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Of Productive Germs and the Immortal Soul. Friedrich Schlegel's Writings on Language and Early Biological Theory¹

Friedrich Schlegel's lasting contribution to linguistics is usually seen in the impact that his book *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* from 1808 left on comparative linguistics and on the study of Sanskrit. Schlegel was one of the first European scholars to have studied Sanskrit extensively and he made a number of translations of Sanskrit literature into German which make up one third of *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*. Schlegel's book is widely regarded as a founding document both of comparative linguistics and of indology,² a fact which is quite remarkable in light of the development of Schlegel's thought after this text. His interest in Indian studies ceased more or less directly with the publication of this work, while his thoughts on language became more and more suffused by transcendental philosophy. Already in the original text from 1808 the chapter on Sanskrit is rather short, compared with those larger parts of the book concerning ancient Indian religion, mythology and philosophy. The aim of this paper is to give an overview of the development of Schlegel's language theory, including its development after the Sanskrit book, and to put it in context with developments in the natural sciences of the time. As we know, in the academies around 1800 the division between science and humanities common to us today was only beginning to take shape. Regardless of the fact that after 1808 Schlegel was more and more occupied with metaphysical issues, we can observe a transfer of concepts from natural history to his earlier linguistic and literary historical texts. In the following, I would like to sketch some of these transfers and thereby try to comment on some of Michel Foucault's observations in his *The Order of Things* that concern just this epistemic transfer from natural history to the human sciences.

Right at the beginning of his outline of the invention of linguistics and philology in the early 19th century, Foucault quotes a significant remark from Schlegel's text that. It is in fact one of the most famous passages in Schlegel's book and has been quoted abundantly:

Jener entscheidende Punkt aber, der hier alles aufhellen wird, ist die innere Struktur der Sprachen oder die vergleichende Grammatik, welche uns ganz neue Aufschlüsse

¹ For a more extensive German version of this text see: Michael Eggers: „Von Pflanzen und Engeln. Friedrich Schlegels Sprachdenken im Kontext der frühen Biologie“. In: *Die Lesbarkeit der Romantik. Material, Medium, Diskurs*, ed. by Erich Kleinschmidt. Berlin: de Gruyter 2009, p. 159-183.

² For the construction of India as the origin of ancient European and German culture at the beginning of the 19th century see René Gerard: *L'orient et la pensée romantique allemande*. Paris: Didier 1963; A. Leslie Willson : *A Mythical Image. The Ideal of India in German Romanticism*. Durham, N.C.: Duke UP 1964.

über die Genealogie der Sprachen auf ähnliche Weise geben wird, wie die vergleichende Anatomie über die höhere Naturgeschichte Licht verbreitet hat.³

The sentence marks, as Stefan Willer has shown,⁴ Schlegel's intention to choose grammatical structures rather than etymology (the latter of which was 'in fashion' as a philological method at the time) as criteria for his effort to reconstruct the genealogy of the ancient languages and to prove that Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and German have a common basis in history.⁵ Schlegel's motivation for mentioning comparative anatomy, of all things, as the discipline that might point the way for such a linguistic enterprise probably lies at least in part in the success of a number of prominent publications that appeared shortly before he set out for Paris in order to pursue his Sanskrit studies. Georges Cuvier's groundbreaking *Leçons d'anatomie comparée* were published between 1800-1805, and 1805 also saw the publication of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's *Handbuch der vergleichenden Anatomie* which became well known in the German speaking world. Indeed, Foucault's epistemological account of the beginning of the 19th century rests on the central hypothesis of a deep methodological correspondence between comparative anatomy and linguistics since Cuvier and Schlegel. Yet even before his linguistic studies, Schlegel had been attentive to the problem of systematic classification in natural history. He repeatedly drew parallels between specific problems of aesthetic theory and the results that were achieved within the

³ Cf. Michel Foucault: *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Pantheon Books 1971, p.280.

Friedrich Schlegel: *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*. Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe (in the following referred to as: KFSa). Hg. v. Ernst Behler. 8. Bd. München u.a.: Schöningh 1975, p. 105-433 (137). I quote Schlegel in the German original because what I want to show depends to a large extent on his terminology and choice of words. I provide the bibliographical data for the English translations and the text of the longer quotes in footnotes. The translation of the above reads as follows: "There is, however, one single point, the investigation of which ought to decide every doubt, and elucidate every difficulty; the structure or comparative grammar of the languages furnishes as certain a key to their general analogy, as the study of comparative anatomy has done to the loftiest branch of natural science." F. Schlegel: *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*. [Originally published in: F.S.: *The aesthetic and miscellaneous works*. Translated from the German by E. J. Millington. London: Henry G. Bohn 1849]/Horace Hayman Wilson: *The Mégha Dúta*. With introductions by Michael J. Franklin. London: Ganesha Publishing 2001, p. 439.

⁴ Cf. Stefan Willer: *Poetik der Etymologie. Texturen sprachlichen Wissens in der Romantik*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2003, p. 86ff. and by the same author: „Haki Kraki. Über romantische Etymologie“. In: *Romantische Wissenspoetik. Die Künste und die Wissenschaft um 1800*, ed. Gabriele Brandstetter and Gerhard Neumann. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2004, p. 393-412 (396): „Mit dem *Indier*-Buch scheint der feste Boden der historischen Sprachwissenschaft, der neuen Empirizitäten und des Denkens der Struktur betreten, in dem etymologisierende Letternauguren ausgedient haben“. For Schlegel's verdict on empiricism see below p. 9.

⁵ Speculations about this started long before Schlegel, see Theodor Benfey: *Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft und orientalischen Philologie in Deutschland seit dem Anfange des 19. Jahrhunderts mit einem Rückblick auf die früheren Zeiten*. Munich: Cotta 1869, p. 222 and 336-338, as cited in: Winfred P. Lehmann: "The Impact of Jones in German-Speaking Areas". In: *Objects of Enquiry. The Life, Contributions, and Influences of Sir William Jones (1746-1794)*. Ed. Garland Cannon and Kevin R. Brine. New York and London: New York UP, p. 131-40 (133); George J. Metcalf: "The Indo-European Hypothesis in the 16th and 17th Centuries". In: *Studies in the History of Linguistics*, ed. Dell Hymes. Bloomington: Indiana UP, p. 233-57.

natural sciences, as in the following passage from his *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie* (1797):

Reine Wissenschaft bestimmt nur die Ordnung der Erfahrung, die Fächer für den Inhalt der Anschauung. Sie allein würde *leer* sein – wie Erfahrung allein verworren, ohne Sinn und Zweck – und nur in Verbindung mit einer *vollkommenen Geschichte* würde sie die Natur der Kunst und ihrer Arten vollständig kennen lernen. Die Wissenschaft bedarf also der Erfahrung von einer Kunst, welche ein durchaus vollkommenes Beispiel ihrer Art, die *Kunst kat'exochän*, deren besondere Geschichte die *allgemeine Naturgeschichte der Kunst* wäre.⁶

Schlegel's vision of a "general natural history of art" combines science, which provides the order, and aesthetic experience, which provides knowledge. Within the hypothetical framework of such a natural history, Greek drama and poetry amount to the fulfilment of a natural system of species, i.e., the classified order of all species following the criteria given by nature itself; in other words, the kind of system which had been given a completely new theoretical basis by Carl Linnaeus since 1735⁷:

Die *Gränzen ihrer* [i.e., Greek poetry's, M.E.] *Dichtarten* sind nicht durch willkürliche Scheidungen und Mischungen erkünstelt und bestimmt. Das System aller möglichen reinen Dichtarten ist sogar bis auf die Spielarten, die unreifen Arten der unentwickelten Kindheit, und die einfachsten Bastardarten [...] vollständig erschöpft. Sie ist eine *ewige Naturgeschichte des Geschmacks und der Kunst*.⁸

Schlegel does not embark on any elaboration of such an aesthetic version of a natural system,⁹ but the idea as such is clearly recognizable in his evaluation of Greek literature.

⁶ Friedrich Schlegel: *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*, Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe. Hg. v. Ernst Behler. 1. Bd. München u.a.: Schöningh 1979, p. 273. „Pure science only determines the organization of the experience, the pigeonholes for the contents of intuition. By itself, it would be empty – just as experience would be confused, without sense or purpose – and it is only in connection with a perfect history that it would be able to truly impart lessons about the nature of art and its genres. Science needs the experience of an art which is a perfect example of its kind, art *kat' exochen*, the history of which would be the *general natural history of art*." F. Schlegel: *On the Study of Greek Poetry*. Transl., ed., and with a critical introduction by Stuart Barnett. Albany: State University of New York 2001, p. 47.

⁷ See Staffan Müller-Wille: *Botanik und weltweiter Handel. Zur Begründung eines Natürlichen Systems der Pflanzen durch Carl von Linné (1707-1787)*. Berlin: VWB 1999.

⁸ Schlegel: *Über das Studium*, p. 308. „The *boundaries of its poetic types* are not constrained by arbitrary divisions and combinations; rather, they are produced and determined by formative nature itself. The system of all possible pure poetic types – which includes the different varieties, the immature types of an unevolved childhood, and the simplest bastard types that are produced out of the confluence of all genuine poetry in the decadent age of imitation – has completely exhausted itself. It is an *eternal natural history of taste and art*." *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, p. 66.

⁹ As Claudia Becker has shown, it is August Wilhelm Schlegel who set out to develop such a programme further. Claudia Becker: *"Naturgeschichte der Kunst": August Wilhelm Schlegels ästhetischer Ansatz im Schnittpunkt zwischen Aufklärung und Frühromantik*. München: Fink 1998. While Becker emphasizes the temporal aspect of August Wilhelm's history of art, Friedrich's notion of an "eternal natural history" must be seen as untouched by historical change.

Whereas Linnaeus applies his theory of a comprehensive system of species exhaustively, the "eternal natural history of taste" remains a rhetorical and speculative demonstration of the supremacy of Greek art. From the beginning, every use made by Schlegel of concepts or notions from the realm of natural history is strongly conditioned by his philosophy: while he borrows a number of crucial concepts, he ignores any unsuitable implications and explores only those aspects that fit into his own argument. The correlation of the idea of a system of species, which Linnaeus had conceived as static and unchangeable in time, with his own concept of a historical development of art, forces him to situate the system of Greek literature *before* the beginnings of history, it is an "eternal natural history of taste" that he has in mind. For Schlegel, history has brought with it operations of reason and artificiality, and as a consequence the pure and natural ideal of Greek literature has degenerated (*entartet*)¹⁰ in time and – this is Schlegel's poetic program – must be re-approximated by modernity. Applying the terminological opposition of "natural/natürlich" vs. "artificial/künstlich" that he uses throughout the essay to praise or condemn works of art, such a system must be natural by definition.

In his description of Sanskrit, Schlegel remains true to this historical model of a cultural golden age in antiquity, followed by degeneration. His division into organic and mechanical languages, the first category having a much higher cultural value than the second, is well known and has often been described.¹¹ What remains of interest is the way this evaluative scheme draws on notions taken from the discourse of natural history. Schlegel's organic languages, for which Sanskrit serves as an outstanding example, are inflectional languages. The structure of an inflected language is, writes Schlegel,

organisch gebildet, durch Flexion oder innere Veränderungen und Umbiegungen des Wurzellautes in allen seinen Bedeutungen ramifiziert, nicht bloß mechanisch durch angehängte Worte und Partikeln zusammengesetzt.¹²

He describes the verbal roots of these languages as extremely mutable and endowed with a semantic potential that in most cases makes combinations with other morphemes unnecessary. These roots have the power to create significant meanings by themselves. Within Greek literature, they share the lot of having become corrupted within the course of history, but in their beginnings they are equal to the natural species of the Greek poetological

¹⁰ Schlegel: *Über das Studium*, p. 350.

¹¹ Heinrich Nüsse: *Die Sprachtheorie Friedrich Schlegels*. Heidelberg: Winter 1962, p. 40ff.; Eric Eisel: „Friedrich Schlegel's ‚Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier““. *New German Review* 9 (1993), p. 45-61. For evidence that Wilhelm von Humboldt, for whose language theory the term 'organic' is of crucial importance, strictly rejected Schlegel's categorical opposition of organic vs. mechanical, see Nüsse, p. 48 fn. 35.

¹² Schlegel: *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 149. „Not the slightest appearance of any such amalgamation can be traced in the Indian language; it must be allowed that its structure is highly organised, formed by inflection, or the change and transposition of its primary radical sounds, carried through every ramification of meaning and expression, and not by the merely mechanical process of annexing words or particles to the same lifeless and unproductive root.“ *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*, p. 445.

'system' which Schlegel describes in his *Studium*-essay. According to Schlegel, Sanskrit language has "ein sehr feines Gefühl nämlich für den unterscheidend eigentümlichen Ausdruck, für die ursprüngliche Naturbedeutung, wenn ich so sagen darf, der Buchstaben, der Wurzellaute und Silben."¹³

Its roots have an original or primary sense and the words derived from them adapt their shape to any specifically required grammatical relation, while they remain fixed to the root which may still be detected at any time. What might as well be a simple, common description of any linguistic inflection is seen by Schlegel as a revelation and as irrefutable proof of the exceptional quality of Sanskrit. It is just this principle of inflection that Foucault sees as being decisive for the epistemological shift at the turn of the century: according to Foucault, after this shift the features that allow one to differentiate and classify objects are no longer visible on the surface, as they still were during the 18th century; they are now at work *within* the body or object itself. The anatomical dissection of the body and the effort to define specific vital functions of organs¹⁴ runs parallel to linguistic analyses of grammatical structures and the prominent position of the inflectional principle.¹⁵

Schlegel describes the flexibility or mutability of root morphemes within classical languages as being akin to a life force that comes from within. This kind of description can only be undertaken through recourse to metaphor, and the imagery that Schlegel uses is consistently taken from the context of botany. Beginning with expressions like the 'organic' development of language and its 'roots', Schlegel uses images of plants to describe linguistic structures: there is a "fruchtbarer Same" ("living and productive germ") and a "Keim lebendiger Entfaltung" in languages which can be traced back to a "auf einen gemeinschaftlichen Stamm", and all this may build an "ein organisches Gewebe".¹⁶ Some of these expressions have become part of the standard terminology of linguistics, of course, and were in use long before Schlegel. For example, *Das Grimmsche Wörterbuch* quotes the first instance of his key term 'Wurzel' (used in the linguistic sense), which dates from 1571; while the specific use that Schlegel makes of it – that is, as an original morpheme that is the basis of lexical inventions in related languages – was introduced by Herder and Grimm.¹⁷ However, in Schlegel's writings, metaphorical language is more than just a rhe-

¹³ Schlegel: *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 151. "...a peculiar fine feeling of the separate value and appropriate meaning, if I may thus speak, of the radical words or syllables", *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*, p. 445.

¹⁴ According to Foucault, this is the innovation - summarized here in simple terms - introduced by Cuvier, see Foucault: *The Order of Things*, p. 263ff.

¹⁵ Cf. Jürgen Trabant: *Mithridates im Paradies. Kleine Geschichte des Sprachdenkens*. München: Beck 2003, p. 244.

¹⁶ Schlegel: *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 159. I have chosen not to quote Millington's translation here, because many of the biological implications of the original texts are lost in his English version.

¹⁷ *Grimmsches Wörterbuch*. Bd. 30, Sp. 2356. Cf. on Schlegel's „Wurzel“-term and its earlier history Simone Roggenbuck: *Die genealogische Idee in der vergleichenden Sprachwissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts. Stufen, Stammbäume, Wellen*. In: *Generation. Zur Genealogie des Konzepts - Konzepte von Genealogie*. Ed. Sigrid

torical device to illustrate an abstract argument. It is the overt and visible level of a deeper, epistemological correspondence between conceptual language and its object. What Helmut Müller-Sievers has stated for Wilhelm von Humboldt¹⁸ and John Neubauer for Schlegel's literary history¹⁹ applies to the latter's linguistics, too: the model of language as a "lebendige[s] Gewebe, das nun durch innre Kraft weiter fortwuchs und sich bildete"²⁰ is derived from the idea of epigenesis as it was first conceived by Caspar Friedrich Wolff²¹ and, with much more impact on German philosophy of nature and romanticism, by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach.²² Thanks to their inner powers or formative drives, its *Bildungsstriebe*, root morphemes create their shapes and semantics autonomously, just as organic beings gradually take on their shapes after birth and rebuild them after physical injuries. This epigenetic model of linguistics makes sure that verbal elements are original, organic and have no need of any secondary support or addition, which would make them, in Schlegel's terms, "mechanical". Exactly this central conceptual opposition of *organisch* vs. *mechanisch* is in accordance with Blumenbach's seminal essay: Blumenbach distinguishes strictly between the organic and non-organic kingdoms of nature, between the *organisiertem* and *unorganisiertem Reich*, the latter of which may have formative *forces* but lack the kind of formative *drive* that is at work in living beings.²³ This cardinal distinction, which Foucault traces back to Peter Simon Pallas and Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck,²⁴ implies a hierarchy between the two kingdoms that reappears in Schlegel's classification of language.

Weigel a.o. Berlin: Fink 2005, p. 292ff. and 303. On the use of biological concepts in linguistic contexts see *Biological metaphor and cladistic classification*. Ed. Henry M. Hoenigswald and Linda F. Wiener. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1987. W. Keith Percival dates most of the above mentioned terms referring to 'biological' phenomena back to "ancient, medieval, and Renaissance thought" and locates the use of "root" in the morphological sense to "the early modern period". See his "Biological Analogy in the Study of Language Before the Advent of Comparative Grammar", *ibid.*, p. 3-38 (21). He sees no early epistemological parallel: "In other words, there is no clear evidence that developments in linguistics up to the beginning of the nineteenth century had been influenced in any essential way by natural history." (p. 26)

¹⁸ Helmut Müller-Sievers: *Self-generation: biology, philosophy, and literature around 1800*. Stanford Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press 1997; *Epigenesis. Naturphilosophie im Sprachdenken Wilhelm von Humboldts*. Paderborn: Schöningh 1993; „Über Zeugungskraft. Biologische, philosophische und sprachliche Generativität“. In: *Räume des Wissens. Repräsentation, Codierung, Spur*. Ed. Hans-Jörg Rheinberger. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1997, p. 145-163.

¹⁹ John Neubauer: „Epigenetische Literaturgeschichten bei August Wilhelm und Friedrich Schlegel“. In: *Kunst - die andere Natur*. Ed. Reinhard Wegner. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2004, p. 211-227.

²⁰ Schlegel: *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 171. „[...] a living organisation, ever advancing, and developing itself by its own internal strength and energy.“ *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*, p. 455.

²¹ Caspar Friedrich Wolff: *Theorie von der Generation, in zwei Abhandlungen erklärt und bewiesen* (1764)/ *Theoria generationis* (1759). Hildesheim: Olms 1966.

²² Johann Friedrich Blumenbach: *Über den Bildungstrieb*. 2. Fassung. Göttingen: Dieterich 1789. According to Müller-Sievers: *Self-generation*, epigenesis is the governing principle that underlies Romantic language philosophy from Herder to Wilhelm von Humboldt.

²³ Blumenbach: *Über den Bildungstrieb*, p. 70ff.

²⁴ Foucault: *The Order of Things*, p. 232.

Foucault suggests two further, summarizing conclusions regarding the shift that occurs around the turn of the century: while 18th century methods of classification make their most significant progress in botany and consequently privilege *plants* as their most instructive objects, the 19th century, with its focus on anatomical studies, gains more from the examination of *animals*.²⁵ This has to do with Foucault's second conclusion: that the central notion of all biological disciplines at the time in question is *life*, as a complex process that governs all organic functions and determines the hierarchy of organs in every living body. With regard to Schlegel, the first of Foucault's suggestions has to be modified: while it is true that comparative anatomy and linguistics both study structures that are not visible at first glance (e.g., life functions, grammatical structures²⁶), linguistics remains close to botany and gains many of its guiding principles from botanical knowledge. The concept of organic inflectional languages with an inner formative drive has much more affinity with the notion of plant life, with its steady but unconscious growth, than with the life of animals. Any transfer from natural history to linguistics on the plane of concepts or of terminology could therefore, in Schlegel's time, be made much more easily much easier from the realm of plants. Although, biologically speaking, human life has much more in common with animal life than with the life of plants, Schlegel must have perceived animals as being the counter-image of humanity. And Schlegel's constant recourse to botanical imagery is of course in line with his repeated rejection of one of the most powerful hypotheses of the 18th century, advocated by Condillac, Rousseau and Maupertuis, that language has its primeval origins in primitive sounds or cries of passion, which come very close to instinctive vocal utterances by animals.²⁷ Correspondences between Schlegel's linguistics and the biological knowledge of his time thus concern both comparative anatomy and botany: and while the classificatory criteria in anatomy and linguistics are now conceived as organisational structures, the supposition of a life force or *Bildungstrieb* applies to both language morphemes and plants.

Linguists such as Franz Bopp, Jacob Grimm, Friedrich Rückert²⁸ and Wilhelm von Humboldt²⁹ shared Schlegel's preference for the use of botanical expressions for language

²⁵ Foucault: *The Order of Things*, p. 276ff.

²⁶ Foucault: *The Order of Things*, p. 252f.

²⁷ Schlegel: *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 169; Schlegel: [*Über J.G. Rhode: Über den Anfang unserer Geschichte und die letzte Revolution der Erde 1819*]. KFSÄ 8. Bd. Hg. v. Ernst Behler, p. 474-528 (511); Schlegel: *Philosophische Vorlesungen insbesondere über die Philosophie der Sprache und des Wortes*. KFSÄ 10. Bd. Hg. v. Ernst Behler. p. 309-534 (359). For Schlegel's ideas about the origin of language see Nüsse (as in fn. 11), p. 50ff. Schlegel necessarily had reservations about the role of animal sounds in the history of human language because he was advocating a divine origin of the organic languages. In his earlier years he conceded a basic function of animal sounds, cf. Nüsse, p. 17ff.

²⁸ Cf. Willer: "Haki Kraki", p. 410f.

²⁹ For Humboldt see Eva Picardi: "Some Problems of Classification in Linguistics and Biology, 1800-1830". In: *Historiographia Linguistica* 4 (1977), No. 1, p. 31-57 and Müller-Sievers: *Self-generation*.

description³⁰ and August Schleicher took the affinity further by trying to reinvent linguistics as a hard natural science in opposition to matters of *Geist*.³¹ It was also Schleicher who, in 1850, postulated the need to establish a natural system of languages, which echoed Schlegel's idea of a system of Greek poetry.³² The epistemic relation between the two areas of knowledge does not begin with these German thinkers, though. Sir William Jones, founder of the "Asiatic Society" and proponent of the study of the Asian cultures, initiated further research into the genealogical relation between Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, Persian and German with his observation of lexical and grammatical similarities between these languages.³³ The fact that Jones published not only on philosophical, mythological and linguistic topics relating to Asia but also comprehensively on the Indian flora gives further testimony of the contiguity of these disciplines before the 19th century. Jones did not only contribute to both disciplines but reflected on their methodological similarity. Again, the epistemological link is classification:

As we learn a new language, by reading approved compositions in it with the aid of a Grammar and Dictionary, so we can only study with effect the natural history of vegetables by analysing the plants themselves with the *Philosophia Botanica*, which is the *Grammar*, and the *Genera et Species Plantarum*, which may be considered as the *Dictionary*, of that beautiful language, in which nature would teach us what plants we must avoid as noxious, and what we must cultivate as salutary, for that the qualities of plants are *in some degree* connected with the *natural orders* and *classes* of them, a number of instances would abundantly prove.³⁴

Jones' approach to language differs from Schlegel's, though.³⁵ The assumption of a common genealogical source for Sanskrit and the ancient European languages – a discovery for which Jones presumably gained more fame than for all his other activities, which included translations from Persian into French and a grammar of the Persian language – is condensed into one sentence that has been quoted just as often as Schlegel's comparison of

³⁰ In fact, language theory has made use of vocabulary that refers to the realm of plants much earlier, although with different intentions and implications. Cf. Willer: *Poetik der Etymologie*, p. 51ff. on Justus Georg Schottel's „organologische Metaphorik“.

³¹ On Schleicher's biologic linguistics see Roggenbuck's account: *Die genealogische Idee* (as in fn. 17), p. 294ff.

³² August Schleicher: *Die Sprachen Europas in systematischer Uebersicht*. Bonn: H.B. König 1850, p. 23.

³³ Although Jones' remark (s. below) has had a great influence, he was not the first to see the connexion between European languages and Sanskrit. For a record of earlier instances see Jean-Claude Muller: "Early stages of language comparison from Sassetti to Sir William Jones (1786)". *Kratylos* 31 (1956), p. 1–31. See also Henry M. Hoenigswald: "Etymology against grammar in the early 19th century". *Histoire, épistémologie, langage* 62 (1984), p. 95-100.

³⁴ William Jones: *The Design of a Treatise on the Plants of India*. In: *Works in six vols*. Vol.2. Ed. Anna Marie Jones. London: GG. and J Robinson 1799, p. 1-8 (8).

³⁵ Cf. Henry M. Hoenigswald: "On the History of the Comparative Method". *Anthropological Linguistics* 5 (1963), p.1-11 (3): "A world of difference lies between him [i.e. W. Jones, M.E.] and even Schlegel's comparative grammar - let alone the Comparative Method."

the genealogy of languages and natural history. It can be found in Jones' "Third Anniversary Discourse. Delivered 2 February 1786", Works, vol. 1. It offers a suggestion which Schlegel and after him Franz Bopp were to elaborate upon systematically.³⁶ Jones was not interested in inflection and in his work there is no trace of the kind of botanical imagery we can see in Schlegel. His recourse to botany referred to Linnaean classification methods, as in the above quote, and both his works on language and on the Indian flora are strictly descriptive in the sense of the empirical observation of the shape and characteristics of an object as, for example, in his "Botanical Observations on Select Indian Plants"³⁷, where he lists the characteristics of plants found in India and adds their Indian names to Linnaeus' binomial designations in order to facilitate future botanical research in the Asian countries.³⁸

While Jones adhered to empirical research, Schlegel already resolutely and derisively rejects empirical methods in his Sanskrit book. There he sketches the course of European philosophy beginning with an original idealism that has come to mankind through divine revelation and eventually declining to its low-point which is the "empirische[...] Denkart" ("empiric theory") as "letzte[r] Geisteszustand" ("lost condition of the soul"), a state of mind that eliminates any possibility to think of God or the divinity.³⁹ In 1808, the year of publication of the Sanskrit book, Schlegel converts to Catholicism. In the years to come he becomes more and more committed to idealist and transcendental thought. In 1819 he expressly confirms his language categories and repeats his valorisation of the organic growth of inflectional languages over and above monosyllabic languages like Chinese or pictographic writing systems.⁴⁰ He now states explicitly what had remained an implicit conclusion in the *Sanskrit* book: language has been given to mankind by God and any original language or *Ursprache* is of divine nature. Schlegel refers to Genesis to explain the adamic creation of words and leaves no doubt as to the source of this first of all languages, "eine *ursprünglich wahre* und *wesentliche* Redemittelung" (an originally true and essential spoken communication).⁴¹

To continue with the consultation of Foucault's theses, it is instructive to examine what happens to the notion of life in Schlegel's thought. According to *The Order of Things*, 'life' is, around 1800, invested with a completely new meaning and has to be seen as the

³⁶ On Jones' achievements and reception as a linguist see R. H. Robins: "Jones as a General Linguist in the 18th Century-Context". In: *Objects of Enquiry* (cf. footnote 5), p. 83-91 and Lehmann: *The Impact of Jones*, *ibid.*, p. 131-40.

³⁷ William Jones: "Botanical Observations on Select Indian Plants". *Works*. Vol. 2, p. 47-118.

³⁸ For a botanical evaluation see B. T. Styles: "Sir William Jones' Names of Indian Plants". *Taxon* 25 (1979), p. 671-74.

³⁹ Schlegel: *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 303. *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*, p. 519f.

⁴⁰ Schlegel: [*Über J.G. Rhode*], p. 508ff.

⁴¹ Schlegel: [*Über J.G. Rhode*], p. 508 and 511.

most prominent of all new concepts that arose with the invention of biology.⁴² Schlegel's linguistics is indeed informed by the biological notion of life to a degree that goes beyond mere metaphor or rhetoric. And life remains his preoccupation up to his last series of lectures (1828/29) where he tries to conjoin the notions of life and language. In its emphatic rejection of rationality, the metaphysical argument of Schlegel's late philosophy is difficult to grasp, even while it is all the more decisive: life now becomes the "allumfassendes GrundWort" (sic) ("all-embracing fundamental word") and is the result of the interaction of the twelve letters of an "Alphabet des Bewußtseyns" ("internal alphabet of the consciousness"). It consists of twelve "Grundkräfte" and "Nebenvermögen",

aus denen alsdann weiter die ersten Stammsylben oder Sprachwurzeln der höhern Wahrheit und Erkenntnis hervorgehen und gebildet werden, und endlich ganze Wörter und zusammenhängende Redesätze in dieser innern Sprache der wahren Wissenschaft.⁴³

Schlegel at this late point in his life has indeed fulfilled what his earlier writings gave a hint of: what he now calls „Wissenschaft“ stands in maximum possible opposition to empirical knowledge, it is, for him, the highest form of inner consciousness that leads to the idea of God. Schlegel accomplishes the feat of remaining true to his early terminology while constructing an idealist system on top of it. Theology is added to biology as a source of knowledge. When he says that the "higher principle of inward life" has an "organic framework" ("dem höhern Princip des innern Lebens und seinem ganzen organischen Gliederbau"⁴⁴) it is important to note that these are no metaphors. What must necessarily appear as figurative for the modern reader, must in Schlegel's perspective have a proper metaphysical meaning that is in keeping with his early writings and is approved by his theological confidence. A passage from his *Philosophie der Sprache und des Wortes*, in which he refers to syllables as "living roots, or chief stem and trunk", and as "the primary and original data of language" ("die lebendigen Wurzeln oder auch de[r] Urstamm", "das Erste und Ursprüngliche, was in einer Sprache gegeben ist"⁴⁵) might as well have been taken from his Sanskrit book. The metaphysical superstructure added by Schlegel elaborates the analogy between higher consciousness and language:

Dann wäre also die wahre Denkmethode in dieser Selbsterkenntniß des zur Sprache gelangten Lebens auch von einer durchaus grammatischen Natur und Beschaffen-

⁴² Foucault: *The Order of Things*, p. 272ff.

⁴³ Schlegel: *Philosophie der Sprache und des Wortes*, p. 427. „According to that outline of the human mind which we have just sketched, its whole alphabet, so to speak, consists but of twelve letters or primary elements. These are formed first of all into the stem syllables or radicals of higher truth and knowledge, out of which again, in the inner language of true science, entire words and connected propositions are constructed.“ F. Schlegel: *The philosophy of life, and philosophy of language, in a course of lectures*. Transl. from the German by the Rev. A. J. W. Morrison, M.A. London: Henry G. Bohn 1847, p. 456.

⁴⁴ Schlegel: *Philosophie der Sprache und des Wortes*, p. 433 / *The philosophy of life*, p. 461.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

heit; und die höhere Logik, wenn man es so nennen [...] wollte, würde dann auch nichts anders seyn als die innere Sprachregel und richtige Grammatik des lebendigen Denkens.⁴⁶

Schlegel's version of a philosophy of life defines life as a spiritual principle that leaves little room for material reality. The distance between this supreme and almighty principle and a biological notion of life might be gathered from the fact that he goes as far as to deny death and extends the idea of an immortality of the soul to nature as such:

Streng und genau genommen aber giebt es nach jenem Standpunkte des Lebens eigentlich keinen Tod, sondern nur einen Wechsel des Lebens und seiner vorübergehenden Formen [...]. Es giebt keinen Tod in der Natur, d.h. der Tod ist nichts wesentlich Ursprüngliches; er ist erst später und zufällig in die Schöpfung hineingekommen.⁴⁷

While Schlegel's Sanskrit book helped to initiate comparative linguistics and literature, he now suggests that classification be extended beyond material nature to indicate the existence of beings ranked above man: he postulates a „comparative psychology“ that includes a comparison of man with „reine Geister“⁴⁸ (“pure spirits”) or „Lichtnaturen“⁴⁹ (“creatures of light”) for which he finds testimony in the philosophy and mythology of all those ancient cultures whose common tradition and genealogy he was already emphasizing in 1808. As a result, Schlegel hopes to learn more about the faculty of language that distinguishes man from both animals and higher geniuses. This effort still contains echoes of natural history's concept of classification, but is far from the progress that linguistics had meanwhile made with Bopp and Grimm. Considering language to be part of human artistic creativity, Schlegel closes the circle and comes back to his early romantic and linguistic thought, the classification methods of which had been, in great measure, governed by judgments of taste rather than by exact description.

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⁴⁶ Schlegel: *Philosophie der Sprache und des Wortes*, p. 451. „But this would imply that the method of thought in this self-cognition of life, thus expressed in words, is of a thoroughly grammatical nature; and then the higher logic – if we must so speak and isolate and detach the latter, as an elementary science, from its connexion with the living whole – the higher logic would consist simply of the rules for this inner language, and be nothing but a correct grammar of living thought.“ *The philosophy of life*, p. 478.

⁴⁷ Schlegel: *Philosophie der Sprache und des Wortes*, p. 502. „Strictly and accurately speaking, however, there is, according to this view of life, no such thing as death; there is only a fluctuation and variation of life through its several transitory forms. [...] In nature itself, however, death has no existence, *i.e.*, death is neither essential nor from the beginning. It was brought in afterwards, and incidentally, into creation.“ *The philosophy of life*, p. 526.

⁴⁸ Schlegel: *Philosophie der Sprache und des Wortes*, p. 330. *The philosophy of life*, p. 369.

⁴⁹ Schlegel: *Philosophie der Sprache und des Wortes*, p. 339. Schlegel introduces the idea in his *Philosophie des Lebens* (1827), see KFS 10. Bd. Hg. v. Ernst Behler, p. 1-307 (18ff.). *The philosophy of life*, p. 377.