

# NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE: HENRICH STEFFENS' "ENHANCED" NATURALISM

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**Abstract:** With one eye on his sources and another on his production, in this contribution we would like to present Henrich Steffens' philosophy as an "enhanced" naturalism. After explaining the meaning of this definition, we will examine some topical places in Steffens' philosophical, political, and psychological-anthropological production. There the naturalistic perspective will prominently emerge, so as to demonstrate how it is central to the author's understanding and unusual with respect to its context. Finally, we will propose some general considerations on the heuristic fruitfulness of Steffens' original point of view.

**Keywords:** Naturalism; Naturphilosophie; Anthropology; Ecology.

## 1. *Introduction*

Henrich Steffens (1773-1845) was a Danish philosopher, mineralogist, naturalist, and writer. Born in Stavanger, Norway, Steffens lived for most of his days between Germany and Denmark. A leading figure in the events of German and Danish romanticism, he is mainly known as a peculiar source for the cultural history of the nineteenth century, thanks to a massive ten-volumes autobiography. Since his philosophical works has not had the same luck as his autobiography, in this contribution we will try to present Steffens as an original and important thinker. With an eye on his sources and another on his production, we intend to present his philosophy as an "enhanced" naturalism. After having clarified its meaning, we will take into account some occurrences of such a naturalism in Steffens' philosophical, political and psychological-anthropological production. Finally, we will propose some general considerations regarding the heuristic fruitfulness of Steffens' original standpoint.

## 2. *The "cultural" naturalism*

First of all, it is necessary to specify in what sense we speak of a naturalistic perspective in Steffens, thus explaining how the philosophical posture of Steffens represents an "enhanced" naturalism. Firstly, speaking of an "enhanced" naturalism helps us differentiate Steffens from other thinkers of his time, who

were elaborating a similar naturalistic arrangement of knowledge. Especially in the medico-philosophical debate of nineteenth century, many seem to focus on the problem of the knowing subject, on its nature and its ways of knowing. In this area we can refer to important thinkers who devoted themselves to a form of philosophical naturalism, which can be broadly described as empirical and anti-metaphysical. In this line we can find thinkers like E. Platner (1744-1818), G.E. Schulze (1766-1833), J.F. Fries (1773-1843) or, later, F.E. Beneke (1798-1854).<sup>1</sup> A common belief between those thinkers was indeed the full rejection of Steffens' interpretative framework, aligned with romantic *Naturphilosophie*.

Conceived by Friedrich Schelling, one of the fathers of German idealism, *Naturphilosophie* was a well-know philosophical-scientific movement, which had great success among scholars at the beginning of the nineteenth century. *Naturphilosophie* promoted a holistic approach for the investigation of nature, based on the assumption that to understand the world we must conceive its «real» and «ideal» side as one. Nature and spirit had to be understood as the two ways in which God asserts its presence in the world. From this broad presentation, we can already hint how Steffens, as an adherent of *Naturphilosophie*, cannot in any way be considered an empiricist in the strict sense, at least because in his philosophy the sensitive knowledge receives a truthful meaning only within a holistic ontological framework. Therefore, he cannot be associated with the naturalism of the aforementioned philosophers, who based their assumptions on strictly empirical premises. However, we also have to observe some similarities: Steffens is indeed prone to empirical observation, and he equally shows an explicit interest for the nature of the knowing subject.

To understand the meaning of this set of differences and similarities, it is necessary to point out that a naturalistic perspective was already present in Steffens' thought, well before the encounter with *Naturphilosophie* and with German philosophy. Nonetheless, Steffens early naturalism cannot be associated with some philosophical current, as it comes from his national culture. In other words, this naturalism would represent an initial posture that Steffens acquired in his youth and in his early Danish training. This posture seems already capable to shape Steffens' worldview and it must be understood as an important place of mediation between Steffens and German philosophy. Obviously, it is not possible to define with absolute clarity the entity of this "cultural" naturalism, since it is not possible to determine how much the training years have influenced Steffens. However, in our opinion, this naturalistic figure returns throughout Steffens' whole philosophical itinerary, at least partially conditioning every declination of his philosophy. From Steffens' autobiography we know that the university years in Copenhagen were disappointing, since he did not feel himself enriched by the knowledge he received. Nevertheless, both the cultural atmosphere that prevailed

<sup>1</sup> See, at least, Poggi (1977, *passim*) and Martinelli (2004, Cp. II-III).

in late 18th century Copenhagen and the Danish cultural background with which Steffens approached German philosophy should not be overlooked.

As we have mentioned, Steffens had a strong scientific background, mainly in geology, mineralogy, and natural history.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, he seems to have developed both a predisposition for observation and a spontaneous hostility towards metaphysical speculation. In addition to this, Steffens grew in late 18th century Denmark. From a strictly philosophical point of view, this means that Steffens encountered a tradition of thought that was more attracted to British empiricism and *Popularphilosophie* than metaphysics.<sup>3</sup> Differently, from a socio-political point of view, we must keep in mind that late 18th century Denmark society would gradually start to move away from German culture, even though especially Danish high society continued to cheer for the German way of living.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. *Naturalism and Naturphilosophie*

We might be inclined to associate this idea of a "cultural" naturalism with 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century *Volksgeist* theories. Without reaching so far, we can argue that this "cultural" naturalism could have had a certain relevance for Steffens, precisely because he was attracted by the influence that nature (and culture as a «second» nature) has on the human being. Since he pondered these questions all his life, we have no reason to believe that he could have thought out of this perspective. We should now see how Steffens philosophically enacts such a naturalism. Its first philosophical occurrence is in a strictly theoretical and anonymously published review for the *Erlanger Litteratur-Zeitung*.<sup>5</sup> This review has been attributed to Steffens between others,<sup>6</sup> but today we can assert with certainty his paternity.<sup>7</sup> The subject of the review is the *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (1800)<sup>8</sup> by Friedrich Schelling, the main proponent of *Naturphilosophie* and the main philosophical reference of Steffens.

<sup>2</sup> Among his contemporaries Steffens was mainly known as a mineralogist and scientist. In this contribution, more space will be given to his philosophical career, which, however, must never be separated from that of a scholar of natural sciences. On Steffens as a scientist see Poggi (2000: 372-380).

<sup>3</sup> See, at least, Koch (2003, *passim*).

<sup>4</sup> See, at least, Østergård (1992: 3-27) and Krøgh Nielsen (2014).

<sup>5</sup> Steffens (1801a: 649–663).

<sup>6</sup> See Furhams (1962: 316).

<sup>7</sup> The attribution had already been attempted by Schmidt (1913, II: 620). Onnasch (2009: 307-356) then identified a further Schellingian *locus* supporting this thesis; see Schelling (2005: 25, Anm. 72). For further arguments see the letter from Steffens to Gottlob Ernst August Mehmel (1761-1840), editor-in-chief at the *Erlanger Litteratur-Zeitung*, dated 02/09/1800, in Feigs (1979: 62). In the latter Steffens offers to review the Schellingian *System* or, in alternative, some Ritter's unspecified «galvanischen Schriften», the latest issue of the *Athenaeum* and Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*.

<sup>8</sup> En. tr. Schelling (1978).

In this work Schelling investigates the «spiritual» or «ideal» side of reality, which is presented to be as the reciprocal of a «natural» or «real» side. However, this configuration does not represent Schelling's last words on the subject. Soon after the publication of the *System*, Schelling will move away from this perspective, separating his way from the one of his mentor Johann Fichte, who saw in *Naturphilosophie* nothing more than an appendix to his *Wissenschaftslehre*. Against him, Schelling will finally publish his *Darlegung des wahren Verhältnisses der Naturphilosophie zu der verbesserten Fichte'schen Lehre* (1806).<sup>9</sup> In this work, Schelling will declare that both sides of reality can be explained by *Naturphilosophie*, since *Naturphilosophie* is not the doctrine of a side, but the doctrine of the whole.<sup>10</sup>

However, quite surprisingly, in his review of Schelling's *System*, Steffens anticipates exactly this controversy. This would explain why Steffens' review was noted by Kant, who quotes it in his *Opus Postumum*. In the same pages Kant goes so far as to say that Spinoza, Schelling, and Lichtenberg can be seen as the past, present, and future of his transcendental philosophy.<sup>11</sup> The reasons for this strong impression that Schelling would have made on Kant have already been partly examined,<sup>12</sup> but no one seems to have considered the importance of Steffens as mediator between the two. Thanks to Steffens, Kant would have read Schelling's *System* as a spinozistic work,<sup>13</sup> thus inferring a correlation between the *System* and his doctrine of the *Selbstkonstruktion*.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in the text Steffens does not celebrate Schelling as a Spinozist, but as the new Leibniz. However, according to the reviewer, Leibniz was the first who read Spinoza's philosophy as a «philosophy of perception», thus opposing Spinoza and Newton's «purely reflexive» philosophy. In parallel, Schelling read Kant's «philosophy of reflection» as opposed to Fichte's «philosophy of perception».<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Steffens says that the whole transcendental idealism is to be understood as a continuous «strengthening of perception»,<sup>16</sup> but he also adds that Schelling's strengthening of transcendental idealism, as presented in the *System*, is, indeed, an overcoming of it. According to the reviewer, Schelling's *System* asserts that the self can be considered as a productive entity only when the productive element is not already present in it, which is not the case of the early version of Fichte's

<sup>9</sup> En. tr. Schelling (2018).

<sup>10</sup> On this assumption, which can be extended to the entire Würzburg period, see, at least, Griffero (2000, 10n; 324-325), Dezi (2013, *passim*) and Grant (2006: 19ff).

<sup>11</sup> See Kant (1993: 285).

<sup>12</sup> See Onnasch (2009: 307-356) and Forster (2005: 146-169). The latter assumes that Kant may also have had knowledge of the early Schelling's *Naturphilosophical* writings, again through some reviews that appeared in periodicals.

<sup>13</sup> See Basile (2013: 224).

<sup>14</sup> See Onnasch (2009: 327).

<sup>15</sup> Steffens (1801a: 662).

<sup>16</sup> Steffens (1801a: 664).

*Wissenschaftslehre*. The productive element must emerge when we conceive the perceptual act in-itself, in the sense that we must always be able to find traces of conscious activity in the product.<sup>17</sup>

This is the core of the entire review, which then proceeds to consider all sections of Schelling's text. However, what should strike us here are both the naturalistic features of the discourse and the feeling that this text could in some way anticipate Schelling's rupture with Fichte. Steffens sees Schelling's *System* as a definitive overcoming of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, precisely because it represents an overcoming of Fichte's concept of «non-ego» and, therefore, a “superior” philosophy of perception. Still, the review is not a mere praise of the author: Schelling's *System* represents nothing but a sketch, that could possibly lead to a broader advancement in philosophy, which will lead «physics to poetry».<sup>18</sup> Steffens argues that Schelling can overcome Fichte's philosophy of perception only by virtue of a «physical» approach to transcendental idealism, therefore bringing the theoretical and practical sides of his inquiry into unity. Finally, Steffens points out that consciousness, as explored in the *System*, is the object of a «physical description» and part of the organic process. This definition should not sound new: prior to the *System*, Schelling had, indeed, prefigured a «speculative physics», i.e. a possible new discipline derived from *Naturphilosophie*, which would reveal to us a fundamental and ideal constructive activity in nature. In Steffens' view, this speculative physical approach works even in the «ideal side» of reality: the transcendental idealism is nothing more than «physics».

Steffens goes so far as to claim that he does not understand how Schelling can consider his *Transzendentalphilosophie* and his *Naturphilosophie* as two opposite sides, when it is evident that the transcendental side is itself a part of *Naturphilosophie*; it almost seems, Steffens concludes, that the author realised the depth of his reflections while writing.<sup>19</sup> It is not by chance, at this point, that Steffens refers, for a deeper understanding of Schelling's philosophy, to a little-known article, called *Anhang zu dem Aufsatz des Herrn Eschenmayer betreffend den wahren Begriff der Naturphilosophie, und die richtige Art ihre Probleme aufzulösen* (Schelling 2004). This work is a commentary over an incorrect attempt to read *Naturphilosophie* in a Fichtian way but is also an *addendum* of Schelling's *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* (1801),<sup>20</sup> which will be Schelling's first step away from Fichte. To summarize, Schelling's second thoughts on *Naturphilosophie* represents an enhancement of reality or, in other words, a «naturalisation»<sup>21</sup> of the «ideal» side of reality and, in this respect, Schelling's

<sup>17</sup> See Steffens (1801a: 652).

<sup>18</sup> Steffens (1801a: 663).

<sup>19</sup> See Steffens (1801a: 656).

<sup>20</sup> En. tr. Schelling (2002).

<sup>21</sup> See Moiso (1990: 57-84).

philosophy has been defined as an «ontological over-realism».<sup>22</sup> Since we wanted to preserve the spirit of this assumption but also to underline some differences between Schelling and Steffens, we speak here of an “enhanced” naturalism.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. *The Anthropologie*

As we have seen, the 1801 review by Steffens is of great theoretical interest since it demonstrates both the philosophical relevance of Steffens' naturalism and the theoretical subtlety of his perspective. However, in these years Steffens published another work, which would be widely known: the *Beiträge zur innern Naturgeschichte der Erde* (Steffens 1973). This work made a great impression on the main philosophical players of the time, immediately getting Steffens into the good graces of Goethe and Schelling. However, the *Beiträge* mainly proposed a new epistemological model, through which Steffens depicted his first speculative synthesis of the organic process. The keystone of the work is represented by certain “mineral chains”, proposed as elemental roots of the organic process. In terms of naturalism, we find here a constant effort to corroborate speculation with observation and a certain circumspection in the use of philosophical terminology.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, we will here find only a sketch of an anthropological perspective, which will represent the most complete form of Steffens' “enhanced” naturalism. In fact, before being able to give back an autonomous anthropological model, Steffens will have to mature a certain detachment from the context in which he operates.

However, despite some internal revisions, Steffens' philosophical horizon remained unchanged throughout his whole speculative itinerary. Unlike Schelling, who would turn towards a first “philosophy of freedom” and, therefore, towards the so-called late “positive” philosophy, Steffens would never abandon the perspective of *Naturphilosophie*, seeking, instead, to keep Schelling's turning points within it. To reach this goal, Steffens had to find an enhancing interpretative key that would allow him to hold together the different levels of knowledge, starting from a triple idea of nature that animates his writing. In Steffens' philosophy we must distinguish between 1) a primary, physical nature, 2) a secondary, cultural-spiritual nature, and 3) an abysmal and telluric *Natura naturans*, which providentially presides over the world. Following this path, Steffens will finally come up with an innovative anthropological model, that seems not easy to understand today. To grasp the radicality of his anthropology it will be necessary to make the following explicit: it is not possible to conceive Steffens' anthropology as a casual essay on human nature, not in the sense in

<sup>22</sup> Dezi (2013, *passim*).

<sup>23</sup> On the meaning of such a definition we will have to return later.

<sup>24</sup> See, at least, Gurka (2021: 101-118) and Poggi (2000: 372-380).

which such a treatise was conceived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>25</sup> Let us take as a reference his mature *Anthropologie* (1820-22): as we are about to see, this work would become the keystone of Steffens' speculation precisely insofar as it does not represent a mere anthropology. Steffens' *Anthropologie* first goal is to build an "anthropological" philosophy, where the human being is not examined for itself, but rather as a point of access to the world: the human being needs to recover a retrospective gaze towards the «infinite past» of Nature and a prophetic gaze towards Its «infinite future». To be effective, Steffens' *Anthropologie* must allow the human being to «sink into nature» without losing itself. With this in mind, Steffens elaborates a refined naturphilosophical *pastiche*, made of philosophical, theological, anthropological and geographical observations. Steffens builds this way a "decentralised" anthropology, in which the human being is the subject of speech precisely inasmuch as it becomes an object before Nature.

Steffens' *Anthropologie* finally shows itself as an «anthropodicy»,<sup>26</sup> i.e. as a justification of the genesis of the human being within nature. Steffens' main argument concerns racial differences between humans. In *Anthropologie*'s first section (*Geologische Anthropologie*) he starts from the idea that some substances, which can be hypothetically located in the centre of the earth, are to be held as fundamental in Nature. As we understand from the following section (*Physiologische Anthropologie*), those substances pertain to the entire organic development and can therefore be found, even only by derivation, in the various realms of the organic world. As a consequence, those substances can be accounted as the source for racial differences, but only in a teleological and «religious» sense. In other words, we must assume a primitive act of egoism (*Selbstsucht*), for which human beings lost their ability to mediate between Nature and God, within a primeval Edenic place. Since the human being then became subjected to the organic process, we must presume that it was already naturally predisposed to racial differentiation, but also that those traits became predominant only when the human being lost the purpose of his genesis. Eventually Steffens will present these racial differences as apparent, since, according to his interpretation of the original sin, God's plan is to put humankind together just after they split up, so that they can prosper from their differences. Human beings' true nature turns out not to be the apparent somatic and cultural difference, but rather the interior, spiritual richness of their individuality. This individual nature, however, cannot show itself as fundamental until external nature is exhibited as its antecedent.

*Anthropologie*'s last section, which goes by the name of *Psychologische Anthropologie*, will then deal with psychology, trying to link human external and

<sup>25</sup> For a general overview of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century continental anthropological debate see at least Woodward and Ash (1982), Verwey (1985), Poggi-Bossi (1994: 103-174) Wellmon (2010) and Gaukroger (2016).

<sup>26</sup> See Larrimore (2007: 95).

internal nature. Steffens will try here to propose a psychological explanation that is alternative to contemporary "empirical psychologies", thus calling into question that *simpliciter* naturalism we discussed at the beginning. Steffens' psychological anthropology will mainly look at Kant's *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* and will derive from it the notions of temperament and talent. In Steffens' reading, temperament and talent are the fundamental places through which the human being can connect its external and internal nature, thus reconnecting itself with nature. Temperament, race, and also gender, are the places where nature decides for the human being, at least partially determining it. *Inter alia*, temperament implies a first individual determination, as it mediates the passage between the external and the internal nature, but only a further dimension gives a meaning to this connection; this dimension is the one of «talent».

Talent represents the anthropological understanding of our first individual determination, which binds 'first' nature to the so-called 'second' nature, namely that of 'spirit' and culture. In other words, talent arises from the generic individual temperamental dimension, through the emergence of individual inclinations: when correctly understood and developed, inclination becomes talent. In light of these explanations, Steffens' *Anthropologie* can be finally seen as a hard-to-set in any field *unicum*; not only because it involves many different fields and levels, but also because this anthropology implies more than standard anthropologies. Steffens' *Anthropologie* reach the status of an epistemological model for a holistic (or «religious» according to Steffens) understanding of the world, in which the human being «sink» without losing itself.

### 5. The political naturalism

Now that we have understood in what sense Steffens' *Anthropologie* differs from standard romantic anthropologies, we can define more clearly the scope of our "enhanced" naturalism. Since the human being is precisely the point of access to nature, everything pertaining to the human being will both represent a part of nature and an 'enhancement' of nature itself. Before the human being became manifest in the world, a whole new realm of knowledge was remaining unconceived. With the advent of humans in nature, a new realm appears, both as the realm of the spirit and as the realm of the ultimate communion of spirit and nature. In the first sense, the human being represents an enhancement of nature, since its spiritual nature is somehow unexpected; human nature preserves the trace of God's primordial act of love. On second thoughts, however, this new spiritual dimension appears to be the same with the first, "natural" one, in which the human being was born. According to Steffens' anthropological model, the human being is revealed as the offspring of a second nature, but only in light of the first one.



In his main political work, the *Caricaturen des Heiligsten* (1819-21), Steffens carries out a naturalistic description of the so-called second nature, distinguishing its primal state from its late degeneration. By means of a philosophical-narrative and rhetorical-dialectical analysis, Steffens presents us with pairs of *Caricaturen*, i.e. pairs of distorted elements of today's society. A caricature is not a rhetorical exaggeration of a cultural element, but rather a real exaggeration of it, which took place historically, thus changing the 'natural' aspect of political life. Through this path Steffens show us a naturalistic outline of social classes (peasants, bourgeoisie, and nobility) in which, also the interrelation between classes follows a naturalistic assumption. In general, Steffens can be said to derive his considerations from a fundamental analogy, according to which the state is to be regarded as an organism. In the life of this second nature, which is «as inexorable as the first»,<sup>27</sup> everything must be subject to a criterion of harmonious and "natural" development. On the one hand, it is said that there should be as few laws as possible, as little bureaucracy as possible and that a constitution is sufficient since it represents the natural costume and the natural will of a given people. On the other hand, however, it is to be noted that the boundaries between classes and their differences remain functional to the fruitfulness of the state: everything must follow a spontaneous and undisturbed growth and the disputes are resolved by means of a superior understanding of political life that Steffens' moderatism inherited through Danish cultural naturalism becomes here a true declaration of political immobility.

In Steffens' design, the freedom of the citizen can only be deduced from the state of society, so that every class is equally free and indispensable. In other words, each class, when it is present to itself, when it is aware of its own condition and indispensability for the state community, realises its freedom. The privilege of the aristocratic class, for which freedom materialises as an external condition, carries with it a 'natural' responsibility, which is due precisely to their social position. Steffens' idea is that free people, in the above sense, can 'educate' each other, making use of their personal peculiarities; therefore, legislation (and education) should follow and support this same principle. The law should not improve people, it should not change lives, the law should be confirmatory;<sup>28</sup> it must confirm a change that has already occurred among the people. If the opposite occurs law becomes dangerous and unnatural: the set of laws or the constitution must always embody the character of a nation, its way of life.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, since the king must symbolise the righteous life of his people, by his presence and actions, Steffens states that the preferred form of government should be that of monarchy.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Steffens (1910: 241).

<sup>28</sup> See Steffens (1817, I: 129).

<sup>29</sup> See Steffens (1817, I: 133).

<sup>30</sup> See Steffens (1817, II: 157).

If understood in this light, a forgotten minor contribution of Steffens which examines the new parliament of Norway minutes (1825) is of quite different interest. Norway, having separated from Denmark, was now in a personal union with Sweden, while at the same time enjoying a relative autonomy, enshrined in a parliament and in a new constitution. Steffens tries here to “empirically” apply his political naturalism. Starting with a proclamation that we can already find in the *Caricaturen*, Steffens reiterates that ‘a constitution should not change existing life but synthetize it; «this is what we can learn from Norway, which itself has infinitely much to learn». Steffens believes that Norway was not yet ready for a constitution such as the one it had, because the country was still on the road to national consciousness. Nevertheless, he tries to approach it with his model of “statical” and harmonious development. The placid reality of Norway, previously subordinate to Denmark and now to Sweden, had long been in a state of tranquillity that had partially shielded it from wartime. It was therefore possible to envisage a slow growth without major upheavals, which should naturally produce a constitution that was an expression of national identity, without any external artificial intervention.

#### 6. *The psychological naturalism*

Going back to our aim, one last step is missing to understand how Steffens’ “enhanced” naturalism represents the *trait d’union* of his thought. As we have seen, Steffens’ naturalism is rooted in his anthropological declination of *Naturphilosophie*’s methodological holism. Steffens calls this holistic and anthropological standpoint a “religious” understanding of the world, which is an attempt to conceive life from a higher point of view, without running into metaphysical constraints. Let’s see how this standpoint is developed in his late *Christliche Religionsphilosophie* (1839). This text represents a further stage in Steffens’ expansion of *Naturphilosophie*, which follows the “political” philosophy of nature attempted in the *Caricaturen* and the “human” philosophy of nature presented in the *Anthropologie*. Here Steffens will explore the “natural” religiosity of the human being, through a philosophy of religion. Nonetheless, we are about to see how this philosophy of religion has a strong psychological basis, which is once again inspired by *Naturphilosophie*.

The first volume starts from *Anthropologie*’s last section, in which Christ is presented as the apotheosis of consciousness, since he represents the spiritual overcoming of natural differences between men. Therefore, to analyse human natural religiosity we will have to start from the Christian consciousness. We can draw a line here through Schelling’s *Über das Verhältnis der bildenden Künste zu der Natur* (1807),<sup>31</sup> where the religious fact is presented as strictly human.

<sup>31</sup> En. tr. Schelling (1974).

Nonetheless, Schelling refers to a general idea of consciousness, in which the religious fact becomes a vehicle for a «noetic» knowledge of the Absolute. Steffens, on the other hand, remains anchored to the individual dimension, which he intends to investigate in depth. In this sense, Steffens' *Religionsphilosophie* is not philosophy but its necessary propaedeutic, to be conceived in place of an empirical psychology or phenomenology.

*Christliche Religionsphilosophie*'s first volume (*Teleologie*) shows how the world is arranged according to God's plan; the second volume, (*Ethik*), questions the possibility of contrary forces in this world that oppose a rapid and coherent realisation of God's plan. To fully understand the psychological basis of Steffens' teleology, we must start with an analogy.<sup>32</sup> As we already know, the fundamental *locus* on which Steffens' anthropology hinges is talent. Talent is the place where the natural-individual element in man (temperament) takes on a spiritual guise, substantiating and specifying itself in the form of an individual predisposition. Consequently, talent will be the basis for the spiritual elevation of the human being. In the *Christliche Religionsphilosophie*, religiosity is configured as a life experience, which is not given to everyone to fulfil in the same way: religiosity is a subjective experience of something objective, that is, of the divine. More specifically, according to Steffens, religiosity consists of «sentiment, desire and talent».<sup>33</sup> The first two guide human religiosity during earthly life but are essentially a subjective and «egoistic» deviation of our objective nature. Talent, on the other hand, preserves the trace of the eternal, as something that is «innate»<sup>34</sup> and cannot be reduced to some «feeling of uniqueness».

Steffens here revisits the problem of racial differentiation as proposed in the *Anthropologie*. Indeed, some peoples appear to be primitive, lacking any internal spiritual upheaval, and it might therefore seem bizarre to want to grant them the fecundity of talent. Yet to deny talent to these same peoples would lead us into much greater difficulties:<sup>35</sup> if religiosity is to be thought of as a natural dimension of consciousness, as a universal place of conciliation between the individual and the universal, valid for all men, albeit in different ways for each, then talent, or at least a trace of it, must be found in all human beings. Through the *Christliche Religionsphilosophie*, after we have understood the true nature of talent, we can understand the true nature of faith, or rather, that talent and faith are one and the same thing. Apart from Romantic subjectivism, faith can only be understood as a «subjective understanding» of the objective: if talent as such is to be considered as an object (the Fichtian «non-ego») that is opposed to consciousness, faith is to be considered as a subject, that is, as the feeling that constantly accompanies the internal opposition between consciousness and talent. Faith is talent's necessary

<sup>32</sup> See Hultberg (1981: 110).

<sup>33</sup> Steffens (1839, II: 379).

<sup>34</sup> Steffens (1839, I: 23).

<sup>35</sup> See Steffens (1839, I: 36-37).

correlate: if the first is a feeling of dependence towards God, the latter is what causes this feeling, as the trace of the divine bond between us, God and Nature.

In the second volume Steffens moves on to illustrate how Christian ethics and dogmatics (from which ethics descends) can be interpreted precisely from his standpoint. To tell the truth, this does not happen without difficulties, which our author attempts to overcome rather nimbly, once again in a naturalistic sense. The most obvious example is found in the discussion of miracles: according to Steffens, the only way to give a coherent explanation, neither reductionist nor fanatical, is to look at the world as a process in which something like a miracle can still seldomly happen, thanks to some seminal reasons that are instilled in nature.<sup>36</sup> In other words, according to Steffens, it is necessary to think of a comprehensive criterion of rationality, which takes the biblical fact as a *datum*. However, precisely under the banner of his naturalism, Steffens must address the final problem of evil.

Steffens is immediately forced to point out that evil is not something real. If it were real, it would have belonged somehow to God, and this is not possible, as Schelling stated in his *Freiheitsschrift*.<sup>37</sup> Yet it is precisely here that the path becomes bumpy: Steffens fails to find an autonomous place for evil and has to take into question the biblical figure of the devil.<sup>38</sup> The devil is a clear imaginary figure, represented as a shadowy halo moving over the earth, which, nevertheless, is subservient to God. Moreover, the devil appears not to be created by God, but as the result of a condemnation brought about by his own freedom; similarly evil, which does not come from the Absolute, must come, at least in a certain sense, from ourselves. Here Steffens' anthropo-psychological shines a light on the issue: as we said, talent is a «non-ego», or, in other words, an alien objectivity that is always present in us. Talking about the evil, Steffens seems to allude to this inner contrast of ours as the root of the metaphysical idea of the devil. In other words, if talent is to be understood as the crossroads of human nature, which opens the way to the accomplishment of our own personality, we must also keep in mind that this will bring in a certain imbalance, fed by continuous inner and outer contrasts. The appropriation of talent is to be seen as a struggle against one's own inner self, which hardly allows its own inhibition, leading, instead, to unbridled and uncontrolled actions.

Finally, we come to an impasse: if the human being is to incur guilt for its actions, then it must be endowed with free will. Nonetheless, such a being, as we have seen, is essentially determined in its innermost nature by the divine mark of talent. To solve this «enigma», Steffens has one last card to play: a speculative understanding of the Lutheran dogma of grace. Believing in the dogma of grace means acknowledging that the divine works in us and leads us, but it also means

<sup>36</sup> See Steffens (1839, I: 440).

<sup>37</sup> See Steffens (1839, II: 35).

<sup>38</sup> See Steffens (1839, II: 20).

that we must live according to freedom, as if through our actions we are able to shape our own destiny.<sup>39</sup> Even in this case, between divine grace and freedom there seems to be a reciprocal and dialectical relationship, since both represent the same thing, one from the point of view of the divine, the other from the human. A solution that is certainly not decisive, yet coherent: the human being is created in such a way as to be supported and oriented by the divine through nature, in the form of temperament and talent, yet he is also created in such a way as to perceive itself as free. Since this perception is also 'natural' and in this sense innate, he receives this freedom as a postulate confirmed by experience, of which he therefore has an inductive certainty.

## *7. Conclusion*

In conclusion, let us summarize the two main acquisitions of Steffens' "enhanced" naturalism. Firstly, we must underline its clear eco-logical perspective, insofar as it recognizes nature as the subject of philosophy. In other words, Steffens' "anthropological" philosophy<sup>40</sup> shows itself as a unique point of view that conceives reality in a speculative and decentralised sense, without losing it in abstractions. In light of this, Steffens' "human" philosophy of nature can be easily separated from the aforementioned naturalistic anthropologies, but also from the whole romantic anthropological debate. His thought seems to represent a precious source of questioning for us today, especially in opposition to the idea that the only anthropological tradition that western/continental thought has been able to develop is the Cartesian-"anthropocentric" one. Departing from the manner of his time, Steffens' anthropological model exhibits a holistic, non-reductionist plan, together with a clearly delineated description of the individual and cultural dimensions. It should come as no surprise that one of the last attempts by Steffens<sup>41</sup> was an "empirical application" of his anthropological model, while studying the Christian mission towards Sami people, even prefiguring intercultural dialogue as the cultural mission of the future. Overcoming Danish cultural naturalism, while partially distancing himself from the romantic debate on the status of philosophy and anthropology, Steffens' perspective comes as an unique and useful thought, irreducible to its sources or contexts.

<sup>39</sup> See Steffens (1839, II: 147).

<sup>40</sup> It may be appropriate to point out that one of the fundamental postulates of this approach to Steffens' work is the unity of his thought. This position is clearly not shared by all studies on the author, whose first opponent is undoubtedly Hultberg himself.

<sup>41</sup> See Steffens (1842).

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