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**The Human Vocation and the Question of the Earth: Karoline  
von Günderrode's Philosophy of Nature**

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# The Human Vocation and the Question of the Earth: Karoline von Günderrode's Philosophy of Nature

## I. Introduction

The idea of 'nature' and the question concerning the human place within the natural world were at the heart of the German romantic and idealist projects. In fact, recent research has argued that for the romantics and idealists, the philosophy of nature was not only one concern among many, but the grounding concern of these movements—such that it is their philosophies of nature that furnished these thinkers with the basis for their epistemology and metaphysics, their philosophies of art and aesthetics, and their political and social philosophies.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, what this research has also shown, albeit implicitly, is that there are two main strands of romantic and idealist philosophies of nature and what distinguishes them is their conceptualization of the relation between the human being (and human morality), and the natural world.

The first strand emphasizes epistemological and metaphysical questions, such that moral questions (i.e., questions concerning the human vocation and human freedom) are largely peripheral. This strand is most well-represented by Friedrich Schelling, who considers the philosophy of nature to be the essential starting point for developing a theory of knowledge and a theory of being, and its legacy can be traced back to Spinoza's influence on romanticism and idealism.<sup>2</sup> Thus in 1799 *First Outline of a System of a Philosophy of Nature*

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<sup>1</sup> On the centrality of the philosophy of nature for the development of romanticism and idealism, see Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life*, Beiser, *German Idealism* and Beiser, *Romantic Imperative*, especially Chapters 9 and 10. On the connection between epistemological and metaphysical questions in romantic philosophy of nature, see Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute* and (with specific reference to Schelling) Steigerwald, 'Epistemologies of Rupture'.

<sup>2</sup> Beiser, in particular, emphasizes this legacy and its outcomes for romantic and idealist moral philosophies. See *German Idealism*, 583-4; *Romantic Imperative*, Chapter 10.

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3 (*Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie*), where Schelling attempts to derive all  
4 of reality (including human consciousness) from the fundamental forces of nature, the human  
5 being is regarded as a member of nature, such that human subjectivity, and with it human  
6 freedom, are understood as the highest, most complex manifestation of natural productivity  
7 (HKA 1/8, 31). On this account, human morality is an outcome of nature's activity, such that  
8 moral acts are understood as nature (as the absolute) 'acting through me' (SW 6, 305). The  
9 goal here is contemplation (of what is) rather than realization (of what ought to be). Or, as  
10 Friedrich Schleiermacher puts it in his 1799 *Speeches on Religion*, religion, the highest aim  
11 of humanity, 'tends to inactive contemplation'.<sup>3</sup>

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26 The second strand of romantic and idealist *Naturphilosophie* agrees that the human being  
27 must be regarded as part of nature, but in the place of contemplation, emphasizes the active  
28 realization of (potentially unrealizable) moral ideals—ideals that involve the transformation  
29 of nature.<sup>4</sup> Friedrich von Hardenberg (i.e., Novalis) is exemplary in this regard. Speaking of  
30 poets, he writes: 'We are on a mission: we have been called to educate the earth [*zur Bildung*  
31 *der Erde sind wir berufen*]' (NS 2, 427, no. 32). And he goes on to describe this education as  
32 moral: 'Nature will become moral. We are her *educators*—her moral *tangents*—her moral  
33 stimuli' (NS 3, 252, no. 73). The implication is that it is only through transforming nature to  
34 align with (our) moral ends that nature can be complete.<sup>5</sup>

3 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, 280. In his *Explanations of the Speeches* Schleiermacher notes that 'those who are early absorbed in a pure contemplative endeavour' are led to the proper understanding and practice of religion. *On Religion*, 22.

4 Manfred Frank's interpretation of the romantics as good Kantians emphasizes this strand to a greater extent. The view here is that the romantics do not assume an original unity as the starting point of philosophical inquiry (or regard it as achievable), but posit it as a regulative ideal and thus regard it (to some extent) as a moral task. Frank, 'Unendliche Annäherung', 851-7. On the differences between Beiser and Frank, see Millán-Zaibert, 'The Revival of Frühromantik'.

5 On Novalis's moral understanding of nature, see Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute*, Chapter 3.

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6 There is no doubt that any attempt to categorize these authors fails to account for the nuances  
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8 and complexities of their accounts. Nonetheless, these two strands are representative of the  
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10 our current understanding of romantic and idealist conceptions of the human-nature  
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12 relationship and of the human place within (and moral imperative toward) nature.<sup>6</sup> The aim of  
13  
14 this paper is to show that there is a third romantic-idealist response to the question concerning  
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16 the relationship between the human being and the natural world—one that has been largely  
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18 ignored, but which might be the most relevant strand today. It is the position articulated by  
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20 Karoline von Günderode (1780-1806) in her essay ‘Idea of the Earth’ (*Idee der Erde*).  
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26 Günderode, who was a published poet and playwright with some renown during her lifetime,  
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28 first gained widespread philosophical recognition through the 1840 publication of Bettina  
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30 Brentano von Arnim’s *Die Günderode*, which was loosely based on the correspondence of  
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32 the two women in the years immediately preceding Günderode’s death.<sup>7</sup> The earnestness of  
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34 the exchange between the women, and the sophisticated philosophical content which the  
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36 letters contained, made *Die Günderode* particularly popular among American intellectuals  
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38 (Emerson and Margaret Fuller among them), who saw the text as a paragon of Platonic  
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40 friendship.<sup>8</sup>  
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51 <sup>6</sup> Thus one can argue that Beiser emphasizes the first strand, while Frank emphasizes the  
52 second.

53 <sup>7</sup> The spelling of Günderode’s name as Günderode in Brentano von Arnim’s text may have  
54 been intentional, as a means of indicating editorial authority. The author also offers a  
55 different spelling of her own name (Bettine instead of Bettina).  
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57 <sup>8</sup> Fuller partially translated *Die Günderode* into English in 1840 under the title  
58 *Correspondence of Fräulein Günderode and Bettine von Arnim*. Although Fuller published  
59 her translation anonymously, in 1842 she wrote an essay on *Die Günderode* for Emerson’s  
60 journal, *The Dial*.

Günderrode's philosophical significance has been more recently revived through the publication of her complete works in the early 1990s, which include a volume of notes on Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Hemsterhuis, Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel (among others), and the appearance of a number of works which convincingly situate Günderrode within philosophical romanticism and idealism.<sup>9</sup> Thus, we now know that Günderrode was an avid reader of philosophy, and that her poetic writings were inspired by the same philosophical questions and concerns that inspired romanticism and idealism. We also know that Günderrode wrote a number of philosophical essays<sup>10</sup>, which she was unable to publish during her lifetime, but which contain the 'kernel' of her philosophical thinking.<sup>11</sup>

This is above all the case with 'Idea of the Earth', which she composed in 1805, at the height of her engagement with philosophy.<sup>12</sup> It was during this period that Günderrode read Schelling's writings on the philosophy of nature, and composed lengthy commentaries on

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<sup>9</sup> See esp. Westphal, *Karoline von Günderrode und 'Naturdenken um 1800'*; Dormann, *Die Kunst des inneren Sinns*; and Ezekiel, "Introduction," in Günderrode, *Poetic Fragments*.

<sup>10</sup> Her philosophical prose pieces include 'Idea of the Earth', 'The Manes' and 'An Apocalyptic Fragment'.

<sup>11</sup> 'Idea of the Earth', in particular, was regarded as one of Günderrode's most interesting and significant works from the beginning. Its first reader, Friedrich Creuzer, writes in a letter to Günderrode from 1 December 1805, 'It's been a long time since I've liked anything as much as I like your "Idea of the Earth"'. *Friedrich Creuzer und Karoline von Günderrode*, 78. More recently, Westphal has argued that 'Idea of the Earth' contains the 'kernel' of Günderrode's 'thinking about nature [*Naturdenken*]'. *Karoline von Günderrode und 'Naturdenken um 1800'*, 99.

<sup>12</sup> Günderrode intended for this piece to be published along with her collection, *Melete*, before her death in 1806. However, the philologist Friedrich Creuzer (her married lover) halted publication following Günderrode's death, for fear that his affair would become common knowledge (he recognized himself in the figure of 'Eusebio' in the play and the prose pieces accompanying it). Creuzer did not only suppress publication of these works, but also destroyed various versions of them. See Hille, *Karoline von Günderrode*, 119-121. Today we have two versions of 'Idea of the Earth', one which is titled 'To Eusebio' (An Eusebio) (and is in the form of a letter to the character Eusebio) while the other is titled 'Idea of the Earth'. Both are available in GSW vol. 1.

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3 them, and it was also during this time that she read Fichte's popular 1800 work *Bestimmung*  
4 *des Menschen (Vocation of Man)* [BdM] and responded to it in her notes.  
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10 Despite the fact that Günderröde was working through both Schelling and Fichte shortly  
11 before writing 'Idea of the Earth', scholars have focused on Günderröde's connection to  
12 Schelling, ignoring her interest in Fichte. As such, 'Idea of the Earth' has been generally  
13 interpreted as a creative adaptation of Schelling's philosophy of nature.<sup>13</sup> Indeed,  
14 Günderröde's claim that the earth is both ideal and real appears to coincide with Schelling's  
15 understanding of nature as infinite productivity (*natura naturans*) and the (apparently finite)  
16 material product (*natura naturata*).<sup>14</sup> Similarly, her view that a fundamental polarity underpins  
17 nature's activity parallels Schelling's emphasis on the original duality of nature.<sup>15</sup>  
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31 There are, however, important elements in 'Idea of the Earth' that do not map onto any  
32 Schellingian concerns or themes. Günderröde's view that the earth must be 'realized' and her  
33 claim that this realization depends on human (moral) activity carries echoes of Novalis's  
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41 <sup>13</sup> The editor of Günderröde's collected works, Morgenthaler, argues that the piece should be  
42 interpreted as part of Günderröde's interest in Schelling (GSW 3, 336). Similarly, Westphal  
43 situates the text entirely within her reading of Schelling. *Karoline von Günderröde und*  
44 *'Naturdenken um 1800'*, 99-104. In contrast, Dormann contends that the work does not only  
45 address nature-philosophical but also ethical and aesthetic concerns. However, Dormann  
46 continues to interpret these aesthetic and ethical concerns from an entirely Schellingian  
47 framework, writing that for Günderröde the ethical should be understood in terms of  
48 chemical sympathies. Dormann, *Die Kunst des inneren Sinns*, 184-189.

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50 <sup>14</sup> In the Introduction to the *First Outline*, Schelling explains that 'nature' is both the  
51 productivity of nature and its (apparently finite) products (HKA 1/8, 46). In her notes on  
52 *Naturphilosophie* Günderröde writes that 'nature is an eternal activity, a self-producing  
53 product, an ever enduring becoming, for if it were a being, then its productive activity would  
54 be cancelled out by this completion...' (GSW 2, 364).

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56 <sup>15</sup> Günderröde speaks of the 'primal connection of both forces' of nature in her notes on  
57 *Naturphilosophie*, while in 'Idea of the Earth' she describes life as the coming together of  
58 two forces (GSW 1, 446). In the *First Outline* Schelling argues that the view that nature is  
59 composed of two opposing forces is the 'absolute hypothesis' of the philosophy of nature  
60 (HKA 1/8, 35).

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3 statement that the earth must be ‘educated’. Furthermore, the text appears to be addressing  
4 questions concerning the human vocation—questions which Fichte poses in BdM and which  
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Günderrode interrogates in her notes on Fichte’s text. That Günderrode is specifically  
concerned with the human relation to the earth also brings her closer to Novalis and Fichte,  
both of whom regard the cultivation of nature to be fundamentally connected to the human  
(poetic) vocation.

Nonetheless, despite her proximity to Novalis and Fichte, Günderrode’s account of the  
human vocation departs from theirs in significant ways—and this departure makes  
Günderrode a particularly interesting interlocutor for us today. According to Günderrode, the  
human vocation is not to transform the earth in order to make it more amenable to human  
moral goals (Fichte and Novalis), but to be *transformed for the sake of the earth’s vocation*.  
This position, which distinguishes Günderrode not only from Fichte and Novalis, but also  
from Schelling, is based on Günderrode’s account of the self and nature, which she develops  
in her notes on Fichte’s BdM.

As such, to fully grasp the moral significance of ‘Idea of the Earth’, to discern its argument  
and its distinctive understanding of the human vocation, it is necessary to read it alongside  
Fichte’s BdM and Günderrode’s notes on Fichte’s text. My claim then is that by reading  
‘Idea of the Earth’ in light of BdM and Günderrode’s assessment of it, we begin to see an  
argument about the human moral vocation that we might otherwise miss (and which others  
have indeed missed)—and that it is in this argument that we find Günderrode’s distinctive  
position.

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3 The paper proceeds as follows: I begin by examining Fichte's text, focusing on his  
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5 conceptions of nature and the earth—precisely those aspects which concern G nderrode in  
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7 her notes. I consider G nderrode's interpretation of these conceptions, investigating the  
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9 reasons why she diverges from Fichte. I argue that G nderrode poses two challenges to  
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11 Fichte: the first concerns his conception of the self; the second his understanding of nature—  
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13 both of which become key themes in 'Idea of the Earth'. In the final section, I turn to 'Idea of  
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15 the Earth', homing in on the meaning of G nderrode's claim that the earth must be 'realized'.  
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## 2. G nderrode's first challenge

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26 Fichte wrote BdM as a popular text, with the goal of bringing his philosophy to a wider  
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28 audience, and enabling his readers to better grasp the idea that underpins his philosophy,  
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30 namely the summons to produce the fundamental acts of the self for oneself. Fichte had  
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32 emphasized this in earlier works, especially in his two introductions to the *Wissenschaftslehre*  
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34 from 1797, where he calls upon his readers to undertake intellectual intuition. In the BdM, by  
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36 contrast, the reader is invited to participate in an internal dialogue—an internal drama of  
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38 sorts—in which the speaker critically assesses and dismisses various systematic attempts to  
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40 grasp the self, arriving, finally, at the only portrayal of the self that can adequately account  
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42 for human freedom.  
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49 Fichte's text comprises of three sections that bear different titles: doubt, knowledge, faith. As  
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51 it is in the first and final parts of the book ('doubt' and 'faith') that Fichte takes up the  
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53 question of the relation between the human being (and human freedom) and the natural world  
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55 most directly, I will focus on these two parts, and on G nderrode's response to them.  
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3 Book 1 kicks off when the speaker raises the question ‘what is my vocation?’ and in raising  
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5 it, comes to realize that what he regards as his vocation was something that he was given (by  
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7 education, by society, etc) rather than having determined for himself. He begins by asking  
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9 who or what he is, and to respond to these questions brackets all previous knowledge and  
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11 proceeds with a self-examination, claiming that he will ‘honestly accept the result whatever it  
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13 may be’ (BdM, 7; VoM, 3). In the end, he does not honestly accept the result of this  
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15 investigation. For he rejects the account developed here not because it is untrue or dishonest,  
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17 but because its conclusions are ‘unbearable’ and can only result in ‘despair (*Verzweiflung*)’  
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19 (BdM, 65; VoM, 33). For Günderröde, by contrast, the conclusions that Fichte achieves in  
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21 this section do not lead to despair or require her, as Fichte’s speaker assumes, to transition to  
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23 a different perspective.  
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31 What then are the conclusions? According to Fichte, the first examination of the self gives us  
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33 the self as part of a larger whole, namely nature. This leads the speaker to question what  
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35 nature is. At first sight, we are told, nature is a chain of causes and effects, ‘in which every  
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37 link is determined by that which has preceded it, and in its turn determines the next’ (BdM,  
38  
39 14-15; VoM, 7). However, the speaker continues, this conception of nature does not account  
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41 for the forms of things—what makes a flower a flower, for instance, cannot be explained by  
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43 external, antecedent causes, or as Fichte puts it ‘mere passivity [*Leiden*]’ (BdM, 18; VoM, 8).  
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45 There must be something in nature that enables things to achieve their distinctive forms. This  
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47 capacity, we are told, must be internal rather than external and active as opposed to passive.  
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49 Thus the speaker arrives at the notion of ‘formative powers [*bildende Kräfte*]’—picking up  
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51 on the language developed by Blumenbach and adopted by Schelling and other  
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3 *Naturphilosophen* (BdM, 21; VoM, 10).<sup>16</sup> Now although all natural entities are underpinned  
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5 by formative forces, the speaker continues, these forces must differ in different beings,  
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7 corresponding to their distinctive forms and capacities. The human being thus possesses not  
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9 only the formative power of the plant and the motive power of the animal, but also a thinking  
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11 power:  
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17 I, like the plant, am a particular mode or manifestation of the formative-power; like the  
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19 animal, a particular mode or manifestation of the power of motion; and besides these I am  
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21 also a particular mode or manifestation of the thinking-power, and the union of these three  
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23 original powers into one—into one harmonious development—is the distinguishing  
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25 characteristic of my species. (BdM, 29-30; VoM, 14-15)  
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31 However, the speaker continues, the fact that the self is a member of nature—an expression  
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33 of a natural force—implies that the self is not self-grounding, but grounded in something  
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35 outside of itself. This implies that it is not free. For who I am, how I behave, what I choose,  
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37 are not determined by me—by *my* will or intention—but by external circumstances (BdM,  
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39 33-34; VoM, 17). Such a conception of the self, Fichte contends, denies me all action and  
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41 thus any possibility of a moral self: ‘I do not act at all; it is nature that acts through me... I  
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43 am not the author of my own being, but nature has made me myself, and all that I am’ (BdM,  
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45 49; VoM, 25).  
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56 <sup>16</sup> Blumenbach introduces the notion of a *Bildungstrieb* (formative drive) in 1780. Kant  
57 cautiously lauds Blumenbach’s notion in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, while  
58 Schelling argues that *Bildungstrieb* is a foundational notion for the philosophy of nature  
59 (HKA 1/6, 217-8). For a useful overview of the idea of *Bildungstrieb* in the philosophy of  
60 nature, see Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life*, Chapter 5.

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3 Although Fichte does not claim that this perspective results in *logical* incoherence, he does  
4 claim that it ‘contradicts the profoundest aspirations, wishes and wants of my being’ (BdM,  
5 51; VoM, 26). For it ‘contradicts all the purposes for which alone I live, and without which I  
6 should loathe my existence’. The problem with this account is that who I am and how I act  
7 are out of my hands—a realization that results in ‘horror’ (BdM, 53; VoM, 27). The horror,  
8 in other words, results from the realization that an externally-determined self is not a free  
9 self; in fact, it is no self at all. For what we have is not a *self*-determining being, a being that  
10 is cause and effect of itself, but a being that is determined by external forces.  
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24 In her notes, Günderröde follows Fichte’s account of nature, his understanding of the  
25 formative forces and his portrayal of the self within nature. She does not, however, follow his  
26 critical assessment of *Naturphilosophie*, nor does she agree that this account results in an  
27 elimination of the self. Instead, she emphasizes the value of seeing myself as part of a larger  
28 whole, claiming that it is only through others that I become a self.  
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38 To begin with, she notes that determination (*Bestimmung*) is only possible in relation to the  
39 whole: ‘That I am this and nothing else [i.e., that I am determined] is necessarily determined  
40 in conjunction with the whole’ (GSW 2, 290).<sup>17</sup> Such determination does not, however, imply  
41 elimination of the self. Rather, it is only by being with others that the self comes to realize its  
42 limits and—through these limits—recognizes its individuality. As Günderröde puts it:  
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<sup>17</sup> The English translation of Günderröde’s works referred to here are by Anna Ezekiel and are forthcoming in 2019.

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3 limits that they impose upon me are real limits—limits which enable me to recognize how I  
4 am at once *like* and *different* from them. In fact, it is the specificity and reality of these limits  
5 that enables me to recognize myself not as an abstract or pure I, but as my self. As she puts it,  
6 in recognizing myself as one of the many possible expressions of humanity I become ‘known  
7 to myself as my *self*’ (KvG’s emphasis). Günderröde’s claim is that to be a self is to  
8 recognize one’s self as one’s self—not to regard one’s self abstractly as a formal principle.  
9 This means that to be a self is to be a concrete, real individual—something that can only be  
10 achieved through interacting with other concrete, real individuals. Here then we see  
11 Günderröde’s first divergence from Fichte. The self refers to *my* self—not to an abstract self.  
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30 This divergence follows from Günderröde’s larger critique of Fichte’s understanding and  
31 treatment of nature. His claim is that the self cannot be a member of nature, because that  
32 would undermine its self-grounding character. The trouble is that this conclusion follows  
33 neither from the account of nature that Fichte himself offers, or the account that is developed  
34 in *Naturphilosophie*.  
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As we have seen, Fichte argues that nature is a formative power and allows that the human  
species exhibits a thinking power that distinguishes humans from other natural beings. Such  
an account appears closely aligned with Schelling’s understanding of nature as a nexus of  
dynamic and developing forces, wherein natural products are not ontologically distinguished  
from the productivity that underlies them—but are finite manifestations of nature’s  
productivity, which achieve increasing consciousness and ultimately, in the form of the  
human being, freedom. From a Schellingian perspective, nature is not opposed to (human)  
freedom, but the source of it.

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5 Schelling's key claim is that nature exhibits the *very same structure of self-determination* that  
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7 underpins the I.<sup>18</sup> This structure comes to consciousness in the human self, and in coming to  
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9 consciousness, it is an expression of freedom.<sup>19</sup> Thus one can say that nature achieves  
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11 freedom *in* the human being. What is important to emphasize is that, for Schelling, the  
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13 structure of self-determination that Fichte locates in the self (i.e., self-consciousness) is more  
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15 originally (and fundamentally) the structure of organized beings. In fact, one could argue that  
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17 Fichte adopts the idea of a self-determining being that is both cause and effect of itself (i.e.,  
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19 the structure of intellectual intuition) from the emerging life sciences and their attempt to  
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21 describe living beings.<sup>20</sup> The point is that for Schelling, freedom and self-determination do  
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23 not stand in opposition to nature, precisely because nature exhibits structures of self-  
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25 determination, such that human self-determination can be understood as a more complex,  
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27 conscious, and thus free, manifestation of these structures or capacities.  
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35 As we have seen, Fichte perfectly understood the notion of nature as a dynamic unity of self-  
36  
37 determining beings when he distinguished the view of nature as 'mere passivity' from the  
38  
39 view of nature as composed of formative forces. However, despite his evident understanding  
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44 <sup>18</sup> Thus Schelling famously writes in the concluding remarks to his 1797 introduction of  
45 *Ideen* 'Nature should be visible spirit, spirit should be invisible nature'. SW 1/2, 56.

46 <sup>19</sup> This is the thesis of Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, which, in a letter to  
47 Schelling, Fichte claims to have read. In their letter exchange from this period, Fichte  
48 disputes the fundamental premise of the philosophy of nature, and argues instead that all we  
49 can know are the laws of our intelligence (SFB, 176). For Fichte nature can never be the  
50 starting point of inquiry. Fichte's elaboration of a philosophy of nature akin to Schelling's  
51 and his attempts to contest it (on practical grounds) in the BdM can thus be read as his public  
52 reply to Schelling.

53 <sup>20</sup> Mensch has shown that Kant's understanding of reason originates in his study of the life  
54 sciences and specifically the theory of epigenesis (which argues that organized beings emerge  
55 out of unformed matter that has the capacity to self-form). The argument could be extended  
56 to claim that Fichte's conception of self-consciousness as an original act in which the self as  
57 subject and the self as object has its sources in the description of living beings as self-  
58 organizing. Mensch, *Kant's Organicisim*.

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3 of this difference, when he turns to criticize the conception of the self that emerges out of  
4  
5 *Naturphilosophie*, Fichte reverts to the first elaboration of nature that he offers, i.e., of nature  
6  
7 as a chain of ‘rigid necessity’ based purely on external efficient causality (BdM, 49; VoM,  
8  
9 25). For his claim that myself and my actions are not mine—i.e., not determined by my  
10  
11 will—is based on the view that what I am is caused by something external to me, with the  
12  
13 implication that there is no self-determination in nature.<sup>21</sup> A nature that lacks internal  
14  
15 determination would of course have no place for anything like a self-directing or self-causing  
16  
17 entity, such as the I. This would mean, however, that it also has no place for *any* self-  
18  
19 directing or self-causing entity, whether it be plants or animals. From this it appears that  
20  
21 instead of properly taking up and challenging a vaguely Schellingian account of freedom in  
22  
23 nature, Fichte is offering an account that does not cohere with either Schelling’s  
24  
25 understanding of nature or with the account that Fichte himself had developed. Günderrode’s  
26  
27 choice to dismiss his conclusions and assert their opposite makes this evident. Her claim is  
28  
29 that it is only if the self is a member of nature, a part of a larger community, that it can  
30  
31 emerge, and, she does not think there is anything logically inconsistent or morally abhorrent  
32  
33 about this, given that nature itself exhibits organization or self-direction. As a member of  
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35 nature, the self is capable of self-directed action.  
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45 A serious challenge to Schelling would have to take on the specific conception of freedom  
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47 that he develops, i.e., as self-determination modelled on the cause-effect structure found in  
48  
49 organized beings—something which Fichte does not do here, but which he attempts to do in  
50  
51 the third part of the text. In her notes on this third part, Günderrode appears more sympathetic  
52  
53 to Fichte’s critique—and with good reason. For she agrees with Fichte that any consideration  
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58 <sup>21</sup> Fichte writes: ‘the reference of my being, and of all the determinations of my being, to a  
59  
60 cause lying outside of myself... this is that from which I so violently recoiled’ (BdM, 53;  
VoM 27).

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3 of the human-nature relation must have a moral angle (something that Schelling's account  
4 lacks). Nonetheless, her agreement with Fichte is contingent upon her distinctive conception  
5 of the self—or more accurately, her understanding of the self as both part of a larger,  
6 transforming reality, and as bearing a special moral responsibility toward this reality.  
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### 14 **3. Günderrode's second challenge**

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19 Having argued in Book 1 that nature is not the space in which human freedom can develop,  
20 in Book 3, Fichte elaborates the view of nature as a space of rude unfreedom, which must be  
21 transformed in order to accord with human ends (BdM, 223; VoM, 116). This is imperative,  
22 he argues, because it is only by cultivating nature that we can achieve our vocation (BdM,  
23 224-5; VoM, 116-7).  
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33 Although Fichte appears to emphasize the need to transform the earth to accommodate  
34 human morality, he goes on to argue that the human vocation cannot in fact be fulfilled on  
35 the earth. Rather, he maintains that it is only in a super-sensible (*überirdisches*) realm that  
36 human freedom can be properly practiced. This is because to remain on the earth or with the  
37 earthly would be to remain with a problematic conception of human freedom. As he puts it,  
38 on the earth, 'there is no true freedom for us, no freedom which holds the ground of its  
39 determination absolutely and entirely within itself. Our freedom is, at best, that of the self-  
40 forming plant' (BdM, 280; VoM, 146). From this statement, it is clear that Fichte is once  
41 again attempting to challenge the conception of freedom that emerges out of  
42 *Naturphilosophie*. In contrast to his earlier challenge, however, Fichte is specifically  
43 contesting the freedom implied in the notion of self-formation, claiming that the activity of  
44 self-formation in nature is not equivalent to human freedom, even if earthly human freedom  
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3 is a more complex, more conscious instantiation of that activity. And his contestation is based  
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5 on the claim that human freedom is not of the earth—and thus requires that we posit a non-  
6  
7 earthly or super-sensible realm.  
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12 Importantly, Fichte claims that das Überirdische is not elsewhere: ‘the super-sensible world is  
13  
14 no future world; it is now already present’ (BdM, 271; VoM, 141). Nonetheless, he does  
15  
16 think that the move to the super-sensible requires ‘the renunciation of the earthly  
17  
18 [*Verzichtleistung auf das Irdische*]’ (BdM, 278; VoM, 145). And, as we shall see, his  
19  
20 argument can only work if the super-sensible is *in fact* elsewhere, i.e., if there is an  
21  
22 ontological difference between the earthly and das Überirdische.  
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28 Fichte offers several justifications for the need to posit something beyond the earth, only two  
29  
30 of which, I think, make sense—and so I will focus on them.<sup>22</sup> The first has to do with the fact  
31  
32 that as a reasonable being, I set a purpose before myself, which I seek to achieve through will  
33  
34 and determination. In setting this purpose, I must expect it to be realizable; otherwise, I  
35  
36 would not set it. However, if my goal is to achieve moral acts, by following the voice of  
37  
38 conscience, I quickly realize that this goal is not achievable in the world of sense. In the first  
39  
40 instance, it is possible that my intention (which is moral) does not achieve the consequence  
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42 that I had intended (a moral intention can result in an immoral consequence). There is a  
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49 <sup>22</sup> Fichte’s first argument (which, I think, is not successful) begins by describing a utopic  
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51 vision of life on earth, in which strife is eliminated and humanity lives (with nature) in a state  
52  
53 of eternal peace and harmony. However, Fichte notes that if this is the purported goal of  
54  
55 earthly life, it is finite (because it is achievable) which means that upon achieving it, human  
56  
57 activity would lose all purpose (BdM, 246-7; VoM, 127). For this reason, Fichte goes on to  
58  
59 argue that there must be a higher, non-earthly goal that grants meaning to human existence.  
60  
This argument does not cohere with Fichte’s premise in the *Wissenschaftslehre* (that the goal  
of human achievement is *infinite*) or with what he says later in BdM (that it is impossible to  
achieve moral ends on earth). On the tension between this argument and the  
*Wissenschaftslehre*, see Farr, ‘The Vocation of Postmodern Man’, 299. On contradictions in  
Fichte’s arguments within this text, see Steinberg, ‘Knowledge Teaches Us Nothing’, 65.



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3 separation between my will and its consequences, a separation that is tied to my sensible  
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5 existence: my intention can be easily hindered or transformed by external causes, beyond my  
6  
7 control. In the earthly realm, as Fichte puts it, my will is not the only cause; other causes  
8  
9 necessarily enter the picture and impede it. However, as a rational being who sets and seeks  
10  
11 to achieve ends, I must assume that my will *can* be realized—and given that this realization  
12  
13 cannot occur in the realm of the sensible, I am required to posit a super-sensible realm in  
14  
15 which my moral ends are realizable.  
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22 The second argument that Fichte offers is as follows: if it were the purpose of our existence  
23  
24 to produce an ‘earthly condition of our race’, then all we would need to be are ‘an unerring  
25  
26 mechanism’ whose actions achieve pre-determined goals (BdM, 254-5; VoM, 132).  
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29 However, the fact of freedom, the fact that I am capable of consciously choosing the moral,  
30  
31 requires that I posit a non-mechanical, i.e., super-sensible realm, in which this freedom would  
32  
33 make sense. Or as Fichte puts it,  
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38 ...there is something in me and there is something required of me, which finds in this  
39  
40 life nothing to which it can be applied, and which is entirely superfluous and  
41  
42 unnecessary for the attainment of the highest objects that can be attained on earth.  
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44 There must therefore be a purpose in human existence which lies beyond this life.

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46 (BdM, 263-4; VoM, 137)  
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52 In both cases, Fichte’s claim is that the fact of reason and the fact of freedom demand that we  
53  
54 move beyond the earth. This is because both reason and freedom are self-grounding, which  
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56 means that they cannot have their source in the sensible world, where everything is caused by  
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58 something else. There must therefore be a super-sensible realm. However, it is not only their  
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3 source that is non-earthly, but also their realization, because it is only in the super-sensible  
4 that rational ends and free will are not impeded—i.e., in a sphere in which mechanical cause  
5 and effect do not rule. In such a sphere, there is no separation between will and its  
6 consequence, because will is the only cause—nothing can hinder its realization.  
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14 Fichte's argument appears to be falling back on a mechanical conception of nature, and thus  
15 once again failing to address Schelling's conception of freedom. There is, however, an  
16 important difference between the argument he is launching here from the one developed in  
17 Book 1: By distinguishing human freedom from the activity of the self-forming plant, Fichte  
18 is claiming that human freedom cannot be anything like earthly freedom, and thus requires us  
19 to posit a super-sensible realm. As such, his new challenge to *Naturphilosophie* is based on  
20 his introduction of the super-sensible, such that its success depends on the success of his  
21 justification of the super-sensible. The two arguments which I've reviewed depend on one  
22 key claim which is, I think, largely implicit. It is the claim that self-determination requires  
23 *complete* determination of the self, wherein *nothing* impedes it. For it is on the basis of this  
24 claim that Fichte is able to make the two further claims: that self-determination cannot be  
25 achieved in the sensible world, where it faces impediments, and a non-sensible world must be  
26 posited.<sup>23</sup> Thus the success of Fichte's argument depends on the distinction he draws between  
27 the two worlds—a distinction that does not only claim that the *source* of the will is in the  
28 super-sensible, but also that the will can only be *realized* in the super-sensible. This means  
29 that, despite his insistence on the contrary, Fichte created two worlds: a world in which the  
30 will is realizable, and a world in which it is not.  
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55 <sup>23</sup> Fichte describes the properly free will as follows: 'a will which operates purely as will; by  
56 itself, and absolutely without instrument or sensible material of its activity; which is, at the  
57 same time, both act and product; with whom to will is to do, to command is to execute; in  
58 which therefore the instinctive demand of reason for absolute freedom and independence is  
59 realized...' (BdM, 290; VoM, 151).  
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5 In her notes, Günderrode homes in on the need to posit a super-sensible or spiritual world.  
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8 Achieving one's moral vocation, she writes, requires belief in the spiritual, because 'in the  
9  
10 sensory world my free obedience does not work directly towards the command of duty; no[,]  
11  
12 only an act can work, no matter what attitude it occurs with' (GSW 2, 295). And, she  
13  
14 continues, 'this drives me to the belief in the spiritual world, where my spirit can work  
15  
16 immediately, i.e., by mere will'. Interestingly, Günderrode is not claiming—with Fichte—  
17  
18 that the spiritual is the only space in which my will can be realized. Rather, her claim is more  
19  
20 specific: the spiritual is the space in which the will can work *immediately*. Furthermore, she  
21  
22 allows that my will can be partially realized in the sensory world (via an act).<sup>24</sup> Günderrode  
23  
24 does not make the stronger claim that the will can only be realized in the spiritual world,  
25  
26 because she does not need to—unlike Fichte, she is not launching a challenge to  
27  
28 *Naturphilosophie*. In fact, she goes on to identify the will not only with human freedom, but  
29  
30 with the activity of animals and plants as well. Fichte needs to make the stronger claim (that  
31  
32 the will can only be realized if its realization is complete) because it is the claim that forms  
33  
34 the basis of his distinction between human freedom and plant self-formation.  
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42 The question remains, then, as to why Günderrode posits the super-sensible at all. The  
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44 answer, I think, can be found in a footnote, where Günderrode introduces the idea of  
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46 opportunity. She writes: 'My best will does not work in the world if I do not have the  
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48 opportunity to show it in acts; if I do not have this opportunity, what is it worth, if there is  
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53 <sup>24</sup> This perspective is also evident in Günderrode's other writings, which investigate the  
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55 possibility of action within a particular social and political context (rather than conceiving of  
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57 our activity within nature more generally). In those writings (including her plays *Muhammad*,  
58  
59 *Hildgund* and *Magic and Destiny*) she does not overlook the constraints of these contexts (in  
60  
fact, she emphasizes them, as she does in the footnote to her notes on Fichte—see below) but  
she nonetheless maintains the importance of attempting to realize these ends, even if only  
partially, in the world (rather than beyond it).

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3 only a sensory world?’ (GSW 2, 295, note). While Fichte argued for the necessity of the  
4  
5 super-sensible on the basis of the separation between will and consequence, Günderröde  
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7 posits the super-sensible because the sensible does not furnish me with the opportunity to  
8  
9 realize my intention. Günderröde is pointing to the possibility of finding oneself in a situation  
10  
11 in which one cannot even attempt to realize one’s intention—a problematic far more basic  
12  
13 than the separation of will and consequence. For Günderröde this scenario was of course not  
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15 simply imagined, but speaks of the reality of being a woman intellectual in the late eighteenth  
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17 and early nineteenth centuries. Thus one can say that insofar as it concerns opportunity, the  
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19 spiritual provides an imaginal space in which I do not *realize* my will, but *imagine* a reality  
20  
21 that offers me the opportunity to realize it. In other words, the spiritual furnishes me with a  
22  
23 normative ideal of what the world ought to look like, in order to provide me with the  
24  
25 opportunity to realize my will. On this account, the spiritual is not a different world, nor is it  
26  
27 the space in which my will is realized. It is, rather, the ideal which I posit as necessary for my  
28  
29 continued moral striving, my transformation, in this world.  
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38 To some extent, this is what Fichte also wants. However, to maintain that the spiritual is not  
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40 elsewhere but here, would mean that the spiritual and the earthly are not as opposed as Fichte  
41  
42 would have it. It would mean that the earthly must also be a manifestation of the spiritual,  
43  
44 must be capable of realizing moral ideals, such that our moral striving would not require us to  
45  
46 ‘give up on the earth’, but to remain with it. One can mistake this for Fichte’s view, given  
47  
48 that he describes the will as ‘the common mediator [*Vermittler*] between us all...’ (BdM,  
49  
50 294; VoM, 152). When we look more closely, however, it becomes evident that for Fichte,  
51  
52 the common denominator here—the ‘us all’ of which he speaks—specifically applies to  
53  
54 human beings, to the exclusion of other beings (and indeed it must, if his challenge to  
55  
56 *Naturphilosophie* is to succeed). For, Fichte explains, the acts of human beings differ from  
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3 those of all other beings because they ‘are not brought about by the mere mechanism of  
4 nature, but by a free will elevated above all nature [*durch einen über alle Natur erhabenen*  
5 *freien Willen*]’ (BdM 297-8; VoM, 155).  
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12 In deep contrast, Günderröde contends that nature as a whole expresses a will—that all  
13 natural beings are self-directed in some way:  
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19 I am related to that will and everything around me is related to me. And its life is (as well  
20 as I can grasp) a self-forming and presenting willing that flows through the whole universe  
21 in manifold forms. A force that organizes itself in the plant, moves in the animal, and  
22 presents its own world in each. (GSW 2, 297)  
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31 This statement, which strikingly differs from Fichte’s attempt to distinguish human freedom  
32 and will from that of a self-forming plant, regards the will not as a distinctively human  
33 capacity but as a natural capacity—recalling the notion of formative forces that Fichte  
34 introduced in Book 1.<sup>25</sup> As such, however, Günderröde does not disagree with Fichte’s view  
35 that transformation is necessary. What she disagrees with is his claim that the capacity to  
36 transform (the will) is specifically human, and that in transforming one’s self, in willing, one  
37 rises ‘above all nature’. Her claim, ultimately, is that the will underpins all of reality, such  
38 that all beings are self-transforming, self-directed in some way. She does, however, note a  
39 difference between human willing and other forms of willing—a difference that has to do  
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54 <sup>25</sup> Fichte appears to be challenging his distinctions, just a few pages later, when he writes that  
55 the will is ‘the creator of the world’, and goes on to disagree with those ‘who regard the will  
56 as building up a world of an everlasting inert matter, which must remain inert and lifeless...’  
57 (BdM, 302; VoM, 157)—the implication being that the will animates the world in its entirety,  
58 such that nothing in it is inert or lifeless. Thus, Fichte seems to be affirming, rather than  
59 challenging, a unity between the natural and the spiritual, the earthly and that which he  
60 designates as beyond the earth.

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3 with our particular ability to consciously seek to transform ourselves. It is, ultimately, this  
4  
5 ability that sets us apart, but it is also this ability that grants us a special responsibility  
6  
7 towards the earth.  
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#### 10 11 12 **4. 'Idea of the Earth'** 13 14 15

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17 'Idea of the Earth' was written shortly after Günderrode's reading of Fichte. Although the  
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19 themes of the essay are ones that Günderrode considers in other contexts, in 'Idea of the  
20  
21 Earth' she focuses on the question of the relation of the human being to the earth from a  
22  
23 moral perspective—a perspective which can be easily missed if not read alongside her notes  
24  
25 on Fichte.  
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30 To begin with, Günderrode notes that the earth is constantly transforming, and indeed  
31  
32 striving. As such, the earth appears to be directed toward a specific goal, which Günderrode  
33  
34 describes as the 'realization' of the 'idea' of the earth (GSW 1, 446). To speak the earth as an  
35  
36 idea that strives seems strange at first sight. For it implies that the earth is not only a material  
37  
38 reality, but somehow also an ideal reality. In light of her notes on Fichte, however,  
39  
40 Günderrode's conception of the earth as an ideal or spiritual reality gains some clarity.<sup>26</sup> On  
41  
42 the one hand, Günderrode is drawing on the notion of formative force, which, as Fichte  
43  
44 explained, cannot be gleaned with the physical eye. As he puts it: 'I can describe this power  
45  
46 only through its effects, and it is to me no more than the producing cause of such effects', i.e.,  
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48 of plants, animals and organic forms generally (BdM, 21; VoM, 10). Following  
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55 <sup>26</sup> While we could also draw on Schelling to interpret Günderrode here, Günderrode diverges  
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57 from Schelling on this important point—and, I believe, comes much closer to Fichte. As Ruth  
58  
59 Christmann has noted, Günderrode's emphasis on striving toward a final goal distinguishes  
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her from Schelling, who instead focuses on the original duality that makes possible nature's  
infinite productivity. Christmann, *Zwischen Identitätsgewinn und Bewußtseinsverlust*, 112.

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3 Blumenbach,<sup>27</sup> Fichte describes formative force as the means by which organic beings  
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5 maintain their distinctive forms (their form as plant, as animal, or as human) over time (both  
6  
7 individually and as a species) and also as the means by which to explicate their distinctive  
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9 capacities—growth, nourishment, and reproduction. As such, although formative forces  
10  
11 cannot themselves be seen, but only assumed, we can see their effects—in the material bodies  
12  
13 of living beings. To speak of formative forces is thus to speak of an ideal or spiritual reality,  
14  
15 which is not opposed to the material, but manifests itself in the material (its effects). Thus by  
16  
17 speaking of the earth as an ideal, Günderrode is drawing on this perspective, which she  
18  
19 further developed in her notes when she connected the notion of formative force to will. As  
20  
21 she puts it in ‘Idea of the Earth’:  
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28 The earth is a realized idea, a simultaneously effecting (force [*Kraft*]) and an effect  
29  
30 (appearance [*Erscheinung*]). [It is] thus a unity of soul and body, the latter [is one] pole of  
31  
32 her activity in which she [the earth] turns outward and which we call existence, form,  
33  
34 body; the former is turned inward [and we call it] intensity, essence, force [*Kraft*], soul.  
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36  
37 (GSW 1, 446)  
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42 On the other hand, Günderrode is working with the view—also developed in her notes—that  
43  
44 the ideal or spiritual places a normative claim upon us, a claim that calls for transformation.  
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46 The earth, she writes, must be ‘realized’ and it is our task, as members of the earth’s  
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51 <sup>27</sup> In *Über den Bildungstrieb*, Blumenbach invokes the Newtonian idea of a ‘*qualitas occulta*’  
52 when speaking of the *Bildungstrieb*. He writes: ‘I hope it will be superfluous to remind most  
53 readers that the word *Bildungstrieb*, like the words attraction, gravity, etc. should serve, no  
54 more and no less, to signify a power whose constant effect is recognized from experience and  
55 whose cause, like the causes of the aforementioned and commonly recognized natural  
56 powers, is for us a *qualitas occulta*...’ Blumenbach, *Über den Bildungstrieb*, 25–6.  
57 Blumenbach was not the only eighteenth-century life scientist to make use of Newton’s  
58 *Hypotheses non fingo*. See Wolfe, ‘On the role of Newtonian analogies in eighteenth-century  
59 life science’.  
60

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3 community, to help realize this idea/ideal (GSW 1, 447). The earth, in other words, is placing  
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5 a normative claim upon us, and it is our task to understand what this claim requires and to act  
6  
7 accordingly.  
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12 Now, Günderröde explains that all members of the earth's community 'give back to the  
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14 earth...'—a giving back that involves becoming more alive, more attuned to the earth and  
15  
16 one another, and more unified in mind and body (GSW 1, 447). As a member of the earth's  
17  
18 community, the human being contributes to this giving back, which, in the case of the human,  
19  
20 involves a more conscious form of self-transformation: transforming the way we *think* and  
21  
22 *feel*, the way we *perceive* and *understand*, such that what appear to be distinct or separated  
23  
24 (mind and body, self and other, sensation and cognition) are connected. Or, as Günderröde  
25  
26 puts it, the realization of the earth requires unity between 'being (body) and thought (spirit)',  
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28 to such an extent that they begin to 'penetrate one another' and become 'indistinguishable'  
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30 (GSW 1, 448). It is the state in which 'body [*Körper*] is simultaneously spirit, thought is  
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32 simultaneously body [*Leib*]...' (GSW 1, 448).  
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40 While this may strike us as highly speculative, Günderröde's ultimate claim is that self-  
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42 transformation must involve achieving greater harmony or unity. This is particularly  
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44 significant for human beings who—more than any other beings on earth—experience a  
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46 separation between inner and outer, self and world. It is thus the human being's special task  
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48 to transform herself to become more aligned, not only with herself, but with others. And this  
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50 self-transformation Günderröde describes as unity with oneself.  
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56 Fichte too had argued that self-unity is the highest goal of humanity. For Fichte, however,  
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58 self-unity specifically implies formal unity (i.e., non-contradiction), unity with one's *pure I*,  
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3 which in turn means self-determination, or as he puts it, the human being must “determine  
4 himself and not permit himself to be determined by something foreign.”<sup>28</sup> Such an account of  
5 self-unity follows from Fichte’s conception of the self as absolutely self-grounding, which  
6 entails that the self cannot emerge through relation with others, but that others emerge *out of*  
7 (not prior to, or in relation with) the self. As he puts it in BdM: ‘The ground upon which I  
8 assume the existence of something beyond myself, does not lie outside of myself, but within  
9 me, in the limitation of my own personality’. It is only via a deduction from myself, that I can  
10 go on to make an ‘inference’ with regard to the existence of others (BdM, 41; VoM, 21). IN  
11 light of Fichte’s understanding of the self, it follows that the goal of self-unity means *only*  
12 unity with *one’s self*—not unity with *others*.  
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29 For Günderröde, by contrast, the self emerges only through being with others. Others are thus  
30 not secondary to the self, but are at its very foundation. As such, to achieve ‘unity’ or  
31 ‘harmony’ with oneself is to achieve unity or harmony with others—or, to put it in terms of  
32 ‘Idea of the Earth’, unity with and through the earth.<sup>29</sup>  
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45 <sup>28</sup> Here is the full passage which comes from *Some Lectures Concerning the Vocation of the*  
46 *Scholar*: ‘Man is always supposed to be at one with himself; he should never contradict  
47 himself. Now the pure I cannot contradict itself, since it contains no diversity but is instead  
48 always one and the same...’ to which he adds that for the empirical I, which does contradict  
49 itself, the goal must be ‘to determine himself and not permit himself to be determined by  
50 something foreign’. This implies that the fundamental principle of morality, as Fichte  
51 explicates it, ‘is to act so that you could consider the maxims of your willing to be eternal  
52 laws for yourself’. ‘Some Lectures Concerning the Vocation of the Scholar’, 149; GA 6, 297-  
53 8.  
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55 <sup>29</sup> While in ‘Idea of the Earth’ Günderröde’s focus is on the earth and the more-than-human  
56 community of which we are part, the view that the moral vocation involves transforming  
57 one’s self in order to become part of a larger community—without, however, annihilating  
58 one’s individuality in order to achieve this unity—is present throughout her work. See  
59 Ezekiel, “Metamorphosis.”  
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3 It is thus not surprising that Günderrode goes on to claim that the goal of human mora  
4 activity—i.e., unity with oneself—is essential for the realization of the idea of the earth. Her  
5 point is not that I must be identical with myself alone, but that I must come to identify with  
6 the earth's community, and in so doing, help realize the earth's vocation. Thus she explains  
7 that truth, justice, beauty, love, goodness and charity are all based on the idea of unity, but  
8 this unity, Günderrode importantly adds, implies connection with others, or in some  
9 instances, totality (*Allheit*). In fact, she goes on to claim, in order to realize these ideals, the  
10 individual must free herself from the 'bonds of personality', for in each case, achieving the  
11 ideal involves bringing oneself to harmonise with that which is beyond oneself, in this way  
12 achieving a real and vital connection with other human beings, animals, and the earth itself  
13 (GSW 1, 449). Or as she puts it in 'To Eusebio', virtue is 'the forgetting of personality and  
14 particularity for totality' (GSW 1, 361).<sup>30</sup>

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33 Self-unity as harmony with others is, Günderrode concludes, the realized idea of the earth. Or  
34 as she puts it: 'What is always one with itself, in harmony with itself, not torn into  
35 particularity... is that which I have referred to as the realized idea of the earth...' (GSW 1,  
36 449). The realized idea of the earth is thus the achievement of truth, justice, beauty and  
37 goodness through unity *not with oneself in the limited sense, but with oneself in an extended*  
38 *sense.*

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49 In this way, Günderrode reimagines the human vocation, such that what it means to be human  
50 and achieve virtue necessarily involves transforming oneself *for* and *with* the earth. This

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<sup>30</sup> Günderrode's explanation of the relationship between one's self and others in 'To Eusebio' similarly articulates this extended notion of the self, but recasts it in slightly different terms, as the 'resolution of the many into the one' (GSW 1, 361). The implication is that I start to regard others as part of myself—precisely because who I am is inseparable from (and dependent on) the world around me.

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3 reimagining is made possible by Günderrode's understanding of the self and of nature as  
4 developed in her notes on Fichte. Precisely because the human being emerges in relation with  
5 concrete others, the self is not alienated from the earth community, but can only exist within  
6 it. The relationship between self and earth is thus re-configured: from one in which the earth  
7 exists *for* me, to one where I exist *because* of the earth. This does not mean, however, that the  
8 self is annihilated for the sake of this transformation or for the sake of the earth. Rather, as  
9 we have seen, for Günderrode the self is born out of this original relationality. In turn, this  
10 relationship between self and others (more-than-human others) allows Günderrode to  
11 reimagine our moral vocation, which does not involve transforming the earth to align with  
12 our ends, but rather, to be transformed with it, in order to help the earth achieve *its* ends.  
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Günderrode thus offers a distinctive vision of our moral vocation and our relationship to the  
earth—one which both resounds with and can contribute to contemporary efforts to rethink  
the human-nature relation. Her claim that the self—human culture, human ways of thinking  
and perceiving—must be transformed such that our thinking and perceiving are unified  
prefigures the work of eco-feminist Val Plumwood, who has argued that the environmental  
crisis is a 'crisis of reason', more specifically, of a reason which has failed to accommodate  
itself to the earth and its demands.<sup>31</sup> What Plumwood calls for—a transformation of mind in  
order to adapt to the earth and its inhabitants—not only appears to harken back to  
Günderrode's demand for a transformation of our sense of self, but to be founded on  
Günderrode's reconceptualisation of the self, such that others are no longer seen as external  
or foreign entities, but as essential parts of one's self.<sup>32</sup> This means, importantly, that one's

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57 <sup>31</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 15.

58 <sup>32</sup> Plumwood describes this as a 'dialogical model of the self' though she does not go into  
59 great detail, which in many ways coheres with and is prefigured in Günderrode's expanded  
60 conception of the self. *Environmental Culture*, 33.

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3 sense of responsibility extends beyond a responsibility for one's actions and includes all  
4 those whom I regard as myself. Thus in contrast to Schelling's 'virtually debunking' the  
5 notion of responsibility<sup>33</sup>, we find here an expanded conception of responsibility, founded on  
6 an expanded conception of the self.  
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Günderrode's reimagined understanding of the human vocation thus distinguishes her not only from Fichte—who regarded our relationship to the earth as one of mastery—but also from her fellow romantics, who saw it as our task either to transform the earth or merely contemplate it. Günderrode's claim is that we must be transformed *for* the earth, a claim that, in the place of mastery, education and contemplation, emphasizes service.

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<sup>33</sup> Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 186.

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4 Abbreviations of Primary Literature  
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8 Fichte  
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10 BdM: Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*. Berlin: Vossische  
11 Buchhandlung, 1800.  
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13 VoM: Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. *The Vocation of Man*, trans. William Smith. Chicago: Open  
14 Court, 1910.  
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17 ‘Some Lectures’: Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. ‘Some Lectures Concerning the Vocation of the  
18 Scholar’, in *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*. Edited and translated by Daniel  
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21 GA: Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Edited by  
22 Reinhard Lauth et al. Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1962–.  
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26 Günderrode  
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28 GSW: Günderrode, Karoline von. *Sämtliche Werke und ausgewählte Schriften*. Edited by  
29 Walter Morgenthaler. Frankfurt: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1990-1.  
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35 NS: Hardenberg, Friedrich von. *Novalis Schriften. Die Werke von Friedrich von Hardenberg*.  
36 Edited by Richard Samuel, H-J Mähl, Paul Kluckhorn, and G. Schultz. Stuttgart: W.  
37 Kohlhammer, 1960-1988.  
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41 Schelling  
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43 HKA: *Werke: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*. Edited by H. M. Baumgartner, W. G. Jacobs,  
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46 SW: *Schellings Sämtliche Werke*. Edited by K. F. A. Schelling. Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856-1861.  
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49 SFB: *Schelling-Fichte Briefwechsel*. Edited by Hartmut Traub. Neuried: Ars Una, 2001.  
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