whom Hegel's sex division of roles is illogical by his own criteria) that the organic conception leads Hegel to support this sex division. Each organic social function (unity, difference, mediated unity) requires its specialised sphere or institution; each sphere or institution requires a particular class of individuals to be permanently based in and responsible for its material and spiritual maintenance. Each social sphere must be maintained by a dedicated set of people who serve as its 'organs' or functionaries, according to a line of reasoning which I set out in a little more detail in chapter 11. And so Hegel writes that:

The actual Idea is the spirit which divides itself up into the two ideal spheres of its concept – the family and civil society – as its finite mode. . . . In so doing, it allocates the material of its finite actuality, i.e., individuals as a *mass*, to these two spheres. (*PR* §262, 285)

Charles Taylor (1975: ch. 16) identifies the same principle at work in much of the *Philosophy of Right*, such as Hegel's sub-division of civil society into the agricultural, business and civil service classes (which replicates within civil society the broader division into unity, difference and mediated unity). In choosing a line of work, each individual takes up a position within the complex whole, rather than falsely pretending to be able to realise the whole totality directly within themselves. Similarly, Hegel introduces sub-divisions into the political state, and within its estates assembly he has the representatives of the business class appointed by the corporations, thus opposing both universal suffrage and direct democracy. Appointment is through the corporations so that representatives can play their political role as members of an articulated economic

structure, not as sheer individuals; and so that those who appoint them can also do so *qua* participants in corporations, in terms of their economic roles and identities, not as sheer individual atoms. As for the agricultural class, they are only represented by the unappointed landed aristocracy. Consequently, Hegel says, 'In our modern states, the citizens have only a limited share in the universal business of the state' (PR §255A, 273). Just as women represent the family and may not advance beyond it, most *Bürger* and all of the peasantry represent civil society and may not advance beyond it to the political level as such. The organic model now appears to support a series of hierarchical social stratifications – of which women's confinement to the family is merely an instance. Far from being illogical, then, that confinement now seems to be an eminently logical consequence of Hegel's organic approach.

We may still think that Hegel's particular argument for women's place in the family makes illegitimate reference to mere nature if the reason why women and not men are deemed to be the rightful representatives of the family sphere is because of women's reproductive biology and functions. But matters are more complex than this. In a rational state, the division in gender roles does not result from biological sex difference merely as such but from the state's elevation of that biological difference into the basis of a functional differentiation between citizens. That latter functional differentiation is itself rationally necessary so as to raise the citizens to the status of being members of an organic whole rather than leaving them as a heap of atoms. Thus, Hegel writes,

The *natural* determinacy of the two sexes acquires an *intellectual* and *ethical* significance by virtue of its rationality. This significance is determined by the difference into which the ethical substantiality, as the concept in itself, divides itself up in order that its vitality may thereby achieve a concrete unity. (§165, 206)

The 'ethical substance' of the rational state needs to achieve a unity at once concrete and vital – that is, organic. This requires that this state 'divide itself up' into two functional roles corresponding to family *versus* civil society. In turn, each role must be assumed by a determinate set of representatives. Here natural sex difference, which would otherwise have merely contingent practical consequences but no intrinsic ethical significance, comes into play as a basis on which to assign roles. This role difference gives ethical meaning – socio-political purpose – to natural sex difference, converting what would otherwise be its merely practical consequences into rational functions of the state. Accordingly, Hegel speaks of women's female nature becoming the basis of the socio-political identity of woman-as-wife-and-mother.

Overall, then, the organic conception of society points both towards equality, including sex equality, *and* against it, towards the rightfulness of social hierarchies, where it is generally the latter implication that Hegel

pursued.⁴ I now want to argue that the source of this tension in Hegel's thought is not his organic concept of the state *per se* but his particular *conception* of it.

IV. ANIMAL STATE, VEGETAL STATE: HEGEL *VERSUS* EARLY GERMAN ROMANTICISM

Hegel's confinement of women to the family, as we've seen, follows from his principle that each social sphere requires a specific class of people to represent it – just as each functional sub-system within an organism requires a specific set of organs to embody it. Functional specialisation of this kind is for Hegel intrinsic to the structure of organisms, political or natural. If it is intrinsic to organisms, though, it only achieves full realisation in *animal* organisms – which for Hegel are the highest form of organic life, surpassing the other two forms, the earth (mineral life) and plants (vegetable life).

What makes animal life so excellent? Hegel does not actually see the earth as properly alive at all; he calls it 'self-alienated life'. As for the plant, he complains that here 'the objective organism and its subjectivity are still immediately identical' (EN §343, 303). The plant

is not as yet . . . the articulated system of its members . . . It unfolds its parts; but since these members are essentially the whole subject, there is no further differentiation of the plant; leaves, root, stem, are themselves only individuals. Since the reality which the plant produces . . . is completely identical to it, it does not develop authentic members [*Glieder*]. (EN §337A, 276. *Glied* is Hegel's term for a limb or organ as an articulation within a fully realised organic system.)

The whole of the plant is directly contained in each of its parts. That is, the entire set of functions specified by the whole is in principle performed by each part. It may seem that the parts of plants are functionally differentiated: leaves absorb light, roots absorb moisture, stems distribute water and sap, and so on. But each part can, if cut from the whole, take on any of the other functions and undergo a transformation in its material structure to support this. Branches, for instance, can be cut off and planted to become roots from which new plants grow. In an animal, in contrast, the whole organism so completely masters its manifold parts and adapts their materiality to its purposes that those parts become materially incapable of taking on another function if removed from the whole. As Hegel likes to say (following Aristotle), a hand cut from a body ceases to be a hand. The hand cannot regenerate a new body from within itself, so thoroughly has it been made into the material of its function. But the parts of plants are not so mastered by the unity of the whole plant as each to serve as organs of one and only one function. Instead, each part contains within itself the potential to perform any number of functions, even

if circumstances dictate that one of these functions predominates in it at some given time. Because plants exhibit a level of functional specialisation, they meet Hegel's criterion for being organic; but their manifold parts are not completely subordinated to their general functions as they should be according to the concept of an organism. For this reason, Hegel complains that plants grow by simple addition of more and more identical parts – identical, in principle, because each alike contains the same potential for the same set of functions. Plants grow not by qualitative development but mere quantitative proliferation.⁵

Evidently, underpinning Hegel's conception of the political organism is the idea that its organic form is animal, not vegetal. But what might a state be like that was modelled on the plant instead? Presumably, in such a state, each individual would have to contain within themselves at least the potential for participating in every social sphere, and which sphere they specialised in – and to what extent they specialised in it – would be a matter of contingency and might change over time. But to contain these multiple potentials, individuals would have in addition to their specialisations to have some level of access to all spheres. *All* social spheres would be realised in each individual to some extent at least.

This intriguing possibility of a 'vegetal state' is not as whimsical as it might seem. We can explore it further with reference to the political writings of the Early German Romantics. They share Hegel's commitment to an organic state – but for them, the model of the organism is the plant rather than the animal. In fact, this privileging of the plant applies across all areas of their work (see Miller 2001). Schlegel remarked in 1799 that: 'The highest, most complete life would be nothing other than *pure vegetating*' (L 27/66). He also states that 'The *world* as a whole, and originally, is a plant' (PL #332, 151) – by which he meant that the universe is a self-differentiating organic whole whose manner of self-differentiation is that of the plant: this whole develops endlessly, never reaching a point of closure, but forever progressing to higher and higher levels of organisation. The same plant model underpins the fragmentary literary form beloved of the Romantics, a form that reflects their belief that a philosophical system can only exist as a sequence of interconnected fragments. Yet despite their interconnection, each fragment is a whole unto itself: 'A fragment . . . has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine' (AF #206, 189). This is because each fragment contains within itself the potential to become each of the others: it contains all the others *in nuce* and thus crystallises the entire system within itself – again like each part of a plant as Hegel saw it. Thus, Schlegel conceives the plant in similar terms to Hegel, but valorises it positively because of its fragmentation and open-ended development. This reassessment of the plant is bound up with early Romantic political thinking about the ideal of an organic state.

This Romantic ideal has often been seen as politically reactionary. But in their youth the Romantics ardently embraced the ideals of the French revolution and, despite growing reservations in view of the Terror, they continued throughout the 1790s to support the revolution's basic principles (see Beiser 1996: xiv). This specifically *Early* German Romantic political thinking is my focus here. Admittedly, none of the Romantics developed their political thinking to the level of systematicity and sophistication we find in Hegel. Their political ideas are largely expressed in fragmentary and exploratory form. Even so, instructive contrast with Hegel is possible.

The Romantics opposed the so-called machine-state – the paternalist, enlightened absolutist state which took its purpose to be the provision of security and the satisfaction of individuals' material needs (a view of the state upheld by influential theorists of the time, such as Christian Wolff; see Ross 2008: 12). But in opposing this kind of state the Romantics did not, generally, oppose the state *per se*. Some did: Wilhelm von Humboldt's opposition to the machine-state led him to advocate what we now call a minimal state (see Humboldt 1969); and the author of the 'Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism' – variously identified as Hölderlin, Schelling, or the young Hegel – declares that: 'We must . . . go beyond the state! For every state must treat free human beings as if they were cogs in a machine; but that it should not do; therefore it should *cease* to exist' (in Beiser 1996: 4). On the whole, though, the Romantics proposed instead a different, organic, kind of state,⁶ which does not dominate other spheres of social life from the outside but instead permeates and animates them from within. The organic state must therefore self-differentiate into these manifold social spheres; within each sphere, political participation and common will arise immanently, 'elevating us' (as Schleiermacher puts it) to embrace the unity of the state as a whole. Civil life is not to be set free from the state, but to become the organ *of* the self-differentiating state, so that politics and orientation to the common good pervade all areas of daily life, leaving no footholds for atomistic individualism. For individuals to be fully free – rather than being dominated by the state as an external limitation on their activity – they need to be able to find the state to be their home, flowing out of their own activities and identities; this requires that political participation run through the entirety of social life. The Romantics saw this ideal as that of a 'true republicanism', in which there is a 'general participation in the state' (in Beiser 1996: 47).

To see how these thoughts relate to the Romantic privileging of the plant model, we can turn to Novalis's controversial 1798 essay 'Faith and Love; or, the King and Queen'. On first reading, Novalis here seems to be proposing a renewal of a (highly idealised) feudal monarchy – the essay was occasioned by and appeared to celebrate the coronation of the new Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm III and his wife. But as Novalis indicates

in his prefatory comments on cryptic language (*FL* #1, 35), he is covertly using the idealised royal couple whom he eulogises here as a symbol of a possible future organic state, which might be monarchical, aristocratic or democratic, but where the key issue is not its 'indifferent form' but its organic or 'republican' essence (*S* 2: 503). Moreover, Novalis covertly situates this kind of state as something the coming of which has been made possible by the French revolution (see O'Brien 1995: 169–71). The idealised royal couple provides a model of felt commitment to the common good, a model that permeates and inspires all of society: 'It is a great mistake of our states that one sees so little of the state. The state should be visible everywhere, and every person should be marked as its citizen. Can not badges and uniforms be introduced everywhere?' (*FL* #19, 40) Although these remarks have been criticised as proto-totalitarian, they are surely meant to be a humorous illustration of the idea that attachment to the common good is not to be separate from but to run through all dimensions of social life. The idea, then, is not that most people are to participate in political affairs only indirectly via economic life, but that through economic life everyone is to become educated to become an active participant in politics and the state too, as irreducible to but permeating civil society. The vegetal model is at work: each member – each individual agent – is directly to contain, and to realise to at least some degree, the potential for political activity as well as for economic activity (after making the above claims, Novalis compares this ideal state to 'a new plant'; #21, 40). These radical ideas, however, are disguised, not to say distorted, by Novalis's monarchical symbol, since the monarchy that he envisages makes no structures available to enable people's active political participation (and so we have to question Novalis's claim that the 'form' of the republican state is a matter of indifference).

The vegetal model also shapes Novalis's thinking about women and the family in this essay, although, again, a tension emerges between its radical implications and its distorted conservative presentation. Novalis sees the family, too, as a sphere which is to give rise directly to political participation: each household is modelled on that of the royal couple whose household is organised by commitment to the common good,

and by such means one could ennoble daily life through the king and queen as the ancients once did with their gods. Then there was a genuine religiosity through the constant mixture of the divine in daily life. Now a genuine patriotism can emerge through the constant interweaving of the royal couple in domestic and public life. (*FL* #30, 44)

If the family is to be a sphere through which individuals can be directly raised into political activity and identification with the common good, then equally the state – as symbolised by the royal couple – has to have its *own*, internal, domestic aspect that descends into and arises out of family life. This is the queen's domain: the domestic life of the entire

nation, encompassing the education of women and children, pastoral care for 'the sick and poor' (#27, 42), and matters of sex and personal morality. For Novalis, then, there must be a king *and queen* – as his essay title indicates – because the organic political sphere must expand into a domestic aspect so that participation in domestic life, especially by women, can reciprocally rise to political participation. Evidently, in making these claims, Novalis accepts women's domestic vocation. On the other hand, when he suggests that all women are to emulate the queen, hence – non-cryptically – to participate in the (pastoral side of the) life of the state, he implicitly suggests that women ought to be full participants in the state and that their domestic role is to feed into this. Women's domestic role is not to be merely private or privatising but to expand into broader social concerns. Rather than seeing women's domestic role as excluding them from the state, as Hegel does, Novalis sees this role as compatible with women's participation in the state insofar as that state, as an organism, intrinsically differentiates itself into a pastoral side.

However, cutting short this potentially radical idea, Novalis suggests that the state's pastoral side is not actually political after all: 'The queen has indeed no political sphere of influence, but she does have a domestic one' (#27, 42). Yet her supposedly merely domestic pastoral realm *is* part of the state, on his own account: it is an intrinsic self-differentiation within the organic state. In denying that the queen's – and by extension all women's – roles are political, Novalis contradicts his own organic conception of the state. Whereas Hegel's exclusion of women from politics has roots in his organic conception and so does not merely reflect the prejudices of his time, Novalis's exclusion of women from politics contradicts his organic view and thus *does* reflect merely the prejudices of his era.

Because of his vegetal model, Novalis suggests that each individual is to be raised into direct political activity by their participation in either economic or family life. However, we can now see that he divides participation in those last two spheres by sex: family life and pastoral political work for women, for men civil life and direct participation in government. On this point again Novalis fails to pursue his own vegetal model of the state consistently. Since under that model each individual is to be raised through their everyday activities and self-identifications to '*universal* participation in the whole state' (#37, 47), as Novalis puts it, each individual should have full access to both family and economic activity and identities and to the forms of political activity and self-identification arising from each. When pursued consistently, the vegetal model pushes towards sex equality.

From Hegel's standpoint, a vegetal state would be defective. It would involve a merely immediate union of individual citizens with the state as a whole, rather than their mediated union by way of nested hierarchies. Yet that latter form of union is in some tension with Hegel's own idea of

social membership which also flows from his organic conception of the state. We could resolve this tension in Hegel's thought by re-thinking the organic state along vegetal rather than animal lines. Even if the resulting kind of state would contain more immediacy than Hegel would have liked, offsetting this is the fact that this kind of state would enable all individuals to achieve full social membership and thus would be more fully their home.

NOTES

1. See for instance *PR* §200R, 234; §267, 288; §269, 290; §279, 316–21.

2. Franz Grégoire (1996) also emphasises that Hegel understands the state as organic in a sense that includes individual autonomy. Likewise, Charles Taylor (1975) stresses Hegel's organicism within his reading of Hegel as a specifically communitarian liberal, while Michael Wolff [1974] (2007) argues that Hegel's organic conception of the state has not only political but also epistemological roots in his idea of *Wissenschaft* (science/systematic knowledge) as the understanding of methodically self-unfolding wholes. Another recent (brief) re-examination of Hegel's organicism is Lambier (2002).

3. To be precise, Ross argues this only apropos of Hegel's Jena political writings (the *Natural Law* essay and the *System of Ethical Life*), in which, he maintains, Hegel argues that the most genuinely organic state integrates into itself the mechanism of civil society, which it regulates and organises; such a state thus includes bourgeois freedoms, rather than excludes them as did the ancient Greek *polis*. But Ross argues that in the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel adopts a different view of the state as an 'absolute mechanism' (a concept derived from Hegel's *Logic* where it primarily applies to the solar system): a set of mechanisms which regulates civil society. This, it seems to me, incorrectly reduces the Hegelian state to what Hegel describes as its 'ethical root' within civil society (*PR* §255, 272); namely, that sphere's regulatory and legal institutions plus the corporations.

4. Neuhouser argues, however, that over time Hegel increasingly favoured 'the right of all (male) individuals to participate in social life as a family member, as the practitioner of a socially productive occupation, and as a citizen all at once' as a condition of full social membership (2003: 141–42). That is, Hegel understood organicism more and more in egalitarian terms, and so, Neuhouser suggests, the fact that Hegel nonetheless remained supportive of the patriarchal family shows that this support was merely an accidental consequence of sexism and was not held on philosophical grounds. But we could equally argue the reverse: that the fact that Hegel remained supportive of patriarchy indicates that he did not consistently go over to construing organicism in egalitarian terms. Moreover, there need be no conflict for Hegel between the ideas that most male individuals are limited to civil society *and* that they participate in social life both as *Bürger* and as citizens – for they achieve a limited, but still real, level of participation as citizens *just by* participating in the corporate life of civil society (through which they contribute to appointing representatives to the estates assembly).

5. Hegel is drawing extensively on Goethe's 1790 *Metamorphosis of Plants*. Goethe identified how the parts of plants could assume one another's functions and thus metamorphose into one another, and he identified this as the principle of plant growth. Thus, he argued that the universal, common principle in a plant is not unitary form or structure but metamorphosis itself, as process, of which the different parts are more or less transitory manifestations. However, Goethe evaluates this metamorphic character of plants positively, whereas Hegel regards it as indicative of their inferiority to animals. See Miller (2001: esp. 53–56).

6. Thus Schleiermacher inveighs against views like Humboldt's: 'Whoever thus regards the most splendid work of art of humanity [the state], which elevates it to the highest level of its being, as merely . . . an indispensable mechanism . . . , must feel as only a restriction that which is designed to secure him the highest degree of life' (Schleiermacher in Beiser 1996: 192). The artwork counts here as paradigm of a self-determining organic whole.

THIRTEEN

Hegel and Colonialism

Recently there has been considerable discussion amongst Hegel scholars of Hegel's views on race.¹ There has been less direct consideration of what Hegel thought or what his philosophy implies regarding colonialism,² even though the discourses of race, colonialism and Eurocentrism are entwined. In this chapter I reconstruct Hegel's position on colonialism – taking 'colonialism' to mean the system of European political and economic dominance over the rest of the world, which began to form when Columbus and others arrived in North and South America, culminated in the 'scramble for Africa' in the late nineteenth century, and lasted into the mid-twentieth century.

To reconstruct Hegel's position on colonialism, I focus on his *Philosophy of World History* (PWH), for reasons explained in section I, in which I re-examine the Eurocentrism of the PWH's essential claims. In section II, I explain how the PWH implies that colonialism is justified on the grounds that it spreads the principle and spirit of freedom. For Hegel, it has only been possible for this principle to be grasped and put into practice in Europe. Therefore, the world's other peoples can acquire freedom only if Europeans first impose their civilisation upon them. Although this imposition denies freedom to colonised peoples, this denial is legitimate because it is the sole condition on which these peoples can gain freedom in the longer term. Further, colonialism is necessary to the ongoing expansion of freedom which is world history's goal.

I argue, then, that Hegel's PWH generates a case for colonialism. In this I agree with critics of Hegel such as Enrique Dussel and Teshale Tibebu. They regard Hegel as a – indeed the – quintessential Eurocentrist, giving 'the most sophisticated rendition of the Eurocentric paradigm' (Tibebu 2010: xxi) and of the 'myth of modernity' (Dussel 1993) – the myth that modern Europe is the world's most advanced civilisation

which is obliged to educate, develop and civilise the others, using violence where this mission requires. I also take it that:

Eurocentrism . . . emerged as a discursive rationale for colonialism . . . [but a]lthough colonialist discourse and Eurocentric discourse are intimately intertwined, the terms have a distinct emphasis. While the former explicitly justifies colonial practices, the latter embeds, takes for granted and ‘normalizes’ the hierarchical power relations generated by colonialism and imperialism, without necessarily even thematizing these issues directly. (Shohat and Stam [1994] 2014: 2)

As we will see, in Hegel’s PWH overt Eurocentrism and more implicit pro-colonial reasoning are present in just this fashion. One might conclude – assuming that colonialism was morally wrong – that there is little point studying Hegel’s stance on colonialism today. I disagree, and believe such study important because the international order today remains deeply shaped by the power relations established under colonialism, so much so that this order can reasonably be described as ‘neo-colonial’ or as continuing to exhibit a ‘coloniality of power’ (Quijano 2000). In this context it is important to understand the Eurocentric and colonialist discourses that still shape the world, and to reflect critically on how some major European philosophers, including Hegel, have contributed to these discourses.

An alternative view is that it is worth studying Hegel’s stance on colonialism so as to find out what resources he offers us for critiquing it. Perhaps we can filter out his basic account of freedom and its historicity from his Eurocentric narrative of the actual movement of history, and perhaps, so filtered out, his account of freedom tells *against* colonialism for denying freedom to many peoples. I consider this strategy for rescuing Hegel from himself in section III, then argue in section IV that matters are more complicated because Hegel’s conception of freedom as self-determination has significant connections with his Eurocentrism and the pro-colonialism that follows from it. His philosophy nonetheless contains possibilities that can be taken in an anti-colonial direction; but it also contains elements that have real and tenacious links with colonialism, which we should not overlook.

I. WORLD HISTORY AND EUROCENTRISM

Hegel’s best-known argument regarding colonialism, in his *Philosophy of Right*, is that migration of the European poor to colonies overseas can alleviate modern civil society’s endemic problems of poverty and over-production (PR §§246–48, 267–69).³ In this chapter, though, I concentrate on the scattered statements on colonialism in Hegel’s *Philosophy of World History* (PWH), along with the PWH’s broader implications.⁴ I focus on the PWH because this is where Hegel argues that history runs

from East to West, that history proper only unfolds in the West, and that Christian European civilisation, especially in its latest phase as modern, liberal Europe, is the most advanced world civilisation (so far, at least). That is, in the PWH Hegel overtly upholds Eurocentrism, or so I will argue in this section.

I understand Eurocentrism, informed by Shohat and Stam (2014: esp. 2–3), as the position that (1) history follows a linear path from Greece through Rome to medieval then modern Europe, all change powered internally to this line; (2) ‘modern Europe’ includes European-derived cultures in the United States, Australia, and broadly ‘the West’; (3) inherent progress unfolds along this intra-European line towards freedom, equality and other liberal values; (4) where unfreedom has existed or still exists in Europe’s past or present, this is only because it has not yet fully worked through and applied its own governing principles of freedom and equality; (5) no equivalent progression to freedom and equality has occurred outside the West. This kind of position, focusing on freedom, is expressed in Hegel’s PWH – his distinctive mode of approaching history notwithstanding – and his Eurocentrism brings pro-colonialism in its wake, I’ll argue. Thus, it is from the PWH that we can best ascertain how Hegel’s thought tells for colonialism.

Regarding Hegel’s distinctive approach to history, suffice it here to say that Hegel’s deceptively simple claim is to apply thought to history (EVPG 78/138) where ‘the sole conception [or thought] that [philosophy] brings . . . is the simple conception of *reason* – the conception that reason governs the world, and that therefore world history is a rational process’ (79/140). That is, we aim to discern the immanent reason why real historical events took place: to see why it made sense for these events to happen, why they had to happen, to advance history’s overarching goal: the ‘consciousness of freedom’ (*Bewußtsein der Freiheit*). This goes even for dismal episodes of decline, destruction and suffering: we ask how they too played a part in history’s broader advancement. This is not a matter of imposing an external logic or categorial scheme on historical events (81/143) but rather of discerning *their* logic, through interpretation of the recorded facts. That said, *we* the philosophical historians bring forward the idea of reason and with it freedom – the idea that this single goal must regulate all world events – *and* we find that the historical record confirms this. ‘Whoever looks at the world rationally sees *it* as rational too; the two exist in a reciprocal relationship’ (81/143).

As is well known, Hegel holds concretely that world history’s progression in the ‘consciousness of freedom’ unfolds over three main stages: ‘one is free’, ‘some are free’, ‘all are free’ (all containing subdivisions), corresponding to Oriental, Classical, and Germanic civilisations. On ‘consciousness of freedom’, Hegel’s views are these. Freedom consists in self-determination: rational decision making about what ends to follow, which impulses to satisfy, or whether to act purely from uni-

versal principle instead (HG 148–49/28). All human individuals have this *capacity* for self-determination – ‘all human beings are intrinsically free’ (*an sich . . . frei*) (EVPG 88/154) – but individuals are not always aware of this. If they are not, then they will fail to exercise, develop and actualise their capacity, remaining practically unfree (although ontologically free) – free ‘in themselves’ (*an sich*) but not for themselves (88/153). For instance, ‘the Orientals do not know that spirit, or the human being as such, is intrinsically free; *because* they do not know this, they are not themselves free’ (87/152; my emphasis). As this implies, if the civilisation to which I belong does not treat me as being free – say, if my place in it is to be a slave or serf – then I will be unaware of my capacity for freedom, for what I can know depends on what is known in the social world around me. This is why individual freedom advances in tandem with the shared *consciousness* of that freedom on the part of members of societies and as this consciousness is embodied in their practices and institutions. As this consciousness advances, the nature of freedom is grasped more adequately; its domain is expanded, for example, from religious to secular affairs; and, crucially, its scope is expanded: ever more people and categories of people are known to be free.

As to Eurocentrism, Hegel famously states that history moves west like the sun, for history’s most advanced stage is the ‘Germanic’ civilisation whose spirit is that ‘all are free’. Admittedly, for Hegel, the insight that ‘all are free’ was first won, albeit only in spiritual form (e.g., that we may all be saved), by Jesus Christ – thus in Judaea, not Europe (88/153). But Christ’s message took hold in ancient Rome, not the Middle East, because the Romans already held that *some* are free: native male slaveholders (HG 450–51/423). The soil was therefore ripe for other Romans to claim that *they* shared in freedom too, Christianity affording them terms to do so. Next, due to Roman imperialism which spread Christianity, the Teutonic tribes encountered and gradually took on Christianity, and then, after the Roman Empire fell, spread Christianity through the rest of Europe (VPG 355/408), becoming the ‘bearer’ of the Christian principle of freedom (HG 460/437). Through its adoption of Christianity, Europe emerged as a distinct civilisation, the ‘Germanic’ or ‘Christian’ – Hegel tends to talk indifferently of the ‘Christian’, ‘Germanic’ and ‘European’ states (e.g., 463). ‘Germanic’, then, means *not* ‘German’ but ‘Christian European’ more broadly (see also Mowad 2013: 168–70).

Freedom’s development continued with the Reformation at last restoring the principle of the spiritual freedom of all, against previously dominant Church hierarchies. The next step, the Enlightenment, was to grasp that freedom applies in secular life too, in freedoms to own private property, choose a profession and spouse, participate in public affairs, and more. Against the excessively abstract realisation of freedom in the French Revolution, the most advanced European states treat determinate social institutions – nuclear family, market economy, constitutional mon-

archy – as needed to secure these individual freedoms and reconcile them with social membership. Overall, then, European history has been a centuries-long process of working out and putting into practice one defining principle – the freedom of all (EVPG 88/153).

Europe, then, comes to bear the Christian principle of freedom because it takes it over from the Roman Empire, where in turn Christianity had taken hold because the Romans were *already* conscious that ‘some are free’, building on the same consciousness by the ancient Greeks. So that last – the ancient Greek consciousness that ‘some are free’ – was ultimately decisive. ‘The consciousness of freedom *first* awoke among the Greeks, and with that they *were* free’ (87; my emphases); they made the key transition from unfreedom to freedom. Ultimately, this is why the development from ‘some are free’ to ‘all are free’ has only spontaneously occurred on European soil.

The transition that the Greeks made was equally from pre-history to history. Hegel says of China and India that we ‘cannot speak here of a proper history as such’ (HG 214/123). The Oriental civilisations are in world history only ambiguously. They are unhistorical insofar as they are not conscious of freedom – or rather are conscious of it only very inadequately, as belonging to one emperor (China), ruling caste (India), or empire (Persia). Consequently, individuals in these cultures are not motivated to pursue or advance their own freedom, for they do not know that they are capable of self-determination in the first place (again, the ‘Orientals do not know that . . . the human being as such, is intrinsically free; because they do not know this, they are not themselves free’; EVPG 87/152). Oriental culture contains no inner motor for progressive development to take place, by way of individuals broadening and deepening the scope of an extant yet still incomplete level of freedom. Lacking that motor, the Orient has no history properly speaking. Even so, Hegel includes the Oriental civilisations in world history because they do have a minimal level of consciousness of freedom; that is, as belonging *only* to the emperor, highest caste, and so on. In contrast, for Hegel, Africans and indigenous Americans lack *any* awareness of freedom; their worlds are *fully*, non-ambiguously pre-historical, whereas Oriental pre-history is on the threshold of world history and to that extent lies partly within it.

Hegel’s denial of full history to the Orientals sheds light on the kind of reason he takes to be immanent in historical events, which in turn illuminates his Eurocentrism. Whereas the Orientals lack a motor for historical development and hence are pre-historical, that motor does arise when, a given level of consciousness of freedom being attained and embodied in social life, that level of consciousness harbours some inner ‘contradiction’ or tension which propels people, *qua* rational beings, to bring about change and improvement. These conditions are first met by the ancient Greeks. Another instance, mentioned earlier, is that the Romans conferred freedom on slave owners while denying it to slaves, giving slaves

rational grounds to claim freedom as well. In section IV we will encounter other instances of this type of historical development through the rational response to contradictions.

That reason is immanent in historical changes might suggest that in history, logical and temporal development coincide (whereas in, say, Hegel's Logic, the dialectical development of categories is not temporal). This is so to an extent. The pre-historical civilisations of Africa, indigenous America and the Orient have no consciousness of freedom sufficient to harbour self-contradictory limitations that call for change, hence these civilisations actually show no significant social change over time, for Hegel. They are and have ever been the same, embodying time but not history; that is, no instantiation over time of the dialectical-and-rational development of freedom. Conversely in Europe the limitations placed on a freedom that is nevertheless known power developments that are at once rationally warranted and transpire, through human agency, over time. Yet for Hegel, all that exists in space and time is subject to contingency and so realises rational requirements under an innumerable variety of permutations arising from the very nature of a spatio-temporal, indefinitely complex, causally interconnected world (*EN* §250 and *R*, 22–24). For example, the Reformation ultimately had to happen; but it is a contingency that Luther posted his theses in Wittenberg in October 1517.⁵

But not all that the PWH covers is historical. In Africa, indigenous America and the Orient, time unfolds without history. Consequently, the advancement from Africa to the Orient and from China to India to Persia occurs *purely* spatially, in that each region in turn grasps freedom to successive – all highly inadequate – degrees. Conversely, historical development (in Europe) takes place in space as well as time, but not *only* in space (*HG* 156–57/39–40). Where advancement occurs only spatially, its motor is not human reason and agency but geographical variation. Because we are natural, spatially embodied as well as rational beings, we are inescapably located in natural surroundings that divide into continents: America, Asia, Africa and Europe. The continents' features affect how their inhabitants live and so what level of civilisation and consciousness of freedom they can reach by their own efforts. America is weak and powerless, yielding immature, weak and lazy people (193/93–94). Africa is dominated by highlands and other non-cultivable areas, so that African peoples form no awareness of their freedom, something people first develop by working on nature (196/98). Asia is dominated by fertile plains, so that its peoples focus on agriculture (199/103), and so gravitate towards patriarchal family-based relationships and uncritical obedience to authority (199–200/104). Only Europe is geographically diverse enough to foster people living in diverse ways and so thinking for themselves (196/98).

Thus, Europe's physical environment explains why Greek civilisation arose and started the trajectory to modern liberalism. Conversely, for

their part, the Orientals advanced beyond the Africans not by thinking rationally about the limitations of the latter's grasp of freedom – after all, allegedly they had none – but due to the Orientals' more auspicious environmental circumstances. Ultimately, here, what guarantees the progression of stages up to the transition to history proper is the reason that for Hegel is embodied in the world's geographic divisions.⁶ Then the European natural environment made it possible for the Greeks to form a conception of freedom that in turn enabled historical progression, in time *and* on the continuing basis of (intra-European) geographical space, to begin.⁷ (We might still ask, though, why the successive Oriental views that 'one is free' were *not* sufficient to initiate historical progression proper. I will return to this question later. For now let us just note that, for Hegel, they were not.)

In sum, Hegel is a Eurocentrist as defined above. As per (1) and (3), he believes that European civilisation develops purely internally towards the fuller comprehension and application of its principle of the freedom of all, where (2) this development has come to include that of all of the 'West', including, for example, the United States.⁸ (4). He explains oppressive episodes in European history either from its not yet having consistently worked out and applied its own principle of freedom (as with the hierarchies of the medieval Church) or as unavoidable requirements for advancement (e.g., the religious wars of early modern Europe). (5) He denies that any equivalent progression to freedom has occurred or can spontaneously occur outside Europe. Next I argue that it is Hegel's Eurocentrism, in particular his sharp divide between European freedom and non-European unfreedom, which generates a case for colonialism.

II. HEGEL'S CASE FOR COLONIALISM

In the PWH Hegel explicitly says relatively little about colonialism, but what he does say is approving. Finishing his account of the European Middle Ages, he praises the revival of learning, the flourishing of fine art, and the arrival of the 'hero' Columbus in the new world (*VPG* 430/490; *Hei* 204). Columbus, he says, was motivated by the 'outward' urging of spirit to know its own earth and convert non-European natives to Christianity. The reasons why Hegel regards this positively emerge in the passages on the 'geographical conditions of history' that address the 'new world'.

It does not matter that Mexico and Peru did indeed have significant civilisations, since they were of a feebler stock and are long gone. The new world has shown itself to be much feebler than the old world. . . . Some of the tribes of North America have disappeared and some have retreated and generally declined. (*HG* 192–93/93)

In 1830 to 1831 Hegel expanded on the new world, adding that African Negroes had to be brought to America to do the physical work of which the weak natives were incapable (*Hei* 59). For 'the Negroes are far more receptive to European culture than the Indians' (*VPG* 99/109), and 'it will still be a long time before the Europeans succeed in producing any genuine feeling of self [*Selbstgefühl*]' in indigenous Americans (*Hei* 59). Hegel praises the Church in Latin America for beginning to instil discipline in the natives; through these and other colonial efforts, the 'authentic Americans are . . . now beginning to educate themselves [*sich hineinzu-bilden*] in European culture' (*RH* 165/203). Incidentally, Hegel's points about indigenous Americans apply equally to Aboriginal Australians, since he includes 'New Holland' – that is, Australia – in the new world.

As for the old world, Hegel begins with Africa – the 'authentic' sub-Saharan Africa of the Negroes. He contends that the Negroes know no morality and practice slavery along with polygamy, cannibalism and other customs that embody total ignorance about freedom.

Another characteristic fact in reference to the Negroes is Slavery. Negroes are taken into slavery by Europeans and sold to America. Despite this, their lot is even worse in their own country, where an equally absolute slavery is present; for the overall foundation of slavery is that man has no consciousness of his freedom yet, and so sinks down to a mere thing, a worthless object. . . . Slavery is in and for itself *wrong* [*Unrecht*], for the essence of humanity is freedom; but for this man must first become mature [*reif*]. This is why the gradual abolition of slavery is therefore more appropriate and more right [*Richtigeres*] than its sudden removal. (*VPG* 113–17/125–29)

So: European enslavement of Africans involves a degree of moral wrong insofar as Africans have intrinsic capacities for freedom. Yet before enslavement, Africans did not know themselves to have that capacity; accordingly they enslaved and mistreated one another, and acted merely on their natural desires. The latter does not constitute freedom, Hegel insists; if I act from naturally given desires, I am still not determining for myself how to act. So slavery was, *relatively*, an improvement, because it 'matured' the Negroes to become aware of their freedom. 'One must educate the Negroes in their freedom by taming their naturalness' (*Hei* 70).

We can infer from Hegel's comments that slavery educates in several ways. (1) Those enslaved are subjected to European culture and ethical standards (from, e.g., *RH* 164–65/202–3). (2) Slavery imposes the discipline of work (e.g., *Hei* 59). In working, one learns to hold one's natural desires in check and thereby see oneself as capable of deliberating about or even rejecting them. (3) Work also instils an awareness of one's capacity to mould natural objects – a sense of 'achieving independence through one's own activity' (61). (4) Ironically, those enslaved thus acquire a sense

of private property (61) – partly by learning of European institutions of property and partly by imposing form on objects, thereby forming a sense of ‘possessing’ them which fosters an appreciation of property.⁹

In sum: ‘Slavery . . . is necessary at those stages where the state [and its people] has not yet arrived at rationality. It is an element in the transition to a higher stage’ (*HG* 197/100). Because slavery still has elements of wrong, though, the final step must be for slavery to end. However, Hegel cautions, slavery should not be suddenly abolished because it must end *after*, not before, the Negroes have been educated *through* it. ‘If slavery was altogether wrong, then the Europeans should give the slaves their freedom immediately; but in that way the most frightening consequences arise, as in the French colonies’ (*Hei* 70).

Hegel’s line of thought, then, takes in slavery and colonisation at once (understandably, since enslavement of Africans was fundamental to colonial America). Use of slavery in the colonies might be judged wrong because it violates the rights, equality and freedom of the slaves. But *through* being enslaved, slaves take steps forward in their consciousness of freedom which they could not otherwise make, for Africa is intrinsically pre-historical and unfree, so that freedom can come to Africans only from without. Analogously, one might think that colonisation was altogether wrong because it violated the rights, equality and freedom of indigenous peoples – but no, for before colonisation those people *had* no awareness of their freedom. They ‘ha[d] no sense of private property, of achieving independence through one’s own activity, or of securing one’s property through right’ (61). By being forced to labour and being disciplined spiritually by agencies such as the Christian Church, these people will eventually learn about their freedom. Until then, their subjection, while partially wrong insofar as it is subjection, is also partially right: it is, at least, an improvement on the natives remaining in their natural, wholly unfree, pre-colonial condition.

Colonialism is justified, on this view, because it spreads freedom to peoples who otherwise both lack it and have no native means of acquiring it. Moreover, the colonisers are justified in extirpating the indigenous cultures of native peoples – hence Hegel’s endorsement of the Christian clergy and missionaries ‘setting out to accustom the Indians to European culture and ethics [*Sitten*]’ (*RH* 164/202) – since those indigenous cultures embody unfreedom. We might wonder whether Hegel regards even the violence and slaughter that occurred during the colonisation of America as justified. He does acknowledge European, especially Spanish, violence towards indigenous Americans, but he is only overtly critical of this violence when the colonial project had, he says, degenerated into mere robbery (*Hei* 204). Moreover, he disguises the extent of European violence by running together indigenous Americans having been ‘destroyed and slaughtered’ (*untergegangen, verdrängt*), having disappeared (*verschwunden*), and having voluntarily withdrawn (*haben sich zurückgezogen*; *RH*

163/200–1; see also Parekh 2009). Hegel does not wholly denounce colonial violence because he thinks that Europe's conquest of America was based on a sound goal – spreading freedom and the culture of freedom to all people – and that the violence that was necessary for achieving that goal was justified. Hence Hegel *does* disapprove of violence when it served merely an unworthy goal – robbery.

This is congruent with Hegel's overall approach to violence in history, which he memorably calls a 'slaughterbench' (*Schlachtbank*). On his view, the consciousness of freedom advances through each civilisation, in turn establishing its pre-eminence by prevailing, culturally and militarily, over its predecessor. To the extent that war and violence are necessary for progress, they are justified (although 'justified' does not mean 'to be celebrated'). Even in these terms, though, much of the violence carried out by European colonisers – the decimation of many native American tribes, the Middle Passage – went beyond the minimum necessary to subject non-Europeans to colonial control along the way to their ultimate freedom. But likewise, in history generally, violence has regularly gone beyond the minimum necessary to propel progress. Such excesses are inevitable, an aspect of the inescapable contingency of human affairs. These excesses of violence are not justified; yet we can be reconciled to them as an inevitable, albeit non-ideal, concomitant of progress (*EVPG* 90/157). Presumably, Hegel thinks the same about the excesses of colonial violence.

Hegel's overall line of thought is that colonialism is not only justified but also necessary, as part of Europe's centuries-long process of realising freedom. A logical step in this process is to extend freedom to non-European peoples: after all, the European principle is that *all* are free. This extension can only occur, though, by passing through a stage of subjugating non-European peoples, since they have no native means of acquiring freedom: 'The [Negroes'] condition is incapable of any development or culture [*Entwicklung und Bildung*], and as we see them today, they have always been' (*RH* 190/234). And 'the Negroes . . . cannot move [*bewegen*] to any culture' (*Hei* 67). Likewise with indigenous Americans: America is new and young because it had no history until the Europeans arrived. These claims do not mean that Negroes and indigenous Americans cannot be educated; they can. But given their native ignorance of freedom, they cannot educate themselves but must be educated by Europeans, which requires that they first be subjected to European control.

Hegel's case for colonisation could be extended to the Orientals. He admits that unlike Africans and indigenous Americans the Oriental peoples do have an idea of freedom – that 'one is free' – but this idea remains so inadequate as to count as *unfreedom*. Hence, lacking belief in their own freedom, Oriental people cannot pursue any extensions or advancements of freedom and, without such pursuits to drive historical change, their societies remain ahistorical. Colonisation of these peoples for educa-

tive purposes would therefore be justified. As long as a people is at a low enough level to count as unfree and pre-historical, that people can advance only through having the European spirit imposed on it, for being pre-historical it has no native way to attain freedom. And indeed Hegel does say of India that: 'The English, or rather the East India Company, are the lords [*Herren*] of the land; for it is the necessary fate of Asiatic empires to be subjected [*unterworfen*] to Europeans; and China will also, some day, have to submit to this fate' (*VPG* 160/179).

We should not be misled by an apparently conflicting statement in the *Philosophy of Right*: 'The liberation of colonies . . . [is] of the greatest advantage to the mother state, just as the emancipation of slaves is of the greatest advantage to the master' (*PR* §248A, 269). Hegel's paradigm here is American independence: that is, the independence of what, he is explicit and adamant, is *colonial European America*, not *Native America* (*RH* 165–66/203–4). That is, America merits independence once its native populace is reduced or placed securely under European tutelage. This coheres with Hegel's approving reference to independent Haiti in the *Philosophy of Mind* (*EM* §393A, 40): he says that this is a Christian state that the Negroes could only found after having undergone long spiritual servitude. Once a people has been colonised sufficiently to acquire European culture, as in Haiti, then and only then does that people merit freedom.

Hegel's argument for colonialism is of the 'civilising mission' family. Effectively, his defence is that colonialism benefits most those who fare worst under it – colonised peoples – by civilising and bringing them freedom that they cannot access without passing through colonial subjection. For Hegel, colonialism and the advancement of freedom go hand in hand.

III. SAVING HEGEL FROM HIMSELF

Hegel's PWH implies that colonialism is required to further the realisation of universal freedom. Does this show that Hegel's conception of freedom is necessarily bound up with his pro-colonialism? If so, then – taking it that colonialism was in fact morally wrong – presumably his conception of freedom and its historical development must be rejected (although not necessarily freedom as such, of course).

But perhaps that would be to dismiss Hegel's thought too summarily, and thereby to do disservice not only to Hegel but also to anti-colonial and decolonising thought and activism, which, after all, has regularly drawn on Hegel, both directly – for example, when Frantz Fanon ([1952] 2008) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2012) use Hegel to critique colonialism – and indirectly, through Hegel's influence on Marxism and critical theory. Moreover, Hegel's thought may still offer further anti-colonial resources

which remain to be mined. We might therefore reasonably seek to separate Hegel's basic conception of freedom and its historicity from his Eurocentric narrative of history so that, when so separated, that basic conception tells *against* colonialism. Such a view – one that rescues Hegel from himself – is often adopted, more or less explicitly, by his interpreters.¹⁰ I now want to set out my own version of this type of view, although I will go on to complicate it in section IV.

The view is this. We can separate the essentials of Hegel's account of freedom from his concrete interpretation of the actual movement of history. Hegel was wrong and prejudiced when he dismissed Africans, indigenous Americans, and Orientals as unfree and incapable of coming to freedom on their own. Nevertheless, his basic account of what freedom is, including its necessary historical development, remains insightful. A better-informed judgement of non-European peoples would require a very different historical narrative. But that does not undermine Hegel's basic points that freedom develops historically in tandem with the consciousness of it, as embodied in different cultures and social institutions. When we separate these basic points from his actual narrative, we find that these points serve a progressive purpose, yielding grounds to reject colonialism.

This view dovetails with Hegel's claim that the human capacity for self-determination is *universal*, not confined to Europeans (see, e.g., *EVPG* 88/153–54). Admittedly, though, this starting point is only an abstract universal. Self-determination can be actualised only when one is conscious of one's capacity for it, and that requires social and cultural institutions, a whole way of life, that foster that consciousness. Such a way of life arose for the first time only in ancient Greece, for Hegel, so that *actualised* freedom does not obtain universally. Arguably, though, given his basic view of freedom and its historicity, Hegel could and should have interpreted *all* the world's regions as taking part in the gradual historical unfolding of social institutions that support freedom. Hegel does not do so because he denies that non-European peoples are conscious of freedom at all. Since non-European societies were not conscious of freedom even in the restricted ways that the Greeks and Romans were, the former had no basis for moving forward historically by further advancing an already partly realised freedom.

Thus, what underpins Hegel's denial of historicity to non-European peoples is his sharp division of European freedom from non-European unfreedom. That in turn is underpinned by his claim that the ancient Greeks made the decisive break from unfreedom into freedom. The Greeks, Hegel says, became the distinctive people they were out of a mixing within them of heterogeneous Oriental peoples and their cultures, but the Greeks *surmounted* or *overcame* (*überwinden*) this background (*HG* 374/318). By doing so, the Greeks created their 'free, beautiful' spirit. The

Greeks overcame their Oriental preconditions to 'make themselves' (372/316).

However, this view that the Greeks 'overcame' the Oriental world of unfreedom seems overstated by Hegel's own lights. For Hegel himself, the Greeks mark only the latest phase in a growing consciousness of freedom running from China through India to Persia and culminating in Egypt, Persia's most advanced province. Egypt is the hinge between Orient and Occident, in which the human soul's intrinsic capacity for freedom was almost grasped. But it was not quite grasped, for the soul was still not distinguished from animal nature, a distinction the Greeks went on to make (*HG* 334/268, 368/311). That lack of distinction is shown by the way the Egyptians modelled their gods and goddesses on animal species, often with animal heads. Yet for Hegel, the Greeks too stopped short of recognising that all people have an inherent capacity for freedom. They admitted freedom only to male, native-born slave owners. In that way their view of freedom remained intermingled with acceptance of natural contingency; that is, accidents of birth, sex, and geographical location (*EVPG* 87–88/152). So the difference between the Egyptian view (human freedom) is incompletely distinguished from (animal) nature – and the Greek view – human freedom is again incompletely distinguished from nature – appears to be a difference of degree, not kind.¹¹

Hegel's 'overcoming' idea therefore sits uncomfortably with his graduated portrayal of history's stages. That portrayal could be taken to show that belief in freedom is *not* exclusively European, since the Persians and Egyptians already had versions of that belief. To be sure, they were inadequate versions (for Hegel) – but then so was the Greeks'. And by extension, the Indians and Chinese likewise had versions of the belief in freedom – even more inadequate ones, since they attributed freedom only to 'one', not 'some' – but where that inadequacy still differentiates these peoples from the Greeks only by degree and not kind (more so in the Indian case since the 'one' is a whole caste). But if the Oriental peoples did have versions, however unsatisfactory, of the belief in freedom, then Hegel should not have denied that these peoples are historical. For if it is believed that someone is free, be it only 'one' ruler or caste, then others may claim and demand that same freedom for themselves, powering historical change.

Now, Hegel regards the Africans and indigenous Americans as lacking freedom more radically than the Orientals, yet contrary evidence was available to him. He might, for instance, have noted the Iroquois Confederacy of five (later six) Native American tribes, founded c. 1600 and dissolved c. 1800: a system of intra- and inter-tribal governance which 'maximized individual freedom while seeking to minimize excess governmental interference in people's lives' (Johansen 1982: 9), influencing the American Constitution. And Hegel embellished, exaggerated and at times outright distorted his sources on Africa so as to portray a people

without any respect for human life, freedom or rights – more so than the sources suggested, and they were already unreliable (see Bernasconi 1998).¹² The way was open to Hegel to recognise Africans and indigenous Americans as having views of freedom, even if he classed them as even less adequate than Oriental ones. With that those peoples would, like the Orientals, have had an entry to history.

Nonetheless, Hegel preserves his division of European freedom from non-European unfreedom by counting all the European stages as stages of freedom, down to its lowest level, and all the non-European stages as stages of unfreedom, right up to where unfreedom is almost freedom, but not quite. But the placement of this dividing line appears arbitrary. Consider, for example, Hegel's view that Hindus are not conscious of their own freedom because they fail to distinguish themselves, as human subjects, from nature (*HG* 256/172, 273–81/193–204). On Hegel's account, as we've just seen, there are ways that the ancient Greeks did not fully extricate human agency from nature either, so – on his own terms – it is not clear that the difference here is one of kind (history *versus* non-history, freedom *versus* unfreedom) rather than degree (more or less freedom, more or less far along the historical path towards full freedom).

Hegel could and, it seems, should have interpreted much of his material as evidencing how non-European peoples *have* grasped and practised freedom, albeit imperfectly. We might still find this revised Hegelian narrative objectionable, assuming that it ranks non-European conceptions of freedom as less advanced than European ones. Yet once it is admitted that non-European peoples *are* historical in principle, Hegel would also have to trace how historical advances unfolded in those societies, so re-interpreting his material once again. *Each* continent would have its own history of progression in consciousness of freedom, rather than non-European continents merely paving the way for Europe. The several continents would have histories of freedom that run in parallel, rather than corresponding to more or less advanced phases of a single historical line that culminates in modern Europe.

Neither of these revised Hegelian narratives – the single line or parallel lines versions – supports colonialism, not even the single line model on which non-European peoples' native levels of freedom are, although real, deficient compared to European ones. By recognising freedom, however unsatisfactorily, non-European cultures would still have the internal potential and motor to advance to greater freedom. In that case colonisation would not be necessary for non-European peoples' achieving freedom, and would not be justified as a necessary step in the realisation of universal freedom. Another plank in Hegel's justification of colonisation is that colonised peoples enjoyed no freedom pre-colonisation – so that, despite its abrogation of their freedom, colonisation did not worsen their position (and ultimately would improve it). But if these peoples *did* have a grasp of freedom, however imperfect, then colonisation stood to wors-

en their position. That risk is especially pronounced given Hegel's own perspective that some violence is necessary for colonisation and, given the role of contingency in human affairs, that that violence may well mushroom beyond the necessary minimum. Further, for Hegel colonisation requires the extirpation of native cultures; but if these are not cultures of unfreedom, then that extirpation is not justified. Apparently, then, Hegel should by his own lights have opposed colonialism, for his own philosophy generates a case against it.

IV. THE GREEKS, HISTORY AND SELF-LIBERATION FROM NATURE

The view just canvassed is that, despite the Eurocentrism and pro-colonialism of Hegel's substantial narrative in the PWH, his distinctive account of freedom, as developing historically through successive civilisations, does not in itself necessitate his substantive Eurocentrism and, when extricated from the latter, yields a case against colonialism. However, we can distinguish weaker and stronger versions of this view. More weakly: Hegel's basic account of freedom can be separated from his actual pro-colonialism, and so does not necessarily imply pro-colonialism, but contains anti-colonial possibilities as well as the pro-colonial possibilities that Hegel developed from it. More strongly: Hegel's basic account of freedom can be separated from his actual pro-colonialism and, when so separated, this account implies anti-colonialism and has an inherently anti-colonial direction. I endorse the weaker but not the stronger claim, and the weaker one only subject to a significant qualification: Hegel's basic account of freedom can be separated from his actual pro-colonialism, but not as easily as section III suggested. This is because Hegel's conception of freedom as self-determination has significant connections with his Eurocentrism.

In section III I suggested that Hegel's divisions Greeks/non-Greeks, free/unfree look arbitrary. But actually they are not. For Hegel:

Its [Greece's] principle is that self-conscious freedom steps forth. . . . [Regarding t]he unity of spirit with nature . . . the *specificity* of this unity [in the Greek case] is to be grasped. One unity is the Oriental, . . . consciousness immersed in nature; a [new kind of] harmony is now to be brought forth [by the Greeks] in which . . . *spirit* dominates. Spirit now determines nature, and this is a spiritual unity . . . (*Hei* 117; my emphases)

[The] fundamental characteristic [of the Greek spirit is] that the freedom of spirit is conditioned by and in essential relation to some natural stimulus. Greek freedom is stimulated by something other *and is free because it changes and produces the stimulus from out of itself (aus sich)*. (*VPG* 238/293; my emphasis)

Thus, the Greeks were free in that they were at home with themselves in the other, that is, nature. But this does not mean that the content of their practices and way of life was determined by natural givens such as the Greeks' given impulses. Rather, they *reshaped* these givens and so became at-home-with-themselves in them. In the Greek case, then, spirit 'determined' nature, whereas previously spirit had been immersed or absorbed (*versenkt*) in nature. This Greek determination of nature by spirit – spirit's investment of nature with meaning of its own – was made possible by a prior moment, first carried out by the Greeks, through which 'spirit is no longer immersed [*versenkt*] in nature, . . . [but] releas[es] itself from nature [*sich losmachend von der Natur*]' (HG 395–96/350). This moment in which the human spirit first releases or sets itself free from nature corresponds to the overcoming (*überwinden*) by the Greeks of their mixed ethnic heritage, a moment of overcoming through which they became able to remake that heritage for themselves, to make themselves. Hegel is explicit that none of the world's other peoples to that point had achieved this.

Even so, for Hegel, the Greeks exercised freedom always with respect to nature and existing givens in the world – re-shaping what they found already there, rather than creating a totally new world out of themselves. Hence the Greeks did not regard free individuals as being capable of adjudicating independently on the given natural and social world through their own reason, or of generating norms and principles purely through the exercise of their spiritual freedom. Or, as Hegel also puts it elsewhere, individual subjectivity was not differentiated from social substance, but the individual identified fully and unquestioningly with his or her social role, and there was no ground for independent social criticism (see Hardimon 1994). Connected with all this, the Greeks restricted freedom to some people only, effectively stipulating that only those with certain kinds of nature – male, free-born – or natural location – native Greek – had the power of self-determination. In these ways spirit's freedom remained 'conditioned', or limited (*bedingt*), by – although not immersed in – nature (and see HG 390/342).

However, these limitations contradicted the essence of self-determination as the Greeks understood it, as including a moment of overcoming or setting-oneself-free from nature, such that the power to overcome nature cannot possibly be limited *by* nature (or it would not be a power to overcome nature at all). Thus: 'The principle of Greek freedom already comprises the idea that even thought has to become free on its own account' (HG 416/380) – although the Greeks for a long time did not explicitly grasp or follow through on that implication. Nonetheless, in the end that contradiction was what made it possible for the Greeks' exclusion of some people from freedom, and their other ways of restricting freedom's scope, to come in for criticism. The criticism came with Socrates and the Sophists claiming that thought can adjudicate rationally on

what is and generate norms by itself (417/381–82). In that freedom of thought was thereby grasped fully independent of nature, it was also grasped as universal, at least in principle. In these two ways, ‘Thought . . . introduces an opposition [*Gegensatz*] [to the Greek mixture of freedom and nature] and asserts the validity of essentially rational principles’ (VPG 286/326).

For Hegel, then, Greek culture enabled rational criticism of what is, including of limited freedom, as no pre-Greek cultures did, just because the Greeks had established a root opposition between freedom and nature, whereas ‘in the Oriental states, in which a lack of opposition is present, no moral freedom can come about’ (286/326). Although the advent of rational critique brought on the demise of Greek culture, Europe was thereby also set on the path of transformative historical change. We see, then, why in his own terms Hegel says that non-European peoples could not advance critical claims for freedom’s extension but uncritically accepted the authority of their rulers – patriarchal authority in China, caste hierarchy and caste-based restrictions and rituals in India, and state power in Persia. Non-Europeans could not question such authorities because their cultures did not grasp freedom as including the moment of overcoming or setting-oneself-free from nature and the given. Because freedom was not grasped as including that moment of human separation *from* nature and the given, no contradiction was perceived in freedom being limited *by* nature; that is, confined to people of certain castes, or *by* given states of affairs; for example, customary authority and ritual. Non-Europeans lacked a critical motor to drive social change, hence lacked history proper – or indeed freedom as properly distinguished from unfreedom.

So, for Hegel, there *is* a genuine difference in kind, not merely degree, between the Greek and post-Greek European world on the one hand and the non-European world on the other; the Europe/non-Europe divide is not arbitrary but has a philosophical rationale. For while the Greek view of freedom was, like non-European views, limited and inadequate, the former was more advanced in one key respect – the inclusion in freedom of a primary moment of ‘overcoming’ nature – which enabled the Greek and post-Greek European world to become self-critical, self-revising, and so historical. This is what motivates Hegel to identify Greek and post-Greek European views as views of freedom, however limited, whereas non-European views that might *prima facie* look like views of freedom are still actually modes of *unfreedom*.

Once again, we might object that non-Europeans *have* at times construed freedom as including this moment of overcoming nature. Even on Hegel’s account, Hindus appreciate the human power to abstract from the world in thought. He maintains, though, that this is merely an intellectual withdrawal and that when it comes to practical agency Hindus see human agency as immersed in, and not including any moment of self-

freeing-from, nature (see, e.g., VPG 158/176–77). In response we could, with Jaspal Peter Sahota (2016), agree that in classical Indian thought there has been a tendency to locate human agency within nature but argue, against Hegel, that this does not constitute a real absence of freedom but rather a different conception of freedom. We might then say that because these – and other – non-European views *were* still views of freedom, those views were still sufficient to motivate social criticism, and hence place non-European peoples in history, even without the element of overcoming nature. However, such a position would take us further away from Hegel's own account of the historicity of freedom, according to which, as we have seen, that moment of overcoming nature, uniquely new in ancient Greece, *is* crucial in powering historical progression.

Hegel's basic account of freedom and its historicity thus has more extensive and significant connections with his Eurocentrism than I suggested in section III. In particular, that account connects with Hegel's denial that non-European peoples are historical – that is, can come to freedom on their own – and hence with his case for colonialism, as the only route along which those peoples can reach freedom. These connections suggest that, after all, we cannot straightforwardly take up Hegel's account of freedom and its historicity while sloughing off his pro-colonialism. This is not to say that we cannot separate out these parts of his thought at all. But rescuing Hegel from himself is set to be a complicated process, not quick or straightforward. To the extent that such a rescue is possible, Hegel's pro-colonialism cannot rightly be counted as necessary to his thought or system. Yet his pro-colonialism does have extensive and deep-seated connections with his other views – enough to show that it is not the case that Hegel should not have endorsed colonialism by his own standards. Rather, he did and could endorse it coherently in his own terms, although other, anti-colonialist possibilities were also available within his own terms which he could have developed.

So the claim that Hegel's account of freedom is inherently anti-colonial is unduly strong. Through his understanding of freedom as involving spirit extricating itself from nature, that account has sustained links with his Eurocentrism and so his pro-colonialism. We can nonetheless envisage various manoeuvres by which to maintain that freedom develops historically for all the world's peoples; for example, by saying that they have several conceptions of freedom where freedom *can*, but does not have to, include self-liberation from nature. Then ancient Greece would initiate one historical pathway to freedom, but not the only one. Even so, Hegel's own account of freedom and its historicity does not inherently drive us to make these intellectual manoeuvres, but only permits them. In sum, if Hegel's view of freedom does not necessarily imply pro-colonialism, neither is it inherently anti-colonial. We *can* make distinctions and qualifications within his thought so as to yield anti-colonial conclusions, but this is only one of several possible lines of development of which his

thought admits, another being its elaboration into the Eurocentric and pro-colonial system that Hegel in fact forged.

There is a broader moral. We – that is, the heirs of the European heritage that runs through philosophy into modern political thought – should not let this heritage off the hook too easily. This heritage, including Hegel's thought, has been implicated in colonialism in various ways. To be sure, because it extols and articulates the values of freedom and equality, this heritage also furnishes conceptual resources for critiquing colonialism and giving support to anti-colonial struggles, and anti-colonial thinkers and activists have drawn on modern European ideas for this purpose. For example, the Haitian revolutionaries declared that they were acting in allegiance to the emancipatory goals of the French Revolution. This might lead us to suppose that the European political legacy is intrinsically liberatory, and that theorists in the European tradition – Hegel included – have only ever justified colonialism due to unfortunate prejudices that led them to go back on their own principles.

I believe that taking that view exculpates our predecessors too quickly and leaves us at risk of inadvertently embracing ideas inherited from these predecessors which actually have deep-rooted internal connections with Eurocentric and pro-colonial attitudes. This is not to say that we should or could repudiate these ideas outright. Rather, in view of their connections with colonialism, we need to think carefully and critically about how far to take these inherited ideas forward and how we might do so differently. My aim has been to help us cultivate this caution in Hegel's case by acknowledging that, while his thought harbours anti-colonial possibilities, it also has real and tenacious links with colonialism of which we should remain mindful.

NOTES

1. Contributors include Bernasconi (1998, 2007, 2016), Bonetto (2006), de Laurentiis (2014), McCarney and Bernasconi (2003), Mowad (2013), Parekh (2009), Purtschert (2010) and Tibebe (2010).

2. However, see Buck-Morss (2000), and – for highly critical accounts – Dussel ([1992] 1995, 1993), Guha (2002), and Tibebe (2010). Also relevant are Bird-Pollan (2014) (on Hegel and Fanon), Brennan 2013 (on Hegel's influence on post-colonialism), Buchwalter (2009) (defending Hegel against charges of Eurocentrism), Monahan (2017) (*Creolizing Hegel*), and Serequeberhan (1989) (on colonialism in the *Philosophy of Right*).

3. Ranajit Guha identifies another argument for colonialism in the *Philosophy of Right*, from the 'rights' that Hegel claims civilised nations have with respect to less advanced ones (PR §351, 376). These rights, Guha argues, are 'rights of conquest', noting Hegel's praise for British military victories over India led by Robert Clive (1725–1774), whose conquests established the East India Company's rule over Bengal and other Indian states. See Guha (2002: 43–44) and PR §372A, 364 and 474 note 1.

4. Hegel lectured on the PWH in 1822 to 1823, 1824 to 1825, 1826 to 1827, 1828 to 1829 and 1830 to 1831. His manuscripts of the Introduction from 1822 (rev. 1828) and 1830 to 1831 survive, as do many transcripts, between them covering every course.

Some, such as de Laurentiis (2014), are wary of directly attributing to Hegel's views, notably on race, expressed only in the transcripts. I agree that we should disambiguate sources, but where multiple independently written transcripts converge, as do – extensively – several transcripts of the PWH, we may take them to be reliable. Accordingly, I refer to: Hegel's own manuscripts for the introduction (*EVPG*) and the integrated text of the 1822 to 1823 course composed primarily from Hotho's and Griesheim's transcripts (*HG*). Since the German critical edition of the transcripts remains incomplete, for materials on Hegel's later courses I have used Heimann's transcript of 1830 to 1831 whenever possible (*Hei*), otherwise the composite texts produced by (1) Karl Hegel and reproduced as *Werke 12* as translated by Sibree (*VG*) and (2) by Georg Lasson/Johannes Hoffmeister (Hegel 1988) as translated by Nisbet (*RH*).

5. For more on contingency in Hegel, see, *inter alia*, Burbidge (2007: esp. ch. 1). Burbidge stresses the extent to which Hegel 'takes the contingencies of history seriously' (2007: 9).

6. For Hegel, 'nature . . . is indeed a rational system, operating in its own distinct element' (*RH* 44/50). The division into continents is rational in that different natural features and their varieties – mountains and plains, lands and seas, and their fusion and differentiation – each find full embodiment in different continents (*EM* §393 and R, 40–41). In a sense, then, non-Europeans are subject to reason and rational progression insofar as nature imposes it on them from the outside rather than by exercising rational thought for themselves. This coheres with Hegel's view that these peoples are immersed in nature, out of which only Europeans can lift them; see below.

7. This recalls Hegel's derivation of time from space in the *Philosophy of Nature*, a derivation that positions time as more advanced than space (*EN* §254, §257, 1: 223, 229).

8. This is evident from, e.g., Hegel's discussion of the colonisation of America; see Section II.

9. Hegel connects formation with possession (*PR* §56, 85–86), albeit in the very different context of modern European societies in which private property is institutionalised. I leave unexplored here how far his ideas about slavery's educative power may be informed by his lord/bondsman dialectic.

10. For instance, some interpreters defend Hegel against charges of Eurocentrism and racism; see, e.g., Buchwalter (2009), Houlgate ([1991] 2005: 35–37), McCarney in McCarney and Bernasconi (2003), and Mowad (2013). Others stress Hegel's founding importance for anti-colonial thought (Brennan 2013). And numerous readers of Hegel as a thinker of freedom (e.g., Patten 1999) see no need to discuss his position on colonialism, presumably on the grounds that the latter is a merely accidental, avoidable part of his thought from which his essential views on freedom can be extracted.

11. For Hegel, the Greeks were greatly influenced by the Egyptians, whose influence they nonetheless overcame. Here he accepts what Martin Bernal calls the 'ancient model' of the Greeks' origins, a model to which the Greeks themselves adhered; later-nineteenth-century Europeans instead espoused an 'Aryan model', on which Greek culture proper arose from northern invaders driving out earlier Egyptian and Phoenician influences (Bernal [1987] 1991). Bernal argues that the Aryan model had Eurocentric motivations: if the Greeks, the supposed originators of Europe's distinctive culture, were actually the Egyptians' heirs, then, given that Egypt is within Africa, the Europe/Africa divide would crumble. A further complicating factor is whether the Egyptians were seen as *black* Africans. Bernasconi (2007) argues that Hegel thought so, as did most other Europeans of his time. Later the Egyptians' racial status was changed – to Mediterranean (i.e., Caucasian) – to hold up the divide between Europe-as-white, and Africa-as-black. Bernasconi suggests that Hegel himself dealt with the potential anomaly – of highly cultured black Africans giving much to the Greeks – by making the Egypt/Greece transition the site of the key conceptual transition from unfreedom to freedom, nature to spirit (2007: 212–13). This ties in with my argument in section IV that Hegel actually *did* have grounds, on his own terms, to construe the apparently gradual Egypt/Greece transition as actually being a sharp divide.

12. Bernasconi (2016) has recently shown how Hegel likewise distorted his sources on China, to the detriment of the Chinese.

FOURTEEN

Hegel and Twentieth-Century French Philosophy

Hegel's thought has had immense influence on twentieth-century French philosophy and intellectual life. Having held little significance for French philosophers in the early 1900s, Hegel's thought burst onto the intellectual scene in the 1930s through, above all, the lectures on Hegel given from 1933 to 1939 by the Russian émigré Alexandre Kojève. Kojève placed the master/slave dialectic at the heart of Hegel's philosophy, along with exciting ideas about labour, recognition and the end of history. Kojève's lectures were attended by, amongst others, Raymond Aron, Georges Bataille, the surrealist André Breton, Jacques Lacan, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, all of whom took forward aspects of Kojève's ideas. Those ideas also became widely known through Kojève's 1939 commentary on the master/slave dialectic in the journal *Mesures* and the subsequent publication of selections from his lectures in 1947 as *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*.¹ Becoming important to Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre, Kojève's ideas fed into their key formulations of existentialism. Overall, Kojève's ideas decisively stamped virtually every area of twentieth-century French thought: psychoanalysis; religious thought; international relations theory; phenomenology and existentialism; and anti- and post-colonial thought, by way of their founding figure Frantz Fanon.

In the 1960s the ascendancy that Kojève had given to Hegelian ideas began to wane with the rise of post-structuralism. Its key representatives, Foucault and Derrida, sought to escape what they saw as the all-pervasive power of Hegelian thought. Derrida addresses the difficulty of departing from Hegel, any critique of Hegel being liable to fall into a standpoint that Hegel has already surpassed and incorporated into his system. As Foucault puts it, 'Our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for

us' (Foucault [1971] 1972: 235). This post-1960s preoccupation with the dual necessity and difficulty of overcoming Hegel shows how far French thought had become permeated by Hegelianism. Even Gilles Deleuze, who detested Hegel, could not ignore his thought but set out to craft a non-Hegelian philosophy that revolves around difference rather than the identity that Deleuze saw Hegel as championing.²

An attempted chapter-length overview of the countless elements in Hegel's French reception would inevitably be superficial.³ Instead I'll concentrate on one strand in this reception which I consider especially fruitful. This strand proceeds, through Kojève and Sartre, to the rethinking of the 'struggle for recognition' developed by Beauvoir and Fanon, who conceive of sexual and racial hierarchies as deformations in human relations of recognition. The struggle for recognition should be open to all, but women (for Beauvoir) and black people (for Fanon) have unjustly been excluded from this struggle. Thus, Hegel's ideas, filtered through Kojève and Sartre, gave Beauvoir and Fanon theoretical resources for conceptualising sexual and racial hierarchies.

Beauvoir and Fanon distinguish these hierarchies from biological differences – for these hierarchies obtain within our relations to one another as conscious subjects, not mere biological organisms – and also from the economic class relations that Marxists had long insisted have moral and explanatory priority. Beauvoir and Fanon establish that racial and sexual hierarchies, unlike economic inequalities, are primarily problems of recognition, not redistribution.⁴ Even so, these hierarchies are no less damaging than economic injustice, since – in Beauvoir's and Fanon's existential-Hegelian framework – it is fundamental to human existence for us to affirm ourselves as free subjects and demand that others recognise us as such. To be prevented from doing so is to be unjustly excluded from full human existence. Thanks to the French reception of Hegel, then, racial and sexual hierarchies could be conceived as distinct forms of oppression that need to be understood and challenged in their own right. Besides being innovative philosophically, this position provided theoretical support for the movements for women's liberation, anti-racism and decolonisation that became driving political forces in the 1960s.

But has the politics of existential-Hegelianism been superseded by the anti-Hegelianism of post-1960s French thought? To address this concern, I'll consider how the 'French feminist' Luce Irigaray, an important member of the post-structuralist generation, takes up and transforms Hegel's notion of mutual recognition, urging that differently sexed individuals should learn to accept and recognise one another in their irreducible difference. Thus, positive engagement with Hegel as a thinker of recognition – following Kojève – informs Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference, which is one instance of recent French thinking about difference and otherness. This indicates that Hegel, specifically as read in light of

Kojève, remains important for contemporary French philosophy, not merely as an irritant but also as a positive interlocutor.

It may be objected that all this has little to do with the 'actual Hegel'. Kojève has been accused of distorting Hegel; Beauvoir, Fanon and Irigaray take Hegel's ideas in new directions rather than provide faithful exegesis of his texts. Still, their ideas have *some* relation to those expressed by Hegel, not least because the difficulty of his texts opens them to widely varying interpretations. Moreover, it is precisely by recasting Hegel's ideas that Beauvoir, Fanon and Irigaray have forged from them critical accounts of gender and race relations which are a lasting achievement of the French reception of Hegel.

I. KOJÈVE AND SARTRE

The essentials of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel are these. Kojève translates the lord/bondsman (*Herr/Knecht*) relation as that between *maître* and *esclave* – master and slave. Seeing this relation as the pivot on Hegel's thought turns, Kojève begins his reading of Hegel with 'desire' (*Begierde*) in *Phenomenology* chapter IV. For Kojève, we have here a human being submerged in mere biological life: still essentially an animal, with merely animal desires to consume and eat living beings. The transition to truly human existence begins as, in consuming and thus destroying living objects, we are negating mere life. We start to establish that we are not at life's mercy as animals are but 'go beyond' life in the name of values that we prioritise over self-preservation (Kojève 1969: 5). Thus, we begin to stand out from life as free agents who transcend the given (*transcender le donné*).

Already we see a major departure from Hegel: Kojève wrests life and desire out of the epistemological and metaphysical context in which Hegel addresses them. For Hegel, life arises from the preceding shape of consciousness, 'understanding'. The understanding comes to conceive of its object – laws of nature and the phenomena that they generate – as 'infinity', an unceasing process whereby laws endlessly unfold into manifold appearances (*PhG* #161, 99). This generative process is 'the simple essence of life' (#162, 100). The understanding now sees this real movement as being essentially the same as the intellectual movement that *it* is making in explaining phenomena from the laws underlying them. Consciousness thereby becomes *self-consciousness* (#164, 102), for in relating to the outer world as life it is relating to something that it sees as having the same essential character as itself. This brings us to desire, in which self-consciousness consumes and destroys living beings in the effort to realise their essential identity with it and thus confirm the truth of its metaphysical standpoint (#167, 105).

By extracting life and desire from this epistemological and metaphysical setting, Kojève frees these concepts from Hegel's Absolute Idealism and from the manifold interpretive difficulties that surround the *Phenomenology*.⁵ In this way Kojève makes Hegel's concepts more accessible – as Kojève does, too, by resituating those concepts as elements of an account of human existence. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* begins: 'Man is Self-Consciousness [*Conscience de soi*]. He is conscious of himself, conscious of his human reality and dignity; and it is in this that he is essentially different from animals' (Kojève 1969: 3).⁶ Our vocation, for Kojève, is to be human and *not* merely animal, natural beings. Whereas for Hegel the desiring subject seeks to prove its *identity* with life, for Kojève that subject seeks to prove that it *transcends* nature. In place of the metaphysical complexities of Absolute Idealism, then, we get immediate, practical concerns with freedom and human agency.

Kojève continues by following the broad steps of Hegel's narrative in *Phenomenology* chapters IV and IVA, within which desire gives way to the struggle for recognition. However, Kojève fills in the logic connecting these steps in his own way, often different from Hegel's. For Kojève, desire is unsatisfactory because even in negating living beings I remain absorbed with them and dependent upon them (1969: 4–5). To realise my humanity I must obtain recognition of it from other human beings who, being human, are uniquely qualified to give this recognition. But to obtain recognition of my humanity as it differs from my animality, I must risk my life. 'The supreme value for an animal is its animal life. . . . Human Desire, therefore, must win out over this desire for preservation. In other words, man "proves" himself human only if he risks his (animal) life for the sake of his human Desire' (7). By risking my life I try to prove to the other that I value prestige and recognition over life. But the other, desiring recognition from me in turn, takes the same risks. Thus provoking one another, we find ourselves embroiled in a fight to the death.

Unless this fight ends with either or both parties dead, eventually one subject concedes that it puts life first. That loser becomes slave, while the victor becomes master. The master, having proven his status as a free agent, decides on the slave's actions, which are all forms of labour performed on material objects to adapt them to the master's desires. The master will not deign to do this work but only to enjoy, consume and destroy its products. The slave, conversely, has shown that he is suited to work, for 'by the refusal of risk, [he] ties himself to the things on which he depends' (17). He thus has to labour on material objects in their intractable reality.

Overarching Kojève's differences from Hegel on the detail of the master/slave dialectic, Kojève also departs from Hegel by giving that dialectic direct social and political significance. Hegel leaves us uncertain how the master/servant dialectic is to be related to the actual social world, but for Kojève matters are clear: master/slave relations really obtain throughout

human history. Marx saw human history as the history of class struggles and relations of class exploitation. Kojève, under Marx's influence, interprets those class relations, in which one group labours on behalf of a ruling group, as master/slave relations in his sense: 'History [is] the history of the interaction between Mastery and Servitude: the historical "dialectic" is the "dialectic of Master and slave"' (9). By giving the master/slave dialectic this direct historical application, Kojève made it seem bold, radical and relevant to the cause of revolution.

Just as Marx saw the progression to socialism taking place by the revolutionary agency of the working class, Kojève sees the slaves as the collective agent of historical progress. 'If idle Mastery is an impasse, laborious Slavery . . . is the source of all human, social, historical progress. History is the history of the working Slave' (20). The goal of this historical progression is reciprocal recognition. Slaves must become recognised as the agents into which they have already made themselves by their labour; and masters cannot be adequately recognised by those – the slaves – to whom they deny human status. History advances, then, as slaves progressively do 'impose themselves' on the masters. The French Revolution was a crucial milestone, initiating the modern era in which universal recognition of each by all is becoming reality. When this process is completed, history will end – for history is nothing more than the history of master/slave relations and their overcoming (57, 70, 135, 148).

Kojève no doubt found inspiration for these claims in elements of Hegel's work, such as his view that Christian Europe is the third and last main historical stage in which, at last, all are becoming recognised as free. But Kojève's claims add up to a position sufficiently removed from Hegel's Idealism that some have accused Kojève of simply foisting his own views onto Hegel (e.g., Rockmore 2013: 325). In particular, what distinguishes Kojève's views is that he regards self-consciousness, negativity and the desire and struggle for recognition as essential and universal features of human existence, consequently elevating master/slave relations, too, into a historical constant. In contrast, for Hegel, these are only *stages* in the much broader progression of consciousness that the *Phenomenology* narrates. Desire, recognition and master/servant relations become superseded by later shapes of consciousness, into which they are partially incorporated (for example, private property owners reciprocally recognise one another, according to Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right*). Thus, Hegel does not give desire, recognition or the master/servant relation the organising centrality that they have in Kojève's thought. Nonetheless, those concepts do have their place in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, and as such Kojève's account of free human existence remains a form of Hegelianism. Moreover, this form of Hegelianism not only allies Hegel with the cause of human emancipation but also challenges the economic bias of conventional Marxism by reframing relations of economic exploitation as resting on a prior distortion in relations of recognition. This move would

make it possible for Beauvoir and Fanon to pay theoretical attention to forms of sexual and racial oppression that are not primarily or exclusively economic.

They did so, though, by way of Sartre. Although an adequate account of how Sartre takes up and modifies Hegel's ideas through the lenses forged by Kojève is beyond the scope of this chapter,⁷ I want to note a few key points that bear on the transition from Kojève to Beauvoir and Fanon.

Sartre substantially assesses Hegel's *Phenomenology* IVA in *Being and Nothingness* and provides a critical reworking of the idea of the struggle for recognition ([1943] 1958: 235–44, 252–303). This is in Sartre's discussion of shame and the example of the man trying to spy on others through the keyhole of a door. Suddenly hearing footsteps, he suddenly undergoes a 'radical metamorphosis' (260) to be aware of himself as looked at from the other's perspective, in an immediate 'recognition [*re-connaissance*] of the fact that I *am* indeed that object that the other is looking at and judging' (261). I view myself from the outside, thus as an object. 'For the other, I *am leant* over the keyhole as this tree *is bent* by the wind' (262). I am reduced to a given thing that bears the properties that the other assigns me. This experience of objectification is the most basic way that I encounter the other:

He is the one who looks at me and at whom I am not yet looking, the one who delivers me to myself . . . without revealing himself, the one who is present to me in that he looks at me (*me vise*) and not in that he is looked at; he is the pole, concrete and out of reach . . . of the flow of the world toward another world. (269)

Far from being primarily perceived as an object of any kind, the other is primarily the one to whom I appear as an object and who therefore strips me of my freedom. Here then is Sartre's reworking of the struggle for recognition. Under the other's look, I become a kind of slave. I am not literally forced to work for the other, but now 'I am a slave to the degree that I am dependent in my being . . . [on] a freedom that is not mine and that is the very condition of my being' (267). I was a free agent absorbed in my projects, as when spying through the keyhole – roughly as, for Hegel, self-consciousness was initially focused on 'superseding the other that presents itself to consciousness as an independent . . . object' (*PhG* #174, 109). But then, for Sartre, I encounter the other, and my freedom is taken away. For Hegel, though, that is true only of those who become enslaved after defeat in the life-and-death struggle. In contrast for Sartre, my transformation into an object occurs immediately after I encounter another subject.

However, Sartre reintroduces a version of the life-and-death struggle by claiming that each of us resists our objectification and fights back against the other. I look back at the other, reasserting that I am an agent

engaged in projects by placing the other in my frame of reference and spatial field. I thereby affirm that I am no mere thing but one who exercises negativity (language reminiscent of Hegel and Kojève). Yet the other in turn reasserts himself against me, and we become locked in struggle, each endeavouring to establish his agency at the other's expense.

Thus, first, Sartre has changed the order in which events unfolded in Hegel's narrative. For Hegel, the life-and-death struggle preceded the reduction of the defeated party to a servant. Conversely, for Sartre, the reduction of each subject to a slave *prompts* a version of the life-and-death struggle as each subject resists this reduction. Moreover, second, the struggle for Sartre need not literally be to the death, just as the slavery in question need not be literal slavery. Sartre has transposed Hegel's narrative away from social structures and onto everyday intersubjective relations.

Sartre's third difference from Hegel and from Kojève is to paint the struggle as endless and irresolvable. Sartre sees no possibility of each subject reciprocally recognising the other, because in the structure of human existence the other primarily steals my freedom. This is reflected in the order of events in Sartre's narrative. I primarily encounter the other as the one who objectifies me, thus straightaway recognising the other *as* an agent – but the agent of my objectification. I then move *from* recognising the other's agency to re-asserting my own agency. Thus, Sartre's narrative closes off the space in which mutual recognition might come in to resolve the conflict. Sartre is pessimistic about human relations as Hegel and Kojève are not, seeing no prospect of a harmonious post-historical society. This pessimism informs Sartre's well-known remark 'Hell is other people', voiced by his character Garcin in the 1944 play *No Exit*, initially called *The Others* (Sartre 1989: 47).

That said, in certain ways Sartre is more optimistic than Hegel or Kojève – a fourth point of difference. For Sartre, a fundamental reciprocity structures relations between subjects: each objectifies the other, each resists. Reciprocal *recognition*, as a stable and harmonious arrangement, may be ruled out; but reciprocal struggling and continual reversals of power are ruled in. We are all in the same condition of *ambiguity* here, as Beauvoir calls it – an ambiguous, unstable combination of subjection and freedom. This, after all, creates the possibility for a kind of ethics in which we recognise our reciprocal ambiguity, our inability ever to achieve sheer freedom without subjection or to be permanently reduced to sheer subjection devoid of any freedom (Beauvoir [1947] 1964). To be sure, we cannot have harmonious mutual recognition in which all adversity is reconciled away. But we can potentially have a more adversarial or agnostic kind of recognition in which we embrace the inevitability of the struggle, at least on an inter-personal or inter-subjective level.

Fifth, although Sartre says that the other's look strips me of my transcendence, ultimately his ontology entails that the other cannot ever

deprive me of my freedom. Has Sartre thus jettisoned Hegel's insight that human agents can only fully achieve freedom by receiving recognition from other agents? Not entirely, for Sartre accepts that my non-recognition from others who objectify me constitutes a denial of my (nonetheless persisting ontological) freedom, which I therefore seek to reclaim by re-asserting myself. When the other objectifies me, I always can fight back. Consequently, even a (literal) slave always remains free to decide what attitude to take to his slave-master, for 'man cannot be sometimes slave and sometimes free; he is wholly and forever free or he is not free at all' (Sartre 1958: 441).⁸ Yet this leaves it unclear how, for Sartre, any individual or group can ever be oppressed. Sartre wanted, though, to acknowledge and theorise oppression. Applying his account of competing looks to anti-Semitism, he claimed that anti-Semites strive to fix Jews permanently in the position of those looked-at, never allowing Jews to look back ([1946] 1965). This is a promising approach to oppression as consisting in the fixation of a group's members in the position of those who are looked-at and objectified. But given Sartre's ontology of freedom, it is unclear how any individual or group ever can be fixed in that position.

This problem gives Beauvoir the task of taking forward Sartre's account of the master-slave dialectic of everyday lived relationships, while transforming this account to recognise group oppression. In short, the task is to recognise that members of some groups can be fixed in subjection socially even whilst ontologically they remain in the same ambiguous condition as their oppressors. A better set of social arrangements would allow everyone to recognise and live out their shared ambiguity rather than distributing its two poles asymmetrically and unequally across different groups.⁹

II. BEAUVOIR

One of Beauvoir's achievements in *The Second Sex* is to provide a theoretical account of women's oppression using Hegel's master/slave dialectic – which, following Kojève, she locates at the heart of Hegel's thought. Her whole reading of Hegel is informed by Kojève; she did not attend his lectures but read his work with great interest.¹⁰

For Beauvoir, women have been defined as men's Other across history, as they still are today.

Masculine and feminine appear symmetrical only as a matter of form, as on . . . legal papers. . . . [But actually] man represents both the positive and the neutral, to the point where in French we speak of *men* to designate human beings in general . . . [while] woman appears as the negative. ([1949] 1953: 15)

Necessarily, to be the negative or Other (*autre*) is to be Other *from* something else that counts as the norm, point of reference or comparison. Thus, women are always understood in negative relation to men – as men's inferior counterpart, opposite, shadowy underside, and more.

For Beauvoir, this status took root during the early period of hunter-gatherer societies. Without birth control, Beauvoir says, women in this period had to spend nearly all their time on childbearing, childbirth, breast-feeding and infant care, while men hunted. By hunting men were able to lay claim to transcendence. Following Kojève, by transcendence Beauvoir means going beyond the circumstances already given to us by creating and positing new values. In doing so, we establish our status as free existents who steer our own lives. By risking their lives in hunting men established that they were free to overcome (to 'transcend') the goal of individual self-preservation that is given to us in our biology. Men instead privileged new, self-created values – conquering nature, securing the clan's future, winning glory and prowess, and so on. Men *decided* what to value and that they valued these values more than mere life. Meanwhile, being exhaustively occupied in gestation and child-caring, women could only maintain life – a goal supplied to women by their reproductive bodies without their having any choice about it. In Beauvoir's terms, women were confined to *immanence* – the status of merely reproducing and not surpassing life. Beauvoir thus takes up Kojève's contrast between risking life and merely preserving life and aligns it with the division of labour between men and women in nomadic times.

In these conditions men began to position women as the Other – inevitably so, because no individual or group can assert its free agency without opposing another individual or group.

No group ever defines itself as One without immediately positing the Other that opposes it. If three travelers are by chance united in the same train compartment, that is enough to make all the other travelers become vaguely hostile 'others'. For the villager, all those not belonging to his village are 'strangers' and suspect; to the native of a country, the inhabitants of countries not his own appear as 'foreigners' . . . Things become clear . . . if, following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility towards any other consciousness; the subject can only posit himself by opposing himself – he claims to affirm himself as the essential and to constitute the other as inessential, as object. (17)

Although Beauvoir imputes to Hegel the thesis that subjectivity requires antagonism, for Hegel that is true only of subjectivity at the developmental stage of self-consciousness; it is Sartre who maintains that subjectivity generally requires antagonism. Sartre's influence is also visible in Beauvoir's claim that ordinarily the other fights back, re-asserting its

agency: 'The other consciousness . . . opposes to the first a reciprocal claim'.

In hunter-gatherer times women could not do that. Absorbed in immanence, they could not convincingly oppose men's othering of them by reciprocating with claims to free agency. In sum, women could not struggle for recognition. Beauvoir contrasts their position with that of Hegelian slaves as she understands it (96). Slaves have lost the struggle for recognition, conceding that they favour life, and so they have been assigned their position as labourers, their proven attachment to mere life qualifying them only to work for the satisfaction of our material needs as living beings. Women do not lose the struggle in that way because they never even participate in it.¹¹ Consequently women can only submit, unresisting, to being positioned as other to men.

Beauvoir, then, does not simply apply Hegel's master/slave dialectic to man/woman relations. Rather, she uses Hegel's narrative as Kojève reconstructed it to identify an alternative pathway along which recognition relations can become structured, not into master/slave relations but into a form where one group – women – becomes othered by failing ever to resist objectification. By returning to Hegel and Kojève, Beauvoir can thus explain, as Sartre could not, how a group can become fixed in the position of other despite everyone's fundamental existential freedom. To claim freedom, one must be in a position to perform the actions that support this claim, which in early conditions meant risking life (as per Kojève). But the nomadic division of labour prevented women from doing that. This is 'how it is, then, that . . . reciprocity has not been established between the sexes, that one of the terms has affirmed itself as the only essential one . . . [and] that women have not contested male sovereignty' (18).

Once women had become Other, a whole culture gradually accumulated that portrays women from men's perspectives – across myth, religion, art, science, and more. Positioned in contrast to men, women have been cast as beings of nature not culture, puppets of biology not agents of their own existence, and thus suited neither for the public sphere nor the life of the mind. These accreted ideas keep women in the place of Other today, although the industrial and technological advances of modernity mean that risking life is no longer necessary for demonstrating free agency. Instead, one proves agency nowadays by labouring – broadly following Kojève's vision of modernity in which labour and recognition are becoming universalised. For Beauvoir, this change from risk to labour potentially allows women to assert their agency at last, given the parallel development of abortion and contraception which can free women to participate fully in paid work. However, entrenched ideas and myths about women's nature often continue to keep women in the private sphere. Thus, even today, Beauvoir concludes, women are often in no position to lay claim to the free agency that they do in fact possess. This is

no moral fault on their part. Rather, women's exclusion from the struggle for recognition is 'inflicted upon' them and as such 'it takes the shape of frustration and oppression' (29).

III. FANON

At the same time as Beauvoir was theorising women's oppression but independently of her, Fanon likewise took up Hegel's master-slave dialectic, which he too read by way of Kojève and Sartre, to analyse racial oppression in *Black Skin, White Masks*.¹² Its chapter 'The Black Man and Hegel' (*Le Nègre et Hegel*) asks how far Hegel's master-slave dialectic applies to white/black relations.¹³ Sartre's and Kojève's influences are apparent in how Fanon construes Hegel's conception of recognition:

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose himself on another man in order to be recognized by him . . . [First] self-consciousness reaches the experience of *desire*, . . . It agrees to risk life, and consequently threatens the other in his bodily being. . . . This risk implies that I surpass life [*dépasse la vie*] towards a supreme good . . . I demand that I be taken into consideration on account of my desire. I am not merely here-now, locked in thinghood, I am for elsewhere and for something else. . . . I pursue something other than life. ([1952] 2008: 191–93)

For Fanon, the human condition is for individuals to struggle for recognition adversarially. To be truly recognised, one must win recognition from the other through struggle rather than being granted recognition without having fought for it (194). I fight for recognition by risking my life and threatening the other person. Unless I undertake this risk, I cannot possibly be recognised as one who freely *negates* life in favour of 'something else'.

Despite the antagonism of the struggle, Fanon regards it as an ideal human condition insofar as its two parties are in positions of reciprocity. 'There is at the base of the Hegelian dialectic an absolute reciprocity that must be demonstrated' (191). *Each* tries to impose his own existence on the other, and when the other reciprocally tries to impose his existence, the first subject struggles to reverse the imposition. This struggle continues endlessly, for Fanon as for Sartre, with each party wishing to be 'absolute', to be the only one recognised as free. So, for Fanon, the reciprocity between the two strugglers is not that they reach equilibrium and recognise one another mutually. Rather, reciprocity obtains just when each party can keep struggling to be absolute, when I impose myself upon the other yet he fights back against me, incessantly.

Fanon deems this condition ideal in contrast to the situation under colonialism, thus using Hegel's and Sartre's ideas to criticise the colonial system. Under colonialism, reciprocity is blocked: by being constructed *as*

black, black people are prevented from ever asserting their freedom. Thus, 'Ontology is made unrealisable in a colonised . . . society' (89). Colonial society prevents people from living in accordance with their ontological condition, which is to struggle for recognition reciprocally. Black people are prevented from exercising negation and so from ever claiming or winning freedom. White people cannot truly exercise negation either, for they never encounter any resistance against which to prove themselves – they are never othered, at least not by black people. Still, if colonialism distorts human existence universally, it distorts that of black people most deeply.

As Beauvoir held that women across history have been unable to participate in the struggle for recognition, then, Fanon's related claim is that under colonialism black people are precluded from ever fully participating in the struggle for recognition. Fanon explores this in the chapter 'The Lived Experience of the Black Man' (*l'expérience vécue du Noir*), much of it written in the first person, and opening dramatically:

'Dirty nigger!' or simply 'Look! A Negro!' I came into this world anxious to uncover the meaning of things, my soul desirous to be at the origin of the world, and here I found myself an object among other objects. Locked into this crushing objectivity, I appealed to the other . . . But . . . the other fixes me, through his gestures, attitudes and looks (*regards*), in the way that one fixes a preparation with a dye. (89)

Like Sartre's man spying through the keyhole, Fanon is engaged in projects, anxious to disclose meanings in things in view of these projects (as a mountain might be disclosed as resistant, challenging, in light of my project of climbing it). But Fanon finds himself looked at by the other, judged and classified as physical objects are. He appeals back for recognition. His appeal is not met; instead he finds himself fixed by the other's gaze – fixed in the race that the other attributes to him, as when a chemical mixture has a dye added to it. Fanon finds that he is seen as black, and to that extent *not* as an agent. The racial attribution is what gives the other's look its fixity: Fanon is prevented from challenging the other's perception of him insofar as he cannot escape from the racial category under which the (white) other views him.

It is not that Fanon is perceived as having a race that he already biologically has. Some of his perceptible physical properties – primarily his skin but perhaps his hair and facial features too – are taken to mark him out as black. But it is not that these properties reveal the race that Fanon has already: Fanon denies that race categories have a biological basis. Rather, Fanon is *made* black – in the way that the chemical mixture has a dye *added* to it – by being inescapably perceived in terms of certain of his visible properties and above all his skin colour. Fanon adds that to become black is to acquire an 'epidermal racial schema' (92). Ontologically, we each have a 'body schema': as embodied subjects and agents, we

always experience and act in tacit awareness of our bodies as, for instance, the place from which we act (90). But superimposed upon that schema, Fanon acquires a further schema that consists in his constant inhibiting awareness of being viewed in terms of his skin colour, from the outside.

Whatever actions Fanon makes in appealing for recognition, those actions are referred back to his physical appearance, to which he finds himself unavoidably tied. His actions are seen in a particular light in view of the race to which he is assigned: these actions are differently evaluated, or differently interpreted; they may even literally be perceived differently. Take for example the little girl Pecola Breedlove in Toni Morrison's harrowing novel *The Bluest Eye*, set in 1930s Ohio. In one of the many distressing episodes that Pecola suffers, she is visiting the household where her mother works as a servant and she reaches out tentatively towards a berry cobbler, only to knock it over, hurting herself with the hot juice but prompting her mother to slap her to the floor and shout at her ferociously. Pecola is not seen as having hurt herself and deserving sympathy but as being incorrigible, 'crazy', incapable of keeping to her place. Her action is read in a particular way because of her race (see Morrison 1970: 84–85).

Here there is a revealing difference from the predicament of Sartre's man spying through the keyhole. He was seen and judged in terms of the activity, spying, in which he was caught. The net of judgement in which he was caught centered on his *activity*, with reference to which he was classified as a voyeur or peeping tom. He was a *transcendence*-transcended, in Sartre's language. In contrast Fanon argues that black people are seen, judged and classified in terms not simply of their activities but specifically of those activities as always referred back to, qualified with reference to, the visible physical appearance of their skin. But the latter is a merely objective property. It is not the objective side of an intentional activity but is a property that *only* exists inasmuch as one is seen from the outside. Just in constantly having his activities referred back to his epidermal appearance from the outside, Fanon is made black. Meanwhile those whose activities are not so referred are made white – acquiring a racial identity that is characteristically *unmarked*, *invisible*.

For Fanon, this process renders black people powerless to resist objectification. To claim recognition, I must prove that I exercise *transcendence* or *negation*. I must show that *I* decide the meaning of my existence rather than its meaning being bestowed by the other. Since others are invariably looking at me, establishing my agency thus requires that I negate the meanings that others have already bestowed on me. To prove my agency is to show, in action, that I always surpass others' perceptions of me. This the black person cannot do, Fanon reasons, just to the extent that he is 'locked in his body' (2008: 200): his acts are always perceived with reference to and in light of his perceptible epidermal appearance, as acts by

white people are not. In that way, black people are never permitted to escape from their visibility to the other's perspective. The possibility of their actions negating that perspective is cut off at the outset.

Racial hierarchy has a different structure to sexual hierarchy as Beauvoir understands it. For Beauvoir, across history the division of labour has prevented women from performing the kinds of action – risk, labour – that demonstrate agency at a given time. For Fanon, whatever actions black people perform, they are still simultaneously perceived in terms of their visible appearance from the outside, and thus are prevented from ever making convincing counter claims to define themselves entirely from the inside. Further indicating the difference between Beauvoir's and Fanon's analyses, Fanon denies that it is ideas about race that exclude black people from the struggle for recognition: 'I am a slave not to the "idea" others have of me, but to my appearance' (95; Fanon's concern here is to distinguish colonial racism from anti-Semitism). For Beauvoir, in contrast, accumulated myths and ideas about women have led them to be more or less restricted to the private sphere and so unable to participate fully in labour and claim agency through it. To be sure, Fanon does identify accumulated meanings that the colonial nations attach to being black: backwardness; cannibalism; evil; ugliness; closeness to animals; dangerous savagery; brute strength. Overall, 'In Europe the black man has one function: to represent lower feelings, base urges, the dark side of the soul' (167). But for Fanon, these meanings only attach to being black on the basis of this identity first being constituted by the look.

Although Beauvoir and Fanon give different accounts of the mechanisms by which women and black people are oppressed, they both conceive these forms of oppression as having distinctive structures in their own right.¹⁴ Refusing to reduce these oppressions to biology or economics, they turn to Hegel as filtered via Kojève to grasp these oppressions as consisting of distortions in the relations of recognition that are fundamental to human existence. Gender and racial oppression, then, are ultimately forms of recognition injustice – but they are no less real for that. However, they are particular forms of recognition of injustice, different from the master/slave relation. Neither group has lost the struggle and become subjugated on that basis as Hegelian slaves did. Instead, both groups have been debarred from participating in the struggle in the first place. So the ideal human condition from which women and black people have unjustly been excluded is, ironically, that of the struggle between looks as Sartre theorised it – ideal because of its reciprocity. Beauvoir and Fanon thus give this struggle a more optimistic, Hegelian cast than Sartre gave it. The struggle against others is not hell: much better to take part in this struggle and share in full humanity than be stuck outside the struggle in second-class status.¹⁵

IV. IRIGARAY

For the post-structuralist generation Hegel is the philosopher of identity, in particular the identity-with-itself that the self-conscious subject achieves by satisfying its desires. Again following Kojève's lead, the account of self-consciousness in *Phenomenology* IV and IVA is construed as centrally revealing about Hegel's overarching orientation towards identity. Against identity, post-structuralists value difference: as Deleuze puts it, in a 'generalised anti-Hegelianism . . . difference and repetition have taken the place of the identical and the negative, of identity and contradiction' ([1968] 1994: xix). For Hegel, difference seems to exist as part of or on the way towards identity – be it the difference between life and self-consciousness which the subject negates in desire, or the difference between master and servant which must cede way to reciprocal recognition. In contrast specifically to Hegel, post-structuralists set out to think of difference as ontologically prior to identity and, ethically, to avoid subordinating difference to identity. This difference assumes various more concrete guises: the differential play of power relations (Foucault), of language (Derrida) or language-games (Lyotard), pure becoming (Deleuze), multiplicity (Badiou), or sexual difference (Irigaray). It might be objected that, far from privileging identity, the characteristic movement of Hegel's dialectic is to incorporate *both* what initially claims self-identity (e.g., 'I', self-consciousness) and what differs from it (e.g., the other) into broader, unifying structures (e.g., the 'We'). But for post-structuralists that 'We' remains a 'We that is I' (*PhG* #177, 110), an 'I' that has only become 'We' by expanding to take in the other. This exemplifies the overall movement of Hegel's thought: to absorb difference into the self-same.

This critique of Hegel's conception of the self-conscious subject may seem to leave the basis of Beauvoir's and Fanon's theories undermined and their work discredited. But that conclusion would be too hasty. To see why, let's consider Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference, an instance of positive post-structuralist engagement with Hegel. Moreover, Irigaray also engages positively with Beauvoir's view of sexual hierarchy as a deformation in recognition relations. Thus, Irigaray's work testifies to Hegel's continuing positive importance for French thought.

Irigaray shares Beauvoir's conviction that women have been positioned as other throughout Western cultural history and remain so today. The "'feminine" is always described as lack, atrophy, reverse of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value' ([1977] (1985b): 69). By way of Beauvoir, Irigaray's overall conception of women's subordination thus comes out of the French tradition of reading Hegel. But Irigaray differs from Beauvoir on what makes women's othering unjust. For Irigaray, its injustice is – paradoxical as it might sound – that women have been positioned as *the same* as men but in reverse, or 'less so', an inferior

version of the same. Women's status has been that of the other-of-the-same: an other constantly referred or adversely compared to the 'same'; that is, the masculine position taken as norm and standard. Whilst Beauvoir had already effectively recognised this, unlike Beauvoir Irigaray concludes that women need to assume a new subjective position as the other-of-the-other – to cease to be men's inferior correlate (the other-of-the-same) and assume a *sui generis* identity as women. That identity would be different from – other to – women's traditional position as men's other. Irigaray aspires for women to belong to a sex/gender or kind that genuinely differs from the male kind: what is needed is recognition of genuine sexual difference.

This vision clearly diverges from Beauvoir's. Beauvoir aspires for women to join in the struggle for recognition and share with men in the continual movement between the two poles of the subject/object, self/other ambiguity. This positive valuation of reciprocity descends to Beauvoir from Hegel, via Sartre's insistence on irresolvable antagonism. Irigaray rejects that valuation of reciprocity, as we see from her alternative vision of ideal relationships between sexed individuals in *I Love to You*, one of the books where she engages with Hegel most extensively.

Here Irigaray claims that each sex should accomplish the 'labor of the negative' towards itself ([1992] 1996: 36). To do so is to depart from our inherent tendency to negate the other: to refuse to let the other exist as other and instead try to absorb the other into the self, to declare 'I am the whole'. To negate oneself is to negate that tendency and so allow the other to be other. Irigaray is indebted to a broadly Sartrean-Kojévian-Hegelian view that each consciousness finds the other threatening to its own agency and so seeks to make that other into its mere vehicle or appendage, resulting in master/slave relations. For Hegel, though, we ultimately must recognise one another as agents and, instead of partitioning body and agency unequally between us, we must recognise that we are all embodied agents. Irigaray agrees. But she asks: Must we not, then, all accept that we are *sexually* embodied? We do not have bodies in the neuter – we have male or female bodies (a minority of people is intersexed, and some people change sex/gender over time, but let's bracket this). As subjects, we *are* our bodies. My sexed embodiment does not sit idly by while I act, feel, think, and more; my embodiment inevitably qualifies and affects the mode of my subjectivity.

On these grounds, Irigaray contests Hegel's view that the two parties to the struggle for recognition are in symmetrical positions, whereby the action of each is 'indivisibly the action of one as well as of the other' (*PhG* #183, 112). If I, a woman, am relating in some way to a man (not necessarily romantically – we might, say, be in intellectual or political dialogue), I cannot rightly assume that he will make towards me the same subjective movements that I make towards him. Yet, Irigaray thinks, I *do* tend to assume that the sexed other will relate to me as I do to him: I project my

own form of subjectivity upon everyone else. Instead, I should cultivate my ability to be open to the other however he or she may manifest him- or herself – an attitude of wonder, as Irigaray sometimes puts it (1996: 39).

Overall, for Irigaray, each sexed individual should perform upon him- or herself a negating movement – negating his or his propensity to assimilate the other sex. I do not try to transcend the other; instead I acknowledge that he or she transcends *me* (105). For Beauvoir and Fanon, the solution to the othering of women and black people was to open up the recognition struggle to reciprocal participation by all. Irigaray departs further from Hegel's ideal of reciprocity by aspiring for sexed individuals to accept one another in their irreducible difference.

Nevertheless, Irigaray does not wholly reject Hegel's ideal of reciprocal recognition. First, she envisages *each* sex exercising negativity upon itself. To be sure, she anticipates that each sex will carry out that exercise differently (27). Moreover, she maintains that the urge to assimilate the other arises for each sex along different routes (threatened by being born of mothers, young boys become accustomed to negate what is other, whereas girls never properly extricate themselves from their mothers to appreciate that others are other). But second, Irigaray explicitly states that each sex is to *recognise* the other as irreducibly different. This is necessary, she agrees with Hegel, to overcome master/slave relations (105). Yet this is a recognition of difference, of what is irreducibly other to the self and beyond its ken. Recognition is the way for us to value difference in its own right and as irreducibly real. If this ideal sounds non- or anti-Hegelian in that it ranks difference above identity, on the other hand Irigaray's ideal is for sexed differences to be held together within a broader structure of reciprocal recognition – a distinctly Hegelian vision.

Thus, Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference descends from Hegel's vision of reciprocal recognition. This is indicative that existential-Hegelianism remains important for French thought after post-structuralism – not only as a foil against which post-structuralists define themselves, but also positively, as a source of ideas that continue to inform. To be sure, post-structuralist insights into the value and ontological reality of difference pose problems for anyone who would endorse existential-Hegelian ideas wholesale. But we should not reject those ideas wholesale either. Existential-Hegelian ideas about the human need for recognition, and how distortions in recognition are constitutive of harmful sexual and racial hierarchies, remain an inescapable starting point for thinking critically about these hierarchies and how we might overcome them.

NOTES

1. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Kojève [1947] 1969) was compiled by Kojève's student Raymond Queneau, using lecture notes, transcripts and other materials; Kojève reviewed the text and added footnotes. Queneau made the 1939 *Mesures* article into the opening chapter, 'In Place of an Introduction'. See Kojève (1969: xiii).

2. Cutting across these major intellectual shifts, French Hegel scholars were active throughout the century, some of them exerting considerable influence. Jean Hyppolite's 1939–1941 French translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* consolidated Hegel's burgeoning popularity, to which Jean Wahl's 1929 study of Hegel's unhappy consciousness also contributed. But in France Hegel's ideas gained a much wider reception than they had in the English-speaking world, reaching well beyond Hegel scholars and being regarded as ideas with which any serious philosopher must engage.

3. Other accounts of Hegel-in-France include: Baugh (2003), Butler (1987), Rockmore (2013), Roth (1988) and Russon (2010).

4. On the recognition/redistribution distinction, see Fraser (1995).

5. Kojève does provide a reading of the entire sweep of the *Phenomenology*, but he takes chapter IV as its starting point. His justification is that absolute knowledge depends on universal human history, the building blocks of which are human agents; and their fundamental character is set out in chapter IV and IVA (1969: 33).

6. For exegetical accuracy when discussing Kojève, Hegel and Fanon, I follow their use of masculine language.

7. How far *Being and Nothingness* bears Kojève's influence is disputed. Sartre did not attend Kojève's lectures but may have read his *Mesures* article. Certainly Sartre informed himself about Kojève, for as Nancy Bauer remarks: 'No one thinking about Hegel during those years [1930s–1950s] could possibly avoid having to take account of his [Kojève's] interpretations' (2001: 86). Kojève's impact shows in the simple fact that Sartre substantially discusses Hegel's *Phenomenology* IVA in *Being and Nothingness*, having previously paid Hegel little mind. Later, Sartre read the 1947 edition of Kojève's lectures, which may in turn be influenced by Sartre – see Fry (1988: 6). Surprisingly, and clearly falsely given the extensive engagement with Hegel in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre subsequently claimed to have seriously studied Hegel only in the late 1940s.

8. Prefiguring Sartre, Hegel claims, 'If a people does not merely imagine that it wants to be free but actually has the energetic will to freedom, then no human power can hold it back in . . . servitude' (*EM* §435A, 175). I thank Dean Moyar for pointing this out to me.

9. For further argument that Beauvoir undertook this task, see Kruks (1995).

10. See Lundgren-Gothlin ([1991] 1996: 273). Beauvoir began to read Hegel in 1940, under Kojève's impact; see Bauer (2001: 86–87).

11. As Lundgren-Gothlin puts it, 'Female human beings do not seek recognition; . . . man, in the relationship to woman, nurtures the hope of achieving confirmation without engaging in this kind of dialectics . . . Woman has not raised a reciprocal demand for recognition' (1996: 98).

12. It is not clear whether Fanon read Kojève directly or read Hegel in a Kojévian way only due to the influence of Sartre, especially his *Anti-Semite and Jew*, which was important for Fanon. Ethan Kleinberg (2003), though, shows that Fanon's view of recognition is so close to Kojève's that perhaps Fanon did read Kojève's *Mesures* essay. Fanon did not read *The Second Sex*, but he read Beauvoir's account of her travels in America; see Macey (2000: 124–26, 367). Beauvoir read Fanon's work only later before meeting him in 1961. Thus, the two did not influence one another; their affinities instead reflect their shared influences in Hegel, Kojève and Sartre.

13. Fanon sometimes also talks of people of colour (*hommes de couleur*), so he does not want to confine his discussion to people of African descent. But for simplicity's sake here I talk of black people.

14. The phrase *women and black people* is unsatisfactory. Some women are black and some black people are women, as many black feminists have pointed out. See, e.g., Gloria Hull and the other editors of *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (Hull, Bell-Scott and Smith 1982). I use this phrase, *women and black people*, nonetheless to reflect a limitation of Beauvoir's and Fanon's views: Beauvoir treats white women as the norm; Fanon treats black men as the norm.

15. Actually, in Beauvoir's ideal condition each subject asserts its agency *and* admits its being-for-other, which together make up its ambiguity. In this way each subject opens itself to the look whilst looking back too. Fanon stresses more how central agency is to the human condition.

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