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## Gleaming Leprosy in the Sky: Hegel on the Impotence of Nature

### 1. A History of Rejection: the Final System and the Status of the Naturphilosophie

We can historically trace the philosophical rejection of Hegel's *Naturphilosophie*<sup>1</sup> at least as far back as Schelling's scathing criticisms, in and around 1833–34, regarding what he saw as the unbridgeable void separating the register of Hegel's *Logic* from the domain of nature.<sup>2</sup> Feuerbach developed his own unique variation of dissent in terms of 'the absolute' being nothing other than consciousness's self-alienation.<sup>3</sup> Marx and Engels developed their criticisms of Hegel's writings on nature by elaborating, as some commentators have argued, on the criticisms first generated by Schelling. Marx and Engels attempted to interpret scientific findings and phenomena in terms of

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<sup>1</sup> Hegel citations are from G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, ed. and trans. M. J. Petry, London 1970, unless otherwise noted; hereafter *PN* followed by paragraph (§), *Zusatz* and page number for references where necessary (*Zusatz*, ##); volume numbers are clearly indicated where specificity requires (vo.#). Where necessary, original German terms are from *Werke [in 20 Bänden auf der Grundlage der Werke von 1832–45]*, eds. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel, Frankfurt am Main 1970; hereafter *W* followed by volume number (#) and paragraph (§), page number (##) and section heading where necessary. Original German terms indicated with square brackets [...] or (...).

<sup>2</sup> See Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie, New York 1994. See especially the section on Hegel, 134–60. Of this chasm, Schelling writes: 'the Idea ... [says Hegel] ... in the infinite freedom, in the "truth of itself, resolves to release itself as nature, or in the form of being-other, from itself." This expression "release" – the Idea releases nature – is one of the strangest ... expressions behind which this philosophy retreats at difficult points ... It is a very awkward point at which Hegel's philosophy has arrived here ... a nasty broad ditch ...' (155).

<sup>3</sup> See "The Contradiction in Speculative Doctrine of God", in: *19th-Century Philosophy*, ed. Patrick L. Gardiner, New York 1969, see 246–50. Here we get a sense of Feuerbach's criticism of Hegel's speculative philosophy insofar as the latter situates both humans and nature *within* the processes constituting the Absolute whereas, pace Hegel, Feuerbach maintains that the Absolute needs to be understood as objectified (alienated) human consciousness, hence, secondary.