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Aesthetic Reason and Imaginative Freedom: Friedrich Schiller and Philosophy ed. by María del Rosario Acosta López and Jeffrey L. Powell (review)

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L'auteur l'admet honnêtement au début de sa *Conclusion*: "Malebranche ne peut être strictement considéré comme un philosophe politique. À la différence de certains de ses contemporains et notamment des grands philosophes de l'Âge classique (Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, etc.) il n'a jamais publié un traité spécifiquement politique" (289). Mais il montre de façon assez convaincante comment la métaphysique malebranchiste fournit une sorte de grille de lecture des phénomènes centraux de la sphère politique—ce qui est parfaitement fidèle à l'intention de Malebranche si l'on se souvient que, d'après ce dernier, c'est la bonne métaphysique qui doit *tout* régler (y compris, donc, peut-on penser, la politique). Un des intérêts de ce livre est ainsi de chercher à recomposer une "vision politique"—qu'on pourrait peut-être plus exactement nommer "philosophie malebranchienne de la société" (160)—à partir de remarques éparées dans les textes de l'oratorien, et de revisiter ce faisant des secteurs de son œuvre peu fréquentés par les commentateurs: la troisième partie du livre II de la *Recherche de la Vérité* consacré à l'imagination; les *Entretiens sur la mort*; et, surtout, le *Traité de morale* où l'auteur estime avec une certaine hardiesse qu'on trouve une "esquisse d'une conception systématique du fondement du pouvoir politique et des rapports entre gouvernants et gouvernés" (205). Somme toute, il s'agit d'un ouvrage qui pourra réjouir les amis de Malebranche, en leur faisant découvrir d'astucieuse façon une facette inattendue de sa pensée, mais qui risque de décevoir les amateurs de philosophie politique *stricto sensu*. On ne taira pas enfin le déplaisir engendré par un nombre élevé de coquilles.

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María del Rosario Acosta López and Jeffrey L. Powell, editors. *Aesthetic Reason and Imaginative Freedom: Friedrich Schiller and Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018. Pp. 217. Cloth, \$90.00.

In the past, Schiller has often been underestimated as a philosopher in his own right. Fortunately, this has been changing, beginning with the bicentennial commemoration of his death in 2005, which has since then produced a fair number of volumes, mostly in French, German, Italian, and Spanish. Unfortunately, Frederick Beiser's 2005 *Schiller the Philosopher: A Re-Examination*, one of the still rare book-length treatments by a single author, has failed to lead to a similar "new wave" in the English-speaking world (3). Thus, it is heartening to have here a volume of essays focusing on his philosophical writings and bringing together titans of the fields of philosophical Schiller-studies, German early romantic aesthetics, and German idealism, such as Beiser, Daniel Dahlstrom, and Manfred Frank, together with a younger generation of Schiller scholars. What makes this compilation additionally useful is the fact that its editors have not shied away from providing several essays in translation, thereby opening access to readers for whom they might otherwise be inaccessible.

As a short review such as this cannot possibly do justice to all essays in this collection, I can only try to mention in radically abbreviated form some of the contributions that offer important or novel approaches. Yonne Nilges's reconstruction of Schiller's implicit references to Rousseau's political philosophy is most instructive for us modern readers, for whom they might be no longer obvious. The same goes for María del Rosario Acosta López's essay, which shows that Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* as a critique of the French Revolution holds its own in comparison to Hegel's in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Frank's "Schiller between Kant and Schelling," first published in German in 2007, provides the indispensable grounding of Schiller's ethical/aesthetic views in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and gives us not only the most complete account of "imaginative freedom" referenced in the title of the book, but also an analysis of different concepts of freedom found in Schiller. Dahlstrom's essay, which starts the second part of the book, could as well have been closing the first, since, in addition to making a connection to twentieth-century phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, it provides a close reading of

Schiller's most important philosophical work after the *Aesthetic Letters*, his *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*—a work that Beiser's *Schiller the Philosopher* had left out. Dahlstrom shows it to render a view of poetry as one way to reflect on humanity's place in the world after the loss of a kind of naturalness that Schiller sees realized in ancient Greek culture—which he idealized, like many of his contemporaries. For him, it is the task of culture, of which poetry is a part, “to lead us back, ‘along the path of reason and freedom,’ to nature” (107). Jeffrey Powell interprets Schiller's political aesthetics as the “disruption” (170) of aestheticized politics as it was critiqued by Walter Benjamin, based as it is on Schiller's concept of perfect freedom. María Luciana Cadahia uses Schiller's concept of positivity in his *Aesthetic Letters* as a corrective to contemporary readings of Michel Foucault's notion of *dispositif*.

This is maybe the most important insight brought forward by most of the contributions: the idea of aesthetic freedom as an all-encompassing force, not one limited to the traditional realm of art but meant to mediate the dualisms of the age, and foremost that of the political and the moral. In the words of Jacques Rancière, “the aesthetic is equally ethical, political, or religious . . . [carrying] the promise of a newly non-separated world, one where art will no longer exist as a separate sphere, but where the practices of artists will be identical to the active forms of elaboration of a common world” (131).

There exists an obvious difficulty for interpreters of Schiller's *œuvre*, namely, to interpret it in the context of maybe the most busy period in the history of German intellectual thought. Consequently, it is not surprising that there is a certain lack of continuity in the philosophical Schiller-reception, and also in this compilation. An obvious example is that Beiser's book-length treatment of *Schiller the Philosopher* is barely referenced. I like to think that his six propositions laying out the merits of Schiller's philosophizing vis-à-vis Kant would have deserved some attention. Another example concerns Schiller's conception of “drives” (*Triebe*), which several of the authors perceptively discuss (see, e.g. Powell's discussion, 167 and following). However, mentioning the fact that Schiller took it over from the Jena philosopher Karl Leonhard Reinhold would have added clarity, in that it would have shown that Schiller's idea of a third—“play”—drive ingeniously combines Reinhold's concept of absolute freedom between two drives and Kant's conception of the free play of faculties in his *Analytic of the Beautiful*.

Still, for anyone interested in Schiller the philosopher, this collection of essays will be stimulating reading.

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Daniel O. Dahlstrom, editor. *Kant and His German Contemporaries, Volume II: Aesthetics, History, Politics, and Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 285. Cloth, \$105.00.

In continuity with the first volume of the series, edited by Corey W. Dyck and Falk Wunderlich, whose focus was on “Logic, Mind, Epistemology, Science and Ethics,” this collection of essays carries on an impressive project in the history of thought and ideas that, due to its breadth and depth of analysis, can be compared to Dieter Henrich's monumental *Konstellationen. Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991). Yet, while the latter's program aimed at tracing the personal and intellectual relations between the various figures of German idealism, here the goal is to bring out of the shadows the German panorama of the second half of the eighteenth century, which is very rich but often remains in the background because of the focus on Kant's transcendental turn and its French/Francophone or English/Scottish sources. Certainly, Hegel's later lashing judgment on the *deutsche Aufklärung* significantly contributed to its eclipse. Only a careful historical reconstruction seems able to rescue these author and topics from this partial oblivion.