

Schelling's Philosophy of Art

Schelling's criticism of Kant's aesthetics. Schelling's monistic metaphysics. The place of art in Schelling's metaphysics: art as 'objectified intellectual intuition'. The relation of art to philosophy: art as 'the eternal organ and document' of philosophy.

Main reading

- F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, trans. P. Heath (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1978), Part Six, 'Deduction of a universal organ of philosophy, or: essentials of the philosophy of art according to the principles of transcendental idealism'. Reprinted in D. Simpson ed., *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism*. Explains the place of art in Schelling's metaphysics.
- F. W. J. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art (1804-5)*, trans. D. Stott, Introduction and Part I, 'General section on the philosophy of art': ch. 2, 'Construction of art as such and in general', and ch. 3, 'Construction of the particular, or of the form of art'. Amplified account of the philosophical significance of art and the derivation of its specific forms and features.
- F. W. J. Schelling, 'Concerning the relation of the plastic arts to nature [selections]' (1807), in D. Simpson ed., *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism*. Account of the ontological relation of art and nature.

Further reading

- A. Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, ch. 4.
- A. Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*, ch. 3.
- D. Simpson, Introduction to Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, trans. D. Stott.
- D. Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, ch. 5.
- R. Velkley, 'Realizing nature in the self: Schelling on art and intellectual intuition in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*', in D. Klemm and G. Zöller eds., *Figuring the Self: Subject, Absolute, and Others*.

Essay questions

- 'Where philosophy stops, there art begins.' Can this view be justified?
- Elucidate Schelling's claim that the 'philosophy of art is a necessary goal of the philosopher, who in art views the inner essence of his own discipline'.

'Concerning the relation of the plastic arts to nature'. The conception of *form* in Kant's aesthetics is 'hostile to essence [Wesen]': form means for Kant simply the modulation of spatial and temporal extension, giving rise to a conception of nature as 'more or less hard form and closed in'; 'once you have mentally eliminated the operative principle from within them ... Nothing but purely inessential qualities, such as extension and spatial relationship.' Kant's austere view of nature lies behind the notion that the artist engages in an 'idealisation of nature': this notion 'springs from a manner of reasoning according to which it is not truth, beauty and goodness, but the opposite of all these that is the real.' But if on the contrary we believe that '[beauty is] full and complete existence', then '[art that 'idealises' has] no other purpose] than to depict that which exists in nature and in fact ... We make the purpose of art the portrayal of that which truly exists.' 'How can we, so to speak, spiritually melt this apparently hard form, so that the unadulterated energy of things fuses with the energy of our spirits, forming a single cast? We must go beyond form, in

order to regain it [nature] as comprehensible, living and truly felt.'

Regarding the traditional idea of art as illusion or appearance (Schein), in e.g. Plato and Schiller, Schelling grants that 'Works of art appear to be endowed with life on the surface only', but it is precisely in this that the truth of art consists: 'art, by endowing its works with a merely superficial animation, in fact represents as non-existent only that which does not exist. [Art] apprises us of the inessentiality of th[e] amalgamation [i.e. of what we ordinarily take nature to be].'

Schelling's metaphysics:

the absolute



point of indifference



subject/subjectivity
freedom
consciousness

object/objectivity
nature & necessity
unconsciousness

= *ideal series*

'*intellectual intuition*'

= *real series*

The place of art in Schelling's metaphysics. Philosophy maintains that the subjective and objective are essentially one, but we are unable, so far, to contentfully grasp them as such.

One kind of object that *partially* achieves this function is a natural organism: 'The complete appearance of freedom and necessity unified in the external world therefore yields me organic nature ... {either in the particular case, or in nature as a whole, which is an absolute organic being}.' '[C]onscious and unconscious activity become objective *in one and the same intuition*': a natural organism is a 'monogram' of the 'original identity' of the conscious and unconscious in the absolute. However, 'we certainly recognise this identity [of conscious and unconscious, freedom and nature, etc.], but not as an identity whose principle lies in the self itself', i.e. the identity of subjective and objective is still not grasped adequately; we need '*identity of the conscious* and the *unconscious in the self*, and *consciousness of this identity*'.

The function is achieved fully only in art: art 'verge[s] on the one side upon the product of nature, and on the other upon the product of freedom, and must unite in itself the characteristics of both ... With the product of freedom, [the work of art] will have this in common: that it is consciously brought about; and with the product of nature, that it is unconsciously brought about ... the unconscious activity operates as it were, through the conscious, to the point of attaining complete identity therewith'; 'Conscious and unconscious activities are ... absolutely one in the product, just as they are also in the organic product, but they are ... one in a different manner; the two are ... one *for the self itself* ... intelligence [achieves] a complete recognition of the identity expressed in the product as an identity whose principle lies in the intelligence itself; it will end, that is, in a complete intuiting of itself'; in art 'conscious and unconscious activity ... coincide absolutely, and thus within the intelligence all conflict is eliminated, all contradiction reconciled. The intelligence [rational subjectivity] will therefore end with a complete recognition of the identity expressed in the product as an identity whose principle lies in the intelligence itself; it will end, that is, in a complete intuiting of itself.' The work of art is a product of genius: 'art comes about through two activities [freedom and nature] totally distinct from each other, genius is neither one nor the other, but that which presides over both' (genius is analogous to destiny, 'a dark unknown force supplies the element of completeness or objectivity to the piecework of freedom'; in both we have the 'absolute concurrence of ... two antithetical activities'). Genius, 'although incomprehensible, yet cannot be

denied'. Art is 'the one everlasting revelation which yields that concurrence'.

Art therefore manifests the absolute, the harmony or identity of the subjective and objective: 'this absolute is reflected from out of the [art] product, it will appear to the intelligence as something lying above the latter ... This unchanging identity [the absolute] can never attain to consciousness, and merely radiates back from the product.'

The relation of art to philosophy. *STI*: The task of philosophy is to articulate the absolute, but the absolute is 'a principle which, *qua* absolutely identical, is utterly nonobjective'. So 'how is this absolutely nonobjective to be called up to consciousness and understood – a thing needful, if it is the condition for understanding the whole of philosophy?' 'That it can no more be apprehended through capable of being set forth by means of them, stands in no need of proof.' Therefore: 'Nothing remains, therefore, but for it to be set forth in an immediate intuition'. Yet: 'How ... can it be established beyond doubt, that such an intuition does not rest upon a purely subjective deception, if it possesses no objectivity that is universal and acknowledged by all men?' The intuition needs to be 'posited objectively'. Art does this: 'This universally acknowledged and altogether incontestable objectivity of intellectual intuition is art itself. For the aesthetic intuition simply is the intellectual intuition become objective.' Because 'aesthetic intuition is merely intellectual intuition become objective, it is self-evident that art is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy ... Art is paramount to the philosopher ... it is art alone which can succeed in objectifying with universal validity what the philosopher is able to present in a merely subjective fashion'. The relation of art to philosophy can be expressed in this formula: 'Take away objectivity from art, one might say, and ... it ceases to be what it is, and becomes philosophy; grant objectivity to philosophy, and it ceases to be philosophy, and becomes art.'

PA: 'at the ultimate boundaries of the infinite and the finite, where the contradictions of phenomenal appearance disappear into the purest absoluteness ... This is the relationship between philosophy and art'; 'in the artist the same principle is objective that in the philosopher reflects itself subjectively ... [the artist] does not relate to that principle subjectively or consciously'; 'It [art] is not only autonomous but also penetrates through to the principle of all autonomy'; 'Philosophy of art in the larger sense is the presentation of the absolute world in the form of art'; 'theory [as opposed to philosophy] concerns itself directly with the particular ... In contrast, philosophy is totally unconditioned and without external purpose ... That which philosophy must recognise and present in it [art] is of a higher sort, and is one and the same with absolute beauty: the truth of ideas'; 'The philosophy of art is a necessary goal of the philosopher, who in art views the inner essence of his own discipline as if in a magic and symbolic mirror'; 'Only philosophy can reopen the primal sources of art for reflection ... Only through philosophy can we hope to attain a true science of art ... Philosophy can ... express immutably in ideas that which true artistic sensibility actually intuits in the concrete work of art'.

Art parallels, as well as supplementing, metaphysics: 'the real world evolves entirely from the same original opposition as must also give rise to the world of art'; 'the philosophy of art is actually general philosophy itself, except presented in the potency [mode] of art'.

Further points. (1) 'Every aesthetic production proceeds from the feeling of an infinite contradiction, and hence also the feeling which accompanies completion of the art-product must be one of infinite tranquillity'; 'the infinite finitely displayed is beauty. The basic feature of every work of art ... is therefore *beauty*'. (2) Art has priority over natural beauty: 'so far from the merely contingent beauty of nature providing the rule to art, the fact is, rather, that what art creates in its perfection is the principle and norm for the judgement of natural beauty'. (3) '[T]here is properly speaking but one absolute work of art, which may indeed exist in altogether different versions, yet is still only one'. (4) Art 'actually excludes relation with everything pertaining to morality'. (5) The metaphysical truth of art is esoteric: 'All effects of art are merely effects of nature for the person who has not attained a perception of art that is free, that is, one that is both passive and active, both swept away and reflective. Such a person behaves merely as a creature of nature and has never really experienced and appreciated art as art. What moves him are perhaps individual moments of beauty, while in the true work of art there is no individualized beauty; only the whole is beautiful. The person who has not yet elevated himself to the idea of the *whole* [the general, philosophical concept of the unconditioned] is totally incapable of evaluating a work of art.'

Hegel on Schelling. 'The great merit of Schelling is to have pointed out in Nature the forms of Spirit ... [But a]s Schelling has not risen to this point of view [of the Concept – Hegel's point of view], he has misconceived the nature of thought; the work of art thus becomes for him the supreme and only mode in which the Idea exists for spirit. But the supreme mode of the Idea is really its own element; thought, the Idea apprehended, is therefore higher than the work of art. The Idea is the truth, and all that is true is the Idea.' (G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, *Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and F. Simson, p. 542)

For next week, if you wish to read ahead:

- F. Schiller, 'On the art of tragedy' (1792) and 'On the pathetic' (1793), in *Essays*, ed. W. Hinderer and D. Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 1993).
- F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), trans. Shaun Whiteside (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993). Read at least the prefatory 'Attempt at a self-criticism' and §§1-5 of the main text.