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Review

Lara Ostaric, ed. *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. ISBN 978-1-107-01892-1 (hbk). Pp. 268. $99.00.

Lara Ostaric has edited a fine volume of thought-provoking essays on Schelling. The book, which covers a wide range of topics, is organised according to Schelling's intellectual development. Ostaric does well, however, not to divide this development into distinctive periods set apart from one another in different sections, instead allowing the various stages of Schelling's thought to develop into one another from chapter to chapter.

In the book's first chapter, Eric Watkins considers the unconditioned character of the first principle in Schelling's early philosophy, highlighting Kant's influence on the early Schelling. This supports the idea that 'Schelling's project is most naturally understood not as an attempt at foundationalist epistemology as Reinhold's and Fichte's are, but rather as one that is essentially metaphysical' (26). In the following chapter, Michael N. Forster—who takes the post-Kantian preoccupation with epistemological foundations to be more influential on Schelling's early philosophy—outlines the different ways in which Schelling engages with scepticism throughout his philosophical career. Forster's essay is helpful in filling a gap in the scholarship on Schelling and scepticism, but it ultimately accounts for precisely why this topic is seldom considered in detail. For even if Schelling was 'swept along by his age's almost obsessive concern with skepticism', he was relatively uninterested in how the speculative philosopher might justify the standpoint of philosophical knowledge to non-philosophical consciousness (47). Again, as Watkins argues with respect to the works of 1794/5, Schelling is first and foremost a metaphysician, and this is a thesis that is implicitly supported throughout the bulk of the essays in this collection.

In Chapter 3, Ostaric returns to the argument that Fichte was not as central to Schelling's development as has often been assumed. In particular, she shows that Schelling's early conception of intellectual intuition is substantially different from Fichte's and involves an 'original conception of a "creative reason"' (57). In addition to describing some of the key features of Schelling's philosophy of nature, such as the construction of matter and life, Ostaric develops a novel argument about the philosopher of nature being similar to the talented artist discussed in Kant's third *Critique*.

Schelling's own aesthetic theory is treated by Paul Guyer and Jennifer Dobe in Chapters 4 and 8. Guyer focuses on the *System of Transcendental Idealism* and the 1802/3 lectures on the *Philosophy of Art*, arguing that Schelling's aesthetics fundamentally differs from Kant's insofar as the Kantian play of the faculties drops out of the Schellingian picture and aesthetic experience comes to be seen as serving an exclusively revelatory function. Dobe's essay turns to Schelling's 1807 lecture on the plastic arts and considers this text to initiate Schelling's more compelling yet seldom acknowledged aesthetics of the middle period. Thus, whereas Guyer emphasises the strictly cognitivist character of Schelling's early aesthetics, Dobe argues that the middle Schelling conceives 'creation, artistic and otherwise, as a quasi-moral act of self-limitation through which the ideal achieves determinate form' (169). Because Schelling understands all determination of form in terms of virtuous self-sacrifice, this implies that beauty gives us insight not into the static structure of the absolute but into the goodness expressed in the dynamic creation of the world.

In addition to Dobe's essay on the middle Schelling's aesthetics, the book includes excellent contributions by Michelle Kosch and Günter Zöller on Schelling's middle period. Kosch argues that with the 1809 *Freedom* essay, Schelling begins to revise his 'compatibilist' conception of free will. At this stage, Schelling understands human freedom in terms of a radical decision for goodness or evil, but he does not yet embrace an entirely 'libertarian' conception of freedom since moral character is determined on the basis of a *principle* in both cases. Kosch concludes the essay by suggesting that Schelling's conception of radical freedom requires that he eventually conceive freedom as wholly undetermined and thus abandon his remnant compatibilism. Although this concluding argument is somewhat obscure, Kosch's essay as a whole presents a very helpful way of understanding the *Freedom* essay, particularly insofar as it relates to Kant's and Fichte's moral philosophies.

In the third essay on Schelling's middle period, Zöller focuses on the political theology contained in the 1810 *Stuttgart Private Lectures*. He convincingly argues that, in this text, Schelling comes to see the state as an expression of human evil that ought to be overcome by an immanent, religiously-motivated revolution, an anti-modern view in which Schelling 'risks realizing religion at the cost of right' (200). This essay is interesting for a number of reasons, not least because it includes a survey of Schelling's changing views on the relationship between church and state up to the lectures of 1810. This strategy of tracing a development of Schelling's thought on a given topic, much like Forster's discussion of Schelling and scepticism, sets a good example as to how one can steer clear of a stark periodisation of Schelling's philosophy without simply ignoring the important transformations his thought undergoes.

Daniel Breazeale's essay, which is one of the most impressive in the volume, considers the role of construction and intuition in Schelling's earlier

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identity philosophy. As Breazeale argues, the constructive method is central to the manner in which the speculative philosopher intuits the universal in the particular and thus demonstrates that absolute reason involves knowledge of particularity. Consequently, intellectual intuition is not only required to arrive at the initial standpoint of philosophical reason; it is also the very tool by means of which reason reveals its universal presence in particular 'potencies' of the absolute. And because this constructive exhibition of reason within particularity reveals what reason *is*, namely, a process of self-construction, Schelling's method of construction proves to be inseparable from his metaphysics. In addition to contributing to contemporary debates about construction and intuition in Schelling's philosophy, Breazeale's essay would serve well as an introduction to the fundamental elements of the system of identity.

Further elaborating on the identity philosophy, Manfred Frank's essay explicates the unique 'reduplicative' logic at work in Schelling's conception of 'identity duplicated within itself' or the 'identity of identity'—different ways Schelling describes the 'potentiation' of the absolute. Frank's aims are far-reaching, and his discussion of Schelling's logic of identity is meant to both shed light on the mind-body debate in contemporary analytic metaphysics and account for why Schelling eventually rejects Hegel's formulation of the absolute as 'the identity of identity and non-identity'. This dense essay is especially compelling in the way it traces the various lines of influence that lead to Schelling's distinctive logic of identity. However, Frank concludes his discussion by arguing that, while for Schelling 'mind is only one moment of that which is bound together by reduplication' (142), Hegel conceives the identity between nature and mind as entirely dependent upon mind. As I see it, he thus perpetuates the misconception that Hegel reduces nature to a mere moment of reflection. It would have been far more interesting had Frank considered how the logic of duplication sets Schelling apart from Hegel without obscuring their more fundamental agreement that nature is independent of mind.

A similar interpretation of Hegel plays a role in Andrew Bowie's essay on Schelling and Adorno. Bowie draws upon Terry Pinkard and Robert Pippin in outlining 'the Hegelian position' against which he pits the Schellingian-Adornian position. For example, Bowie uncritically refers to Pippin's bizarre claim that, with Hegel, idealism 'leaves nature behind', as if Hegel's account of spiritual freedom were not entirely dependent upon his philosophy of nature (Pippin 2005: 189). It is possible that Bowie is sympathetic to this reading of Hegel because it fits so well with the late Schelling's critique of Hegel's *Logic*. On this account, Hegel is primarily concerned with rational, 'sense-making' activity as opposed to the structure of being itself. Interestingly, though, Bowie does not go on to argue that nature occupies a place of systematic priority in Schelling's own system. Rejecting the early Schelling's conception of a 'productive nature' as

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dogmatic, Bowie argues that Schelling's more compelling idea emerges from 'the dialectical tension between ground and existence' which makes possible 'a non-dogmatic understanding of "nature" and its relationship to the subject' (191). Ironically, then, Bowie's criticism of Hegel's supposed lack of interest in nature goes hand in hand with the suggestion that Schelling is not, at his most profound, interested in nature *itself*, but rather in the relationship between a given historical *sense* of nature and the possibilities for innovative sense-making which this sense grounds. Schelling is consequently seen as part of the 'modern move against the very idea of metaphysics' (190). Central to Bowie's argument is the idea that non-cognitive forms of sense-making, such as music, can call into question the metaphysical worldviews that are dominant today, such as scientism and reductive naturalism. Arguing that artistic forms of sense-making can liberate us from techno-scientific practices of domination, Bowie's essay is clearly driven by practical concerns. It is no wonder, then, that he depends largely upon Adorno and Dewey to articulate a 'Schellingian' challenge to the modern metaphysical paradigm. For Schelling's own critique of reductive naturalism is made not on practical but purely metaphysical grounds.

In the final chapter of the book, the Schelling-Hegel relation is treated in more detail and with great subtlety by Fred Rush. Rush notes that Schelling's explicit critique of Hegel's logic, i.e., that logic concerns only the *thought* of being and not the logic of being *as such*, is 'only compelling if one accepts Schelling's analysis of what a concept is and rejects Hegel's conception of the same' (225). Of course, this doesn't mean that the difference between Hegel and the late Schelling comes down to their respective conceptions of the term 'concept', but rather that their difference cannot be done justice if one simply takes Schelling's critique of Hegel at face value. Rush therefore aims to unpack a more decisive difference between Schelling and Hegel and, rightly in my view, argues that the late Schelling identifies *creation* as the conceptual limit of Hegelian rationalism.

Rush is generally sympathetic to Schelling's critique of rationalist philosophy, yet he does not see Schelling's positive philosophy, as presented in the Berlin lectures, to be a very promising way forward. More specifically, he sees Schelling's conception of a transcendent *creator* as unnecessary, since the late Schelling's fundamental claim, according to Rush, is that 'creation bears within it the hidden mark of its creating' (233) and this creating might be more immanent than the late Schelling was willing to consider. While I am in complete agreement with Rush on this point, it does raise the question as to whether this book might have benefited from including a further perspective on the positive philosophy, perhaps one more sympathetic to Schelling's turn to Christian orthodoxy.

Rush makes a number of remarks about the philosophy of nature and the *Freedom* essay, which, although not essential to his argument about the late Schelling, exemplify a questionable trend in this book and in Schelling scholarship

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more generally. For example, Rush understands Schelling's early nature philosophy to celebrate nature's supposedly *contingent* development. Indeed, Rush goes so far as to say that 'reason … is in a way "accidental", not something rationally foreordained' by nature's productive process (223). Similar claims about contingency are made by Dobe, who considers the middle Schelling to hold that, unlike philosophical knowledge of what is *necessary*, 'aesthetic experience is capable of unveiling the free *and thus contingent* act' of divine creation (162, my emphasis). As I understand Rush and Dobe, the creative drive that is essential to Schelling's metaphysics implies that there is some fundamental *contingency* at work in being, as if the forms produced by nature or God *could have been otherwise*. But this association of volitional freedom with contingency—while certainly important in Schelling's late philosophy of revelation—is unconvincing with respect to the early philosophy of nature, the *Freedom* essay, and the *Ages of the World*. In fact, a strong argument can be made that Schelling, prior to developing his positive philosophy of existence, understands the activity of nature (or the ground of divine personality) to be at once creative *and* rationally necessary, as Alison Stone has argued with reference to the early philosophy of nature (Stone 2015: 320). Thus, something is lost when Schelling's later emphasis on contingency is read back into the earlier stages of his philosophical development. Indeed, one of Schelling's distinctive contributions to German idealism is his insistence that freedom and necessity are already united in the impersonal development of nature or, what is the same thing, in divine activity prior to the emergence of personality.

The role of contingency in nature is also emphasised in Ostaric's essay, which goes on to consider the manner in which philosophical knowledge *of* nature may rest on a historically contingent ground. Ostaric rightly notes that, in the *First Outline*, Schelling promotes empirical research into nature's structure, and she sees this as being in tension with the idea that philosophical knowledge of nature is 'grounded on self-evident and absolutely necessary principles' (70). Yet Schelling's demand that the hypotheses advanced by the speculative philosopher be put to experimental test does not necessarily mean that the knowledge gained from this experimentation lacks *a priori* status. On the contrary, as Schelling argues in the *Introduction to the Outline*, the speculative philosopher may very well come to see the necessity of nature's internal structure through an acquaintance with empirical research. As Schelling puts it, 'Every judgment which is merely historical for me—i.e., a judgment of experience—becomes, notwithstanding, an *a priori* principle as soon as I arrive, whether directly or indirectly, at insight into its internal necessity' (Schelling 2004: 198). Knowledge that depends upon experience for its acquisition can, then, still be *a priori* knowledge, because 'it is *not* … that WE KNOW *Nature* as *a priori*, but *Nature* IS *a priori*'. Hence Schelling's claim that 'there is no chance [*Zufall*] in nature at all'—a Spinozist commitment that, in my view, is essential to Schelling's distinctive ontology.

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On a related note, the ontological priority that Schelling grants nature from at least 1800 onwards is generally downplayed in this book. For example, Dobe claims that, 'In Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*, the human experience of freedom and ethical choice is the central and grounding dynamic of his metaphysics' (162), despite the fact that Schelling is clear that a philosophical understanding of human nature is only possible on the back of a dynamic *physics*, since it is the dynamic polarity of nature that grounds human freedom and ethical decision. And even when it is acknowledged that the philosophy of nature grounds the philosophy of spiritual freedom, the former is often seen as merely serving this grounding task. As Ostaric claims in her introduction to the book, 'the central question of Schelling's early system' and 'the main motivating force of his *Naturphilosophie*' is the question as to how a world must be constituted *for a moral being* (3–4). Certainly, this was an important question for the young Schelling. But this way of describing Schelling's project minimises his effort to uncover the intrinsic structure of nature by bracketing any consideration of the moral being that ultimately emerges from that nature.

In any case, this volume is a welcome contribution to Schelling scholarship, not least because it calls for a reconsideration of the real thrust of Schelling's thought. Taken together, the essays collected here attest to the fact that it is Schelling's complexity and openness to philosophical experimentation which continue to motivate debates about this great philosopher.

Benjamin Berger
University of Warwick, UK
Benjamin.Berger@warwick.ac.uk

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