

The Second Book

**Schelling's Philosophical Introduction
to the Philosophy of Mythology**
(Negative or Purely Rational Philosophy)

Translated and Reduced

Being Volume V, Pages 437-754
of the *Münchener Jubiläumsdruck of Schellings Werke*
Edited by Manfred Schröter (1959)

"the latest and most authoritative exposition of Schelling's 'Negative Philosophy' "

- Nuovo (1974a:178 n.xxviii)

After working with Schelling for a while one feels a certain disappointment. Nevertheless, Schelling remains great among the great.

- Knittermeyer, in O'Meara (1977:300)

Introduction

The results of the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* have presented Schelling with a whole new task. Is it possible to effect a rational understanding of Mythological and Revealed Religion? An understanding which takes with complete seriousness the objectively theological character of Religion?

It will be recalled that at the conclusion of the First Book three modes of religion were discriminated. Mythology or Paganism was viewed as blind, unfree, unspiritual religion, the product of a necessary theogonic process, logically prior to Revelation and a preparation for the latter. Revealed Religion, on the other hand, was understood as freely imparted knowledge of God. Strictly speaking it is represented by Christianity alone which makes explicit what was the hidden, inner truth of Mythology. The third form of religion was what Schelling called Philosophical Religion, and this represented the still higher standpoint of Reason seeking an understanding of both Mythological and Revealed religion.

It is of first importance to understand what Schelling means by "Philosophical Religion." He is by no means referring to a rationalist interpretation of religion from outside. The conclusion of the First Book makes abundantly clear that Schelling has in mind the activity of the religious consciousness itself as it seeks to understand itself from

within. Thus, his Philosophical Religion may be called "Philosophy of Religion" but only if this does not obscure the fact that Schelling's Philosophical Religion is for him *both* Philosophy *and* Religion! It is faith seeking understanding, as Fr. Copleston has noted (1963:141). But an understanding sought from within does not annul what is understood. In Schelling's view, Philosophical Religion is *real religion* and *true philosophy*, and we repeat his words:

... 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).

Such a Philosophical Religion *does not yet exist*, declares Schelling, but the way to it is opened up by Christianity. Mythology and Revelation arose in the first place and independently of reason and philosophy. But just as Christianity presupposes Mythology, so Philosophical Religion presupposes Christianity and cannot exist without it. It arises within Christianity alone.

Revelation ... by its inner victory over unspiritual religion, frees consciousness from its power and opens the way to *free* religion, religion of the spirit. And since it is the nature of this free religion to be sought and found only in freedom, it can realize itself completely only as Philosophical Religion. Hence Philosophical Religion is *historically mediated* by Revealed Religion (V:437).

We should note also the word "mediated." Schelling stresses that "the free religion is only *mediated* through Christianity; it is not immediately *posited* by it" (V:440). In contrast with the simple acceptance of the original Christian revelation on authority, Philosophical Religion regards that revelation, and the facts of Christian life and belief, as subject-matter for free reflective understanding. It is faith, not as blind acceptance but as intellectual understanding and free affirmation. It is "Positive" philosophy.

As far as the title "Positive Philosophy" is concerned, Kuno Fischer

(1923:795) has correctly noted the flexibility with which Schelling uses it. In the narrowest sense, it is the Philosophy of Christianity. In a second and wider sense it is Second Philosophy which is grounded in and incorporates First or Negative Philosophy. In the third and widest sense, it is Philosophy of Religion and thus embraces the whole Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation - the attempt to *set forth* the whole historical development of the religious consciousness in the history of mythology and revelation and *understand* it as God's progressive self-revelation and redemptive activity. In this sense Schelling can identify Positive Philosophy with Philosophical Religion or Historical Philosophy,¹ for it now comprehends both his Philosophy of Religion and his Philosophy of History.

Now Philosophical Religion (or Philosophy of Religion) in the restricted sense of Philosophy of Christianity (or Philosophy of Revelation - i.e., "Positive Philosophy" in its narrowest meaning) shall be presented in The Seventh Book of this exposition. In this Second Book, we are concerned with the negative aspect of Philosophical Religion - with Philosophical Religion *as philosophy*, so to speak. We take up the *Philosophical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (V:437-754) whose task is to begin with the result of the *Historical-Critical Introduction* - viz., mythology as a theogonic process grounded in a necessary succession of potencies - and to show *how* this process is both possible and necessary. Schelling regards this as a "negative" task.

By *Negative Philosophy* Schelling means philosophy confined to the world of concepts and essences, thus contrasting with "positive" philosophy which stresses facts and existence. Of course, our philosopher does not agree with those who think the former is a waste of time. No system can be constructed without concepts. "Even if the positive philosopher places the emphasis on existence, he obviously does not and cannot disdain all consideration of what exists (Copleston, 1963:136 cf. V:588f). We must "assert the connection, yes, the unity" between positive and negative philosophy (V:746).²

The fourteen lectures of the *Philosophical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* were written between 1847 and 1852 and represent Schelling's last philosophical work. As the lectures now stand, they are very poorly organized and extremely repetitive. It is only fair, however, to point out that Schelling was about to revise his notes when he fell ill during the winter of 1853-54. (He died in August of 1854). The important Lecture 24, for example, was pieced together

by Schelling's son from individual hand-written pages and suggestions left behind by his father.³

The volume contains historical and speculative material, and we offer our exposition under these two heads. We begin with Schelling's survey of Reason's liberation from the authorities represented by paganism, paganized Christianity, medieval metaphysics and authoritative revelation, and his tracing of the emerging autonomy of reason in modern philosophy from Bacon and Descartes through Kant. We then present Schelling's account of speculative metaphysics in which an autonomous reason seeks - through a form of Induction or rational Dialectic - to find the structure of (noetic) reality and its first or ultimate principle.

This whole discussion, of course, is in the realm of the hypothetical. From the supreme essence one can deduce nothing but other essences; from the Absolute Idea nothing but other ideas. Schelling is entirely explicit about this. From a *What* one cannot deduce a *That*. The negative philosophy cannot explain the existent world. Its deduction of the world is not a deduction of existents but only of what things must be *if* they exist. Of being which is outside God, the negative philosopher can only say, "if it exists, it can exist only in this way and only as such and such" (V:558, cf. VI:744, cf. Copleston, 1963:135). It follows that we may view this whole Second Book as climaxing in a critique of rationalism (especially of Hegelianism, but also of Schelling's own earlier philosophy), since rationalism, for the later Schelling, completely by-passes the existential order. But we must *also* recognise the *necessity* for rational or negative philosophy as part of that "whole" which for Schelling is Philosophical Religion.