Review of *Schelling's Philosophie der Kunst* by Bernhard Barth

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In the winter of 1802-03 Schelling chose to lecture on the philosophy of art as an introduction to his Identity Philosophy. He repeated it in 1804 when he presented the Complete System of Philosophy in lecture form and published Philosophy and Religion. Art and religion, if indeed their metaphysical content can be distinguished, form the ideal side of Schelling's version of absolute idealism; it is these cognitive and affective domains, not ethics, politics, or history, which for Schelling indicate the return of spirit from the otherness exhibited in nature's structured hierarchy of forms. They are the 'homeward journey' indicated in the lapidary text: "History is an epic composed in God's mind; it has two main parts, one depicting humankind's departure from its center to the farthest periphery, the other its return. The first is its Iliad, the second its Odyssey. . . . The ideas or spirits had to fall from their center and particularize themselves in nature, the general sphere of fallleness, so that they could return again to Indifference as particular, and, reconciled to it, subsist in it without destroying it."¹

Bernhard Barth subjects the hundred pages or so of the general or metaphysical part of the Lectures on Art to close textual analysis, supplying conceptual and literary/historical background where necessary. He produces a sympathetic rendition of what he calls, in contradistinction to Hegel's pessimistic aesthetic (the "death of art" thesis), Schelling's optimistic theory of art and beauty—one which, as in the Platonic and Neoplatonic metaphysics of old, defends art's capacity to convey ultimate truth.

Barth supplies a thematic subtitle for his study Divine Imaging and Aesthetic Imagination (Einbildungskraft). He argues that Schelling conceives both the content of art and the experience of the artist-producer as a counterimage of the original in-building of opposites which obtains in reason, the Absolute's form or expression. Aesthetics reflexively reconstructs Indifference, or the identity of opposites. Reflection, human cognitive activity, mirrors reason; aesthetic imagination (Enbildungskraft) mirrors ontological identification of differences (Ineinsbildung); art reveals essence. Barth follows the lead of his teacher, Werner Beierwaltes, in pursuing themes of Platonic and Augustinian image metaphysics which are perhaps on the periphery of Schelling's thought in the early Identity Philosophy period.² But this approach does not hinder his recognition and exposition of the concepts central to Identity Philosophy in 1802, reason as "identi-fication" (Ineinsbildung) and the nature of its products as Ideas or perfect particulars. Ineinsbildung is Schelling's static counterpart of Hegel's dynamic dialectic; it is the rational activity in the Absolute and in the artistic genius (or philosophical knower) which makes truth or systematic grasp of the Absolute possible. Ideas are Schelling's counterpart of Hegel's categories or historical and phenomenological stages. Barth's recognition of the centrality of these concepts makes his study an important contribution to understanding Schelling's Identity

² See Werner Beierwaltes, Platonismus und Idealismus (Frankfurt a. M., 1972), and Identität und Differenz (Frankfurt a.M., 1980).
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Philosophically,

the first section of the study is the most important. It is devoted to

a systematic “placement” of art in the whole, a derivation of it from metaphysical first

principles; this is what Schelling terms “construction.” Barth does a fine job of explain-

ing Identity Philosophy, bringing to bear little-read texts from the period such as

Fernere Darstellungen aus dem System der Philosophie (1802) and Aphorismen zur Einleitung

in die Naturphilosophie (1806). But the clarity of the exposition in this most abstract and

conceptual section of the book is undercut by the author’s tendency to adopt a neuter-

ted Hegelian terminology of “mediation” and “reflexion” to express the conceptual

workings of Schelling’s static Identity Philosophy. Barth makes clear that the result of

Hegelian dialectic (self-mediating negativity) is analogous to Schelling’s nonprocessive

and nontemporal self-affirmation of the Absolute (56–57n.), but to this reader it seems

both unnecessary and confusing to concoct a hybrid terminology—mediation sans

negativity, intellectual intuition explained in terms of reflection rather than the

reverse—to express the analogy. Schelling and Hegel did share a common philosophy

from 1801–1803; they shared a common conceptual vocabulary, including “reflexion,”

“construction,” and “potency.” Afterwards, Hegel evolves a dynamic and negative

cell of reason’s function of intellectual intuition, one which locates it in a this-

worldly discursive process of conceptual specification and transcendence. Schelling

looks back to the history of philosophy to model his own solution to the paradox of

intellectual intuition (the identity of discursiveness and unmediated wholeness) with

his frankly metaphysical talk of Ideas and their “fall” into time and history. Hegel

achieves a theory that connects empirical and metaphysical frames of discourse, Schelling leaves them disconnected. This is a difference which is hard to ignore.

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Virginia Sapiro. A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstone-

In this carefully researched book, Virginia Sapiro argues that the history of political

philosophy shortchanges Mary Wollstonecraft. The canon consigns Wollstonecraft to

See Dieter Jähnig, Die Kunst in der Philosophie. Bd. 1: Schellings Begründung von Natur und