

Friedrich von Schelling

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (b. 1775 in Württemberg, Germany, d. 1854 in Ragaz, Switzerland) was a leading representative of German Idealism. Some of his major works are Ideas towards a Philosophy of Nature (1797), System of Transcendental Idealism (1800), and Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom (1809). He also left behind a considerable body of lectures, published posthumously as the Philosophy of Mythology and Philosophy of Revelation. Schelling's main contribution to 19th century Protestant theology was to provide an alternative to *G.W.F. Hegel. Schelling's emphasis on God's freedom contrasted favorably with Hegel's tendency to make creation a matter of logical necessity. An indication of anxiety about the pernicious effect of Hegel's philosophy was the decision, in 1841, by the Prussian government to bring Schelling to Berlin as professor of philosophy. The express purpose of this appointment was to combat the influence of Hegel. In the 20th century, Schelling's influence on Protestant thought is best seen in the theology of *Paul Tillich. Tillich was attracted to several aspects of Schelling's philosophy. First, he credited Schelling with recognizing the importance of the unconscious as a philosophical principle. Second, he found Schelling's understanding of the divine presence within nature appealing. Third, he found valuable resources for existential philosophy in Schelling's later thought. Fourth, his doctrine of God corresponds roughly to Schelling's. For both, God is the ideal harmony of polar opposites. Both represented God as a dialectical movement between identity and difference.

Further Reading

Beach, Edward Allen. The Potencies of God(s): Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Brown, Robert F. The Later Philosophy of Schelling: The Influence of Boehme on the works of 1809-1815. Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1977.

Tillich, Paul. Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology. Edited by Carl E. Braaten. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.