

Book Review

Review of John Watson's Book: Schelling's Transcendental Idealism: A Critical Exposition

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ABSTRACT

Why do I review John Watson's 1882 classic, "Schelling's Transcendental Idealism"? I write this review in 2007, and the sad truth is that Schelling's system (with upgrades from Hegel, and others) is underappreciated in a world full of strife and dualistic thinking. It is underappreciated with some exceptions (e.g., Ken Wilber) even as Schelling's system could find its partial vindication coming from science. The buying public prefers its confusion coming from Richard Dawkins' "God Delusion." You can find this book at Amazon http://www.amazon.com/Schellings-Transcendental-Idealism-critical-exposition/dp/1402135688/ref=cm_cr-mr-title.

Key Words: Schelling's system, transcendental idealism.

John Watson does a wonderful job describing Kant and his aftermath, describing Fichte's thinking before moving on to Schelling. Watson follows the movements up to Hegel's entrance, but Watson writes mostly about Schelling's contributions.

Watson (page 98) writes: "Even more strongly than Fichte, Schelling rejects as absurd and unthinkable any 'objective' God, independent of man and nature, and seeks to explain each entirely from itself." Schelling's God could not be held separate from God's creation.

Watson establishes "the fundamental proposition of philosophy", and writes (page 109-110): It is not only the supreme condition of knowledge, but of action as well. Assuming, in the meantime, that a knowledge of objects is possible, and that volition also is possible, it is evident that both alike presuppose our fundamental principle. There can be no knowledge of anything apart from consciousness, and, as has been shown, no consciousness apart from the self-activity which we call self-consciousness; nor can there be any volition which is not in consciousness, and therefore none which is not made possible, and alone made possible, by self-consciousness." Schelling, we are told, develops his transcendental philosophy beyond Kant by recognizing two acts of intelligence: pure activity as volition and the limit of that activity presented as sensation.

Watson (page 117) writes: "Sensation is not a mere limitation, but a consciousness of limitation, and such consciousness necessarily presupposes that there is, at the very least, a reaction of consciousness against that which is opposed to it."

Watson (page 122) writes: "Perception is not the purely subjective apprehension of an independent object, but the actual apprehension of an object existing in relation to consciousness."

Watson (page 180) writes: "The world is a divine poem, and history a drama in which

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individuals are not merely actors but authors; but it is one spirit which informs all and directs the confused play of individuality to a rational development."

Unity in opposition is simple enough in principle, yet sometimes a sensation comes from reading Watson that a better articulation is possible (either from Watson or Schelling). This unfinished quality is apparently the nature of the beast; next to the infinite us finite folks are somewhat incomplete. It is better to admit our incompleteness and this is to discover our best art, even in the handiwork of an artist yet to be. Watson (page 194) writes: "Perhaps it is not unfair to say that no amount of self-restraint could ever have enabled Schelling, with his quick imaginative temperament, to build up such an edifice of philosophy as his great successor Hegel has left to us." It is worth noting that Hegel is not well understood today, but perhaps that will change.

References

John Watson, 2005, *Review of John Watson's Book: Schelling's Transcendental Idealism: A Critical Exposition*, Adamant Media Corporation.