
Schelling, Oken and the Problem of Animal Classification

Andrea Gambarotto*^{1,2}

¹Andrea Gambarotto – Italy

²IHPST – Paris I – France

Abstract

The Organism Problem between Life Sciences and Philosophy of Nature around 1800 (Duchesneau, Gambarotto, Illetterati)

In the last thirty years several studies have been concerned with the meaning of German romantic life sciences for the emergence of modern biology. However, these endeavors are often characterized by interpretative errors or too vague arguments. Even the best ones, although they satisfactorily account for Darwin's main intellectual references, fail to address the most important question: which are the respective roles of German life sciences and philosophy of nature in the emergence of the conceptual framework that rendered biology as a science (and thus Darwinism) possible? Most scholars have worked out the problem using Imre Lakatos' vocabulary and referring to an alleged Kant-Blumenbach research program. The paper argues that this notion cannot be used for the analysis of pre-paradigmatic sciences and that, instead, the main ground for a scientific biology is to be sought in the conceptual shift involving the notion of organism from "general form of order" to "individual living entity". Especially in the German context, this shift is expressly connected to the notion of vital force. Kielmeyer was the first one to use it in order to analyze the relationship between physiological functions and animal classification, while Schelling's and Oken's philosophy of nature displays an effective development of this idea. This framework constitute an important link between romantic biology and the British tradition of comparative anatomy, the background on which Darwinism was elaborated.

*Speaker