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Both Fichte and Schelling laid claim to fulfilling the spirit of Kant's philosophy. Both saw themselves as pursuing a system of philosophy that revolved around the absolute pull of freedom. Although each advanced different presentations of such systems of philosophy, both Fichte and Schelling were in agreement that the success of their work depended on resolving the riddle of self-consciousness; a riddle whose resolution lay in accounting for the problematic unity of self-consciousness. In brief, each agreed that the reflexive and thus oppositional structure of self-consciousness could only be explained if a convincing account of the common ground that holds this oppositional structure together could be provided; an account that would not only provide unity to the I, but would also generate insight into the absolute status of freedom. Both tackle this challenge by providing what Kant failed to, namely a derivation of the categories which direct their respective systems' resolution of this riddle.

In what follows I would like to examine the impact of how their choice of categories, and their subsequent derivation, shape their systems, as well as see how these categorical and systematic differences inform the crucial exchange of letters in the Fall of 1800 that set the terms for their eventual estrangement.

The point at which each latches onto Kant's assortment of categories is instructive and reveals the different interests of each. As Fichte wrote to Reinhold in 1795, the second and third *Critiques* were of much more importance to him than the first, which, as he claimed, doesn't supply the highest principle of philosophy, the *Sollen* of the categorical imperative (2 July, *GA*

III, 2, 346). Schelling approached Kant through his study of Plato and the natural sciences, focusing on the first and third *Critiques*.

The Kantian ideas that attracted Fichte revolved around the mathematical categories of Quality and Quantity, whereas Schelling was at pains to show how Kant's dynamic categories of Relation manifested Plato's eternal form of reasoning that permeates not only human consciousness, but the entire organic structure of the cosmos. To employ Kantian distinctions: Fichte works exclusively with a regressive synthesis enclosed within the limits of discursive reflection, while Schelling utilizes Kant's progressive synthesis and its method of construction which, beginning with the inexorable simultaneity of reciprocal causation, enables Schelling to engage in the parallel processing of the organic logic of disjunction.

Fichte appropriates the class of Quality's categories, beginning with the absolute affirmation of the reality of the self-positing I, followed by its negation by the Not-I of nature, an awkward *Verbindung* made possible by the third and all important category of limitation, which Fichte further defines through the use of the *Weltbegriff* Kant associates with this class, the idea of *division* (A 415/B 443; *GA* I/1 270). This move in turn makes possible the transition to the other mathematical class of Quantity. Modeling math, Fichte claims a timeless *Wissenschaftslehre* that should articulate a static system of reason which is not only self-grounding, but more importantly, complete. This dyadic system is determined by a fundamental opposition between nature and subject which, theoretically, Fichte's additive synthesis can never overcome. The oppositional tension created by the inability to arrive at the absolute creates the demand for its overcoming articulated in Fichte's use of the categorical demand of the *Sollen*. Providing an elegant theoretical case for absolute autonomy of subject, whose field of victory is

found in the practical sphere, the vocation of man is to strive to overcome this opposition by becoming masters over nature (cf. *Bestimmung des Menschen*, Bk III. §2).

The role of the cosmological idea of division -- or divisibility -- is significant, demonstrating how Fichte's system, in this regard at least, is the offspring of Kant's divorce of sensuous from intelligible nature, with of course the former dictated by necessity, the latter governed by freedom. Determined by the absolute positing of the I, Fichte's focus is the free realm of the intelligible, that is, of consciousness. As such, from a methodological standpoint consciousness can only be accounted for through consciousness; a position from which follows that the nature of consciousness must be self-explaining. Fichte's task is to disclose the mind's own dynamism, grounded as it is in the oppositional play of dualities that constitute our consciousness. Yet given the foundational role of division as condition of the oppositional relationship between I and Not I, the question immediately arises as to what resources Fichte can call on to intelligibly account for the *unity* of our now operative consciousness. As Schelling will repeatedly point out, Fichte's attempt to *derive* consciousness, in and due to its very method, presupposes the very thing it seeks to prove, since in its first step it accepts reflective self-consciousness as ready-made.

For Schelling, there must be an account of the genesis of self-consciousness -- a requirement aptly fulfilled by the cosmological idea of *origination* Kant associates with the class of categories Schelling chooses to shape his system (A 415/B 443). Following his position that life is "the schema of freedom" (*SW* I/1, 246), Schelling inverts Kant's categories and sets the dynamic categories of Relation as foundational and begins his derivation with the category of

organic life and its self-organizing system, the third category of reciprocal causation.¹ Beginning with the absolute measure of a dynamic relational whole, Schelling advances an organic system which, as self-organizing, must evolve and continue the process of self-differentiation. This provides the simultaneity of the whole within which he can account for the oppositional interaction of its parts which, following Plato's lead, are the unconditioned of the subject and the conditioned of the object.

In his commentary to Plato's *Timaeus* and *Philebus*, written devoid of any Fichtean terminology in 1794, Schelling is at pains to see in Kant's thinking a contemporary manifestation of Plato's eternal form of reasoning that integrates the dualities of thought through the use of the limited (τὸ πέρας), the unlimited (τὸ ἄπειρον) and their union (τὸ κοινὸν) (*TC* 69; *Phil.* 15d8-e5; 16c5-e5).² He sees common structural ground in the triadic form of the ὁδός and the disjunctive form of Kant's category of reciprocal causation, as well as functional similarities in that both Plato and Kant employ these forms as *Naturbegriffe* to account for organic life. In the *Formschrift* Schelling's *Urform* of philosophy bears out this pedigree while also incorporating Fichte. Referring to Kant's new sections §11 and §12 in the B edition of the first *Critique* – both of which try to further explain the “problematic” (A 75/B 100) nature of this category of reciprocal causation – Schelling identifies this category with the “Urform of all knowledge” and Kant's claim that his categories contain the “*momenta* of a projected speculative science” (I/1, 105, n. 2; B 110). The determining element in all this is Kant's disjunctive form of syllogism which, although problematic, is presented as a logic not of sequence, but of opposition (A 73/B 99), making it the logical form of system (A 323/B 379), organic life and its relation between

¹ References are to Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling, I vols. 1-10, II vols. 1-4, (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856-61), hereafter cited as *SW*.

² Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Timaeus* (1794) (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1994), 33 (hereafter cited as *TC*).

whole and part, as well as ordering the articulation and full predication of the Transcendental Ideal (A 336/B 393; A 576/B 604f.) and, perhaps most importantly, 'resolving' the third antinomy of freedom (A 536/B 564).

This results in the triadic system, first announced in 1797 (*SW* I/1 465), that is determined by an organic identity whose dynamic, while also driven by opposition between nature (theoretical) and subject (practical), aims at the integration of self and nature, which is anticipated in works of art (aesthetic). A integrative process whose "ultimate goal" is "to turn the laws of freedom into laws of nature, and the laws of nature into laws of freedom, to bring about nature in the I, and I in nature" (*SW* I/1, 198 n.2). Schelling bases his case for the integration of self and nature on a fundamental yet highly problematic identity between consciousness and nature: the organic form of a self-organizing system common to all of creation. This is the basis for his epistemological principle of *Mitwissenschaft* that enables human consciousness to escape the anthropocentric solitude of the subject and arrive at the 'pure subject-object' of nature and thereby provide a genetic account of how the very oppositional dynamic that animates nature also animates human consciousness. And it is this escape from subjectivity that is precisely the point on which he and Fichte disagree.

To anticipate, Fichte too levels the charge of circularity at Schelling's strategy of using the *Naturphilosophie* as the foundation for Transcendental Philosophy, since the 'pure subject-object' of nature can only be understood as the 'projected analog' of our own conscious activity. This disagreement about the scope of human knowing reflects their respective philosophical standpoints, to the extent that Fichte is more concerned with the vocation and fate of humanity, while Schelling aims at what we would now call the 'Grand Unified Theory' of everything.

For right or wrong, Fichte and Schelling disagree about the relation we enjoy to nature, the Not-I. In Schelling's organic monism, we humans are a part of nature, since the oppositions that animate our consciousness are just a manifestation of the same oppositional forces at work in the system of nature. He grounds on this structural identity his epistemological concept of *Mitwissenschaft* that allows him to abstract beyond the subjective I to the absolute subject-object (*SW* I/4 90; I/6, 144; I/8 200). To ensure the freedom of the human subject, Fichte opts to maintain the more traditional dualism of nature and mind, and insists that human consciousness does not need to break out of its subjective confines, since our imperative is to control and make that which is beyond the subject like unto it.

In their letter exchange it is clear that Schelling wants to build out the *Wissenschaftslehre* to include his *Naturphilosophie*, something Fichte agrees to in principle, but on his own terms, not those advanced by Schelling. Differences first begin to appear in Fichte's letter of November 15 1800, when, in response to Schelling's *Transcendental System of 1800*, Fichte writes that he is "not yet in agreement" with Schelling's "opposition of transcendental philosophy and *Naturphilosophie*" (*GA* III/4 360). Schelling's position "appears to be based on a confusion of *ideal* and *real* activity", Fichte continues, since these are only united in the I. "The *reality of nature* is something different", since in the transcendental philosophy it appears as something "just found .. finished and complete", and "not according to its [nature's] own laws", but rather to the laws "immanent to Intelligence". This, for Fichte, in turn allows Schelling's "science ... [to], through a subtle abstraction make nature its object", and to then allow this object "through a *fiction, to construct itself*, just as transcendental philosophy, through a *similar fiction*, allows consciousness to construct itself". Fichte's substantive criticism seems to be that the reality of the I is not opposed to an equal or similar reality of nature (Schelling's position), but rather that

the reality and status of the I, as found in his *Wissenschaftslehre* and clearly articulated in his *Bestimmung des Menschen*— in fact stands above nature, finding it as an object constituted according to its laws.

Schelling responds that just as in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, in which the oppositional real and ideal are united in something higher, in the I namely, so too in his Transcendental Philosophy the opposition of the thinking I and the material world are united in something higher, namely in the continuum of nature itself, which only the Absolute can embrace. Schelling writes: “The ground” of our disagreement “lies in the fact that even the ideal-real objective, and thus also producing I, is in this its producing nothing other than *Nature*, of which the I of intellectual intuition, or of self-consciousness, is but the higher potency” (*GA* III/4 363). Making direct reference to Fichte’s letter, Schelling drives home this point by expressly noting that the object of *Naturphilosophie* is thus “not what is found, but is that which brings forth”. And with this Schelling claims to have moved beyond the *Wissenschaftslehre* and into philosophy proper, since while Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* is “complete” and finished, it “is not yet philosophy” because “it proceeds merely logically, having nothing to do with reality”. It is instead the “formal proof of idealism, and thus the science κατ’ ἐξοκλήν”. Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, on the other hand, is the “*material* proof of idealism”.

Breaking out of the “orbit of consciousness” (*SW* I 4 85), Schelling claims that his *Naturphilosophie* begins when one, “through an abstraction from the universal *Wissenschaftslehre*”, in which one “abstracts from the subjective (intuiting) activity that sets the Subject-Object as identical with each other in consciousness”, one arrives at “the concept of the *pure* (entirely objective) Subject-Object”, which in turn becomes the principle of the theoretical and “realistic part of philosophy” (*GA* III/4 364). This pure, objective Subject-Object is the less

complex twin of the more potent subjective Subject-Object, which is the I of consciousness. This is the principle of the “idealistic (till now called practical) part of philosophy”, which through the theoretical *Naturphilosophie* “first receives its foundation”. *Naturphilosophie* and Transcendental Philosophy are not, however, opposed to each other as much as they are “opposed parts of one and the same whole, namely of the system of philosophy”. Making a plea for a pluralistic posture, Schelling closes by suggesting that while he “does not know now whether we can agree” on these points, they should still work together, such that “one might see us as approaching the same goal from different directions” (*GA* III/4 366).

Fichte thought long and hard over his response, generating both a brutally honest draft and a very diplomatic letter, which was the version he sent to Schelling. In the former draft Fichte criticizes Schelling, while proposing a new strategy of perhaps moving their debate forward – on his terms. He first levels the charge of circularity at Schelling’s strategy of using the *Naturphilosophie* as the foundation for Transcendental Philosophy. On his reading, the subjective in Schelling’s ‘pure subject-object’ nature can only be “the creation of our powers of imagination”, which as such, is nothing more than the “projected analog of our self-determination (nature as *noumenon*)” (*GA* III/4 404). Under threat of circularity, this projected analog of the subject’s self-determination cannot then be used to explain and ground the subject of consciousness, which is the principal of Transcendental Philosophy. He then clearly states the finite limits of his *Wissenschaftslehre* that he believes Schelling oversteps in his attempt to move beyond the human subject. Fichte’s system is “capable of completely deriving the sense world ... within the limits (*Umkreises*) of the subject=objectivity of the I, as finite intelligence, and of an original limitation (*Begrenzung*) of the same through material feeling and certainty”. But it

“absolutely does not allow itself to explain that original limitation (*Beschränkung*)” (*GA III/4* 405).

In the draft version of this letter Fichte also plays with how the principles of transcendental philosophy could be extended. The only strategy he could envision for “going beyond the I” to explain the “original limitation” would be in a “system of *the Intelligible World*”, in which the subjective in nature would be accounted for by deriving it from the manifestation of the intelligible therein: To get beyond the limits of the I, Fichte proposes to derive “certainty from the intelligible as *noumen* (or God)” and “feelings, which are only the lower pole of the first [certainty], from the manifestation of the intelligible in the sensible nature”. From this standpoint there would be “two new, totally opposed parts of philosophy that are united in transcendental philosophy as their middle-point. The finite intelligence as *Geist* is the lower potency of the Intelligible as noumenon [or god]; this same thing is, as a natural being, the highest potency of the intelligible as nature”. In “this system of the intelligible alone” could he agree with Schelling's search for an objective concept of nature: “I can only find it correct under the condition that I don't posit nature merely as phenomenon, but rather with something intelligible in it”, of which the determinate I “is the higher potency”.

Fichte offers Schelling compromise, however, in the final draft of this letter, agreeing that it is an “urgent demand” to “still further extend Transcendental Philosophy, even in its principles”, to deal with the challenge of accounting for the reality of nature (*GA III/4* 406). He suggests in the draft letter that “just as soon as he is finished with the new *Wissenschaftslehre*,” his “first work” will be to undertake this *further extension* of transcendental philosophy.

It sounds as if Fichte and Schelling are pursuing the same goal of extending the principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre* beyond the limits of its original orbit. Yet obvious differences are also

apparent. Even in introducing the new “system of *the Intelligible World*”, Fichte sustains the systematic division between “two new, totally opposed parts of philosophy”, once again finding it impossible to conceive how the noumenal could actually interact with the phenomenal.

Schelling sticks to the disjunctive form of an organic identity that allows him to construct the opposing spheres of nature and mind as different parts of a larger whole, whose contours are to be objectively revealed in works of art. In the same way that Kant uses the logic of disjunction to account for the way in which the Transcendental Ideal can sustain and thus unify opposing predicates, Schelling uses the *Ineinsbildung* of productive imagination to indicate to us, through art, the nature of a possible wholeness in which the human subject is no longer alienated from nature.

This is a way to systematically integrate difference into a harmonious, productive whole – a model that in many ways both Fichte and Schelling attempted to follow in debating their own differences about the nature of Transcendental Philosophy. But just as this organic identity is based on a logical form Kant considered *problematic*, so too was Schelling and Fichte’s attempt at uniting their different approaches to Transcendental Philosophy.