

## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

I. Describing Friedrich W. J. Schelling's thought is a tricky enterprise. A pedigreed and clichéd philosophical tradition holds that philosophy is "the love of wisdom and knowledge," by which one generally means the pursuit of things true and rational by the philosophical bureaucrats of knowledge, by those dedicated to rendering their domain truly academic. Stubbornly, love and her promiscuous cousin passion seldom buckle to knowledge, truth, and rationality, and only a few philosophers equal the attention Schelling lavishes on the *love* of and *passion* for knowledge.

One result of embracing this juxtaposition of affect and intellect is that his thought often travels the road of excess leading to the palace of wisdom. Although Schelling's road of philosophical excess leads him astray at times, it is obvious from meticulous weighing and adducing of evidence, factual and historical erudition, and stringent argumentation that his thought's refusal to sacrifice feeling for knowledge does not indicate that he abandons rationality, truth, and knowledge. Rather, as the living principle of the objects of inquiry animates his investigations, this entails that Schelling's philosophical thought is related to its object such that thinking "not so much forces, but induces it to open the sources of knowledge that are hidden and still concealed in itself. For our endeavor to discern and be alive to an object must (one still has to repeat it) never have the intention of imputing something to it, but rather only of inducing it to giving itself to be known" [XI 4; works cited at end of introduction].

Schelling, alternately branded a mad Rationalist, Idealist, or—worse still!—a Romantic, demands a research program whose empiricism and materialist aspects attracted Kierkegaard, Engels, Bakunin, and Arnold Ruge (who attended at Marx's prodding) to his Berlin lectures, among which is this *Historical-critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (1842). Already in the first lecture this disposition has methodological consequences, in that the

philosophical views are required to erect themselves in light of the nature of the objects, not to the contrary. Those methodological consequences are still fully manifest in lecture 10, where Schelling chides his era's version of the world's Francis Fukuyamas, the purveyors of a simplified, extorted, pre-arranged philosophy of history: "Nothing is accomplished with the empty and cheap formulas of Orientalism, Occidentalism . . . or in general with a mere application to history of schemas taken from elsewhere" [XI 232]. Indeed, these mythology lectures not only are rich in concepts and their development but also offer a full engagement with both the ancient mythological world's historical detail and a broad swath of the scholarly literature available during Schelling's era. Precisely Schelling's rigorous conscientiousness of balance among passion, conceptual abstraction, and factual detail led the underappreciated Argentinian philosopher Enrique Dussel to remark pithily—when he was guest lecturing at the State University of New York-Binghamton, and on the occasion of his preparation for an article on Schelling's late works—that for Schelling "life is the criterion of truth."

Now, paradoxically, life can display severe obstinacy and even an anti-theoretical relation to truth, a situation deriving substantially from the fact that life is alternately messy, abject, exhilarating, beautiful, fun, boring, not easily classifiable, sublime, unpredictable, flabbergasting—that is, alive. On the other hand, truth is purported to be clean, demarcatable, digestible, and comprehensible—at least in the mode of the correspondence theory of truth, or in truth's classificatory mode, or as viewed through the prism of its logical underpinning. For Schelling, life being the criterion of truth is another expression of the embracing of the juxtaposition of affect and intellect. This expression manifests Schelling's assimilation of Spinoza's own claim about the union of affect and intellect: "[H]e who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." Schelling absorbed this contention but augmented it by claiming that pain and suffering are universal, the point of passage to freedom, and the "path to glory." This potent mixture endows his thought with a most unusual philosophical comportment toward error. "Error . . . is not a complete lack of truth, but rather is itself simply the inverted truth" [XI 74]. If the motto and foundational principle of the terrorism and absolutism of the Grand Inquisition was that "Error has no right!" then the philosophically unusual generosity of Schelling's thought counters with a vigorous defense of error. Hence the trickiness and difficulty in explaining his thought.

With respect to his thinking, one should not mistake the defense of error as capitulation to stupidity, ignorance, fanaticism, or madness; indeed, albeit in a slightly different context, he claims in the lecture "On Fichte" that we have a duty to counter untruth always, and more so when it is witnessed to by silence. That a dedication to what is considered true is no criterion for fending off fanaticism and madness Torquemada and his small-minded henchmen proved precisely by the prosecution of the brutal Inquisition, in all its astonishing stu-

pidity and ignorance. "Error has right!" but Schelling vindicates it in its role in the service of truth, knowledge, and goodness. Perhaps this disposition in his work in part derives from the aftermath of the unique situation in the Tübingen *Stift*, where he roomed with Hegel and the poet Hölderlin. Propelled to fame as the philosopher of the Prussian state, Hegel's later work represented to Schelling the cold, rationalized mechanism of the state apparatus; Hölderlin simply went insane, marching off alone on foot, on a snowy winter night, from Württemberg toward Bordeaux. Stemming from discontent both with Hegel's mechanically formulaic epistemological fundament and the poet's surrender to madness, the vitality in Schelling's thinking is the search to hold these opposites together in their many permutations. For example, his thought is supple enough to assert in lecture 1 that poetry (= potentially error, untruth, the expression of the mad) and truth are utterly opposed, yet that philosophy (= truth, knowledge, rationality) and poetry share the closest of affinities. In contending that poetry and philosophy are less separated than one assumes and that between the two there is an apparently necessary affinity and mutual attractive force, he remarks that general validity and necessity are as inherent in truly poetic forms as in philosophical concepts; but it is also true that philosophical concepts "should be actual, determinate essentialities. And the more they are . . . endowed by the philosopher with actual and individual life, then the more they appear to approach poetic figures . . . [H]ere the poetic idea is included in philosophical thought" [XI 49].

Insanity is just insanity, and to claim (as Hegel did) the real as the rational and the rational as the real is in Schelling's estimation just another form of madness. His philosophy recognizes that the condition of possibility of truth is error. Error is productive. Thus his thought seeks the creativity, expressivity, and lifeblood of error and false starts, whether their form be in poetry or, as the case may be, mythology; simultaneously he attends to the philosophical requirements of rigor. The synthesis of these dispositions and projects carves a path in his thought that might fruitfully be described as that of the knight errant. He is the Don Quixote of nineteenth-century German philosophy; his philosophy is not beholden to a rule. This has positive and negative effects: when his work succeeds it does so spectacularly, and when it fails it does so spectacularly. Particularly after the discrediting of the ontological proof, is it not mad as a hatter to deduce the existence of divinities, which after all is a task of these lectures? Are these mythology lectures a star-crossed late attempt to synthesize philosophical, discursive knowledge and its other, in this case theology, much as Schelling attempted to synthesize art and philosophical knowledge in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*? Why and how does Schelling continue to insist on thinking systematically about that which undermines systemization: freedom, historicity, temporality, and in particular the gods? Availing oneself of a non sequitur, one might perhaps think of a line from David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* as a guide for reading

Schelling's work: "I have no idea where this will lead us, but I have a definite feeling it will be a place both wonderful and strange."

II. As a way of more explicitly introducing the parameters of these lectures, it is fitting to discuss briefly a sense in which Schelling's project is tilting at windmills. He considered erroneous the content of the historical mythological systems and beliefs that are the topic of these lectures, yet his intent to trace philosophically the paths of errors until revealing the truths buried in them is indicative for the modes of production of knowledge and truth he might have envisioned these lectures exhibiting. Truth and knowledge are not *simply* the resultant matter of the activity of ferreting out what is incorrect, error prone, and mistake laden, in that even the mistake free—particularly if it is known only as static and out of relationship to other entities that mediate its existence—can be banal and lifeless to the point of irrelevance, to the point of anaesthetizing the capacity for contact with the multiplicity of the affections of experience. Dovetailing with this variation on the way life is the criterion of truth, it is a key trait of Schelling's grasp of philosophical "science" [*Wissenschaft*], that is, philosophical knowledge-producing activity, that the error of banality and lifelessness is a more cardinal sin than misunderstanding a doctrine. To a significant degree this is because for him philosophical science qua *Wissenschaft* includes the distinctive modality of *Wissenschaft* as history, and indeed history in the senses of both a) *historia* (historical narratives, accounts of historical events) and b) historical events (the German *Geschichte* and *Ereignisse*, events that have happened). To wit, already in *The Ages of the World* he lays his cards on the table in a meditation on *Wissenschaft* and history as related speculatively, that is, related speculatively in the sense of displaying an interpenetration of each other, of subject and object: "Therefore, all knowledge must pass through the dialectic . . . Can the recollection of the primordial beginning of things ever again become so vital that knowledge, which, according to its matter and the meaning of the word, is history, could also be history according to its external form?" [XIII 205].

To start with the most general scope of the temporality at stake in this philosophical modality, one can turn to some of Schelling's most specific statements on the speculative relationship of *Wissenschaft* and history, statements whose epistemological-methodological background appropriately is found in the introduction to a set of 1833–34 Munich lectures on the *history* of modern *philosophy*. Asserting that *science is a constantly developing product of time* and that those positioned to advance science do so in part by elucidating the connection to what is preceding, he remarks that "if it is also necessary, in order to learn to value and judge the truth, to know error, then such a presentation [of the preceding] is the best and most gentle way to show the beginner the error which is to be overcome" [HMP, 41]. The claim to necessity of error in this sense is not obviously true, and the question is

how it is the case, especially with respect to the speculative relationship of *Wissenschaft* and history. In the AW Schelling affirms rather uncontroversially that “[p]ain is something universal and necessary in life” [XIII 335], but more similar in opacity to the claim about error in the Munich lectures, he connects this statement on the necessity of pain to the Spinozist linking of the increase in sorrow to that of knowledge—thus, from this starting point, which is further synthesized with the understanding that knowledge and freedom are inextricably linked, the entire claim runs: “Pain is something universal and necessary in life, the unavoidable transition point to freedom . . . It is the path to glory” [ibid., 335]. The commonality coursing through these contentions regarding the historical, speculative unity of knowledge, error, freedom, and pain is that the element of progression is coupled ineluctably with an element of regression. These lectures are conceived in part as an extended reflection on this thought, as it plays out in a concrete context.

Given Schelling’s insistence on detail, fact, and evidence, it should not be surprising that the key to reliability of these abstract formulae lies not in some putative calculus of validity, and even less in a supposed immediate insight into the nature of things. Rather, it is at this stage that history itself begins to step forward. The moments of history largely comprise a *series* or *succession* of—at least partially—necessary mistakes, errors, painful experiences, setbacks, and *their overcoming*. Schelling is clear about this in the AW: “But when one time is compared with another time and one epoch is compared with another epoch, the proceeding one appears decisively higher. Hence, such seeming regressions are necessary in the history of life” [ibid., 313]. *Sans* elaboration this is a sheer platitude, but it is in fact here where the speculative unity of a dynamic history and *Wissenschaft* begins to take shape.

First, given that acquisition of knowledge qua *Wissenschaft* is the successive overcoming of pain and sorrow qua error, but thus also the transition to freedom and glory, and given that historical progression is grasped in the facticity of history as a series or succession of life-world events that require regression (the historical equivalent of error), setback, painful mistakes, and the proceeding or progressing beyond them, the speculative concurrence of these movements of the human project leads Schelling to the consideration in the mythology lectures that both *Wissenschaft* and history share the fact that “liberation is measured according to the reality and power of that from which it frees itself” [XI 247]. One of the central scientific [*wissenschaftlich*] tasks of the lectures is to add meat to this claim, to flesh out its empirical aspect, to clarify the relations between the varying mythological systems in their integrity as embodying moments of history. The contents of mythological systems qua error are vital because their linked relations circulate the productive and expressive capacities of human being in specific times and localities. Indeed, bitter is the ascent to Golgotha; yet, taking into account Spinoza, sorrowful though the history of *Wissenschaft* and the *Wissenschaft* of history may be, the obliteration of vital error would be a still grimmer fate

precisely because it would mean the clotting, stoppage, and becoming static of the circulating forces, potencies, and dynamism of history, of the successive alteration of meaningful events, of life itself.

Second, with respect to the speculative nature of *Wissenschaft* and history, Schelling performs a reversal of epistemological perspective quite remarkable for a philosopher so closely associated with German idealism. In the *AW*, during the middle period of his career, Schelling observes with regard to the phenomena being investigated that “[m]ovement is what is essential to knowledge . . . [W]here there is no succession, there is no science” [XIII 208/209]; it is *not* the case that Schelling prioritizes the Rationalist or Idealist statement to the effect that where there is no science, there is no succession. Certainly the aspects of knowledge in play here are reflexive, but what is central, and unorthodox for his contemporary milieu, is the foundation from which he derives the notion that scientific [*wissenschaftlich*] principles related to a field of knowledge are locally relevant, positionally significant, temporally limited propositions that are distorted and badly (dogmatically, contradictorily, nonmeaningfully) determined when absolutized or when the method is separated from the being or essence of the matter itself that is at stake.

From the time of the *AW* to the mythology lectures there is an increasing crystallization of the extent to which the scientific concept and the historical material—that is, description and event, or the discursive subjective and material objective—are simply a unified complex of different forms of the same content. Schelling is also quite clear with reference to the fact that thorough conceptual development and empirical precision march in lockstep: “Whoever wants knowledge of history must accompany it along its great path, linger with each moment, and surrender to the gradualness of the development . . . [The world’s] history is too elaborate to be brought . . . to a few short, uncompleted propositions on a sheet of paper” [ibid., 208]. Just as the natural scientist performs indispensable trial and error in the search for success, so philosophical *Wissenschaft*—to abstract for a moment from the speculative identity of subject and object—comports itself nondominatively to its object *because* the object is itself so unruly, and, in so doing, *Wissenschaft* respects the vitality of error, both its own and that of the historical life-world itself, precisely because not to do so would rob itself of its ownmost material, and thus of its ability to thrive.

In this sense Schelling shares an orientation with Theodor Adorno. Not least is this so because both philosophers were concerned to do justice to Hegel’s dialectic precisely by dispensing with its totalizing character and pre-fabricated historical categories. In this vein, Adorno suggests that “[t]he history locked in the object can only be delivered by a knowledge mindful of the historic positional value of the object . . . Cognition of the object in its constellation is cognition of the process stored in the object” [ND, 163]. This means submitting to the qualitative moments of the object itself and immers-

ing philosophical thought in the unruly heterogeneity of those objects. The mythology lectures do precisely this by means of attending with stunning attentiveness both to the mythological systems' content in themselves and to their interrelations—for example, lecture 7's analysis and reading of the intricate, complex, volatile, and unruly relationship between polytheistic mythology and Jewish monotheism is one of the finest exemplars of comparative study in any era or place.

This unruliness manifests itself in a temporal dynamism. Both in general and in the specific case of mythology this is marked by the succession of moments. It is equally the case with history and science that what is authentic, what is propositionally expressible in truth, is so essentially with respect to its affirmation as a moment contextually vouchsafed by the circulation of which it is a part. Thus the occasion for Schelling's declaration in the *AW* that there are "no assertions that would have a value or an unlimited and universal validity in and for themselves or apart from the movement through which they are produced. Movement is what is essential to knowledge" [XIII 208]. That is, already in 1815 Schelling announces the speculative identity of the ontologico-historical and methodological parameters for such a project as the mythology lectures, a project of elaborating the dynamic reciprocity of "proceeding" and "regressions" yielded by viewing historical phenomena in an equally dynamically philosophical way (that is, in a way that is *wissenschaftlich*, scientific). The lectures are devoted to tracing the path of the relevant movement, succession, and development of the concrete religious consciousnesses of various peoples. Just as an element of a system has its integrity by virtue of its positional significance and in a specific temporal order, Schelling observes that the moments and principles of the various mythologies are true to the extent that they are comprehended as part of an advancing movement and false or regressive to the extent that they are abstracted from this movement: "No single moment of mythology is the truth, only the process as a whole. Now, the various mythologies themselves are only different moments of the mythological process. Indeed to this extent every individual polytheistic religion is indeed a false one . . . but polytheism considered in the entirety of its successive moments is the way to truth and to this extent truth itself" [XI 211/212].

With the affirmation of the priority of the mythological process as a whole, and particularly with regard to emphasis on historical theogonies unfolding as related moments in this process, there is visible a Hegelian dimension to the Schellingian comprehension of mythology; nowhere is this more manifest than in the fact that in these lectures mythology in part functions in conjunction with a developing odyssey—a phenomenology, if you will—of human religious consciousness. This contributes significantly to the identity of *Wissenschaft* and *Geschichte* (history) as *historia* in terms of the speculative identity of subject and object, and is an acknowledgment of the inexorable narrative thread—and thus possibility for mistakes—running through

true knowledge and the human history of regression and progression. “The theogonic process, through which mythology emerges, is a *subjective* one insofar as it takes place in *consciousness* . . . The content of the process are not merely *imagined* potencies, but rather the *potencies themselves* . . . The mythological process does not have to do with natural *objects*, but rather with the pure creating potencies whose original product is consciousness itself. Thus it is here where the explanation breaks fully into the objective realm, becomes fully *objective*” [XI 207]. The mythology lectures are an attempt to reanimate this spiritual odyssey; as historical presentation they propose to fulfill the task of knowledge (*qua historia*) treading the path of the gods—a task broached in the *AW*, initiated explicitly in the *Deities of Samothrace*, refined in Schelling’s intervening quiet years, and delivered to the public in Berlin.

III. Having covered partially the background, methodological parameters, and conceptual content of these lectures, it is worth providing briefly a perspective on the role they play as a philosophical launching point for other endeavors and investigative forays that Schelling envisioned. To this end, one would be well instructed to remember the character of what one now is reading in the form of a discrete text. The *Historical-critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* has the character of publicly and orally delivered *lectures*—it was and is not a definitive treatment of the topic, but rather an *introductory* way of locating it historically and of employing a critical analysis (in both the broadly Kantian and polemical senses) for clearing the ground on which would be erected its exposition proper. It is creditable of Schelling that his plan for a philosophical exposition and elucidation of mythology deposits into philosophy the riches of mythological thought, while also lavishing on mythology the time, attention, and energy to understand it under the aspect of discursive thinking.

As with genitive phrases generally, there is an ambiguity in the *Philosophy of Mythology*. Here, on the one hand, this plays out in terms of philosophy’s enrichment by a set of ancient ways of being; on the other hand philosophy endows mythology with a consciously comprehended significance for contemporary history, culture, religion, philosophy, and thinking in general. So, initially, one notices in lectures 9 and 10 that the preliminary conclusions about the contents, paths, and processual development of mythologies bear the fruit of establishing an orientation for research into mythology’s place in the philosophies and content of history, art, and religion.

This set of directions takes up form and content as Schelling weaves them into an interdisciplinary fabric of knowledge in the *Philosophy of Mythology* lectures 11–20, which contain stunning philosophical engagements with a swath of thinking extending from Hume to Hinduism. Just as an example, it cannot be emphasized enough that Schelling’s comprehension of



Greek mythology (particularly in terms of Homer and Hesiod) and philosophy (particularly Plato, but also Parmenides) places them in their contextual trajectory of development as integrally indebted to Indian mythology and philosophy (particularly in terms of Brahmanism as a living theory of the divine Godhead qua interrelationship of universal and particular and ideal and real, as well as the Vedic commentaries on the religious scriptures of the Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita's explanation of human purpose and the good life). The further reach of this connection to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic monotheism (dealt with here in lecture 7, in particular) is a matter of almost incalculably significant cultural, economic, and political importance in the contemporary world. Finally, then, with respect to the admittedly fitful and fragmented nature of Schelling's corpus, one notes that there is a way in which these lectures were to fit into a system that was to localize living temporal moments. The *Ages of the World*, for instance, quite provocatively suggests this system under the auspices of an extravagantly ambitious relationship of mythology, revelation, and pure rationalism, the contours of which were to fit together conceptually the occurrence, in general, of events in the past, present, and future. Others have performed various and variously successful attempts at the task of making Schelling's partial versions of this system fit together, so this task rests with their labors. Suffice to say that these lectures marked an opening elucidation of mythology (continued more substantively in lectures 11–20) and that mythology in its entirety was to be considered as comprising a significant aspect of the foundation for the revelation later handled in the lectures on the *Philosophy of Revelation*.

This introduction has endeavored to indicate how Schelling's philosophy attempts to hold together a series of opposites: truth and poetry, monotheism and polytheism, history and science, subject and object, knowledge and error, affect and intellect. This is possible because he is not a slave to a rule, yet this road of excess leading to the palace of wisdom sometimes leads Schelling far astray, down a sad and terrible path. He can tend to ignore Kant's admonition that philosophical thought requires self-consistency and thinking from the position of others. If he is all too often branded unfairly as seeking flight to the Other of Reason, then it is the case that Schelling does not always attend to the Reason of the Other. As the reader will soon gather, he finds the expressions of subcontinent Indian mythology as exquisite as he finds South American religion and thought abhorrent. He is simply wrong on his own terms, and being a product of his era in Europe cannot excuse his outrageous racism. The select passages where Schelling expresses this aspect of his thinking serve for headshaking and shame to those interested in his work—they also serve as a reminder that among the philosopher's greatest tasks is the sharpening of a critical faculty wielded to weed out prejudice in one's fundamental presuppositions and assumptions.

As a note on translation, there was no highly developed "translation theory" in operation—other than trying to "get it right." The translators, however, did

profit from a tension created by the fact that one of us favored literal translations that sacrifice readability, while the other bridled that instinct and insisted on fluidity of expression. On many levels Schelling deployed German in a way difficult to translate. Thus, in addition to notes on variegated arcana, the rationale for the translation decisions for many words are given in the translators' endnotes, and several words with multiple translation possibilities are accompanied consistently by the bracketed German word. The reader is also advised that there are two sets of endnotes for this translation. The author's endnotes are indicated with superscript letters and the translators' endnotes are indicated with superscript numerals. The standard pagination has been employed. For readers desiring to compare the translation with the German original, the source text is the Manfred Schröter edition (taken from K. F. A. Schelling's editions), chosen because of its accuracy and ubiquity.

### WORKS CITED

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