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BOOK REVIEWS

Schelling's Naturalism: Motion, Space and the Volition of Thought, by Ben Woodard, Glasgow, Edinburgh University Press, 2019, 256 pp., £ 75.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781474438179

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The argument weaved throughout *Schelling's Naturalism*, as stated in the introduction, is Woodard's claim that nature is a species of "nested physical systems"¹ that are potentiated in Schelling by means of the *Potenzen* which indicate the openly constructive and non-restrictive character of both nature and philosophy. This argument develops into Woodard's claim that Schelling is ontologically minimalist whilst creatively expansive due to the ubiquity of the *Potenzen* throughout nature. This claim grounds the project's ambition to navigate through the dimensionality of thought and nature by means of algebra, diagram, and geometry, in terms of both metaphysics and epistemology. Woodard shares Schelling's conviction of a union of philosophy and the physical sciences and attempts to grasp throughout the project how "thought is part of nature's spatiality and temporally expanding continuum."² Thus Woodard shares a commitment to the continuity thesis expressed by Iain Hamilton Grant and Daniel Whistler that Schelling's philosophy is naturalistic and ought not to be periodized. Problematised throughout the book is how to navigate the constructive activity of thought with the activities of construction in nature: That is, how can thought and 'nature' be both a created system and a creative one?

Woodard's exposition of motion, space and thought is structured dynamically throughout the book. The reader follows a dense, non-linear journey through Schelling's articulation of these concepts in relation to thinkers both directly

1 Ben Woodard, *Schelling's Naturalism: Motion, Space and the Volition of Thought* (Glasgow: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 1.

2 Woodard, *Schelling's Naturalism*, 2.

influential and conceptually related to Schelling. In this way, the scope of the book extends beyond Schelling scholarship in each chapter since Woodard locates Schelling within a cluster of diverse thinkers both historically and conceptually influential including Oken, Kielmeyer, Reinhold, and J.G. Grassmann, in addition to the classical figures of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Spinoza, Fichte and Hegel. Whilst rich in content, the book is by no means an introductory piece for new Schellingian's but rather requires a careful reading, demanding the full attention of the reader throughout.

In each chapter, Woodard leads the reader through a web of historical analysis and argumentation with the question of thought's relation to nature firmly at hand. In Chapter One, the question of thought as a "species of motion" is structured, as to be expected, according to Schelling's response to Kant, Fichte and Spinoza. At the close of the chapter however, Woodard introduces Schelling's relation to Plato and Aristotle. Despite the proximity of Plato being well told in Schellingian literature, the recognition of Aristotle as a significant resource for how Schelling conceives of motion is a welcome position that remains in the background throughout the book. In Chapter Two, the Kantian division of inner and outer space is problematised through Maimon's critique of the critical project. Woodard's attention to Maimon demonstrates the scope of his interest in the historical context of Schelling's projects while illustrating his ability to form conceptual ties. A close analysis of Kant's "What Does It Mean To Orient Oneself in Thinking," and aspects of the *Opus Postumum*, tends to rely on the spatial terms employed by Kant like *navigation*, *orientation*, and *horizon* to problematise inner and outer space for Kant, rather than a direct relation to Schelling's thought.

Chapter Three is concerned with the natural place of mathematics in Schelling. Woodard asks how to situate mathematics in nature so that it is not purely ideal but rather can be operative in creating qualitative differences that "location and navigation engender."³ Woodard highlights the recognition Fichte and Hegel have achieved as contributors to the mathematical thinkers after Kant, whereas appropriate attention has until now not been paid to Schelling. As such, Woodard embarks on a demonstration to indicate how Schellingian arithmetic and geometry have shaped a material mathematization of nature in Christian Samuel Weiss and H. and J.G. Grassmann. Whilst admitting that the historical connections require further work, this example highlights Woodard's expansive and adaptive project to take seriously the concept of motion and space throughout all of nature's aspects by means of a Schellingian investigation.

While there is a thread running throughout the book, each chapter develops an argument in itself. Chapter Four, however, brings the previous chapters together through an analysis of the *Potenzen* which Woodard emphasises as forming the basis of the Schellingian position as 'ontologically minimalist' since the *Potenzen* suggest that "construction by nature does not differ from construction by us in kind, but

3 Woodard, *Schelling's Naturalism*, 105.



only in location and degree.”⁴ Thus, central to Woodard’s claims for how space, motion and thought can be conceived nature-philosophically as a species of difference without being radically disjoint from one another is Schelling’s development of the *Potenzen*. This chapter is the crucial hinge of the book, that joins the historical analysis of the previous chapters, and paves the way for the contemporary considerations of those to follow. Woodard surveys the different species of *Potenzen* from the *nature-philosophical*, identity and absolute modes, thereby, tracing the historical landscape of the *Potenzen* through a critique of Spinoza, Kant and Fichte, on the one hand, and *Naturphilosophen* Oken and Eschenmeyer on the other. For Woodard, the *Potenz* are Schelling’s “attempt to create the leanest structure of nature possible in order to determine both transcendental and immanent conditions for, and beyond, human cognition.”⁵ The result according to Woodard is that the *Potenzen* “function as a structuration of freedom-as-dynamics, thereby criss-crossing the mind-world boundary.”⁶

Chapter Five asks what is at stake for epistemology given the real, yet inexistent potencies on the one hand, and object and facts on the other. To do so, Woodard traces the mutual impact of field theory and Schelling’s philosophy to argue for both local creation and knowledge without falling into the various positions he critiques. Through a somewhat unexpected detour through rainbows, Woodard postulates how these phenomena indicate the locality of knowledge and the difficulty to grasp nature within a single theorem. Constructed knowledge is asymmetric with the excess of nature (from the potencies), non-reductive and both ontologically and epistemically significant.

The concluding chapter ends by placing Schelling within the field of pragmatism. Woodard claims that Schelling’s “emphasis on motion and space, coupled with his particular mode of philosophical speculation, lead to a form of proto-pragmatism.”⁷ In this last chapter then, Woodard connects Schelling to Peirce’s pragmatism, and Sellars’ notions of pure process and the myth of the given, amongst others, to demonstrate the contemporary uptake of Schellingianism within the analytic tradition.

Schelling’s Naturalism is a rigorous and exciting new addition to Schelling scholarship. Whilst a traceable indebtedness to Iain Hamilton Grant’s claim for the naturalisation of thought is clear, and acknowledged throughout, Woodard’s distinctiveness is evidenced in the experimentation of Schellingian thought beyond its historical situation and his ability to grasp the concepts of space, navigation and volition as strictly found within Schelling’s work, and to speculatively develop these theses beyond the original texts.

4 Woodard, *Schelling’s Naturalism*, 112.

5 Woodard, *Schelling’s Naturalism*, 107.

6 Woodard, *Schelling’s Naturalism*, 111.

7 Woodard, *Schelling’s Naturalism*, 191.