

Lara Ostaric (ed.): *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014. xiii, 256 pages.  
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This collection of essays is the first volume published by Cambridge University Press devoted exclusively to Schelling scholarship. Despite the burgeoning interest in Schelling over the past decades, relatively little Oxford-Cambridge style commentary on Schelling has appeared. Instead, the great majority of English-speaking work on Schelling has come from philosophers in the Continental tradition, who have published in Continental-friendly presses like SUNY, Routledge, and Continuum. This volume may mark a turning point in this respect, even though not all the essays are equally representative of the Oxford-Cambridge style. It will certainly help Schelling win more respectability among non-Continental philosophers in the English-speaking world – especially since a number of the contributors are prominent ‘mainstream’ historians of philosophy.

What is distinctive about an Oxford-Cambridge style approach to Schelling scholarship? It is difficult to say precisely, since the style is defined by general tendencies rather than fixed characteristics, and many of these tendencies can often be found in more Continental-oriented scholarship as well. In general, the studies in this collection tend to be focused historically on Schelling as well as his immediate predecessors and contemporaries (from Kant to Hegel), avoiding more remote connections in the history of philosophy. The best of the essays are models of the clarity and precision for which analytic philosophy is known.

Often Oxford-Cambridge style scholars formulate their subject’s thought in ways that show its relevance to questions in contemporary analytic philosophy. (I suspect that the general difficulty in doing so in Schelling’s case accounts for his relative neglect up to this point.) Sometimes this involves translating or classifying the philosopher’s thought using contemporary terminology. Although the essays in this volume generally stick to Schelling’s language and read him on his own terms, there are occasional exceptions. For example, the word *Geist* is often translated as “mind” in the essays by Lara Ostaric and Manfred Frank. This translation helps to show the potential relevance of Schelling’s philosophy for the mind-body problem; however, it risks distorting his thought, since *Geist* has a richer set of meanings and associations.

The volume contains eleven essays on diverse topics in Schelling’s philosophy, covering the entirety of his philosophical development, but mostly focusing on writings up to 1815. The articles are arranged more or less

chronologically, and a couple of the authors trace themes over a wider stretch of Schelling's career. The volume has one other unique feature: a number of the contributors are well-established scholars best known for their work on other thinkers in German Idealism. For example, Paul Guyer and Eric Watkins are prominent Kant scholars, and Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöllner are prominent scholars of Fichte. Accordingly, the volume offers readings of Schelling that are especially sensitive to his relationship to other figures in classical German philosophy.

Eric Watkins treats the theme of the unconditioned in Schelling's *Formschrift* and *Ichschrift*, focusing on the influence of Kant and downplaying the importance of Fichte. The most interesting part of the essay is Watkins' qualified defense of Schelling's argument for an unconditioned self-positing being against the objections of Dieter Henrich. Watkins uses Kant's account of the unconditioned to unpack the steps in the argument, while noting that the argument by itself does not rule out the possibility of more than one unconditioned being. Moreover, unlike Kant, Schelling does not distinguish different types of conditioning relations and includes a variety of forms of dependence under the concept 'conditioned.'

Michael Forster, who has written books on Hegel and Kant in relation to skepticism, traces Schelling's attitude toward skepticism through three phases: a Fichte-inspired concern with the certainty of the first principle; a Schlegel- and Hegel-inspired embracing of 'true skepticism' directed against reflection's claims to knowledge; and an endless striving for knowledge in the *Erlanger Vorlesungen*. Forster thereby disputes Hegel's claim that Schelling was a dogmatist – at least in view of his career as a whole. He perhaps overstates his case when concluding that Schelling's "usual stance" involves "showing considerable concern about skepticism" (47), though he concedes that Schelling has strong dogmatic tendencies.

The concept of life in Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie* is the subject of a complex essay by Lara Ostaric, who is also editor of the volume. After giving an account of Kant's construction of matter, Ostaric discusses a wide variety of topics related to matter and life, including their connections to Kant's aesthetics. She wishes to show the continuity in the development of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, since it continually requires intuition of the principle of life, which is the unifying ground of both 'mind and nature.'

Daniel Breazeale's essay on philosophical construction is exemplary for the clarity and precision with which he analyzes the method of the *Identitätsphilosophie*. Breazeale carefully develops eight features of philosophical construction, focusing on the *Fernere Darstellungen* and the essay *Ueber die Konstruktion in der Philosophie*. In the final section Breazeale poses critical questions about Schelling's account, including a question about the relationship of the philosopher's constructions to the original self-construction of the absolute. Although the essay as a whole is excellent, it is missing a discussion of the ordering of constructions and the way in which they build on one another in a series. This would require a treatment of the

*Potenzenlehre* and the "construction of philosophy as a whole" (SW IV, 412), which are the subject of the fifth essay in the *Fernere Darstellungen*.

Two of the essays in the collection treat Schelling's aesthetics. Paul Guyer contrasts Schelling's conception of art in the *System des transscendentalen Idealismus* and the *Philosophie der Kunst* with Kant's account of aesthetic experience. According to Guyer, Kant offers a synthesis of traditional aesthetics, emphasizing the apprehension of truth in art, with a new aesthetics of pleasure resulting from the free play of the cognitive powers. Guyer argues that Schelling's account is a reversion to traditional aesthetics, since the role of art is to reveal truth, and the pleasure experienced is merely relief from the pain of contradiction. In response to Guyer, one might ask whether Schelling is providing a universal account of aesthetic experience, as Kant does, or rather an account of how the *philosopher* views (or 'constructs') art, which would naturally focus on truth.

Jennifer Dobe's essay treats Schelling's later philosophy of art, challenging the view that he lost interest in the subject after 1809. She argues that Schelling's revised philosophy of freedom in the *Freiheitsschrift* is the basis for a revision in his aesthetics that is already present in the 1807 *Akademierede* and confirmed by scattered references in the *Weltalter*. Central to this revised aesthetics is self-sacrifice and the resulting ethical relation of the fundamental principles, which is made visible in beauty.

Michelle Kosch and Andrew Bowie take very different approaches to freedom in Schelling's philosophy. Focusing on the *Freiheitsschrift*, Kosch presents Schelling's formal concept of freedom as drawing on Kant and Fichte, but eliminating the contingency present in Kant's account. On the other hand, Schelling rejects the 'substantive account' of freedom provided by Kant and Fichte, since their accounts entail that moral evil is only possible through a failure of freedom. Schelling remedies this by accounting for the freedom to do evil in terms of an inversion of the proper relation of the principles. Kosch also claims that Schelling's substantive account of freedom is inconsistent with his formal account: the freedom to do evil introduces contingency in nature, which the formal account rejects. Although Kosch is right that there is an apparent contradiction, it is not obvious that contingency has the same meaning throughout Schelling's text. One would need to consider the implications of the distinction between two kinds of necessity: (1) abstract, geometrical necessity, which Schelling rejects, and (2) living, personal necessity, which he affirms (cf. SW VII, 394–397). What is contingent with respect to the former may not be contingent with respect to the latter.

Andrew Bowie's essay discusses the relationship between nature and freedom in Schelling and Adorno. He largely treats the two philosophers as a pair, claiming that both share a dialectical model that conceives freedom in relation to what opposes it, which changes throughout history (cf. 183). In my view, the textual basis for this claim with respect to Schelling is rather thin. According to Bowie, the groundlessness of willing and the rela-

tionship between 'ground and existence' in the *Freiheitsschrift* reveal connections between freedom and meaning as well as the inability of reason to ground itself.

The essay by Günter Zöller examines the historical context and significance of Schelling's theological-political reflections in the *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen*. Zöller begins by tracing the history of the relationship between state and religion from the early-modern political theorists through Kant and the early-Schelling. In Stuttgart Schelling offers a radical critique of the state as an expression of failed freedom. Though the ideal state cannot be realized in this world, the state should develop towards religion, which can help produce an inner unity. Zöller ends by providing a series of helpful contrasts with Kant, which reveal the reasons behind Schelling's radically different approach.

Fred Rush offers a provocative account of Schelling's late philosophy and his critique of Hegel. Rush acknowledges that this critique of Hegel – that the latter treats thought as both a necessary and sufficient condition for being, thus overlooking the pre-conceptual givenness of existence as such – may be an implicit self-criticism of Schelling's earlier philosophy. However, he argues that even in much earlier works Schelling recognizes a space between conceptual determination and being. Even if Schelling's critique does not defeat Hegel directly, Rush argues that Hegel begs the question with respect to views like Schelling's, and thus his philosophy cannot claim to be without any presupposition.

Perhaps the richest contribution in the volume is Manfred Frank's essay on Schelling's theory of identity, which covers the theory's historical sources, its application to the mind-body problem, and Schelling's disagreement with Hegel. Central to Frank's account is the concept of reduplication, which Schelling appropriates from the logical tradition reaching back to Leibniz and beyond. Reduplication consists in specifying an aspect of a thing for consideration (e.g., human being considered *as* animal, or human being considered *as* object in space). Schelling applies this concept of reduplication within his theory of identity. An 'identity of identity' results when identity posits itself *as* identity: A posited *as* A (rather than B) becomes A<sup>2</sup>. Frank succeeds in demonstrating the importance of reduplication for Schelling's accounts of identity and the copula, bringing together a wide range of texts from 1801 to 1830 – although he does not draw attention to the differences in these accounts, such as the different ways that reduplication functions in Schelling's various treatments of the copula. Of particular interest are the connections that Frank draws to the mind-body problem in analytic philosophy, especially the work of Donald Davidson. By reduplication, the same X can be considered in two respects: in one respect as a mental event, in another respect as a physical event. This allows mental and physical events to be identified without collapsing the one into the other.

With the publication of this volume by Cambridge, I expect that we will see more such connections between Schelling's thought and analytic philos-

ophy in the future. In any case, the wide historical range of these essays and the diversity of their topics offer an excellent overview of Schelling's philosophical development.

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