

The Objective Religious Explanation of Mythology⁴⁴

A. Four Stages in Man's Religious Development

We can assign no historical beginning to polytheism if, as Schelling has shown, mythology is potentially present in the first real human consciousness. "The emergence of polytheism is as old as mankind" (VI:180).⁴⁵ Again, if man's first religion was this relative monotheism, it follows that mythology and revelation do not presuppose or precede either the other, but have a *common origin* (VI:181).⁴⁶ Thus, the story of man's religious development does not begin with the fragmentation of some prior religious doctrine or with a primitive deification of nature - "a phenomena found among wretched hordes and degenerate tribes but never among peoples" - but with "relative monotheism."

The religious development of mankind (did not begin) with the *multiplicity* of partial, or even, initially, *local* representations, with so-called fetishism or shamanism or a deification of Nature which turned into gods not even concepts or *kinds* but particular natural objects, e.g., this tree or this river. No, mankind did not start from such wretchedness. The majestic course of history had quite a different beginning. The dominant tone in the consciousness of mankind was

always that great One who did not yet know his equals and who actually filled heaven and earth, i.e., the whole universe (VI:180).

But how are we to account for that "relative monotheism"? The first potentially mythological consciousness cannot be the product of a historical becoming (it is as old as history), and yet it must be the product of a becoming! We must posit, then, a supra-historical process.

Wherever there is a relationship between consciousness and God, its ground cannot be found in the first real consciousness, but must lie beyond it. Beyond the first real consciousness, however, nothing is conceivable other than man, or consciousness, in its pure substance prior to all actual consciousness. In this state man has no consciousness of himself (for self-consciousness is inconceivable where there is no process of becoming conscious, no *Actus*), but since he must have consciousness of something, it can only be of God. And since this consciousness of God is not the result of an *Actus*, that is to say, for example, since it is not associated with a knowing or willing, it is pure substantial consciousness of God. Primitive man posits God not *actu*, but *natura sua*. Indeed, since God conceived in a general way is an abstraction, while the relative-One already belongs to real consciousness, nothing remains but to characterize the Original consciousness as that which posits God in his truth and absolute unity ... it is in this way that monotheism would be the final presupposition of mythology. But as you can now well see, this monotheism is in the first place a supra-historical monotheism, and in the second place it is a monotheism which emanates from human nature and not a monotheism of the human reason, for MAN IN HIS ORIGINAL ESSENCE has no other significance than to be the being-who-posit-God (*Gott-setzende-Natur*) (VI:187 cf. 194f).

Schelling thus leads us back from the individual to the nation (*Volk*) and from the nation to mankind, and now to original man himself (*zum ursprünglichen Menschen selbst*), "for he alone can be conceived as existing in relationship with the supra-historical" (VI:186). Man in his original and essential nature is revealed as the being who posits God.

He originally exists only in order to be the being-which-posit-God (*Gott-setzende-Wesen*). Hence his nature does not exist for itself, but is oriented toward God, absorbed, so to speak, in God. I gladly make a

general use of the most appropriate and significant expressions, without fear of having my theory called fanciful; for it is not a theory which describes man as he now *is* or even as he *could* be, once he has passed through the whole great eventful history which separates his present existence from his original state. To be sure, the theory would be fantastic if it asserted that man *exists (Ist) only* to posit God, and if it asserted, despite man's tremendous step into reality, that this direct positing of God is to be made the exclusive rule of his present life, as has happened in the lives of contemplatives like the Hindu yogis or the Persian sufis. Such contemplatives, inwardly tortured by the contradictions of their religious beliefs and tired of the mutability of existence and thought, strive, to all intents and purposes, to sink back into that state of absorption in God. They are therefore like the mystics of every age who find only the way backward, not the way forward into free knowledge (VI:188).

There is no point, then, in asking how man arrived at God, for the first movement of consciousness is *away* from the true God. In the first *actual* consciousness of God there is only a moment of God - i.e., the relative One - not God himself. But prior to this state, consciousness possesses God *as such*.

We use this latter expression in the same sense that we have in mind when we say of a man that he has a virtue or, more often, a non-virtue *as such*, meaning that it is not objective to him but that he has it without wanting it and even without knowing that he has it. Man (i.e., original man, man in his essence) is the one who exists *as* himself and, so to speak, *before* himself, i.e., before he possesses himself, which is to say, before he has become something *other* (for he is already another when returning to himself, he becomes an object to himself.)

As soon as man *is*, and before he has *become anything*, he is consciousness of God. He does not *possess* this consciousness, he *is* it; and it is precisely in the *non-act (Nichtactus)*, it is precisely by the *non-movement*, that he is the one who posits the true God (VI:188f).

This original essential relation to God may be called monotheism, says Schelling, but it is a *blind* or *natural* monotheism, resting on an absorption of human nature in the divine, hence an essential or *natural theism*. "We are not using monotheism (i) in the formal sense in which

the true God is distinguished as such, or (ii) in the abstract sense which simply excludes polytheism, for indeed it still has polytheism in itself at this stage." This "suprahistorical monotheism" or natural theism simply represents the common antecedent and equal possibility of both polytheism and the future, formal monotheism which rests on real knowledge (VI:189-191).

We may now attempt to summarize these four stages in the history of man's relationship to God, for these stages represent the conclusions to which Schelling's "ascending inquiry" has thus far led us.

(1) In the beginning there is an *original, blind, essential or natural theism* in which man *posits* God not by virtue of a knowing or a willing but *natura sua*. Schelling cannot conceive man as maintaining this relation to the pure divine Ipseity: "man cannot persist in this being-outside-himself." He must strive to disengage himself from such absorption in God so as to transform it into a knowing, a knowledge of God, hence into a relationship with God that is based on freedom. But this can be achieved only step by step.

(2) The second stage is that of a *formed, relative monotheism*, for the first *real* or actual consciousness of mankind contains God under a definite form of existence - the God of Power, the Strong One, the Hebrews' El Shaddai, the God of Heaven and Earth. "This relatively-One is not yet in contradiction with the Absolute-One but exists for consciousness *as if* it were the latter." In him, without knowing it, humanity still worshiped the absolute One. With this first form of God, the other forms are given potentially (VI:192).

(3) *Actual polytheism* now ensues, and is simply "the way which leads to liberation from this one-sided power, an advance toward the establishment of new relations."

(4) The fourth phase is that of *true monotheism*, knowledge of the true God as such, a free relation. Polytheism is not the product of a knowing, but God in his truth is such that man can relate to him only in terms of knowing. (To God in his pure reality even a blind or unknowing relationship is possible).

If his original relationship to God is set aside, man's relation to God *in general* does not cease, for this relation is an eternal, imperishable one. Having become *real* himself, man submits to God in his reality. If we assume - the proposition has not yet been demonstrated philosophically, of course, but has been demonstrated factually by our explanation of successive polytheism - if we assume that God with

respect to his forms of existence (modes of being) is *several* just as he is *one* with respect to his divine ipseity or essence, we can immediately see whereon rests the successive character of polytheism, and what the goal of the latter is. None of those forms, taken separately, is equal to God, but if they come to a state of unity in consciousness, then this emerging unity, this God who has come to be, gives rise to a known and consciously realized monotheism (VI:191f).

B. The Theogonic Process and Tautegorical Interpretation

Now it is only in the light of these conclusions, believes Schelling, that mythology can become intelligible. Of course, it has not been *really* explained as yet. Schelling has merely eliminated all more or less arbitrary assumptions and explanatory hypotheses by demonstrating their unhistorical character. "But where the arbitrary assumptions and hypotheses end, science begins." And for the science of mythology, Schelling needs to assume only two things: (a) a blind theism of the original consciousness to serve as starting point, and (b) the movement by which man, his relationship to the divine ipseity at an end, came under the sway of the real God (i.e., exposed himself to that determination by virtue of which he became subject to the mythological succession). These assumptions, however, belong not to the historical but to the supra-historical order, and completely transform the mode of explanation of mythology (VI:193). They imply rejection of every hypothesis which attributes to mythology an arbitrary birth, and require us to conceive mythology as the product of a *necessary process* - necessary with respect to consciousness - whose origin is lost in the suprahistorical and remains hidden there.

Since the ground of mythology is already present in the first actual consciousness, polytheism, in its essence, arose during the period of transition to that consciousness. It follows, therefore, that the Act by which the ground of polytheism was posited did not take place within that consciousness, but occurred outside it ... This determination is, therefore, incomprehensible to consciousness. It is the unwilled and unforeseen consequence of a movement which consciousness cannot reverse or revoke. Its origin is in a region to which consciousness, once separated from it, no longer has access ...

This relative God is followed by a second, not as a result of chance, but

by virtue of an objective necessity *which we do not yet comprehend*, of course, but which we are nevertheless obliged to recognize in advance as objective. Hence with that first determination consciousness is subjected to the necessary succession of representations by which true polytheism arises. When the first attachment is posited, the movement of consciousness through these successive forms is one in which thought and volition, understanding and freedom, take no part whatever ... Consciousness accepts it as a *fate*, as a *divine decree* (destiny) against which it is powerless ... Prior to all thought, consciousness is already captive to that principle of which polytheism and mythology are the purely *natural* consequence ...

Both peoples and individuals are mere instruments in this process; they cannot transcend it, and serve it without understanding it ... The representations do not *come* to them from outside; they are *in* them without them knowing how or why, for they come out of the depths of consciousness itself, and present themselves to consciousness with a necessity which leaves no doubt as to their truth (VI:194, 195, 196).

In the light of these conclusions we may take a new look at the question of the meaning of mythology, for if the mythological representations were neither invented nor freely chosen then they could not have been *meant* to signify anything! Hence all allegorical interpretation has completely missed the point. Mythology remains enigmatic to the outsider, but "for those to whom the inner process is no secret, it has an entirely comprehensible and rational meaning." The *meaning* of mythology can only be the meaning of the *process* by which it was brought into existence. But since this process is a natural and necessary one, "no distinction can be made in it between *content* and *form*, *substance* and *external appearance*" (VI:197), and the "organic becoming" of mythology, postulated earlier, is finally intelligible in the light of this principle of process.

Since consciousness chooses or invents neither the representations themselves nor their expression, mythology arises just *as such* and possesses no other meaning than the one expressed. As a result of the necessity with which the *content* of the representations is produced, mythology possesses from the very beginning a *real* and therefore a *doctrinal* meaning. As a result of the necessity with which the *form* arises, its meaning is completely literal (*durchaus eigentlich*), i.e.,

everything in it is to be understood just as it is stated, and we are not to look for implicit or disguised meanings. Mythology is not *allegorical*, it is *tautegorical* (the term is borrowed from Coleridge). For mythology, the gods are beings who really exist. They are not something else, and they do not *mean* something else. They mean *only* what they are. Formerly, literal meaning and doctrinal meaning were opposed, but according to our explanation these two cannot be separated. Hence, instead of sacrificing the literal meaning to some doctrinal meaning or other, or of saving the literal meaning at the expense of the doctrinal meaning (as the poetic interpretation does), we are obliged, in the light of our explanation, to affirm the absolute unity and inseparability of both (VI:198).

Tautegorical interpretation must therefore replace poetic and allegorical interpretation; and the absolutely literal meaning of mythological representations must be maintained with respect to both the *polytheistic* and the *historical* aspects of mythology. In other words, mythology deals with *real gods* from the very beginning of mankind's self awareness, and the succession of gods - who had God as their final ground and content - is a movement which *truly takes place* in consciousness (VI:198-200). The most bizarre and preposterous aspects in the history of the gods, as well as the solemn and very often cruel sacrifices offered to the gods by ancient man, become intelligible to us only when interpreted literally. No distinction can be established between *Doctrine* and *History*. The latter is not merely a cloak for the former. "Doctrine is not external to history, but history itself is doctrine; and inversely, the doctrinal aspect of mythology is contained precisely in the historical aspect" (VI:200).

Subjectively considered - i.e., viewed from the point of view of its formation - mythology is a real theogonic process. Since the original relation between consciousness and God is a natural and essential one, "consciousness cannot disengage itself therefrom without being led back into it *by means of a process*." In returning, however, it "cannot avoid giving the impression that it is *positing* God anew, but this time in a *mediate* way, i.e., through a process; in other words, it cannot help appearing as the consciousness which gives birth to God, hence as a theogonic consciousness."

Objectively considered, mythology is what it claims to be: "a *real theogony*, a real history of the gods. But since only those gods are real who have God as their ground, it follows that the final content of the

history of the gods is that of the generation, (the birth, the bringing forth) of *God*, a real becoming of *God*, in consciousness." *The gods* are related to *God* simply as individual moments are related to the whole which they are producing (VI:200).

C. The Objective and Universal Meaning of the Process⁴⁷

This whole introduction has been conducted from the *historical-critical* or *dialectical* point of view because of the intrinsic value of an exhaustive, impartial and accurate review of all possibilities. It has led Schelling to the conclusion - for which he takes personal credit - that the *subjectum agens* of mythology is to be sought in the human consciousness, and that "mythology in general arises by means of a theogonic process ... in which the human consciousness is seized and held fast by its own nature" (VI:206 cf. 221).

There can be no doubt that a very important step was taken towards the philosophical examination of mythology in general when we placed its origin in the inner life of primitive mankind, no longer considering poets or cosmogonic philosophers or adherents of some historically antecedent religious doctrine as creators of mythology, but recognising the human *consciousness* itself as the true seat, the real generative principle of mythological ideas (VI:201).

But it is time now to consider the *objective* meaning of this process, for even though the representations engendered in mankind by the theogonic process have a *subjective* necessity and truth for those who are seized and affected by them, it is possible that they are objectively false and arbitrary. Schelling notes that his explanation of mythology has gone back to a supra-historical process, and this brings to mind the "very ancient view" which traces paganism as well as all corruption in man back to a primeval Fall.

This deduction can sometimes assume a moralistic character, sometimes a pietistic or mystical one. But whatever be its form, it is a view which deserves recognition for the sake of its insight that mythology cannot be explained unless we recognise a *real displacement* of man from his original condition. In its simplest form (it holds) ... that man, who falls through original sin down into the sphere of attraction of nature, and who sinks ever deeper into it, ends up by

confounding the creature with the Creator, Who ceases to be one for man and becomes many (VI:207).

But Schelling is opposed to the arbitrary introduction of "things" into this explanation. Myth has no relation to the "things" of naive realism. It represents solely a reality, a potency of the *spirit*. "The process requires the intervention of no factor outside of consciousness and the principles which posit and constitute consciousness."

In the mythological process, man is not dealing with things at all, but with *powers that rise up in the depths of consciousness* - powers by which consciousness is moved. The theogonic process which gives birth to mythology is a *subjective* process for as much as it unfolds in *consciousness* and manifests itself in the formation of representations. But the causes and, therefore, also the objects of these representations, are the real theogonic powers *as such*, the very powers under whose influence consciousness is originally that-which-posit-God. It is not the mere *representations* of the potencies but the *potencies themselves* which form the content of the process. These potencies create consciousness and, since consciousness is the end of Nature, they create Nature. Therefore they are real powers. The mythological process has nothing to do with natural *objects* but (is accomplished under the action of) the pure creative potencies whose original product is consciousness itself (VI:209).

Thus Schelling, by holding that the mythological process presupposes a *real* Fall, an *actual estrangement* from the divine Self (VI:214), occasioned by the action of *real theogonic powers*, breaks through into "objectivity." All arbitrary and "subjective" explanations - religious as well as nonreligious - are now set aside and the objective religious explanation of mythology exalted as "the one which alone is finally triumphant."

The mythological process which results from the action of the theogonic powers has a meaning which is not merely religious but *objectively religious*, for it is the action of powers-which-posit-God which is operative in the mythological process ...

In this process the powers appear as a succession only in order to produce and reestablish the (lost) unity. Thus the *meaning of the process*

lies not in a divergence but in a convergence of the moments which posit the unity, and the process itself is not one of separation but of reunification. What gives rise to this process is, in all probability, a power which takes exclusive possession of consciousness without the latter being aware of it ... But this very potency which destroys the true unity, is transformed, stripped of its exclusiveness and overcome by the process in which it now posits the unity, not this time as something merely implicit but as something quite *real* or, as I am in the habit of saying, *cum ictu et actu*. Hence the monotheism thus posited is *real* and *formed*, a monotheism which is *understood* and *objective* for consciousness (VI:210, 211).

The mythological process as such, polytheism considered in the totality of its successive moments, is the way to *truth* and hence is truth itself, says Schelling. Where, then, if anywhere, is *falsity* in mythology? Schelling speaks of falsity in two senses. In the first place there is the *falsehood which is prior to the process*, producing the tension that sets the process in motion. In the second place, there is the falsity of the various elements or moments of the process - i.e., the individual theodicies - *when, and only when, these exist* or are regarded as existing *in isolation or abstraction from the total process*. "In the process as such (and this is what matters) there is nothing of falsity, there is only *truth*. The truth is certainly not in the individual moments; if it were there would be no process. The truth is born in the theogonic process and is embodied in it. It is the end of the process and is therefore contained completely only in the process *as a whole*." From this it follows that the last mythology, which unites all the moments, is the true religion, but *only to the extent that the truth is attainable by way of this theogonic process which "always has for its presupposition the estrangement from the divine self."* "Successive polytheism is simply the way in which the true unity is reproduced." But what this last mythological consciousness reconstructs is only the *image* of the true God. It does not involve a relationship with the true God, the divine Self, the approach to whom was first opened up by Christianity. Hence "the monotheism to which the mythological process leads is not false, but it is exoteric as compared with the true or esoteric" (VI:211-214).

The following passages variously express this central thesis of Schelling's work:

One can admit that the detail in mythology is false, but this does not

imply the falsity of the whole considered in its final meaning - it does not imply the falsity of the total process ... The multiplicity of the gods as such is merely an *accidental* fact which is cancelled out in the whole; it is not the intention, not the final purpose of the process (VI:212).

One could compare the moments of which mythology is composed with individual propositions in philosophy. Each proposition of a true system is true in its place and in its time, that is to say, when it is conceived as belonging to an onward movement, and each proposition is false when it is considered in isolation, detached from the unceasing progression.

In like manner, there is inevitably a point where one is *obliged* to say: God is the immediate principle of Nature, for can something exist which would not be God, or from which God would be excluded? To the obtuse, this is already pantheism, for they understand the phrase 'God is *all*' to mean 'God is all *things*'. But above things are the pure causes from which those things are derived; and God, because he is *all*, is the opposite of that immediate principle. The proposition therefore is true or false according to the angle from which it is viewed. It is *true* when it means that God is the principle of Nature - not, however, in order to remain such, but in order to cancel and negate himself as this principle and to posit himself as spirit (notice that here we already have three moments). It would be *false* if it meant that God is that principle in a particular, static or exclusive way (VI:212f).

We have to consider the mythologies of the various peoples as in fact only so many moments of a single and identical process which passes through and affects the whole of mankind. Thus, every polytheistic religion which has become fixed within a particular people and remains among them as something static is, as such, a false religion since it now stands alone as an isolated moment. But we do not just view mythology in its separate moments. We consider it as a whole. We view all the mythological moments as indissolubly bound together in a state of perpetual movement. So long as humanity and each of its parts are immersed in the mythological movement, so long as they are, so to speak, borne up and carried along by this current, they are on the way toward truth. It is only when a people disengages itself from this movement and resigns the transmission of the process to another people, that the former begins to live in error and in false religion (VI:213).

Each of the polytheistic religions, taken separately, is false but in the same sense that each object of nature, when separated from the movement which sweeps all things along, or rejected from the process and left behind like a dead remnant, is without truth, i.e., without *the* truth which it possesses in the whole and as a moment of the whole. It is not only those heathen peoples whose existence has continued up until our own time (the Hindus, for example) who find themselves in a perfectly absurd relation to the objects of their superstitious worship. Even the ordinary Greek had fundamentally the same attitude with respect to his ancient religion which had become fixed and motionless. False religion, as such, is never anything but a dead and meaningless remnant of a process *which, in its totality, is truth* (VI:214).

Schelling can now offer the following outline-summary of the various interpretations of mythology examined in his Introduction "as these appear to one who takes objective truth as his chief point of view":

A. There is *no* truth anywhere in mythology

- Either (i) it has a *purely* poetic significance and any truth found in it is merely accidental
 or (ii) it is composed of meaningless representations which ignorance has produced and which poetic art has later elaborated and combined into a poetic whole (J. H. Voss).

B. There is truth in mythology, but not in mythology *as such*.

The mythological is:

- Either (i) the cloak, the external envelope which disguises
 (a) a historical truth (Euhemerus)
 (b) a physical phenomenon (Heyne)
 or (ii) (the effect of) a misunderstanding, a distortion
 (a) of a purely scientific truth (essentially irreligious) (G. Hermann)
 (b) of a religious truth (W. Jones, Fr. Creuzer).

C. There is truth in mythology *as such* (VI:216).

Initially, and in a special way, the truth in mythology is a *religious* truth. For those caught up in the process this is the only meaning it can have. But along with this particular meaning, mythology has a *general* significance, for it is "inconceivable that the principles of a process which is established as theogonic could be other than the principles of *all* being and *all* becoming" (VI:218). The truth of mythology is a universal truth - including historical and physical truth - because "the general process repeats itself in this mythological process." The powers which create and "inaugurate" consciousness and actuate the mythological process are the same powers which create and posit Nature.

Human consciousness, no less than Nature, is a product of Becoming. It is not something outside of the creation but *the End* of it. The potencies, therefore, must work together toward it as toward a goal ... Thus, the powers which rise up again in consciousness ... and reveal themselves as theogonic powers, can be none other than those which produced the world. It is precisely by rising again that they cease to be subjective and submissive to consciousness as to their unity, and become again objective, assuming anew, with respect to consciousness, the character of external *cosmic* powers which, in their *unity* (i.e., when they posited consciousness) they had lost.

The mythological process can be only the reconstitution of the vanished unity. But this unity can be *reestablished* in a way no different from that in which it was originally *posited*. In other words, the potencies must pass through all the states and relationships to one another that they had in the natural process. We do not mean that mythology was born under the influence of nature, from which the inner life of man is rather excluded because of this process, but that the mythological process unfolds *according to the same laws* and passes through the same stages as those through which Nature originally passed.

Between consciousness in its simple essentiality and consciousness in its realization, between the unity which is posited in it in a purely essential way and the unity which is effectively realized in it - this unity being the goal of the theogonic movement - there, between the

two, is the world. The moments of the theogonic movement, therefore, do not have meaning exclusively for the theogonic process; they are of general significance (VI:217f).

D. The True Philosophy of Mythology

In the light of the above conclusions, the true science of mythology will be that which represents the absolute process in the mythological process. But it is *philosophy* which has as its object the absolute or general process. It follows that "the true science of mythology is the philosophy of mythology" (VI:219) and this is the same as saying that the other ways of dealing with mythology do not recognize the *truth* in it. Schelling stresses the point that the idea of process is "not to be studied in some fabricated mythology but in actual mythology." It is not merely a matter of tracing some general outline; instead, "everything depends on recognizing the moments under the chance form which they have inevitably assumed in reality." "Its objective birth, independent of human opinion, thought and volition, confers on mythology an equally objective content and truth" (VI:220). To justify this conclusion, to establish mythology as a *general* phenomenon and to throw light on the precise nature of its *causes*, was a *philosophical* task. A simple enumeration of interpretations was not enough.

We had to attain the *true* by means of the successive negation of the relatively true (which, by the way, is at the same time the relatively false) interpretation. Our interpretation became for us the Philosophy of Mythology only when no other premise was any longer possible except the assumption of a necessary and eternal condition of human nature - a condition which, in its development and clarification, is transformed into a *law* ... The other views cannot have failed to grasp some aspect of the subject, however, and ... must be given some place in the finished theory (VI:221).

Now philosophy, according to Schelling, deals with the *essence* not the existence of things. It searches for the *animating principle* (*lebendigen Keim*), the true and proper *nature* of things (VI:222). Hence Philosophy has nothing to do with four classes of objects: (a) those which possess no essential reality but exist only in the arbitrary opinion of men, (b) those which are corrupt and distorted, (c) the unbounded and incomplete, and (d) the dead, motionless and stagnant (VI:224f). But Mythology does not fall into any of these classes. Schelling has

discovered that (a) mythology is a natural and necessary product, beyond all arbitrariness and invention; (b) it is not a product of a process of destruction but is the original product of that consciousness which strives to restore and reestablish itself; (c) it is a true totality, a self-contained world in itself (as Nature is), enclosed within definite limits, possessed of a definite beginning, passing through definite intermediate phases and completing itself by arriving at a definite end (VI:224);⁴⁸ (d) it is essentially mobile, its movement being "a self-movement realized by virtue of its own immanent law. It is the *highest* human consciousness which lives in it; and by overcoming the contradictions in which it gets involved, mythology demonstrates that it is *real*, true and necessary" (VI:224).

The expression "Philosophy of Mythology" is thus entirely appropriate and just as intelligible as "Philosophy of Language", "Philosophy of Nature", etc. (VI:225).⁴⁹ It is moreover, both demanded and justified "by the tendencies of the age", and represents the consummation of previous endeavors (VI:229).⁵⁰ It becomes possible, however, only if mythology is successfully traced back to presuppositions of a general character and derived therefrom as a necessary consequence. This will be the task of Schelling's Philosophical Introduction. Finally, once a Philosophy of Mythology exists it cannot fail to broaden and stimulate other sciences. In fact, Schelling's final lecture considers the influence of the results already attained on the Philosophies of History, Art and Religion.

E. The Relation of the Philosophy of Mythology to the Philosophies of (i) History, (ii) Art and (iii) Religion. On the Distinction between Revealed and Philosophical Religions.

(i) History

The Philosophy of Mythology, since it has demonstrated the existence of a theogonic process in the consciousness of primitive man, will influence the *Philosophy of History* (VI:230-238).

As we have seen, Schelling believes there can be no *philosophical* knowledge of what is indeterminate and unbounded. Hence he is critical of what passes for Philosophy of History in his day, since it makes the assumption that history's past, like its future, goes "on into infinity" just as it is. "Belief in limitless and therefore meaningless

progress is one of the articles of faith of contemporary wisdom" (VI:232). Furthermore, Schelling charges, "current notions" do not *really* distinguish historic and prehistoric periods, for they hold merely that events of the former period are *known* while those of the latter are *unknown* - a purely accidental feature. Or again, they claim the events of history are significant while those of prehistory are insignificant, representing the forgotten infancy of the race - a view which fails to recognize the "decisive and determinative importance for human destiny" of that formative, prehistoric age. (VI:233f).

Hence Schelling concludes that historians of his time are a long way from possessing a true philosophy of history. "By regarding time as an unlimited process, doors are opened to all kinds of arbitrariness." "Reason cannot orient itself in such an uncompleted and non-delimited region." "We do not know the most important thing, the beginning" (VI:234). But Schelling claims his present studies have given to the past limits and a form. "History is now divided into contrasting periods which are *really and inwardly different from one another*." Prehistory is the time of crisis, of transition.

Mythology's *becoming*, i.e., its *own* historic existence, filled the prehistoric period. A reversed Euhemerism is the correct view. Contrary to what Euhemerus taught, mythology does not contain the events of the most ancient history. It is the other way around ... Prehistory was filled with those inner processes and movements of consciousness which resulted in the formation of the mythological systems, the theodicies of the peoples and finally the separation of mankind into peoples.

Accordingly, the *historic* period and the *prehistoric* period are *no longer merely relatively distinct aspects of one and the same period*; they are *two essentially different periods*, mutually exclusive and therefore mutually delimiting. (During the former) the consciousness of mankind was subject to an inner necessity, a process which removed mankind, so to speak, from the external, real world; but as peoples, through an inner decision and as a result of the same crisis, ... freed themselves from the process *as such* ... they engaged in those external, worldly and profane exploits which provide the content of the historical period ... Mythology in general presents itself, in the historical period, as something already complete and available (VI:235f).

But this prehistorical period, this time of transition, is only relatively prehistoric (for it contained a series of real events), and is itself delimited by a third period of perfect historical immobility in which man is still one and undivided. This "absolutely prehistoric period" acts simply as a moment, a pure starting point, itself requiring no limit since it contains no true succession of events.

Then too, of course, the sun rose and set, men went to sleep and woke up, made love, were born and died. What we mean is that it contained no advance and therefore no history, just as an individual has no history if all the yesterdays and today's of his life are the same. Everything was in the end what it was in the beginning, hence it was a pure and simple identity, a *non-temporal* time whose duration is a matter of complete indifference ... It forms the limit not simply of a time but of *time in general*. It is where one finishes up in tracing back the course of time. To move beyond it is to step back into the *supra-historical*. It is a kind of eternity (cf. *Olam* in Genesis) (VI:236f).

We are thus presented with a *system of times* related to the four stages in man's religious development (*supra*). By making use of the distinction between *Geschichte* (the actual succession of events) and *Historie* (our knowledge of them), Schelling states this system as follows (VI:236-238):

- (a. the supra-historical
- (b. the absolutely pre-historical or pre-*geschichtliche* period
(the period of "natural theism")
- (c. the relatively pre-historical or pre-*historische* period,
(the period of relative monotheism)
- (d. the historical (*historische*) period,
(the period of the polytheisms and of revelation)

Hence, the history of our species, according to Schelling, does not take place in a disorderly, inorganic, unbounded time, but is enclosed in an organism, a system of times, every member of which is an independent time, limited by and "dethroning" (so to speak) its predecessor. Thus, when History is understood in the widest sense, the Philosophy of Mythology is seen as the first necessary part of the Philosophy of History.

(ii) Art

Secondly, the Philosophy of Mythology bears a fundamental relationship to the Philosophy of Art (VI:239-245). In fact,

whatever be our reasons for pressing back into the earliest period of our race, whether to inquire into its beginnings in general or into the first beginnings of religion and civil society, or of the sciences and arts, we always come up against that dark space, that *Χρονος αδηλος*, which is occupied only by mythology (VI:239).

Now there are those who claim that "all of man's science, art and culture started out from the most wretched beginnings." Heerens, for example, sees a continuity, a progression, from the cave-markings done by the Hottentots to the richly ornamented underground temples of Ellora and Mavalpuram in India. "Art", he says, "must have made this ascent." But such a suggestion is, for Schelling, incredible. We might as easily wait, he says, for something to be born from nothing! The principle of the continuous progress of the human race, almost sacred to so many, ought to be called in question. "Where there is progress there is also a starting point, a *whence* and a *whither*" but, contrary to what is generally assumed, this progress is not from the small to the great but in just the reverse direction!

It is always the great, the gigantesque which constitutes the beginning; the organically composed, the confined and limited, always come later. Homer has a greatness such that no later period was able to produce any one like him ... What distinguishes the various epochs is not that they contain more or less of so-called culture... Rather are they separated because of inward differences which are based on, and due to, essentially or qualitatively different principles which succeed one another; and each of them can achieve, in its own period, its highest expression (VI:241).

When we consider the "ingenious and sometimes astonishing and prodigious architectural realizations" of the ancient Babylonians, Phoenicians and Egyptians, the only source of inspirations sufficient to account for them is the mythological process in which positive, real powers were operative.

Works like the Hindu and Egyptian monuments do not arise as a

result of the mere passage of time, as stalactites grow in caves. The same power which manifested itself inwardly by creating the representations of mythology ... manifested itself outwardly and turned into *art* those bold undertakings whose proportions exceed anything realized in the later period.

The force which, in the mythological representations, carried the human consciousness beyond the limits of reality, was also the first mistress to teach man what is great and meaningful in art. It ... raised mankind, as if by a divine hand, and inspired even in the later creations of antiquity a greatness which remains unequalled ... (VI:241).

Art is always art and, as such, is originally and by nature, profane and pagan ... Christian art should try to express not what is particular to Christianity but what is universal in it, i.e., the elements in terms of which it is related to paganism. It is good ... when art chooses, from among the subjects presented by revelation, those which transcend what is narrowly Christian: events like the confusion of tongues, the birth of peoples, the destruction of Jerusalem and others whose great and universal associations have been brought out not only by the artist (VI:242f).

The Philosophy of Mythology thus forms an indispensable foundation for the Philosophy of Art, because mythology alone provides that original poetry, that raw material, that original source of ideas prior to all conscious and formal, poetic and plastic, artistic creation.⁵¹ Schelling felt that the poetry of his own time was especially arbitrary because it was lacking in poetic *subjects*. By contrast, Greek art was extraordinarily favored by the character and quality of its subjects, especially those furnished by Greek mythology. "Art has always felt the necessity for real beings which would at the same time *be* (not merely signify) *principles, general and eternal concepts*. And philosophy's task is to demonstrate the possibility of such" (VI:244).

We must always bear in mind, however, that antiquity is a particular kind of *world*, with its own proper principle.

A psychology based on present conditions is ... not qualified to explain appearances and events of the distant past (*Vorzeit*) any more than mechanical laws, valuable for a nature that has become stable and

fixed, are qualified to explain the period of original becoming and the first emergence of life (VI:245).

(iii) Religion

Thirdly, this fact of a "theogonic process in which mankind is implicated from the moment of the first awakening of real consciousness" is important for the history of religion and will therefore have a powerful influence on the *Philosophy of Religion* (VI:245-254).

Germans had worked hard at Philosophy of Religion, but in Schelling's view this science was still uncertain of itself, partly, perhaps, because it had always remained in too great dependence on the evolution of general philosophy. Instead of acquiring an independent content and making its own unique contribution, it had merely reproduced the movements of the latter. Hermann, for example, left no place for Philosophy of Religion as an independent science. Although he distinguished two kinds of religion, revealed and natural, he first followed tradition in setting revelation over against natural reason, and then identified Natural Religion with Philosophical Religion, absorbing the latter as a mere chapter in general Philosophy (VI:246).

Now Schelling has opened up a new possibility. He distinguishes *three* kinds of religion: natural, revealed and philosophical. Natural Religion is no longer another name for rational or philosophical religion, but now stands for Mythological Religion, the religion which arises blindly or naturally. Since mythology arose out of a real relationship between the human essence and God, since it reproduces itself naturally and is independent of and prior to all reason, philosophy and revelation, it alone is "natural" to mankind, and appears first (VI:247).

Historically, Revealed Religion appears second, entailed, caused and mediated by Natural (mythological) Religion. Like the latter, Revelation is independent of reason, for it is mediated *to* man and implies a will, an intention. Christianity puts itself forward as a religion which brings deliverance from the blind power of paganism, but of course, to overcome paganism, Christianity had to be a real process, an actual event, not a mere doctrine. "The mythological process can be opposed only by an Act, and this act will be the content of Christianity" (VI:249). "The formal significance of revelation is to be that which overcomes Natural, unfree Religion." The latter, moreover,

is the material precondition of the former, providing the material in terms of which revelation works itself out. Revelation has Paganism in itself in the way that "that which sublimates possesses in itself what is sublimated." Even in the most orthodox circles, observes Schelling, it was once permissible to see in Paganism distortions of revealed truths; but today we should be allowed to see in Christianity a Paganism that has been straightened out and set right (VI:250)! Between the two kinds of religion, there is an inward affinity, and the thrusting out of all pagan elements would remove all reality from Christianity.

The affinity between mythology and revelation is revealed in their common external fate, i.e., attempts have been made to rationalize both by making, in each case, the same distinction between form and content, between what is essential and what is merely the time conditioned guise in which they appear; in other words, to reduce them to a rational sense, or at least to a meaning that appeared rational ... Christianity, of course, is the relation to the Father and the worship of the Father in spirit and in truth. In this relation every pagan element, i.e., everything which is not in relation to God *in his truth*, disappears. But this result would itself have no empirical truth without its (pagan) presuppositions. He who sees Me, sees the Father, said Christ. But he added: 'I am the *Way*' and 'No one *comes* to the Father but through Me' (VI:251).

Natural and Revealed religions are both *real*; hence, for Schelling, it is axiomatic that there can be *no real difference* between them in terms of their final content.

Both must contain the same elements, and all that will vary will be the meaning of these elements from one religion to the other. Since the distinction between these two religions consists simply in the fact that one is natural and the other divinely posited, it follows, that the *same* principles which in the former are merely natural, take on in the latter the significance of divine principles.

Without pre-existence, Christ is not Christ. He existed as natural potency before he appeared as divine personality. ... These very potencies in whose unity God exists and reveals himself are, in their disjunction and in the process, extra-divine powers, i.e., merely natural powers in whom God is not totally absent, and yet he is not

present in his divinity, i.e., according to his truth, for in his divine Ipseity, God is One; He cannot be several or enter into a process (VI:251).

It was Christ who opened a way for both Jew and Pagan to worship the Father in spirit and in truth. Even in Revelation (the Old Testament) there was something which kept men from true spiritual worship. Hence Christ's appearance is the *End* of Revelation "precisely because he took away that which caused the alienation from God" (VI:251f).

The third religion, in this historical succession, is Philosophical Religion. It too is *real* religion (and we are reminded again that "between real religions there can be no difference either essentially or in terms of content"). It has in itself those factors of real religion which are present in Natural and Revealed Religion, but it contains them *in a different way*.

The difference boils down to the fact that the same principles which operate implicitly and without being understood in both revealed and natural religion, are consciously grasped and understood in philosophical religion. Hence, philosophical religion, far from being entitled by its position to suppress the religions which precede it, has the task (by virtue of the place it occupies) and the means (by virtue of its content) to comprehend those religions which are independent of reason and to understand the whole truth and characteristic significance of each (VI:252).

F. Transition to the Philosophical Introduction

Now such a Philosophical Religion would lead us directly to a philosophy of mythology. It would "make intelligible (i.e., demonstrate as possible) what we have discovered and recognized in mythology and also, indirectly, in revelation, namely, a *real* relation between the human consciousness and God." This Philosophical Religion can be "only the final product and highest expression of completed philosophy," but such a *philosophical religion does not exist*. No existing philosophy of phenomena is equal to the task of adequately interpreting mythology. Hence mythology cannot allow itself to be reduced to the measure of any existing philosophy. "Quite the reverse! It is our view of mythology - one which is factually grounded, and one which will inevitably influence particular

philosophical sciences, as we have shown - it is this view which must assume the right and the power to broaden *philosophy* and the *philosophical consciousness itself*, or at least prevail upon them to transcend their present limits" (VI:254).

Thus, his exhaustive historical critique, presupposing no philosophical orientation, brings Schelling at last to the point where his view of mythology remains as "the only possible one." Now the theogonic process is to become "the sole object of the *science* to which the preceding lectures have served simply as introduction" (VI:206). He must understand it from a philosophical standpoint: How is the mythological (theogonic) process both possible and necessary?

