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Review of Iain Hamilton Grant's *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2008).

It has become increasingly difficult to prevent F.W.J. Schelling from either falling into the obscure chasm between Kant and Hegel or to articulate his work outside of the shadows of various contemporaries such as Andrew Bowie, Jason Wirth and, most recently, Slavoj Žižek. In the former case, Schelling is only the clumsiest of the better known figures of German Idealism, damned as either too Kantian, not Kantian enough, or destined only to be overcome by Hegel's far more potent and systematic philosophy. In the latter case, Schelling is further obfuscated, multiplied into a series of inconsistent figures: a theological thinker, a philosopher of freedom, a pre-postmodern theorist, and so forth, each summoned for their due service before being cast back into Schelling's purported inconsistency. Amongst these contemporary articulations Slavoj Žižek's is the best known. Žižek attempts to properly situate Schelling within the network of his German Idealist company. Alongside Fichte's positive exacerbation of the subject, and Hegel's negative subject, Schelling's later philosophy (following the system of identity but preceding his work on mythology) is construed to be a theory of drive and will, thereby laying the groundwork for psychoanalysis and structuralist theories of the subject, casting Schelling as another mind in the service of Transcendental Materialism.

Yet all these figurations of Schelling neglect several crucial features of Schelling's work, and it is these features which Iain Hamilton Grant's dense book rediscovers and extrapolates upon. Grant's task is not merely to pick one aspect of Schelling's philosophical career but to show that all of Schelling's philosophy is fundamentally a naturephilosophy (x). That is, where most contemporary views of Schelling selectively raid his texts justifying themselves in Schelling's aforementioned inconsistency, Grant's approach suggests that Schelling in fact attempted rapidly varied approaches to a singular project; that of redefining the content and relationship of materialism and idealism in league with burgeoning science and German philosophy in order to construct a rigorous

philosophy of nature (2), a philosophy which attempts, in various modes, to demolish what has preceded in order to clear the path for accessing the absolute. Aside from generally rehabilitating Schelling, Grant manages to renew naturephilosophy at large as well as suggest that idealism, and in particular German idealism, cannot be viewed as merely an affront to realism but that idealism itself can be seen as exploring the reality of the idea, or the natural history of the mind (2) through an unconditioning of the metaphysics of nature (6). The larger scope of Grant's work can be taken as the critical integration of the subjective and objective while avoiding the commonplace annihilation of the latter by the former.

Grant begins by articulating a processual nature focusing on being-as-becoming so as to quickly undermine the two-world metaphysics of Kant (of the world as divided between an unknowable noumenal realm and the merely sensible/intuitable phenomenal realm). Through an appeal to the speculative physics of forces and fields, Schelling figures nature as an unending process of grounding and ungrounding resulting from a tension between an original positive and negative force (145). These forces however, cannot be seen as acting upon an inert plasma of materiality but "are neither free nor bonded with respect to the matters they construct, the first, positive force is never completely „free“ of, or wholly „enchained“ by, the negative force. Ideally separable, therefore, they nevertheless lack real conditions of dissociability" (149).

Grant explores the problematic issue of conceiving materiality within processual nature through a seemingly unlikely aid to realism: Plato. Grant argues that Kant, by adopting the Aristotelian malformation of Plato's physics, ignored the complexity of matter, instead cornering it as merely a pre-sensible field (68). By interrogating Platonic dynamism, Grant welcomes the productive darkness of Plato's formulation of matter as idea and as receptacle (34), as both power and substance (28). The resulting problem of course (given fairly abstract principles of materiality) is how does individuation occur? How does something emerge and solidify from the dark swirling of Platonic matter? This problem divides into four subsequent problems, the foremost being the genetic problem, or, from what are the elements of natural phenomenon composed of as well as how does the decomposability of matter occur (119)? The two other problems, those of continuity in terms of time and cause, are both problems found in Schelling's concept of the *Stufenfolge* or "the dynamic succession of stages" (119). While the investigation of the *Stufenfolge* proved a stumbling block for Kant this was due to his aforementioned adherence to somatism which in turn relies on a linearity blind to the dynamism of nature itself. This dynamism, as Grant dissects it, turns the

latter two of the four-fold problem into a tool against the first two problems (139). The key to this strange non-linearity lies in the eschewed radical productivity of nature itself.

The simple statement, often repeated by Grant here and elsewhere, is that the apriority of nature must determine thinking (138). As Grant himself notes in the preface to the paperback edition—there is still much work to be done in refashioning the German tradition of idealism. Part of this ambiguity may lie in the productivity of thought in its mad speculative pseudo-Deleuzo-Guattarian modes in contrast to its anchoring in the dynamic forces of nature (177). Immanence and transcendence must both give ground to nature itself. The specifics of the relation between the genesis of the ideal and the work of nature remain vague and perhaps, not unsurprisingly so, given the sheer mass of the problem. Grant’s brief critical swipe at naturalized epistemology however causes some obfuscation as to how exactly this problem should be engaged if not along strictly, or at least mostly, naturalistic lines (2). Even so, Grant’s statement following Schelling’s use of Plato’s *Timaeus* is intriguing: “the Idea is the eternity of motion phenomenally and physically serialized as „always becoming“ (Tim. 27e9), just as nature is infinite productivity serialized in products” (197).

In regards to the transcendental in relation to idealism, Grant shows that transcendence can be rescued from its usual naïveté through Schelling’s remolding of the transcendental as always being firmly rooted in the real or material as opposed to the abstract or purely formal (158-159). Schelling, Grant shows, reworks “the transcendental as recapitulation of the irreversible dysmmetry between product and productivity in nature in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*” (138). Naturephilosophy exceeds the transcendental as well as the thinker who thinks the transcendental contra Hegel, Fichte, and Kant (Ibid). Opposed to Kant’s naïve use of the category of transcendence which overshoots a caricature of nature as only corporeal (68), Fichte’s grotesque transfusion of all vitality to the *Ich* (61), and the symmetrical whole of Hegel’s treatment of Schelling’s nature in the difference essay (172), Schelling instead subjectifies nature as a radical *natura naturans*, a self activating nature (16). This subject is not then a subject as the term has largely solidified in the post-Kantian centuries, but a de-formalized yet non-vital or romanticized subjectivity (16), a multitude of subjects resulting from the self organizing and constructing power of nature (174).

This constructing power reaches into the ideal realm as well. In chapter five, Grant addresses how ideality is effectively externalized in Schelling’s philosophy due to the reason of nature itself (61), so that

nature's apriority determines the very possibility of idealism (138). Instead of an idealism eliminating nature for the sake of formal consistency (140) an idealism in the wake of Schellingian naturephilosophy illuminates thought as a force which thinks through us, a force which is recapitulated in the concepts produced by the thinking subject (180).

A corollary to this revival of naturephilosophy is Grant's exploration of lesser known German thinkers alongside Schelling, such as Eschenmeyer, Kielmeyer, Blumenbach, and Oken. Kielmeyer's articulation of temporality is particularly important to the deep time utilized by Schelling (126). Furthermore, Grant's exploration of these figures orients Schelling in relation to atomism and vitalism (18). In addition, these thinkers provide an interesting post-Kantian landscape often neglected in the jump from Schelling to Hegel. Grant goes to great lengths to show that while many figures succumb to claims of vitalism or organicism, several (Kielmeyer in particular) provide serious challenges to Kantian dogmatism by way of their utilization of deep time (121).

In a text that does so much it is perhaps anathema to ask, or hope, for it to do more, though the glimpses of critique of more recent theory begged for more explanation. Grant's text leaves one wanting a more extended engagement with the concept of nature in Whitehead, Merleau-Ponty, and, in particular, Deleuze and Guattari as their philosophy of immanence and their use of vitalism has long dominated the thinking of nature as well as philosophical dynamism and process philosophy on the whole. While Deleuze is marked as a failed dynamist due to his reliance on the body (165), how this critique affects contemporary Deleuzians such as Manuel DeLanda, Brian Massumi, and Keith Ansell Pearson, remains an important question. Furthermore, given the preoccupation with Schelling's freedom essay the concept of will gets rather short shrift in Grant's text.

Regardless of these misgivings however, one can hardly fault Grant for venturing out, lamp of knowledge in hand, into strange worlds instead of ceaselessly defending the ramparts (177).

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