

Translator's Introduction

Much has been written about Fichte and Schelling's disagreements, how much they really ever had in common, and what led to the dissolution of their friendship; it is not too much to say that one's understanding of German idealism depends upon it. In this introduction, I examine the end of the affair, so to speak: Schelling's last major effort to settle scores with Fichte. This very personal and passionate quarrel is no mere historical curiosity, however. It is a microcosm that can help to illuminate our understanding of some of the most important issues in German idealism.

Schelling's 1806 *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to Fichte's Revised Doctrine*¹ contains a combination of previously published criticisms and new insights. On June 25, 1806, he wrote to his publisher, Cotta: "Fichte has attacked the *Naturphilosophie* in one of his three new books in such a way that the importance of the matter and my honor does not permit me to remain silent . . ."² The "Statement" is prefaced by a reprint of a previously published review of Fichte's 1805 version of the *Lectures on the Nature of the Scholar* and is a collective response to that work and two others published in 1806, "Characteristics of the Present Age" and "The Way Towards the Blessed Life"; in Schelling's view, Fichte's philosophical standpoint had continued to evolve and change from one work to the next. The initial reason given for writing the "Statement" is that Fichte has "disparaged to the utmost and strongly vilified the philosophers of nature" (I, 7, 24). However, as one reads on, it becomes clear that the "Statement" is by no means simply a response to unfair and illegitimate accusations. It also reveals the larger context of Schelling's attack on

Fichte's concept of nature, which he describes as "essentially devoid of reason, unholy, ungodly, in every respect finite and completely dead" (I, 7, 21). As Schelling had repeatedly noted in the earlier *Naturphilosophie* works, it is characteristic of the Enlightenment and its narrowly mechanical concept of nature that it presents us with a nature that is eminently exploitable for human ends and is otherwise valueless. Thus, this response to Fichte also provides another opportunity to respond to this view of science. Fichte's philosophy seems to provide an instructive *reductio ad absurdum* of the Enlightenment perspective, since as Schelling points out more than once, for Fichte, nature strictly speaking does not even exist except for the role it plays in human life.

But Is It That Simple? Of Course Not.

Since we are joining a conflict very much in progress, it will be useful to remind ourselves of some of the background issues. After Fichte left Jena in the wake of the atheism controversy and moved to Berlin, he and Schelling attempted to sustain their sense of themselves as allies and engaged in at least complementary philosophical endeavors in their correspondence. Yet the letters reveal almost nothing but disagreements. What was at issue has been ably discussed in the introduction to *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling*.³ Here I will consider briefly one major sticking point: the status of being in transcendental idealism. In 1801, after reading Schelling's *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, Fichte writes: "One cannot proceed from a *being* (everything to which mere *thinking* refers, and what would follow from this, to which the *real-ground* applies is *being*; granted, it might also be called reason); but one has to proceed from a *seeing*; it is also necessary to establish the identity of the ideal-[ground] and real-ground, [which] = the identity of intuition and thought."⁴ Schelling's reply in his next letter is instructive: "The necessity to proceed from seeing confines you and your philosophy in a thoroughly conditioned series [of phenomena] in which no trace of the absolute can be

encountered. Consciousness, or the feeling that it must have of itself, compels you in *The Vocation of Man* to transfer the speculative domain into the sphere of faith, since you simply cannot find it in your *knowing*; in my opinion there can be as little discussion of faith in philosophy as in geometry.”⁵ In other words, Fichte’s claim for the primacy of self-intuition can be shown to have no basis, or worse, to rest on faith, which is unphilosophical. This is the original accusation of the insufficiency, indeed circularity, of self-intuition, which is more fully elaborated in the *Statement* (e.g., I, 7, 41)—yet it is the same quarrel. Can an idealism that is based on self-intuition and its self-limitation, as Fichte’s claims to be, ever offer a satisfactory account of reality?

The substance of Fichte’s reproaches, that Schelling’s so-called system, if it does not rest on self-activity, is nothing more or less than realism, and thus unable to account for freedom, is not entirely ignored by Schelling, but his gestures at a response were hardly likely to have satisfied Fichte, since he refers to his “sentiment” that “the truth might lie higher than idealism could go.”⁶ This is a veiled reference to the standpoint of the identity philosophy, which would no doubt also be considered insufficiently idealistic and vulnerable to the same objections. Still, it must be conceded that Fichte is posing a form of the same question to Schelling that Schelling had demanded he answer: what is the proof for your view of being? Fichte’s primordial self-intuition is repeatedly defended by him as self-evident—yet his philosophical career is in part a testament to the difficulty of convincing his readers of that. Schelling’s Absolute (and his access to it) is similarly challenging to describe and defend.

The correspondence breaks off over the conflict about the status of being and the nature and possibility of knowledge of this being. The increasingly impatient tone of the correspondence, as well as the claims of both that the other had never really understood him, makes it clear that they did not agree to disagree; rather, they seem to have given up on direct engagement in exasperation and continued their quarrel in their published works. Yet those published works are harder to understand without the context provided by the correspondence.

Schwärmerei as Epithet

In this context, Fichte's repeated claim that *Naturphilosophie* is *Schwärmerei* has both more resonance and more menace. Martin Luther is usually given credit for popularizing, if not coining, the term, which he used in his struggles against those he regarded as self-deluded, suffused with the mistaken conviction that they were religiously inspired. Unlike the term "enthusiasm," rooted in the Greek for divine possession (*en theos*), the words *Schwärmer* or *Schwärmgeister* are etymologically related to *schwärmen*—in the sense of a chaotic and unpredictable movement, akin to the English "swarm," along with the expression *Schwärm bilden*, with its connotations of massed movement. Therefore, the translation "enthusiasm" captures neither the frenzied, potentially violent undertones of these expressions nor the suggestion of the formation of an ominous mass. Manfred Engel observes that it is important to be aware that German has two expressions to choose from, whereas both English and French have only one, the cognates of *Enthusiasmus*.⁷ *Enthusiasmus* is used in instances that are ambiguous or positive, whereas *Schwärmerei* is always negative.

Anthony La Vopa acknowledges the Lutheran origins of the expression, but he understands it, by the end of the eighteenth century, to have become chiefly significant as part of Enlightenment philosophy's effort to legitimate its authority and distinguish itself from other spiritual and intellectual movements. Kant's comments in "What Is Orientation in Thinking?," his contribution to the Pantheism controversy, were influential. He makes a firm distinction between what is known through "pure human reason" (and is thus presumably universal) and that which is attributed to "a pretended secret source of truth." In this distinction, a challenge is being issued: are your conclusions rational and demonstrable, or are they merely self-deluded raving? In the context of Fichte and Schelling's quarrel, this is what is at issue: Fichte is more than implying that Schelling's philosophy rests on the claim of some secret and illegitimate access to being, an accusation that takes on even more meaning since we know that Schelling had said something very similar about Fichte in the correspondence.

Schelling paraphrases one of Fichte's tirades, which explicitly links the study of nature to the mystical, the magical, and the irrational: "Every *Schwärmer* holds fast to nature and necessarily becomes a *Naturphilosoph*, that is, a kind of magician, interpreter of signs and spirit conjuror, in short a kind of person who must be expelled not just from educated society but even bourgeois society" (I, 7, 37–38). He then follows this with a direct quotation from *On the Nature of the Scholar* about what is to be done: they must be "horribly punished for it," or else "the system of sober experience dies out, the system of *Schwärmerei* with all of its order-destroying consequences begins [its] fearsome dominion" (I, 7, 38).

In response to Fichte's accusations that *Naturphilosophie* is nothing more or less than a dangerous form of *Schwärmerei*,⁸ Schelling invokes what he calls the "original meaning" of the word, which he attributes to Luther: "those who want to insist on the validity of a certain connection and order of principles which are held together only through their own subjectivity, and are grounded neither in them nor in an objective source or connection" (I, 7, 44). This seems to Schelling a completely accurate description of Fichte's philosophy, which in his view has no objective basis. Thus, it is Fichte who is revealed as a *Schwärmer* truly worthy of the name, in the sense that Luther used the term, since his system has always and only been based on his own personality (I, 7, 44–45).

To make this claim plausible, Schelling must explain what it would mean to say that Fichte's philosophy is based on his own subjectivity or personality. Fichte is unblinkingly portrayed as the ultimate *Schwärmer*:

If *Schwärmerei* can be called an unalterable striving to establish his subjectivity through his subjectivity and as generally valid [and] to extirpate all of nature while installing non-nature as the principle and all the extremes of a one-sided education in their most hideous isolation as scientific truths—then who has in the true sense *geschwärmt* longer and louder than precisely Herr Fichte? (I, 7, 47)

Therefore, the lineaments of Fichte's personality are a major focus in the *Statement*, as well as the discussion of the way in which he accomplishes the "extirpation of nature."

Spitefulness

Schelling cites many examples of both Fichte's spitefulness and his false pride, but his true concern is with the central contradiction in his view of nature: on the one hand, Fichte is at pains to describe it as nothingness, empty, nonexistent, at most a mere necessary opposition or field for human action (I, 7, 9–10); on the other hand, it hinders him, it resists him, it must be controlled, even destroyed (I, 7, 17, 36). It is easy to see that even on his own terms, using his own examples, Fichte stresses a kind of resistance and intransigence in nature that he can neither explain nor explain away; this frustration seems to underlie his attitude of permanent antagonism toward nature.

After fuming that Fichte only wants horses to exist so that his wagon can be pulled, and trees because they make good furniture, Schelling contends that Fichte's attitude is due to his inability to grasp nature as alive: "indeed this poverty leads sooner or later to an impossible to disguise spiritual death. There is something fatal in it, since all healing comes through nature. It alone is the true antidote to abstraction. It is the eternally renewed source of inspiration and a constant revivification" (I, 7, 19). If we cannot recognize nature as having a life akin to our own, we are unable, in the end, to live with ourselves. Even if Fichte is permitted to present a slightly more sophisticated view of nature in his own vocabulary, Schelling's criticisms still stand. From *Lectures on the Nature of the Scholar*: "This race of man . . . is surrounded by an inert and passive nature, by which its free life is constantly hindered, threatened, and confined. So it must be, in order that this life may attain such unity by its own free effort."⁹ Here nature is at least given the status of providing our proving ground, but it is clear that its role, however necessary and even exalted, is still merely instrumental.

Even more interesting is Fichte's central claim that we achieve full humanity by means of a (victorious) struggle with nature. The

extent of our triumph over nature's challenges is the measure of our rationality. This is by now a very familiar story, that of the conquering hero, and this makes Fichte one of the earliest, and certainly among the most colorful, defenders of a view of nature that is firmly embedded in Western culture today: humanity's relationship to nature is seen as being that of a zero-sum game. Whatever human beings gain from nature they have wrested away from it by force, and nature's existence and power is acknowledged or taken to be significant only to the extent that it can be understood in terms of greater or lesser impact on human beings.

Returning to the vexed topic of Fichte's long-standing lack of understanding of nature, Schelling reminds the reader of the almost wholly derivative picture of it given in *The Vocation of Man*:

His previous representation and opinion on nature, as recorded in *The Vocation of Man*, was that it consists in affections of the I, which correspond to the qualities of yellow and green, the sweet and the bitter, the sound of the violin or the trumpet—these affections (not, as he has it now, the life and being of God) are transformed by the I into objects, extending them over surfaces, and producing that which is present or permanent, too: in general, however, nature was something absolutely ugly and unholy, without internal unity; something that ought not to be, and only was, in order to not be, namely, in order to be overcome. (I, 7, 92)

On this view, nature is our projection, a simulacrum lacking all independent reality. Therefore, it is vital for Fichte to be able to argue that all of his power must come from his own will rather than an external source such as nature; this makes it easier for him to convince himself that he is superior to nature. Schelling quotes from the *Characteristics of the Present Age*, where Fichte claims that he has “raised himself above all powers of nature, and closed off this source long ago” (I, 7, 111). The significance of the boast that he has extirpated all traces of nature in himself is now obvious: owing nothing to anyone or anything, Fichte is able to see himself

as truly self-made. This explains why that which is outside him is always a threat and must be defended against. Schelling comments: “Between him and nature there is an eternal enmity. . . . still, to listen to him is to have to wonder which of the two has gotten the worst of it. Nature oppresses him, even threatens his life—in return he persuades himself that it does not even exist” (I, 7, 122). This is surely the ultimate expression of spitefulness; it is also a truly breathtaking display of self-centeredness, according to Schelling.

False Pride (*Bauernstolz*)

Bauernstolz is an almost untranslatable word; I will try to clarify what Schelling seems to mean by it with examples. In the previous section, I discussed Fichte’s claims that he was truly a self-made man who had so thoroughly vanquished nature as to have no remaining association with it. This is the basis of Schelling’s reflection that Fichte himself had admitted, indeed, had celebrated the fact that his view of reality is, in essence, maintained only by his own force of personality. As a direct consequence, he has become the kind of *Schwärmer* who exhibits a complete

insensitivity to the truly higher and better, which is due to a real lack of culture, but seems to him a proof of his independent consciousness of his own worth; in a word, *Bauernstolz*, which a clever man once characterized in precisely this fashion; it is the constant accompaniment of the *Schwärmer*, the character trait he parades before everyone; defending his real or imagined rights to the utmost[;] unfeeling hardness and thirst for revenge are the natural accompaniments of this kind of character. (I, 7, 47)

As for the accusations of *Schwärmerei* Fichte has made against him, Schelling says that he can understand that, since he has never made any secret of being willing to learn what he could from those vilified as *Schwärmer*, defined as any philosopher who has even once mentioned the eternal birth of things (I, 7, 120). Indeed, he declares

himself willing to learn from anyone, whether or not that writer has received the approval of the educational establishment. “Our only crime is, and must be, with respect to the received wisdom of this time, that we, who were educated in their schools and their arts, failed to respect the arcane disciplines, but in all seriousness grounded ourselves on the living ground of free nature, where all isolated systems and sects must disappear” (I, 7, 121).

From this perspective of the living ground of nature, Schelling promises, we will come to understand how man can return to the knowledge of nature that abstraction has concealed from him. This too reflects an earlier insight, from the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*:

Our spirit feels more free, when it returns from speculation to enjoyment and investigation of nature, without having to fear that it will be constantly driven back into this state by a dissatisfied spirit. The ideas to which our speculation has risen cease to be the objects of a weary preoccupation, which exhaust our spirit all too rapidly; they become laws of our *life*, and set us free, insofar as they themselves become transformed into life and existence.¹⁰ (I, 1, 341)

This restored state would be characterized by an ability to “freely again read in the book of nature, the language of which long ago became incomprehensible due to the linguistic confusion and incorrect theories of abstraction” (I, 7, 64–65).

Here again a contrast that originally arose in the form of a criticism can be illuminating. The eternal beginning is spoken of in terms of life, rebirth, animation, transformation—images of that which is alive. This could hardly be in sharper contrast to the idea of the building blocks of the universe as inanimate, interchangeable, infinitely manipulable units of matter. A recurrent theme in the *Naturphilosophie* works was Schelling’s criticism of the concept of dead matter, which he saw as a contradiction in terms and, indeed, as at the very heart of his disagreement with Fichte. Here he adds the insight that this “dead matter” which Fichte so frequently invokes

is not an accurate reflection of nature, but rather of Fichte's own state of being:

It is not the life of nature itself, nor your own original sense that is closed down; your own inner death of the heart and spirit obscures and blocks both. A true vision of the living however cannot be realized by that clownish or arrogant withdrawal from things; it requires the trait of inner love and affinity of your own spirit with living nature, the still equanimity [*Gelassenheit*] of the spirit which drives into the depths, in order that the merely sensual intuition becomes a sensible [*sinningen*] one. (I, 7, 62)

Fichte's "clownish or arrogant withdrawal from things" is the opposite of equanimity or *Gelassenheit* and manifests itself as the false pride Schelling calls *Bauernstolz*. It is the view that all things have value only in terms of the individual human being and his goals and purposes. Since these goals are ordinarily not simply utilitarian, but go beyond that to an insistence on man's literal and symbolic centrality, nature is called upon to serve not just economic but also aesthetic purposes. We might think of this as the nature-as-showcase perspective. Schelling's sarcasm is unmistakable in his mocking parody of a passage in *On the Vocation of the Scholar*. "But nature *should* not be *merely* useful and exploitable for man, which is its first purpose and the economic viewpoint, but rather, 'it *should* surround him with dignity,' that is (how can one otherwise interpret this?) it should be transformed into sophisticated gardens and properties, beautiful houses and proper furnishings, which is its second purpose and the aesthetic perspective on nature" (I, 7, 110–111).

This passage continues:

The philosophical Nestor reminds us quite involuntarily of another Nestor, the one in "Prinz Zerbino."¹¹ Having returned in a very bad mood from the garden of poetry, where the forest, the flowers and the winds had spoken, rendering him quite confused, he was then overjoyed as he heard the table, the chair, and the other furniture

speaking, for they were not trees and flowers, but rather things that had come into being through rational action, and were happy to be useful amenities and no longer have to stand outside and rustle in the wind as miserable green trees, *which would not be to the benefit of any rational being*. (I, 7, 18–19)

This is Schelling's free paraphrase of act 5, scene 6, of Ludwig Tieck's play, in which the table says: "We're happy not to have to stand outside as miserable green trees, shivering and shaking, useful to no one. Here we have been remade to serve a useful purpose." After his conversation with the furniture, Nestor concludes excitedly: "I have to have the boldness to confess that this table and this chair are the noblest, the most rational creatures that I have yet encountered on earth, with the exception of myself, of course."¹² The highest and best possible destiny of nature is to somehow manage to become useful to humanity—as Nestor's comment makes clear; it is by being made, if not in man's image, at least to suit his purposes that lifts the individual table or chair out of its originally meaningless existence as a tree and transforms it into something rational and noble. We are also meant to notice what Nestor ignores: the world of nature in all its beauty and diversity.

This last description of the difference between entities as they exist in nature and "useful" objects might remind us of the natural world as depicted by Disney: all those talking animals who just want to help us, and animated footstools and teapots, hurrying to our aid and comfort. This is more amusing than alarming until one remembers the millions of children who spend far more time in front of a screen than they ever do in any encounter with a real animal, plant, waterfall, or mountain. Still Fichte's *Bauernstolz*, as expressed in the effort to understand nature by anthropomorphizing it, takes other forms as well: the tree-hugger who fancies that the trees passionately *want* to remain in the forest is committing the same basic mistake, albeit in a more seemingly admirable fashion.

The thinker afflicted with *Bauernstolz* sees nature as irrelevant, unnecessary, or threatening until we have imposed our will on it, or as Schelling argues, Fichte's assumptions render him incapable of

realizing that nature is valuable for its own sake. However, much of the positive content of *Naturphilosophie* rests on the acknowledgment of the life, value, inexhaustibility, and mystery of nature: only if we approach it in this light is it possible to learn from it. A genuinely Schellingian respect for nature requires above all acknowledgment of its *Unvordenklichkeit*, an admission that permanently decenters the human.

Abstraction and Science

Naturphilosophie is the “direct opposite of abstraction and of all systems based on it” (I, 7, 32). As mentioned earlier, Schelling sees the reason for the spiritual spitefulness of abstraction to lie in a lack of the intuition that reveals nature as living. This is of course a potentially dangerous line of reasoning, since to emphasize intuition as the source of all knowledge renders a theory vulnerable to the same defect that any appeal to prerational experience is open to: an inability to answer those who claim not to know what you are talking about. It is reminiscent of Schelling’s earlier claims for the rarity of both artistic and philosophical talent in the *Lectures on the Method of Academic Study*. Here he emphasizes the problems that arise from Fichte’s reliance on thinking rather than on immediate intuition. Even in *The Way Towards the Blessed Life*, where Fichte first concedes that philosophy is the science of the divine (or at least first employs this language), he fails, in Schelling’s view, to attain to the standpoint of *Naturphilosophie*. “The knowledge he has of God, that is, of that which alone is *being*, is a knowledge by means of mere *thinking*, that is, through that which is opposed to all being and all reality. ‘The eternal can only be grasped through thought,’ (S.L. S.10). . . . There we see the old root of the error brought into the light of day again!” (I, 7, 34). To define God as a being only accessible by thought is to place divinity in opposition to a world or reality that is explicitly defined as an empty, godless wasteland; how is it even imaginable that they might interact? This is, of course, a dogmatic perspective, which means an abandonment of Fichte’s “earlier and better system” (I, 7, 34) and yet fails to get any closer to the truth.

However, it is not just that Schelling is critical of the inability to turn away from abstract thinking on Fichte's part; he also detects an element of willfulness in it: "This spitefulness stubbornly closes its eyes to the sensible, when it does not fit into the mechanical system of thinking" (I, 7, 40). The real difference between Fichte and Schelling lies far deeper than Fichte suspects. Abstract thinking has created a false world of appearances, which then seems to require explanation. Schelling elaborates:

We do not directly deny his theory; we deny the fact of his world of appearance; there is no such world of appearance as he presumes, other than for a degenerate reflection. After he has created such a world for himself, his theories might be necessary and fit the facts; it is a case, as the poet says, that when the cross of wood has been well constructed, that one can easily fit a living body onto it for punishment. (I, 7, 97)

A related difficulty afflicts Fichte's concept of natural science, which strikes Schelling as being as unsuccessful as an attempt to bake butter cake without butter (I, 7, 99), although he adds that it is unsurprising given Fichte's extremely limited knowledge of the subject. After all, in what sense can one have empirical concepts without any willingness to grant reality to the empirical? Fichte's view of natural science is a thoroughly Baconian one: he does have high praise for the scientists who have helped to raise the human race out of the barbarism and subjection to nature into which it was born. The role of the scientist, therefore, is to tame and discipline nature by discovering the laws that can be used to manipulate it, and a good scientist is one who performs this function well. He is and ought to be entirely focused on results; he abstracts from the useless profusion of nature and seeks only what is profitable to man.¹³

One sees the difference between his and Fichte's concepts of natural science most clearly, according to Schelling, by asking what it is that the natural scientist seeks through experiment? He whom Schelling calls the "honest researcher" (I, 7, 99) must seek "*Being*, or that which he actually sees in the natural phenomena" (I, 7, 100).

He who strives for real knowledge is focused only on being. He is the liberator of being, the true priest of nature, who sacrifices that which does not have being, so that being can become transfigured into its true essence. He then gives an example from chemistry, which in his view had only recently attained the status of a science when it recognized the role played in chemical phenomena by electrical forces: this is a revelation of what he calls the “living connection,” that which truly constitutes and differentiates the chemical elements (I, 7, 100). To put it another way, the “honest” chemist is not seeking to manipulate chemical entities he studies for possible human advantage, but rather to understand their relationship to one another.

Many years later he made the same point memorably; its contemporary counterpart is surely the debate about whether to fund basic research or only that which promises immediate economic benefits:

Many investigations have an immediate and obvious usefulness; but the means to the greatest discoveries does not consist in seeking *this* and this alone; it is rather the case that those who, for example, in research in the natural sciences linger too long in the precincts of the useful and easily exploited never arrive by these means at the actual springs of action which could reveal the actual causes, knowledge of which would not yield merely a single success, but bring an entire complex of effects into our power, with which a *world* of phenomena would be revealed. When the founders of the new chemistry, Priestly and Lavoisier, extracted a combustible gas from water, they were not thinking about gas street-lighting, although this necessarily depended upon that discovery; contrariwise, he who sought only a new means of lighting the streets would hardly have hit upon the decomposability of water. (I, 9, 433)

As has been pointed out previously, this difference in approach is so fundamental that Schelling believes it justifies the claim that his philosophy marks a complete break with his own time:

I will here remark, that my main error, with respect to the time I live in consists in the fact that I see nature not as mechanical but dynamic. If I could be convinced that it is a mere mechanism, my conversion would be immediate and complete; for then nature is undeniably dead, and every other philosopher would be right, but I would not be. All current philosophy is modeled on this mechanical outlook since Descartes; it takes no account of dynamic or living nature; and this aspect of nature is highly unwelcome to all previously established and completed forms of philosophy. . . . So it goes now with Herr Fichte. He is in physics as in philosophy a mere mechanic; never has the merest suspicion of dynamic life illuminated his spirit. (I, 7, 103)

Schelling concludes this set of observations on philosophy's relationship to being with a characteristically thought-provoking claim: "Just as it is not the artist's task to exceed nature, but rather to depict reality in art, and to distance himself from the non-being that accompanies it in perception: just so is it in no way the intention of the philosopher of nature to soar above nature, but rather to present and recognize the positive, that in nature which truly *is*" (I, 7, 101).

There is a great deal more that could be said about the metaphors that govern our understanding of nature and science, in particular, but I hope I have said enough to show the vast differences between the Fichtean perspective, with its fixation on dominance, control, and technological assaults on those aspects of the natural world we fear, and the Schellingian emphasis on the interrelatedness of systems, nature as a living being, which leads to seeing man as a part of nature, subject to the same laws and forces as all other natural beings. These ideas are prominently featured in his reflections on what it means to practice medicine: "He who lacks the ability to intuit nature, and fails to bring the healing arts into connection with scientific research more generally, cannot possibly be an experienced or trustworthy physician, now that the organism, and in particular the human one, has begun to be grasped as the

center and epitome of all forces” (I, 7, 138). There is no small irony in the fact that Schelling wrote these words in 1805, just as Fichte was composing his arguments for man’s necessary and unquestionable dominance over nature. Schelling’s argument that humanity plays a centrally important role in the natural world is based on his insight that it is in human intelligence that nature for the first time comes to consciousness of itself, an argument first developed in the *First Outline* and further elaborated in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*—a crucially different conception of humanity.

Schelling refers to Fichte’s claims that his writings, and those of *Naturphilosophen* in general, are not only unclear but cannot even be defended by their own authors by remarking that he personally has never aspired to such a so-called clarity, and that moreover it is neither possible nor desirable to give a “Crystal Clear Report” on the universe (I, 7, 118). Although the tone is jocular, the meaning is unmistakable. Fichte’s mania for understanding, and indeed for forcing others to see the world the way he does (the subtitle of his *Crystal Clear Report* was *An Attempt to Force the Reader to Understand*) is itself another manifestation of *Bauernstolz*.¹⁴

Schelling’s own approach requires him to respect and acknowledge nature’s essential mystery and unknowability. What is the true spirit of the scientific researcher? It is “piety and humility before nature, unconditional surrender to the reality and the truth it reveals to us” (I, 7, 109). In other words, it is the opposite of *Bauernstolz*. Fichte’s

view of reality offers unmistakable advantages for superficiality in life and in knowledge, and at bottom it is precisely this arrangement of things for such easy handling in which the triumphs of the so-called Enlightenment and the present public education consists. In every age, however, there are some who are not susceptible to the doctrine of their time, and so it may be hoped that there are even now some few, who could persuade us of the originality and imperishability of an immediate sense for the living . . . (I, 7, 80)

The “Difference” between Fichte and Schelling

Pointed and specific as these objections are, it could be observed that this disagreement between Schelling and Fichte is hardly new. As early as 1801 Schelling stated in a letter to Fichte: “Your view that you have annihilated nature with your system is not unintelligible, though for the greater part of it, on the contrary, you do not get beyond nature . . . and here is one chief point on which we differ.”¹⁵ Yet the disagreement over the reality of nature is in fact just one aspect of what Schelling sees as the larger problem: that Fichte has abandoned the search for truth in favor of defending his turf and reputation. He concludes the “Statement” with a reminder and reproach that uses Fichte’s own words, taken from the “Open Letter” he published after the *Wissenschaftslehre* was publicly repudiated by Kant.¹⁶

This is what Schelling is referring to when he asks why Fichte has chosen to break the rule that he nobly assented to at one time. The reference is to Fichte’s statement, in a letter to Schelling that was later reprinted in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, that

just as the defenders of pre-Kantian metaphysics did not stop telling Kant that he was wasting his time with fruitless nonsense Kant says the same thing to us, in general, while the former assure Kant that their metaphysics remains unassailed, not to be improved upon and unchanged for all time [and] Kant assured us of the same with respect to him. Who knows where the fiery young thinker already lives, who will go beyond the principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and seek to show its mistakes and incompleteness. *Heaven lend us then the grace not to remain in the position of saying, that is fruitless nonsense, and we will certainly not allow ourselves to stand still, but rather one of us, or if this is not attempted against us, then someone educated in our school stands and either attempts to prove the unworthiness of these discoveries, or if he cannot, gratefully accepts them in our name.* (I, 7, 123–124)

Why has heaven's grace after all inexplicably abandoned Fichte, asks Schelling sarcastically. How is it that he cannot see and admit the merit of the new direction in philosophy that Schelling represents? Obviously, these are rhetorical questions, yet they contain echoes of their earlier disagreements—disagreements about the status of being itself in transcendental idealism. Fichte's focus on the self-activity of the agent and its limitations would drive him in the direction of justifying his conclusions on the basis of thought, whereas Schelling understood himself to be engaged in an inquiry into the nature of being and beings by means of intuition, an inquiry importantly shaped by being itself. The future of German idealism is at a crossroads. Fichte wants to dismiss Schelling as his former "talented collaborator"¹⁷ who has most unfortunately lost his way philosophically and perhaps personally as well, while Schelling strives to present Fichte as the former "spirit of the age" (I, 7, 41) who has been surpassed but refuses to acknowledge it.

Schelling's close contact and collaboration with Hegel in 1801–1803 can be seen in the frequent allusions to and partial adoption of Hegel's criticisms of Fichte, especially the claim that Fichte's thought is an instance of "subjective idealism" or a mere "philosophy of reflection" (I, 5, 272–274). Yet Schelling's use of these criticisms leads him far beyond Hegel. This text provides rich evidence not just of Schelling's detailed and far-reaching arguments that Fichte had always and only presented a narrow idealism of human subjectivity, but also demonstrates Schelling's passionate struggle to rescue the understanding of nature from that same self-centered subjectivity. In so doing he writes the last great defense of the standpoint of *Naturphilosophie*.

Notes

1. *Darlegung des wahren Verhältnisses der Naturphilosophie zu der verbesserten Fichteschen Lehre* (I, 7, 1–130).

2. *Briefe und Dokumente*, Band III (1801–1809), Zusatzband, hrsg. Horst Fuhrmans (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1975), 346.

3. J. G. Fichte and F.W.J. Schelling, *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Michael

Vater and David Wood (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 14–20. Hereafter, PRFS.

4. PRFS, 56.

5. PRFS, 61.

6. PRFS, 63.

7. “Das ‘Wahre,’ das ‘Gute,’ und die ‘Zauberlaterne der begeisterten Phantasie: Legitimationsprobleme der Vernunft der Spätaufklärerischen Schwärmerdebatte,” *German Life and Letters* 62:1, 55.

8. I, 7, 44; I, 7, 119.

9. Fichte, GA I/8, 78.

10. English translation in Fritz Marti, *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 195.

11. Ludwig Tieck, “Prinz Zerbino, oder Die Reise nach dem guten Geschmack,” *Schriften*, Zehnter Bd. (Berlin: Reimer, 1828).

12. “Wir freuen uns, daß wir nicht mehr draußen als elende grüne Bäume im Freien stehn und rauschen und uns schütteln, was keinem frommt. Hier sind wir zu einem nützlichen Zwecke umgearbeitet und erzogen. . . . ich bekenne es mir dreist, daß dieser Tisch und dieser Stuhl die edelsten, die vernunftreichsten Kreaturen sind, die ich noch, mich selber ausgenommen, bisher auf Erden angetroffen habe” (ibid., 460–461).

13. “To us, science has laid open our own spiritual being, and thereby, in great measure, subjected to our will the outward physical forces of the universe. Mechanical science has multiplied, almost to infinity, the feeble powers of man, and continues to multiply them” (GA I/8, 226).

14. Daniel Breazeale writes of Fichte in 1794, shortly after his arrival in Jena, “As is glaringly evident from his contributions to some of the literary quarrels in which he soon became embroiled, he was very thin skinned, with a tendency to see all criticism as personal attack. Too proud for compromise, he was always ready to turn any disagreement into a conflict over principle and to adopt an unbearably high moral tone.” *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, editor’s introduction (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 22.

15. Schelling to Fichte, October 3, 1801. PRFS, 64.

16. “. . . I hereby declare Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* to be a totally indefensible system. For the pure *Wissenschaftslehre* is nothing but mere logic, and the principles of logic cannot lead to any *material* knowledge.” Kant, “Erklärung in Beziehung auf Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre,” *Akademie Ausgabe*, Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1922), XII: 370f.

17. As Fichte had famously referred to him in the 1800 “Announcement” in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, PRFS, 86.