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The Asystasy of the Life Sciences: Schelling, Hunter and British Idealism

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In 1799 the British Crown purchased 13,000 fossils and specimens from the estate of John Hunter (1728-93). This “vast Golgotha”² then became the object of attempts to classify and institutionalize the work of one of the most singular and polymathic figures in the British life sciences whose work encompassed medicine and surgery, physiology, comparative anatomy and geology. The result was the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons, separate Lecture Series on comparative anatomy and surgery from 1810, and “Orations” on Hunter’s birthday from 1814. Almost symbolically, these efforts were disrupted by the burning of twenty folio volumes of Hunter’s notes on the specimens in 1823 by his brother-in-law and executor Sir Everard Home. Home may have wanted to emerge from Hunter’s shadow or disguise his borrowings but saw nothing wrong in his actions and divulged them to Hunter’s amanuensis William Clift (by then Chief Conservator of the Museum). Having based over ninety articles on Hunter’s work, Home claimed he had published and acknowledged everything of value, and that Hunter wanted him to burn the papers, though interestingly he waited thirty years to do so. He also claimed he had wanted to present Hunter’s work in more complete form, and spare him from charges of irreligion. And indeed it had been recently that the debate between John Abernethy and William Lawrence had broken out, over whether Hunter and science should be aligned with religion or materialism: a debate

¹ The author acknowledges the support of the Canada Research Chairs Program in the preparation of this article.

² Samuel Gross, *John Hunter and his Pupils* (Philadelphia: Presley Blakiston, 1881), 52.

that caused Coleridge to invoke Schelling to support a nervous idealization of Hunter in his *Theory of Life*. Ignoring Home's activities, the Royal College, it seems, may also have wanted Hunter's work to be "completed." But if so what was troubling about the British scientist's first outlines and his reluctance to arrive at the "system itself" (SW III: 4)?³ And given that Schelling would prove a dangerous supplement, how does Hunter's speculative empiricism converge with the equally explosive transcendental empiricism of Schelling's *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799), the most fertile and chaotic of his writings in *Naturphilosophie*?

According to Schelling, "contemplating human knowledge within a system" presupposes "that originally and of itself it does not exist in a system" but is "an *asystaton* ... something that is in inner conflict" (SW IX: 209).⁴ In what follows I suggest that Hunter functions as a British surrogate for this asystasy that also lies at the heart of the philosophy of nature as a problem posed to post-Kantian Idealism's self-grounding of spirit in nature. Hunter was an avid collector of (in)organic materials, and as Walter Benjamin says in another context, it is because "he was a pioneer" that he became "a collector," a materialist (in the non-philosophical sense of that term) whose monads of knowledge could "blast the epoch out of its reified ... continuity."⁵ The containment of Hunter that was necessary when his collection—and thus the life sciences themselves—became a public trust took two forms: utilitarian and philosophical. Several commentators (especially the "Orators") absorbed his work into the professionalization of medicine and pragmatized him by focusing on medical institutions rather than ideas. At the other end were the Coleridgeans: metaphysicians or transcendental biologists,⁶ who included Coleridge himself, his friend and executor Joseph Henry Green, and Green's protégé Richard Owen, later the foremost biologist and paleontologist of the period before Darwin. These thinkers used a simplified Schelling (as well as Oken and Carus) to give the life sciences philosophical weight. They thus read *Naturphilosophie* in highly transcendental ways, so as to inoculate themselves against precisely the questions opened up by the feedback loop between science and philosophy of which Schelling's own work is exemplary.

While focusing on Hunter and the philosophical and methodological filtering of his work by British idealism, this paper therefore follows a double path. On the one hand, framing Hunter's work through Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* allows us to see how much of a fifth column it was within

3 F.W.J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), 3.

4 Schelling, "On the Nature of Philosophy as Science," trans. Markus Weigelt, in *German Idealist Philosophy*, ed. Rüdiger Bubner (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997), 210.

5 Walter Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 261-2.

6 On "transcendental" biology and anatomy in Europe see Philip Rehbock, *The Philosophical Naturalists: Themes in Early Nineteenth Century British Biology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 15-30; for its uptake in Britain see 56-114.

British science. Its many disturbing ramifications are one instance of why, on the edge of the Victorian period, British science in its public form felt compelled to unify nature under a natural theology consolidated across the disciplines by the Bridgewater Treatises.⁷ In the space of an article we can only put the two thinkers in constellation suggestively, but Schelling gives us the theoretical tools to release Hunter's work from the immunitary enclosure in which it was increasingly confined. On the other hand, while German Idealism is more philosophically rigorous about the metaphorical short-circuits that produce natural theology,⁸ the Coleridgeans sought sanctuary in Schelling precisely because his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) promised to synchronize the volatile forces of nature with the goals of spirit. Crucial here is the *Stufenfolge* or graduated stages of nature by which nature develops from the polypi to man as one organism "inhibited at various stages." This logical rather than literal evolution which Schelling hypothesizes in the *First Outline* projects a purposiveness that allows mere natural history ("*Naturgeschichte*" or *natura naturata*) to be reconceived as "a history of nature [*eine Geschichte der Natur selbst*]" (SW III: 53, 63, 68).⁹ Juxtaposing German with British Idealism reminds us of the former's transcendental aspirations, which we may want to forget in an attempt to make Schelling (if not Hegel) more contemporary. At the same time reading Schelling in apposition to Hunter (rather than the far more limited John Brown)¹⁰ helps us to understand the explosive philosophical importance of empiricism for transcendental philosophy. For as Schelling writes, "philosophy of nature" is "empiricism extended to include unconditionedness" (SW III: 24),¹¹ and it is this unconditional empiricism that we find in Hunter.

But turning to Hunter, after Home burned the notes, Richard Owen (later Clift's son-in-law), was appointed to catalogue the collection of a "life" whose diversity, Schelling writes, "comes into existence in opposition to nature" (SW III: 89n).¹² Much of Hunter's work *did* survive, through James Palmer's edition of his *Surgical Works* (1835), and then Owen's two-volume edition,

7 These were a series of eight treatises commissioned by the Earl of Bridgewater and published from 1833-6, with the intention of reconciling science and theology.

8 Thus Kant writes: "If one brings the concept of God into natural science ... to make purposiveness in nature explicable, and subsequently uses this purposiveness ... to prove that there is a God, then there is nothing of substance in either of the sciences, and a deceptive fallacy casts each into uncertainty by letting them cross each other's borders." *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 253.

9 Schelling, *First Outline*, 43, 43n, 49, 53.

10 The interest of Schelling, Hegel and Novalis in Brown is well known. However, Brown's single work, *The Elements of Medicine* (1780 in Latin), a form of early psychiatry, hardly has the encyclopedic breadth of Hunter's many texts, despite Schelling's attempt in the *First Outline* to think it in a wider interdisciplinary context.

11 Schelling, *First Outline*, 22.

12 Schelling, *First Outline*, 68n. Schelling has in mind here a normative notion of "Nature as subject," which is deeply hostile to "individual natures" that impede its productivity and "universal activity" (SW III: 17-18, 69-70). Schelling, *First Outline*, 17, 54-5.

Essays and Observations on Natural History, etc. (1861), based on transcripts Clift made of half the notes before Home appropriated them. It is clear from the range of these volumes, particularly the Palmer edition which contains several long works, that Home's "completion" of Hunter missed both the interplay of system and singularity in Hunter's work and the interdisciplinary core of his thought. Home's articles repeat Hunter's detailed investigation of an array of anatomical and medical topics, but share none of his speculative interests in the vital principle at the boundary between chemistry and physiology, nor his sense of how empiricism troubles generalization. Home fragments Hunter's work into "an unintegrated collection of case studies,"¹³ and in the absence of the architectonic that Kant sees as necessary to a "science," his cannibalization of Hunter's work atomizes it into a "mere aggregate."¹⁴ Though it lies beyond the scope of this paper, in the second half of the century Owen's arrangement (rather than fragmentation) of these notes in classificatory series also de-fuses that "most intense moment of natural activity" that Hunter had wanted to get at by focusing on "the most acute moment of individualization in each organism" (SW III: 49).¹⁵

By contrast Hunter's corpus is encyclopedically ambitious and speculatively untotaled. As such, it traverses, even if it does not organize, all knowledge in the life sciences, rivalling the later and more theoretical projects of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and the second volume of Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. The parts of Hunter's work in physiology, surgery, natural history, geology etc. may not all have been original in a broader European context which Hunter knew and in which his work was known, including by Schelling.¹⁶ But Hunter thinks these fields in a kind of dis-integration, whose very empiricism is its own form of theory. As an encyclopedia of the life sciences in parts, his work can thus be approached through the paradigms provided by Novalis' *Romantic Encyclopedia* (1798) rather than by Kant's notion of architectonic. For Novalis the position of the parts in the whole is not determined *a priori*, as Kant suggests. Rather the whole is contingent on the parts, since through "the genuine raising to a higher power" or *Potenzirung*,

13 Nicolaas Rupke, *Richard Owen: Biology Without Darwin*, 2nd revised ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 99.

14 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 691.

15 Schelling, *First Outline*, 39.

16 Hunter's work was translated into Dutch, Latin and German. His famous *Treatise on the Blood, Inflammation and Gunshot Wounds* (1794), as well as his *Treatise on the Venereal Disease* (1786) and *Observations on Certain Parts of the Animal Oeconomy* (1786/17) were all translated into German almost immediately. *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, ed. Miriam Drake, Vol. 3 (London: Taylor and Francis, 2003), 1846. The first two texts are by no means narrowly limited to the subjects named in their titles. Schelling refers to Hunter thrice, in *On the World-Soul* and the *First Outline* (SW II: 570; III: 133, 171). He also refers to *The Contributions to Elementary Physiology* of Franz von Baader, who had read Hunter (SW II: 546). The Baader-Hunter connection is annotated by Iain Hamilton Grant, in his forthcoming translation of *On the World-Soul*, of which he has kindly given me a copy.

“every science” or even “molecule” of knowledge can “pass over into a higher philosophical science,”¹⁷ blasting knowledge out of its continuity. It is in this sense that Hunter’s radical empiricism, far from being unphilosophical in the mode of the British natural philosophy that Hegel criticizes in the Introduction to his *Encyclopedia Outline* (1817),¹⁸ is the condition of possibility for theoretical questions that can be raised when Hunter’s work and *Naturphilosophie* are thought through each other.

Among the problems Hunter shares with his more philosophical successors, particularly Schelling, is the question of the self-organization of life as it develops from matter. Hunter argues that “animal and vegetable matter” have “arisen out of the matter of the globe,” but also writes that “animal and vegetable substances *differ* from common matter in having a power superadded, totally different from any other known property of matter, out of which arise various new properties” (italics mine).¹⁹ This *vis vitae*, however, is not ascribed to a higher power; it is immanent but not easily traceable, since we know it more in terms of effects than causes. Hence we cannot be sure that it exists. Schelling similarly dissociates himself from the “fiction” of vitalism, even though he also seems to endorse an “*immaterial* principle, which is rightly called *vital force*” or *Lebenskraft* (SW III: 80, 80n, 84).²⁰ And indeed Schelling takes positions both for and against vitalism on the same page, as if posing an antinomy whose resolution is not, however, necessary in an experimental text where the facts “are not yet in” (SW III: 4).²¹

On this same issue of life and its forms, Hunter also claims, unsurprisingly, that animals are distinguished by having “motion within [themselves].” But then, unlike others, most famously Bichat—whom Hegel cites²²—who categorically divides animals and vegetables, Hunter ascribes a “power of action” to both animals and vegetables, thus complicating the gradations on which any *Stufenfolge* must be based.²³ While the sheer materiality of Hunter’s work resists the idealization that transcendental biology imposed on it, his understanding of life is not materialist and is certainly not mechanist, nor is it quite hylozoist or even conventionally vitalist. Thus Hunter writes that the “universe has been divided into ‘matter’ and ‘spirit,’” as a “species of

17 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 691; Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopedia*, trans. and ed. David Wood (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), #487, #489 and see also #155, #176, #233, #460.

18 G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline*, trans. Stephen Taubeneck, in *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 1990), 49-50, 50n.

19 John Hunter, *The Surgical Works of John Hunter, F.R.S.*, ed. James Palmer, 4 vols. (London: Longman, Rees and Orme, 1835), I, 214.

20 Schelling, *First Outline*, 61, 61n, 64.

21 Schelling, *First Outline*, 3.

22 G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 373-6, 393. Bichat was of course writing after Hunter, although Lawrence and Coleridge frame Hunter in relation to Bichat.

23 Hunter, *Surgical Works*, I, 214-15, 222.

intelligent quality that presides over and directs the actions of matter”—not language that we normally find in British science. But he adds, with almost Kantian reserve, that we cannot “have an idea” of spirit, “as it goes beyond matter,” where we cannot go “even in idea.” Denying that “spirit” is “a something superadded to ... matter,” even though he elsewhere credits organic matter with a “power superadded” which is different from any other property of matter, Hunter nevertheless does hold on to the word “spirit,” but only in order to yet suggest that it may be a property of matter.²⁴

In short, if nature is possessed of a vital force that is not transcendently grounded nor directed by a principle of sufficient reason, but contingent and elusively (im)material in its workings, there is no clear way of characterizing the force of production in nature. Related to this is Hunter’s sense that normal and pathological life processes may be entwined, evidence for which lies in his many surgical case studies. Though Owen conspicuously excluded these from *Essays and Observations*, some of them are threaded through Hunter’s extensive lectures on surgery and wounds in the Palmer edition, bringing life and mortification perilously close. Indeed, Hunter writes that “diseased actions” may be “established on nearly the same principles that the actions of health are.”²⁵ In the Appendix on medicine in Schelling’s *First Outline* and in the last section of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*, we find a similar proximity between disease and life that imperils the movement from nature to spirit. Indeed, Schelling too writes that disease “has the same factors as life,” (SW III: 222)²⁶a notion that he and Novalis derive from John Brown but develop from an accidental idea in Brown into a substantive idea. And finally, given the resulting difficulty in understanding “life”—life, as Schelling says, is “unnatural” (SW III: 222n)²⁷—Hunter shares with the Germans a sense that in the absence of certain knowledge sciences fold into each other and supplement each other. “Life” may appear one way when focalized through comparative anatomy, and differently when seen through the lenses of medicine.

In its radical but not atomistic empiricism, Hunter’s system in pieces thus lies somewhere between Kant’s binary of system and aggregate. For Kant science is dependent on system as “the unity of manifold cognitions under one idea,” and a system in turn requires an architectonic, where the parts inhere in a whole and there can be no “contingent additions”; otherwise it is “heaped together” as a “mere aggregate.”²⁸ To establish the internal architectonic of a science and its external boundaries in the larger architectonic of knowledge, Kant proposed two forms of introduction: propaedeutic and encyclopedic.

²⁴ John Hunter, *Essays and Observations on Natural History, Anatomy, Physiology, Psychology, and Geology*, ed. Richard Owen, 2 vols. (London: John Van Voorst, 1861), I. 6; Hunter, *Surgical Works*, I, 214.

²⁵ Hunter, *Surgical Works*, I, 300.

²⁶ Schelling, *First Outline*, 160.

²⁷ Schelling, *First Outline*, 160n.

²⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 691.

Though Hunter preferred essays to books, he did provide what Kant calls “propaedeutic” introductions—or at least tables of contents—for his longer works, which frame and divide “the proposed doctrine” and its parts, albeit somewhat *a posteriori*. What he did not provide was an “encyclopedic” introduction that assigned a particular field such as dentistry or geology a fixed place in a larger “system”; nor did he observe Kantian “boundaries between sciences” that cleanly separate “the principles proper to the new doctrine (*domestica*) from those that belong to another one (*peregrinis*).”²⁹ In this respect Hunter’s writings, like the way he kept adding to his collection of specimens in an attempt to complete the catalogue of life, mirror Schelling’s comment that in order to recognize the “asystasy” at the root of knowledge, the mind “must have searched in every possible direction.” Schelling explores this asystasy in his Erlangen lecture, “On the Nature of Philosophy as Science” (1821), where he struggles with the way the desire for a unified system is unravelled by the multiplicity of philosophical systems, some “higher” than others but none ever gaining the upper hand. He thus points to the presence of multiple systems in the body—nervous, digestive, and so on—recognizing that their coexistence may result in one part departing from the whole conceived architectonically (SW IX: 209-11). The analogy silently refers back, not only to Kant’s use of the animal body as a figure for architectonic containment, but also to Schelling’s own Freedom Essay (1809), where he had written that the “individual body part, like the eye, is only possible in the whole of the organism” but has “its own life for itself, indeed, its own kind of freedom,” which it “proves through the disease of which it is capable” (SW VII: 346).³⁰ “Healthy individuals do not feel ... these systems,” and in the Erlangen lecture Schelling still projects the goal of being “free of” or “above all systems.” (SW IX: 212).³¹ But the very metaphor of the body, which refracts cognitive through physiological systems, testifies to the pressure that the life sciences were bringing to bear on philosophy.

For unlike Kant’s mathematization of knowledge into a “stereometrically regular crystal,” as Schelling sees it, philosophy “hosts germs of every possible illness” (SW IX: 212).³² What Schelling says of multiple philosophical systems can also be said of the multiple systems generated by different natural sciences in his *First Outline* and their consequences for seeing nature as a unified entity or force. And just as Schelling uses the body’s systems to rethink philosophical systems in the Erlangen lecture, so too Hunter’s work on the body’s multiple systems can be used to think about systems of knowledge. For instance, Hunter describes the phenomenon of anastomosis, in which one blood vessel opens into another, and where it is unclear whether these lateral ramifications of the veins

29 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 41-2.

30 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 691; Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations Into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 18.

31 Schelling, “On the Nature of Philosophy,” 213.

32 Schelling, “On the Nature of Philosophy,” 212.

help or retard the circulation of the blood.³³ Folding his account of physiological systems back onto the problem of epistemic systems provides a new way of thinking about the role of interruptions, anastomoses and relays within and between fields of knowledge.

Schelling provides a way to do this, for as he works between fields of knowledge such molecules of science are raised to “a higher power” and release philosophic potentials.³⁴ In terms of an emerging Romantic science of “systematics” that is critical rather than dogmatic, Schelling’s response to the multiplicity of physiological or epistemic systems is not to unify them from a higher perspective, but to argue that it is “*one* subject that proceeds through everything,” just as it is one subject “that lives in the different elements of an organism.” If we did not conceive of such an “absolute subject,” absolved from “everything finite” and from being “restricted to one form” or organ (of knowledge), “life and evolution would be inhibited” (SW IX: 215-17).³⁵ In his earlier lectures on academic study, Schelling had momentarily opened up the Kantian means-end architectonic of absolute knowledge, when he argued that “a scientist is faithful to the spirit of the whole only to the extent that he considers his field as an end in itself, an absolute” (SW V: 232).³⁶ We see this same willingness to host germs of every possible illness in the pursuit of “infinite” knowledge (SW IX: 222) in Hunter’s decision to inject himself with gonorrhoea to write his treatise on venereal disease. Less literally, we see it in the tangled paths taken by his work. Although he saw himself as a theorist of surgery (declining a professorship in comparative anatomy), in order to study surgery Hunter had to master physiology and comparative anatomy. But contrary to idealist biology’s desire to make comparative anatomy a science that reveals “the unity and inner affinity of all organisms” as they originate in “one archetype,” (SW V: 143)³⁷ comparative anatomy, to cite Schelling on both sides of this issue, opens up a series of “graduated divergences” (SW III: 64).³⁸ Furthermore, to understand the vital principle, Hunter had to study both inert and living matter and the transition between them in fossils, which arguably encrypted an eternal past in which nature is *prius*. In his traversal of these emergent but entangled disciplines, Hunter thus opened up the vast field of

33 Hunter, *Surgical Works*, III, 207-10.

34 For an elaboration of this (de)constructive interdisciplinarity as Schelling’s method, see my articles “First Outline of a System of Theory: Schelling and the Margins of Philosophy, 1799-1815,” *Studies in Romanticism*, 46 (2007): 311-35; “Evolution and its Resistances: Transferences Between Disciplines in Hegel’s and Schelling’s Systems,” *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy*, 19.1 (2015): 153-75.

35 Schelling, “On the Nature of Philosophy,” 215-17.

36 Schelling, *On University Studies*, trans. E.S. Morgan, ed. Norbert Guterman (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1966), 25. The English title is, of course, a mistranslation, since Schelling, distinguishing himself from Kant’s *Conflict of the Faculties*, for the most part refers to academies and not universities

37 Schelling, *On University Studies*, 142.

38 Schelling, *First Outline*, 50.

life in ways whose many interstices were disturbing for the British agenda of containing the life sciences within natural theology.

Hunter's polymathic embrace of so many fields concedes what he says he wants to transcend, namely that sciences are "blended with one another," or are used, in a form of transference, to explain other sciences. But it is not just that these mixtures and supplements occur for "want of a sufficient knowledge";³⁹ rather they point to the inadequacy of any positivist science. In other words, we are not dealing here with an amorphous pre-disciplinarity that precedes the disaggregation of disciplines often associated with the later nineteenth century. Indeed in the period under consideration disciplines *were* being founded, especially in Europe, and Kant repeatedly returns to the importance of separating the principles internal to a discipline (*domestica*) from foreign principles (*peregrina*) that are borrowed as analogical aids and must gradually be sifted out.⁴⁰ Hunter's comment on disciplinary crossings as due to a science being at its inception may hold out this Kantian hope of the streamlining and thus modernization of sciences. But we must remember that Owen's editing of his work extracts this comment from the asystasy of a notebook and gives it a systematic status by constructing an introduction that Hunter never wrote as such.⁴¹

Thus in practice we are speaking here of a quite different archeology of knowledge that is well described by Joseph Henry Green's phrase, "distinction without separation." This archeology distinguishes fields but resists dividing them from each other, and in the case of Hunter is also sensitive to the inexplicability of life and its resistance to clean scientific organization.⁴² It is the same in Schelling's *First Outline*, which operates in terms of a vertical axis that tries to organize nature into a "history" by way of the *Stufenfolge* or graduated stages of nature, but also in terms of a horizontal axis that diversifies the natural sciences into a number of fields that displace and re- or co-determine each other. We can find in the text the pathways cut by any number of fields: dynamic (rather than Newtonian) physics, chemistry, biology, physiology, geology, pedology (the study of soils), and cosmology. These fields are not always named and cannot be synchronized. Moreover, they transect the text and make incursions into it, rather than being put into a succession or

39 Hunter, *Essays and Observations*, 1.4.

40 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 252.

41 Hunter wrote his thoughts down on scraps of paper and then had his assistants copy them into notebooks. The relevant notebook at the Royal College of Surgeons is the copy Clift made of one of these notebooks, from which Owen, in turn, edited *Essays and Observations* over fifty years later. Owen's editing, to say the least, has its own agenda.

42 J.H. Green, *Distinction Without Separation* (London: Hurst, Chance and Co., 1831), 11, 43. Green's "holism" is, of course, more institutional and far less experimental than Hunter's or Schelling's. But confronted with an increasing specialization of the professions, specifically between surgeons and physicians, he argues that while there might have to be a "practical distinction" between the two, their "scientific unity" must be preserved, alongside an encyclopedic educational curriculum.

Stufenfolge of sciences, as in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*. Hegel's arrangement is a simulacrum or feint whereby the succession of disciplines seems to demonstrate Reason in Nature while in fact making this rationality contingent on an Idea which, at every stage of its development, releases complicating potentials.⁴³ But Schelling's spatial rather than temporal arrangement in the *First Outline* is more radically averse to hypostatizing any of its constructions, recognizing how, as different fields try to enclose nature within their sphere, or perhaps even as we try to enclose a field as a science or sphere of knowledge, "other spheres are again formed" within each sphere "and in these spheres others" (SW III: 55).⁴⁴

In what remains I take up the Coleridgeans' encounter with Schelling at the site of the problems posed by Hunter to a theory of life, as a case study of how British Idealism itself reined in the speculative potentials of its German counterpart: potentials that were particularly intense in the philosophy of nature. Coleridge and Green (as well as Owen⁴⁵) were familiar with Schelling and *Naturphilosophie*, even though Schelling was not translated till the later nineteenth century, and then too not in Britain.⁴⁶ Green, who worked closely with Coleridge, whom he met in 1817, twice studied in Germany, and was familiar with German science, including Goethe, Carus, Meckel and Wolff. An avid collector of books in German, he was also well-versed in the work of Kant and Schelling, and went to Berlin in 1817 to immerse himself in German philosophy with Karl Solger, who had just been involved in appointing Hegel. I venture here that Green, apart from reading the *Science of Logic*, had at least second-hand knowledge of Hegel's *Encyclopedia*, the first *Outline* of which appeared in 1817.⁴⁷ All this being said, British and German Idealism are very different, and

43 I suggest, in other words, that while a thinker such as Jean-Baptiste Robinet in *De la Nature* simply (and more naively) describes nature's ascent up the chain of being, Hegel's construction of his *Philosophy of Nature* in terms of a disciplinary series raises the question of mediation (which is throughout his struggle to impose/find the Idea in nature). Schelling differs in recognizing the relationship of the I to the Not-I as a construction which, as an "experiment" or "question" put to nature is open to its deconstruction (SW III: 276). Schelling, *First Outline*, 44.

44 Schelling, *First Outline*, 44.

45 Richard Owen, *On the Archetype and Homologies of the Vertebrate Skeleton* (London: John Van Voorst, 1848), 168-9. I do not take up Owen here, as his work is more scientific than philosophical. Owen's knowledge of Schelling was also somewhat second-hand, by way of Green and German transcendental anatomy.

46 Selections from Schelling's work were translated in the American journals, *The Dial* and more extensively, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. These included the Introduction to the *Outline*, all of *On University Studies* in parts, and part of "On the Principle of the I." There was a translation of Schelling's essay on the plastic arts and nature in 1845 by J. Chapman. But in contrast to the reception of Hegel, there was no book-length English translation of a work by Schelling until James Gutmann's *Of Human Freedom* (1936). The neglect of Schelling is extraordinary, considering that Bichat, Blumenbach, Carus, Cuvier, Oersted, Oken, Werner and others were all translated during the nineteenth century. While translations of science (including *Naturphilosophie*) were more frequent than translations from philosophy, given Schelling's place in *Naturphilosophie* the omission is still striking.

47 According to the sale catalogue of Green's library, a copy of which is held at Victoria

Coleridge grew nervous when it became clear that his Fichteanized Schelling and borrowings from the *System of Transcendental Idealism* in *Biographia Literaria* were not representative of the more dangerous *Naturphilosophie*.⁴⁸ The Coleridgeans, caught in the issue of science vs. religion, all sought to foreclose the difficulties that nature caused for spirit: difficulties they also tried to skirt in Hunter. Hence British Idealism in its first phase, inspired by Kant and Schelling, tried to immunize the Germans' opening up of an autotelic, even autogenetic nature, by retaining a designing power for God. In its second phase, inspired by one side of Hegel only, it repressed *Naturphilosophie* into an organic conception of the state, entirely avoiding a nature whose "ever-increasing wealth of detail" Hegel himself saw as "refractory towards the unity of the Notion."⁴⁹

Typical here is Green, and here his possible knowledge of a Hegel stripped of the *Philosophy of Nature* is significant. In fact, Green's two Hunterian orations, *Vital Dynamics* (1840) and *Mental Dynamics* (1847), enact a progress from matter to spirit that resembles Hegel more than Schelling. For while this progress is the spinal cord of the *System's* absorption of the *Stufenfolge* into an evolution from nature to freedom (SW III: 491, 495, 588),⁵⁰ in the *First Outline* itself the purposiveness of nature never becomes teleology, nor is the word "spirit" attached to nature's "epigenesis" or "dynamical evolution" (SW III: 61).⁵¹ Taking Schelling's speculative physics in a more dogmatic direction, Green, in his Hunterian Oration of 1840, but also much earlier in his Hunterian lectures on comparative anatomy in 1827 and 1828, introduces the new interdisciplinary of "physiogy" to cement the sequencing of nature and spirit. Physiography is natural history: the description of *natura naturata*. Physiology studies *natura naturans*: the powers behind nature conceived vitally rather than mechanistically. Finally physiogy aims to "exhibit every order of living beings, from the *polypi* to the *mammalia*, as so many embryonic states of an organism, to which Nature from the beginning had tended, but which Nature alone could not realize." Physiogy or "the history of nature" thus becomes a "preface and portion of the history of man," as nature "labour[s] in birth with

University College, Toronto, there were three lots of books, totalling 21 volumes, which could have contained texts by or on Hegel. But all we can say is that Green owned a copy of the *Greater Logic* (1812), and A. Ott's (*Hegel et la Philosophie Allemande* [Paris: 1844]), which has a substantial section on the *Philosophy of Nature*; this may indicate a general interest in Hegel, even though the book was published after *Vital Dynamics*. Green also owned work by Karl Rosenkranz on Hegel, and various histories of German philosophy, including by K.L. Michelet and Kuno Fischer (*Catalogue of the Library of the Late Joseph Henry Green Esq., F.R.S., D.C.L., &c* [London: Sotheby, Wilkinson and Hodge, 1880]).

48 For a more detailed account of the two phases of British Idealism and also of Coleridge in particular, see my article, "Immunitary Foreclosures: Schelling and British Idealism," in *Schelling's Afterlives*, ed. Daniel Whistler and Johannes Zachuber, special issue of *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, (forthcoming 2018).

49 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, 444.

50 Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 122, 125, 199.

51 Schelling, *First Outline*, 48, 48n.

man” to complete “the evolution of the organic realm.”⁵²

As previously noted, this “gradative evolution,” in Green’s Schellingian term, is an idea which can be found in many sources outside German Idealism that undertake a temporalization of the Chain of Being. Through this temporalization, as Arthur Lovejoy suggests, the “*plenum formarum*” is reconceived “not as the inventory but as the program of nature, which is being carried out gradually.”⁵³ But Green very much follows in the footsteps of a certain German Idealism in binding this program of nature to spirit, a word which for him avoids a more dangerous Schellingian “freedom.” Beyond his lectures in the 1820s, which were broadly in the vein of natural theology but technical rather than philosophical,⁵⁴ we can see Green’s increasingly Victorian development of natural into political theology in his deployment of the word “constitution,” initially used in a medical context by Hunter’s follower, the surgeon John Abernethy. Although Green links physical to political constitution only once and as a metaphor, this connection is why, unlike Abernethy, he does not focus on potentially troublesome constitutional diseases but on what he repeatedly calls “constitution to one,” through “spirit,” which he defines as “one power, manifesting itself in a diversity of forms.”⁵⁵

In this use of the word “constitution” Green may also have in mind Schelling’s allusions to a “universal constitution” (SW III: 587).⁵⁶ Indeed, Philip Sloan argues that under the more acceptably British alias of “Hunter” Green’s lectures secretly introduced his audience to Schelling and a Kant read back through Schelling.⁵⁷ But this is the Schelling of the *System* and not the *First Outline*. And if Green rarely mentions Schelling, it is also because he knew, in the wake of his bi-weekly tutorials with Coleridge, that Schelling was as much of an alibi for natural theology as Hunter, in ways that might similarly unground the intellectual work Green wanted Hunter to do. Green did nevertheless develop the term “physiogeny,” which is merely tossed off by

52 Green, in *Vital Dynamics* (London: William Pickering, 1840), 101-3. *Vital Dynamics* includes Green’s 1840 Hunterian Oration which gives the collection its title, the “Recapitulatory Lecture” for his Hunterian lectures of 1828 (from which the above passages are taken), and a number of other essays which are more philosophical than his Hunterian lecture courses of 1824-8, at least in terms of trying to read Hunter’s work in the life sciences and medicine within natural theology.

53 Green, *Vital Dynamics*, 39; Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: The Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942), 242-4.

54 These lectures have not been published, and survive only *via* the notes taken on them by Clift and Owen, manuscripts of which are at the Royal College of Surgeons.

55 John Abernethy, *Surgical Observations on the Constitutional Origin and Treatment of Local Diseases* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1817); Green, *Vital Dynamics*, xxii-iii, 41, 81-4. The link between physical and political constitution is explicit in Coleridge’s earlier short essay, “On Life,” *Shorter Works*, 2, 1027-8.

56 Schelling, *System*, 199.

57 Philip Sloan, “Kant and British Bioscience,” in *Understanding Purpose: Kant and the Philosophy of Biology*, ed. Philippe Huneman (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 155-6. Sloan does not get into the complexity of either Schelling or Hunter.

Kant,⁵⁸ in specific response to Schelling, whose *First Outline* he was re-reading with Coleridge in 1827. His justification of this new inter-discipline—albeit only as an “idea”—on the grounds that natural history is “an erratum in the nomenclature of science”⁵⁹ builds on Schelling’s stated desire to replace natural history as *Naturbeschreibung* with a *Geschichte der Natur selbst* that would give the term a “much higher meaning,” subsuming nature into history (SW III: 116).⁶⁰ Green then uses his hypostasis of Schelling’s speculation to narrativize Hunter, whose work is more like the networks of fields in the *Outline* itself.

Green’s claim that a “history of Nature” aims, like “all other history, to discover in the past the solution of the present, and in both the anticipation of the future,”⁶¹ evokes something very much like the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. His later focus on disciplines as they contribute to *Bildung* is also loosely Hegelian. In line with this broader organization of knowledge, Green’s second Hunterian oration, *Mental Dynamics* (1847), only touches on the life sciences, which it absorbs, not so much into a philosophy of spirit, as into an arts and science curriculum of knowledge for the education of a medical clerisy, to borrow Coleridge’s pseudo-religious term. By 1847 we are well into the Victorian period, and rather than research into life or even psychology, *Mental Dynamics* provides a pragmatic, philosophically de-fanged version of the *Bildung* projected by Hegel’s *Encyclopedia*.

To be sure, Green saw his work as entering a “region of thought, little, alas, frequented by the English reader,” and as bringing the “dynamic” philosophy of the Germans to the reading of Hunter, who had not been understood because his contemporaries missed his “philosophical principles.” Thus he wants to recognize Hunter as a “philosophical physiologist” so as to elevate the life sciences into philosophical sciences with higher aims than either the pragmatic or technically scientific ones emphasized by other commentators on Hunter. Still Hunter’s radical empiricism and complete disinterestedness raise questions that Green’s anxiety to “reconcile the study of Nature with the requirements of our moral being” avoids; moral being was hardly the concern of someone who experimentally injected himself with venereal disease. It is thus telling that Green, in outlining a “history of nature,” elides the complexity of this idea in the *First Outline* by glossing it through Schelling’s more transcendently idealist comments, from the lectures on academic study, on comparative anatomy as a field that discloses the unity and affinity of all organisms.⁶² It is also worth noting that though Green’s expertise was in surgery, he chose to give his Hunterian lectures on comparative anatomy,

58 Kant, “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy,” trans. Günter Zöllner, in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöllner and Robert Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 198n.

59 Green, *Vital Dynamics*, 107.

60 Schelling, *First Outline*, 63.

61 Green, *Vital Dynamics*, 102.

62 Green, *Vital Dynamics*, v-ix, xv, xix-xxi, 81.

and that the guiding spirit in these lectures is Cuvier more than Schelling: classification rather than speculation on a field that Schelling sometimes saw as proving the unity and inner affinity of all organisms, but also saw as disclosing “increasingly graduated divergences” between organisms (SW III: 64).⁶³

Coleridge is more tangled, because his more complex understanding of the threat posed by natural to transcendental philosophy made him both anxious about, and fascinated by, the complexities of *Naturphilosophie*, and so at times hysterically resistant to Schelling. As is well known, Coleridge “plagiarized” extensively from the *System* in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). The general view of these borrowings is that what led him to credit Schelling with a “revolution” in philosophy beyond the “crude Egoismus” of Fichte, was Schelling’s “inclusion of nature in the system of absolute mind”: his “dynamic philosophy,” which repudiated “realism” by making nature “unawakened mind” and mind “nature that has achieved” self-consciousness.⁶⁴ Indeed this understanding of Schelling would for a long time dominate Anglo-American readings of Schelling, even though Coleridge himself thought better of it.⁶⁵ In the immediate period of his enthusiasm from 1816-17 (though he had been interested in Schelling since 1812), Coleridge tried to buy everything that he could from across the channel. He had read at least seventeen texts by Schelling and owned twelve (including the five in the *Philosophische Schriften*), spanning transcendental idealism, *Naturphilosophie* and religion.⁶⁶ But as he delved further into Schelling’s work, he concluded that “as soon as [Schelling] commenced the Objective or Natur-wissenschaft, he gave the Slip” to the *I Am* and in “his Jarbücher der Medicin fairly involved it” in the *It Is*, leaving “both in the Lurch.” As Coleridge wrote somewhat ingenuously to Green in late 1818, if he had not been misled by having read only the *System* when writing *Biographia*, Schelling himself would have put him “on guard.”⁶⁷

The common wisdom accepts Coleridge’s story, and dates his turn against Schelling to late 1818, when he started working through the latter’s corpus more carefully with Green, whom he had met the previous year through Ludwig Tieck. But in fact when Coleridge wrote the *Biographia*, he had read a fair

63 Schelling, *First Outline*, 50.

64 S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 158-9, 163; G.N.G. Orsini, *Coleridge and German Idealism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 198-200.

65 See Raimonda Modiano, *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 160. The assumption here is that Coleridge rejected Schelling because the latter’s concepts of freedom and the self-organization of life failed to achieve the identity of God, mind and nature which both thinkers wanted, and not that Schelling might have been doing something radically different.

66 Coleridge could also draw on Henry Crabb Robinson and Green for German books. The Sale Catalogue for Green’s library indicates that Green owned five volumes by Schelling, but beyond *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* and something given the title of “*Naturgeschichte*, 2 vols. in 1,” it does not indicate what they were.

67 Coleridge, *Collected Letters*, ed. E.L. Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), IV, 874.

amount of Schelling's work, including the Freedom Essay in the *Philosophische Schriften*. Indeed in 1812 he had told Crabb Robinson that "Schelling appears greatest in his last work on *Freiheit*." Coleridge may indeed have read Schelling more critically after 1818, as his annotations of the Freedom Essay include ill-tempered comments about the passage on the eye's capacity for sickness being an example of freedom, on Schelling as doing no more than rehash Boehme, and on how "Freedom" devolves into a mere synonym for "Life."⁶⁸ But he must have had earlier knowledge of what would later disturb him, and long after his turn against Schelling, he also continued to use and to wrestle—privately, in his notebooks—with the language of polarity, indifference, powers, ground, and copula: in other words, with the ungrounding role played by nature in relation to transcendental philosophy in Schelling's work. Coleridge was particularly concerned that Schelling introduced polarity into "the unity of a perfect will" or "Godhead,"⁶⁹ and could close down this spectre only through a convoluted Trinitarianism that performed an *Aufhebung* of this polarity,⁷⁰ and that he tried to fix in mathematical schemas to prevent the possibility of philosophy hosting germs of illness, or indeed infecting theology with the illness it had contracted from the life sciences.

It is through the *Theory of Life* that Coleridge enters the story of the double projection by which Schelling is used to contain what he simultaneously opens up, and what Hunter and *Naturphilosophie* potentially catalyze in each other. The *Theory* was probably written late in 1816, in the wake of the Abernethy-Lawrence debate (1814-16) over whether Hunter was a vitalist whose thought was philosophically compatible with religion or a materialist closer to Bichat, with all that a French connection going back through the Revolution to the *philosophes* might imply for the relation of spirit to matter. The text opens ceremoniously in front of Hunter's bust and the "august temple" of his Museum, in which Coleridge seeks an adequate embodiment of "the true idea of Life."⁷¹ Its aim is to fit the troublesome science of life into a larger system that perceives in nature the "workings of a spiritual activity that is essentially identical with the activity of a self-conscious being," to quote one characteristically simplified account of Schelling.⁷² The text was not published in Coleridge's lifetime because, according to its editor Heather Jackson, it was an occasional piece written to give "the support of a philosophic system" to

68 Raimonda Modiano's headnote to Coleridge's annotations of *Philosophische Schriften* in Coleridge, *Marginalia*, ed. H.J. Jackson and George Whalley, 6 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), IV, 402. See IV, 344 for Coleridge's reading of Schelling by this time. For the above, more critical comments on the *Freedom Essay* see *Marginalia*, IV, 422, 425, 434, 445.

69 Coleridge, *Letters*, IV, 873-4.

70 See Modiano, *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature*, 189.

71 Coleridge, *Theory of Life, Shorter Works and Fragments*, ed. H.J. Jackson, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 485-6. The *Theory* had first been published posthumously in 1848 by Seth Watson, who found it among the papers of James Gillman, the doctor in whose house Coleridge lived from 1816 onwards.

72 Modiano, *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature*, 160.

Abernethy's argument, and was rendered superfluous by the appearance of Abernethy's own two-volume *Physiological Lectures* in 1817. Jackson also suggests Coleridge's turn against Schelling as another reason for withholding the text, since after 1817 it is "unlikely that he would have wished to publish" the theories of "German philosophers ... in the comparatively uncritical form in which we find them here."⁷³

I suggest, by contrast, that the *Theory* is part of an ongoing interest in the life sciences and medicine on Coleridge's part that transected and survived the Abernethy-Lawrence debate, and that his turn against Schelling was by no means definitive.⁷⁴ In other words, Coleridge's reasons for keeping the *Theory* to himself run deeper than simply the appearance of Abernethy's lectures. He kept working on the topic of "life," and could bring it to closure only in moments when he limited it to a schema,⁷⁵ but as the *Theory* showed, any longer articulation of the project complicated and unravelled it. The opening of the Hunterian Museum and the ensuing Abernethy-Lawrence debate provoked Coleridge to think about issues of matter vs. spirit raised by (in)organic life. But the fact that, unlike Green, he was not a central figure in the Royal College allowed him to write from the margins and to return to this private writing—in marginalia, notebooks and essay fragments—when the issue had been "resolved." Curiously Schelling and his follower Henrik Steffens are nowhere mentioned in the *Theory*, even though their ideas are throughout the text, and particularly as a complication of the *Stufenfolge* which provides the main axis of Coleridge's argument. We will return to this evasion that is the condition of possibility for Coleridge to be speculative rather than dogmatic. But as important for our purposes is the fact that the *Theory* was roughly contemporaneous with the *Biographia*, and its densely textured engagement with the philosophy of nature puts the lie to Coleridge's nervous claims to be firmly on the side of the *I Am* rather than the *It Is*.

Indeed the relationship of the *Theory* to the philosophical sections of the *Biographia* uncannily mirrors that of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* to his *System*, as if recognizing the very problem opened by Schelling but confining it to the privacy of an unpublished text. Coleridge's endeavours are also secretly disturbed by the link between pathology and life that traverses the work of both Hunter and Schelling, via Hunter's focus on medicine and Schelling's

73 Heather Jackson's headnote to the *Theory* in *Shorter Works*, I, 481-3.

74 On this topic see my article, "The Unavowable Community of Idealism: Coleridge and the Life Sciences," *European Romantic Review* 14:4 (2003), 395-416.

75 I refer here to the account of a lecture given in 1822 which was posthumously published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1835, and which is included in *Shorter Works* under the title "On Life" (II, 1027-32). Trevor Levere takes this brief sketch as indicating that Coleridge was "looking forward" to publishing the *Theory* in 1823. Trevor Levere, *Poetry Realized in Nature: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Early Nineteenth-century Science* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 45. This seems unlikely, but based on many notebook entries in the 1820s it is clear that the topic of "life" continued to worry Coleridge, as the particulars overwhelmed the universals, which therefore remained hypothetical.

Appendix on disease in the *First Outline*. For the *Theory* is thought to have been composed as a “foundation” and “sequel” for an *Essay on Scrofula*, which Coleridge also did not finish or publish.⁷⁶ This essay too is connected with Hunter and with Abernethy’s recuperation of the dark matter of pathology in Hunter through the notion of “constitution” as the curative return of diseased parts into a whole. Evoking this context, Coleridge ends the essay by saying that if scrofula is a “constitutional disease,” we need a conception of “the living principle” to understand the “derangement of some one or all of the primary powers, in the harmony or balance of which the health of the human being consists.”⁷⁷ He thus constructs a bridge from disease back to vitality, so as to exit the disturbance of spirit by matter that makes pathology a dangerous supplement in the philosophical life sciences. Yet as we see both in the last section of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature* and in Schelling’s Appendix on disease, using life to understand disease as “derangement” can equally well derange life by disclosing that it has the “same factors” as disease. Moreover, what Schelling calls the perspective of the “individual” cannot be without consequences for the “*whole of organic nature*” (SW III: 220-2).⁷⁸ And although in the *First Outline* Schelling reserves this problem for future consideration by putting it in an Appendix, in the Freedom Essay he constructs a feedback loop between the real and ideal portions of philosophy that results in his exploring the transcendental consequences of illness for spirit.

Coleridge, for his part, does not take on disease in the *Theory*, reserving it for other private writing and reading. But he does focus on how nature “brings forth the whole multiplicity of its products through continuous *deviations* from a common ideal”: a formulation that Schelling uses both in the *First Outline* and the *System* (SW III: 68, 588; italics mine).⁷⁹ The Hunterian Museum would have confronted Coleridge with an array of different, often mutant specimens which Home, and later Owen, arranged into “diverse series,” according to the physiological function of each organ. These series, as described by Home, who was the first to organize the Museum, begin with the “most simple state in which each organ is met with in nature,” and follow it “through all the variations in which it appears in more complex animals,” so as to trace “one regular series of gradations,” through “all the complications which lead by almost imperceptible steps to man.”⁸⁰ Home’s relatively simple synopsis hypostatizes an arrangement that was probably heuristic into something approaching a history of nature.

76 Levere, *Poetry Realized in Nature*, 43. Coleridge wrote the essay in 1816 for Gillman, who wanted to compete for a prize offered at the Royal College for a contribution on scrofula or syphilis. Coleridge wrote the philosophical part of the essay, but Gillman never wrote the medical part and withdrew from the competition.

77 Coleridge, *An Essay on Scrofula*, *Shorter Works*, I.478.

78 Schelling, *First Outline*, 159-160.

79 The wording is virtually the same except that *gemeinschaftlichen Ideal* in the *First Outline* (p. 53) is changed to *ursprünglichen Original* in the *System* (p. 199).

80 Everard Home, *Lectures on Comparative Anatomy; in which are explained the preparations in the Hunterian Collection*, 2 vols. (London: G. and W. Nichol, 1814), I, 7.

But it would later be deemed inadequate once Home's management of the Hunter materials was called in question. The ongoing organization of the Museum described by Hunter's biographer Drewry Ottley in the 1830s, and the ensuing discrimination of five kinds of comparative anatomy by Richard Owen,⁸¹ who became the Museum's most important intellectual presence, lend themselves less easily to a temporalization of the Chain of Being. In short, it is incorrect to say that Hunter's view of life, while obscure in his writings, was clearly embodied in "the selection and arrangement of specimens for his museum ... hence Coleridge's success in attributing to Hunter ideas clearly beyond his utterance."⁸²

Nor is Coleridge quite able to attribute what Green would later call physiogony to Hunter. Complaining of the "obscurities" and contradictions" in Hunter's writings that result in a "temporary occultation" of his idea, Coleridge projects this "idea" onto the Museum, whose objects he describes as "a more perfect language than that of words—the language of God himself, as uttered by nature." Yet he also complains about the clutter created by Hunter's "incessant occupation" and "stupendous industry." Thus when he says that Hunter constructed the "idea" for "scientific apprehension out of the alphabet of nature," this unscientific retreat into hyperbole betrays Coleridge's nervousness about whether the collection really shows "the wisdom and uniform working of the Creator." As Hunter proves an inadequate prosthesis for the "idea," Coleridge concludes that we must "climb up on his shoulders"⁸³ and turns for philosophical supplementation to Steffens' *Beyträge zur innern Naturgeschichte der Erde* (1801) and Schelling's *First Outline*. By combining Schelling's graduated stages of nature with Steffens' more detailed extension of it to geognosy or the inner history of the earth, Coleridge sketches out life's self-organization from minerals and crystals, through vegetables and plants, to man.⁸⁴ In the process he imagines an organized ascent up the "ladder" of being that is not just a "series" but a dynamic logic of nature, as implied by the very term *Stufenfolge*.

Yet this logic, as derived from *Naturphilosophie*, is precisely what makes the ladder impossible; thus Coleridge writes that even as nature ascends "the steps in a ladder," it "expands" in "concentric circles." More specifically, he sees the power of production in nature as involving a tension between a

81 Drewry Ottley, *Life of John Hunter*, in Hunter, *Surgical Works*, I, 145.88; Richard Owen, "Observations on Palaeontology," in Hunter, *Essays and Observations*, I, 281-4.

82 Levere, *Poetry Realized in Nature*, 210. Levere seems unaware of the controversy surrounding Home.

83 Coleridge, *Theory of Life*, 486; *The Friend*, ed. Barbara Rooke, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), I, 474.

84 The borrowings or, as some have claimed, plagiarisms from Steffens are well known (see Heather Jackson's notes to the *Theory*). On Coleridge and Steffens, see Levere, *Poetry Realized in Nature*, 161-9. In discussions of Coleridge and Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, the *First Outline* is strangely neglected, but its separately published *Introduction*, which is often cited, was bound together with it in the copy belonging to Henry Crabb Robinson that Coleridge read.

“positive” force of “attachment or reduction” into the universal life and a force of “detachment”: a “negative” and “limitative power, constantly acting to individualize” and “figure the former.”⁸⁵ Whether they are drawn directly from the *First Outline* or indirectly from Schelling via Steffens, the notions of “figure” and of an inhibiting or retarding power are very much in the vein of Schelling’s *First Outline*. We can contrast Coleridge’s distinction with that of Green, for whom “individuation and integration to a whole” are also “the great polar forces of organic nature.” But for Green integration is nature’s tendency “to integrate all into one comprehensive whole, and consequently retaining each part,” while individuation is “integration in the parts,” so that the two poles are really the same, and cooperate in an “advancing Integration.”⁸⁶ Just as Coleridge makes individuation a force of detachment from nature’s productivity, echoing Schelling’s conflicted focus on “individual natures which have torn themselves away from universal Nature” (SW III: 69),⁸⁷ so too he sees this individuation as happening not just through but in the individual organism. Thus in 1822 Coleridge writes of the relations of “the different parts of the Body” to the “nervous system” and “the nerves themselves to the Brain,” and says that “the polypus nature of every nerve” means that each part not only has “relations to its centre” but is “a center in itself.” In a similar vein, Schelling writes of “individual systems of *specialized excitability*” that make physiology a “*whole* of systems” that cannot be reduced to the “*absolute identity*” of one force (SW III: 174-5). This “dynamical infinity” of “*absolute involution*” makes any “*absolute evolution*” impossible (SW III: 261-2).⁸⁸

In conceding that there are multiple systems of specialized excitability Schelling is discussing the “gradation of forces in the organism,” namely reproduction, irritability and sensibility: a triad whose hierarchy remains uncertain and which has many permutations in the physiological theory of the day (SW III: 206).⁸⁹ If we are to see “one cause acting uninterruptedly” throughout nature, the “graduated series of functions” in the individual must be aligned, in a form of recapitulation, with “the graduated series of organic forces” in nature (SW III: 206, 220)⁹⁰ as expressed in the scale of organisms. It is this which Coleridge, drawing on Steffens, attempts to do, in aligning individual species (such as fish and insects) with individual powers. A synchronizing of the graduated functions in the organism with the graduated forces in nature

85 Coleridge, *Theory of Life*, 507, 515, 557.

86 Green, *Vital Dynamics*, 38-9, 105.

87 Schelling, *First Outline*, 53.

88 Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn and Anthony John Harding, 5 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957-2002), IV.4865; Schelling, *First Outline*, 126-7, 187.

89 Schelling, *First Outline*, 149. The progression is sometimes irritability > sensibility > reproduction (as here and for Hegel), or the reverse (as for Coleridge and sometimes Schelling). There are sometimes more than three forces (five for Kiehmeyer), or fewer (for Brown, just excitability, which combines sensibility and irritability).

90 Schelling, *First Outline*, 149, 159.

as expressed in the graduated series of organisms would indeed yield a uniform productivity throughout nature. Then “nature as subject” or *natura naturans* and “nature as object” or *natura naturata*, or “nature” and “life,” would not be at odds (SW III: 284, 222n). They would cooperate in the creation of “one product” (SW III: 206).⁹¹ This in turn would mean that a physiology of nature—in Green’s sense—could be raised to the higher potency of a physiogony in which purposiveness becomes teleology.

However, if the forces (of irritability, sensibility etc.) are both identified with particular species and are found in different proportions in all species, the scale becomes confused. Indeed the scale is rendered entirely problematic by the Appendix on disease, which concedes the relativity of the proportions of powers in individual organisms. Moreover, though Schelling may look to comparative physiology to provide a “continuity of organic functions” that will be “far simpler” than that of comparative anatomy, and will allow him to project a history of nature (SW III: 65, 69),⁹² this promise is (de)constructed by the empirical specificities of nature, as Coleridge would also have seen them in Hunter’s collection. For even if the galleries of life were to be arranged in an ascending series, there was still the problem of whether to organize them by organ or organism. While we can imagine organisms in a scale that culminates with man, in an organization by organs the hierarchy of organisms could change, depending on the organ under consideration. In other words the guiding thread for an ordering of things seems to vary. For his part Schelling uses the notion of gradation with respect to several terms—powers, functions, organs, organisms—and this proliferation confuses synchronization; hence Schelling cannot and does not really construct a scale of anything.

In Coleridge’s shorter and potentially more streamlined text, which is more committed to a linear narrative, premonitions and residues of such problems nevertheless surface. Coleridge wants to combine the graduated series of forces with the scale of organisms, by recognizing the coexistence of the “powers” (of reproduction, irritability etc.) in different species, but aligning powers and species in an ascending scale, based on the “*proportion*” of the “predominance” of one of the powers in “the Species of animals subsumed,” which allows him to move from fish to insects to birds. On this basis he wants to see life as “the copula, or unity of thesis and antithesis.”⁹³ But are birds, for instance, really the “synthesis of fish and insects?” Also troublesome are entities that cross organizing categories, such as corals, which confuse vegetation and animalization, as well as being linked to minerals.⁹⁴ Aware of these aporias, Coleridge laments that he is not permitted to “deduce the philosophy of Life synthetically,” and concedes therefore that the “evidence” cannot be “carried

91 Schelling, “Introduction to the Outline,” 202; *First Outline*, 160n, 149.

92 Schelling, *First Outline*, 50, 53.

93 Coleridge, *Notebooks*, IV, 4719; *Theory*, 518-9 and see also 495, 510 and 512 for other instances of the copula.

94 Coleridge, *Theory*, 539-41.

over from section to section,” allowing for a “*quod erat demonstrandum*” at the “conclusion” of one chapter to be “the principle of the succeeding.” Since he must instead construct nature *a posteriori*, “positions arranged” in his “own mind, as intermediate and organic links of administration” remain “mere hypothesis.”⁹⁵ Thus Coleridge repeatedly describes Hunter’s understanding of life as an “idea.” And the word “idea” is one to which Coleridge gave some attention, characterizing it as “equidistant from an *ens logicum* (= an abstraction), an *ens repraesentativum* (= a generalization), and an *ens phantasticum* (= an imaginary thing or phaenomenon).”⁹⁶

We lack space for a thorough traversal of the ways in which nature’s “ever-increasing wealth of detail” resists “the unity of the Notion”⁹⁷ that Coleridge wants German Idealism to confer on Hunter. Suffice it to say that Schelling, through the density of natural detail in the *First Outline*, opens up the very problems that Coleridge wants him to close off, namely an overrunning of the unity of production by a bio-diversity that generates proliferating speculative differences. Hence the “august temple” into which Coleridge wants to form Hunter’s corpus in two media—writings and specimens—resembles nothing more than the “Gothic cathedral” that Coleridge uses to figure his own half-unwritten theory of imagination in the *Biographia*, supported by ten unacknowledged “theses” often loosely credited to Schelling.⁹⁸ While the *Theory* was simply not published, in the *Biographia* Coleridge actually published a letter from a “friend” (assumed to be himself), which advised him not to publish his theory.⁹⁹ This curious subterfuge draws attention to the deferral of publication as a way of writing under erasure. Schelling enters both these texts as a zone of disavowal, openings and untraversed difficulties in the relation of natural to transcendental philosophy, and hence can only be there incognito. Repressing the asymmetry of the empirical and the transcendental, plagiarism holds together in a bipolar short-circuit a simultaneous enthusiasm for and doubt about their unity. In short, the infamous borrowings in the *Biographia* are a way for Coleridge not to put in his own words, not to take responsibility for, a unifying idealism that cannot be grounded in Schelling either, even though in some ways it is not wrong to attribute it to Schelling, who also entertained it as an idea. For as we have said, the relationship between the *Theory* and the philosophical sections of the *Biographia* recapitulates that between the *First Outline* and the *System*, natural and transcendental philosophy, which Schelling

95 Coleridge, *Theory*, 551. In what seems like a Freudian slip, Coleridge actually refers to “medical” chapters.

96 Coleridge, *The Friend*, ed. Barbara Rooke, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), I, 494n. See also Levere, *Poetry Realized in Nature*, 91-3.

97 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, 444.

98 Coleridge, *Biographia*, 254-84. As the notes by Engell and Bate indicate, these theses are loosely compounded from Schelling’s “On the I” and the *System*. The long tradition of dismissing them as plagiarisms is a way of dismissing both German Idealism and Coleridge’s serious engagement with it.

99 Coleridge, *Biographia*, 300-4.

too wanted to think as exemplars of “one science, differentiated only in the opposite orientation of their tasks” (SW III: 272).¹⁰⁰ The difference is that although Schelling wants to identify the two, he is open to the possibility that they might unfold differently. But Coleridge could entertain that asystasy only in private.

100 Schelling, *Introduction to the Outline*, 194.