

# Three Scandals in the Philosophy of F. W. J. Schelling Ontology, Freedom, Mythology

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the philosophy of F. W. J. Schelling as a precursor to a theory of ontological *anarchē*. Contesting Mikhail Bakunin's dismissal of Schelling early in *God and the State* as an "idealist," as well as the later Schelling's reputation as a conservative and stooge for the Prussian government, I propose a different reading of the historical and ideological context which shapes Schelling's arrival in Berlin. Where standard-issue histories of philosophy often frame the Berlin period as a *gigantomachia* between the "conservative" Schelling and the "radical" Hegel, this narrative neglects Schelling's prior reputation as an anti- or non-establishment thinker. I then go on to examine three "scandals" proper to Schelling's philosophy, including his conception of philosophy and of nature as "unconditioned," his attempt to think a "system of freedom," and his subsequent deconstruction of origins in the *Ages of the World*. I argue that Schelling's turn to sciences such as geology to help explain cosmic origins in the *Ages* represents an initial effort at what Quentin Meillassoux (2008) calls "ancestral" thinking, that is, the task of thinking a world prior to *archē*. Finally, I focus on Schelling's transition from negative to positive philosophy in his philosophy of mythology, and how it forms a critical response to the Hegelian "philosophy of essence."

## KEYWORDS

Friedrich Schelling, anarchism, ontological anarche, German Idealism, Quentin Meillassoux, Speculative Realism, Mikhail Bakunin, G. W. F. Hegel

This essay finds its starting point in two rather singular, but suggestively connected, remarks. The first refers to the future direc-

tion of anarchist theory in Jesse Cohn and Shawn Wilbur's 2010 paper, "What's Wrong with Postanarchism?" Under their fourth point of contention, Cohn and Wilbur argue that post-structuralist criticisms of "classical" anarchism tend to situate the latter within the reductive categories of "humanism," "rationalism," and "Enlightenment." This in turn creates an artificially monolithic conception of both the history of such terms and of anarchism itself, "as if there was no significant developments in ideas about subjectivity, truth, or rationality" after Descartes (Cohn and Wilbur, 2010: 5). One of the many suggestive possibilities Cohn and Wilbur proceed to excavate from the lacunae within the post-anarchist project is a suggestion to take up what "[Mikhail] Bakunin might have learned from Schelling's call for a 'philosophy of existence' in opposition to Hegel's 'philosophy of essence'" (Cohn and Wilbur, 2010: 5). The second remark also appears in a much earlier essay by Jürgen Habermas (1983, 2004). Explicating the consequences of Schelling's thought for a materialist philosophy of history, Habermas writes that although Schelling is "not a political thinker," his writings nonetheless contain "barely concealed anarchistic consequences" (Habermas, 2004: 43, 46).

This essay takes up Cohn and Wilbur's and Habermas' remarks so as to disclose the "anarchistic consequences" within Schelling's "philosophy of existence," which, I argue, must be read as a theory of ontological *anarchē*. This *anarchē* begins to emerge as early as Schelling's 1799 *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* and continues to shape Schelling's philosophy throughout the rest of his career, from the 1809 *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* and the unfinished drafts of the *Ages of the World* (1811, 1813, 1815) to the Berlin lectures on the philosophy of mythology and revelation that Bakunin attended in the 1840s. Though standard histories commonly acknowledge Schelling's influence on Bakunin, the former's potential contributions to the history of anarchism have been almost entirely overlooked, not least because of Bakunin's own dismissal of Schelling in *God and the State* (1871, 1882). In that text, Bakunin labels Schelling an idealist who, along with Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, fails to acknowledge that "*facts are before ideas*" and, as such, cannot properly explain the emergence of the living existence of matter from the perfection of the divine Idea (Bakunin, 2009: 9). On the one hand, by lumping Schelling together with such thinkers under the catch-all of an "idealism" that is simply, as he says,

“wrong,” Bakunin ironically anticipates what Cohn and Wilbur later criticize as post-anarchism’s reductive approach to the history of ideas. On the other hand, Bakunin’s criticisms of idealism are in fact already a prominent feature of Schelling’s middle- and late-period work, in which Schelling also criticizes his contemporaries’ reluctance to “acknowledge the priority of Realism” (Schelling, 2001: 107). In short, Bakunin’s criticism, which eventually turns towards a post-Hegelian vision of the real as rational, fails to acknowledge Schelling’s own explicitly stated transition from “negative” to “positive” philosophy, or as Karl Jaspers puts it, from “rational *a priori* science” to a “science of actuality”: “In negative philosophy we proceed to the ascent of the highest idea and we attain it only as an idea. Positive philosophy leaves us in actuality and proceeds from actuality” (Jaspers, 1986: 98).

At the same time, I want to suggest that Schelling’s significance for anarchist theory extends well beyond Bakunin’s (mis)readings of him. An anarchistic reading of Schelling today necessarily occurs in the context of a certain return to Schelling already undertaken by post-Marxist theorists such as Habermas and Slavoj Žižek (1996), as well as speculative realists such as Iain Hamilton Grant (2008). For such thinkers, Schelling serves as an important precursor for their own attempts to re-conceptualize what materialism and materiality mean today. In particular, this reconceptualization takes place through a rigorous return to German Romanticism’s still under-recognized contributions to a philosophical materialism that proceeds from a sense that Being is always *an-archically* non-identical with itself.

In what follows, I wish to pursue how Schelling’s philosophy represents a thoroughgoing attempt to think an ontological *an-archē*, an ontology that anticipates and responds very precisely to the desire to think beyond the opposition between idealism and realism. Before pursuing this argument, however, I first propose a different reading of the historical and ideological context which shapes Schelling’s arrival in Berlin. Where standard-issue histories’ of philosophy have framed Schelling’s Berlin period in terms of a *gigantomachia* between the “conservative” Schelling and the “radical” Hegel, this narrative is, at best, an oversimplification that short-changes Schelling’s own prior reputation as an anti- or non-establishment thinker. I then go on to discuss the salient features of Schelling’s philosophy of existence as a philosophy of ontological *anarchē*, including his conception of philosophy as a mode of “unconditioned” thought that contests the positivism of Enlightenment sciences, his paradoxical attempt to think a “sys-

tem of freedom” and his subsequent deconstruction of cosmic origins in the *Ages of the World*. In particular, I suggest that Schelling’s turn to such sciences as geology to help explain cosmic origins in the *Ages* represents an initial (though incomplete) effort at what speculative realist philosopher Quentin Meillassoux (2008) calls thinking “ancestrality,” that is, the task of thinking a world prior to thought, and therefore prior to the *archē* by which subjectivity establishes the world as its objective correlate. In turn, I contest Meillassoux’s dismissal of Schelling to suggest that the *Ages* agrees with certain aspects of speculative realism, although he also departs from it in other ways. Finally, I focus on Schelling’s transition from negative to positive philosophy in his philosophy of mythology, and how it forms a critical response to the Hegelian philosophy of essence.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXTS: SCHELLING IN BERLIN

In 1841, the recently appointed German Minister of Culture hired a 65-year-old Schelling to take up the Chair of Philosophy at the University of Berlin, a full decade after the death of Schelling’s former roommate at the Tübingen seminary, Hegel. Schelling’s arrival in Berlin has become something of an academic legend, much of which had to do with the makeup of Schelling’s audience rather than the actual content of his lectures. Indeed, the “imposing, colourful” group attending Schelling’s inaugural talks on the philosophy of mythology and revelation, so vividly recounted by Friedrich Engels in 1841, included a veritable who’s who of the nineteenth century’s most influential philosophical minds, including Engels himself, Soren Kierkegaard, Otto Ranke, Alexander von Humboldt, and of course, the young Bakunin (Engels, 1841). High expectations from both conservative and radical quarters of German intellectual and political society preceded Schelling’s arrival. According to the King’s Munich ambassador C. J. Bunsen, with whom Schelling negotiated a lucrative salary and the promise of freedom from the royal censors, Schelling was not merely a “common professor” but “a philosopher chosen by God” (cited in Matthews, 2007: 6). King Wilhelm IV himself perceived Schelling as a means to stamp out the “dragonseed of Hegelian pantheism” that had taken root within the student population (cited in Matthews, 2007: 6).

The King’s comment speaks to a broader crisis about the ultimate status of religious faith in German culture, a crisis that had begun with Kant’s critical reduction of faith “within the limits of

reason alone,” continued with the ensuing controversy over Lessing’s pantheism and the growing threat of an atheistic “Spinozism” throughout the 1780s and 1790s, and finally climaxed in Hegel’s reduction of faith to logic. In the wake of Hegel’s critique of religion, the traditional segments of the German intelligensia perceived Schelling’s appointment as nothing less than an attempt to win back the hearts and minds of the nation’s youth, so long corrupted by what the King acidly called the “facile omniscience” of the Hegelian system (Matthews, 2007: 7).

Nonetheless, the enthusiasm of Bakunin and many of his like-minded peers was also palpable. In a letter to his family in the summer of 1841, Bakunin writes: “you cannot imagine with what impatience I have been awaiting for Schelling’s lectures. In the course of the summer I have read much of his works and found therein such immeasurable profundity of life and creative thinking that I am now convinced he will reveal to us a treasure of meaning” (cited in Matthews, 2007: 13). Similarly impatient, and just as eager to label Schelling a philosophical saviour, Kierkegaard disparaged the Hegelian reduction of life within the massive architectonic of a universal logic, while praising Schelling’s desire to reconnect “philosophy to actuality” (cited in Matthews, 2007: 13).

The rest of the story of Schelling’s Berlin period, however, is far less auspicious. The *denouement* typically goes like this: the treasure Bakunin so anticipated turned out to be far less than expected, or, perhaps, the treasure discovered was in a currency that was no longer valuable. As Jason Wirth remarks, “in an era when mythology was considered a science, and when science itself was becoming increasingly alienated from its philosophical grounds, the lectures were doomed to be virtually inaudible” (Wirth, 2007: viii), and few in the audience would heed Schelling’s own advice to his listeners that “whoever would seek to listen to me, listens to the end” (cited in Matthews, 2007: 5). Abandoning his earlier enthusiasm, Kierkegaard later privately writes that Schelling’s lectures were “endless nonsense,” while Engels’ hysterical *Anti-Schelling* (1841) book publicly attacked the philosopher for criticizing Hegel and called for the Young Hegelians “to shield the great man’s grave from abuse.” Bakunin would also leave Schelling behind and instead turn towards an intensive politicization of Hegelian negativity that would serve as the theoretical premise for his anarchism; after joining the Young Hegelians, Bakunin then published *The Reaction in Germany*, which ascribed a revolutionary status to the negative as a simultaneously

destructive and creative passion (cf. Dolgoff, 1971). This radical return to Hegel, carried furthest in the work of Engels and Marx, would subsequently help establish the philosophical foundations for both the communist and anarchist projects of the nineteenth century.

This story remains somewhat misleading, however, if only because it has been largely dominated by the sometimes extreme representations of Schelling proffered by both the Prussian establishment and the Young Hegelians. Given the King's stated intentions, the left undoubtedly had reason to be suspicious of Schelling for riding to the defence of the Christian orthodoxy that then dominated the upper reaches of the non-secular Prussian state. As Bruce Matthews points out, the Hegelian subordination of religion to logic actively threatened to destabilize the "very center of ideological power that held the state together" (Matthews, 2007: 10). Yet it would also seem that the Young Hegelians effectively swallowed the establishment narrative whole by branding Schelling, as Engels put it, "our new enemy" (Engels, 1841). In turn, the left generated an equally extreme view of Hegel to be defended with a fervour as unquestioning as the establishment's idea of the "god-appointed" Schelling.

This shared characterization of Schelling as a reactionary conservative tends to overlook pertinent historical evidence about Schelling's reputation and his actions towards the Young Hegelians themselves during his tenure in Berlin. On the one hand, Schelling had good reason to procure the King's assurance that his lectures would not be expurgated, since Schelling had already been the victim of censorship in 1838 for openly disobeying the Bavarian government's prohibition against professors lecturing on theological issues. But perhaps the most telling evidence against the characterization of Schelling as a Prussian stooge was his active role in convincing the government to lift censorship of the *Halleschen Jahrbucher*, the main philosophical journal of the Young Hegelians. As Matthews points out, such actions should prompt the question: "if Schelling was a vehicle for reactionary conservatives, why were his lectures such a problem for the conservative government in Munich?," for "even taking into consideration the very real differences between Catholic Bavaria and Protestant Prussia, a philosophy of revelation that could not be taught in a university would not appear to be a philosophy that a conservative theologian would look to for help in combating secular critiques of religion" (Matthews, 2007: 10–11). Moreover, why would Schelling use his influence to *ensure*, rather than lim-

it, the public dissemination of the Young Hegelians' ideas? And why is it the "conservative" Schelling who announces that the greatest task of philosophy in the modern age "is to shrink the state itself . . . in every form," rather than the "radical" Hegel, whose *Philosophy of Right* (1821) hailed the State as an embodiment of Spirit in the political (Schelling, 2007: 235)?

It is not the purpose of this essay to excavate all of the permutations of the historical and cultural debates surrounding Schelling's Berlin lectures; rather, what becomes apparent in our brief discussion of these debates is that both Schelling and Hegel are not simply the names of philosophers whose work can be understood in their own terms, but sites of contest and struggle, struggles which render the ensuing reification of the two thinkers into a simple opposition of conservative and radical deeply misleading. Also apparent is a sense that this narrative and the conceptual opposition that supports it mirrors what Cohn and Wilbur identify as post-anarchism's tendency to take certain notions for granted within their historical accounts of the movement:

terms taken for granted in much postanarchist critique—'science,' for example—were the explicit subject of complex struggles within anarchism and socialism broadly. To fail to look at this history of internal difference can also blind us to . . . other set[s] of forces at work in shaping anarchism and socialism as we have had them passed down to us. (Cohn and Wilbur, 2010: 4)

Schelling, I here suggest, is a hitherto understudied "subject of complex struggle" within the history of anarchism, one whose role cannot be easily assimilated within a historical logic that would categorize him as an "idealist" (as Bakunin does), and whose conservatism would then re-emerge as the subject of the post-anarchist critique of classical anarchism as a displaced form of essentialism. Instead, our point of departure with Schelling is, as Marc Angenot writes of Proudhon, not an "axiom" but "a sense of 'scandal'—a provocation into thought" (Angenot as cited in Cohn and Wilbur, 2010: 4). What, then, is the "scandal," the anarchic provocation, proper to Schelling's thought?

#### THINKING UNCONDITIONALLY AND THE SYSTEM OF FREEDOM

The scandal proper to Schelling's philosophy, I would argue, is threefold. The first comes in the form of Schelling's conception of

knowledge as “unconditioned,” which, I suggest, grants Schelling’s overall understanding of the task of philosophical thinking a certain political valence. The second, and more radical, provocation has to do with Schelling’s unprecedented attempt to think a system of freedom. The third provocation is what several commentators, such as Joseph P. Lawrence (2005) and Bernard Freydberg (2008), have identified as the untimeliness of Schelling’s philosophy, in particular Schelling’s turn to discourses such as mythology and religion that seem radically out of step with both enlightened, secular modernity, as well as the conventional dictates of anarchism itself (No Gods! No Masters!).

In his lectures *On University Studies* (1802), Schelling makes a distinction between “positive sciences” and “unconditioned” knowledge. For Schelling, the positive sciences are forms of knowledge that “attain to objectivity within the state” (Schelling, 1966: 78–80). Anticipating Hegel’s similar critique of “positive knowledge” as the fiction of something “quietly abiding within its own limits” and therefore unable “to recognize [its own] concepts as finite” (Hegel, 1975: para. 92, 10), Schelling argues that positive sciences take themselves to be systems of knowledge that have been completed or closed, and therefore impervious to change. Hence the sciences officially sanctioned by the state and “organized into so-called faculties” present themselves as completed systems of knowledge, where they in fact merely reflect the values currently sanctioned by the state.<sup>1</sup>

Conversely, in *On University Studies*, as well as in earlier texts such as the *First Outline of a System of a Philosophy of Nature* (1799), Schelling argues for what he calls the “unconditioned character of philosophical knowledge” (Schelling, 2005: 9). In its original German, the “unconditioned” is *das Unbedingt*, literally the “un-thinged,” and thus speaks to a radically non-positive / positivistic mode of thinking that resists the conditions under which knowledge is circumscribed:

The unconditioned cannot be sought in any individual ‘thing,’ nor in anything of which one can say that it ‘is.’ For what ‘is’ only partakes of being, and is only an indi-

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<sup>1</sup> Schelling’s criticism of knowledge “organized into so-called faculties” is a none-too-subtle reaction to Kant’s epistemology and Kant’s subsequent plea for the government to include philosophy within the German university as a “lower” faculty beneath the traditional or “higher” faculties of Law, Medicine, and Theology. See Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1992: 23).



vidual form of kind of being.—Conversely, one can never say of the unconditioned that it ‘is.’ For it is BEING IT-SELF, and as such, it does not exhibit itself entirely in any finite product. (Schelling, 2005: 13)

As *Unbedingt*, the unconditioned can therefore reveal itself only through “negations. No *positive* external intuition of [it] is possible” since it is that which marks what is always in excess of its positive determinations (Schelling, 2005: 19). Redeploying the Spinozist distinction between *naturans* and *naturata*, Schelling sees fixed or instituted forms of knowledge as the product of an originally infinite activity; as such, these products always maintain within themselves an excess that marks a “tendency to infinite development” through which they can be always be decomposed. Yet no decomposition is ever absolute; rather, Schelling characterizes the unconditioned as a Platonic *chora*, not “absolutely formless” but that which is “*receptive to every form*” and hence condition for both the decomposition of fixed forms of thought in order to release the potentiality of recomposing them otherwise (Schelling, 2005: 5–6, 27; Rajan, 2007: 314).

The *First Outline* interprets this process as a dynamic rather than mechanistic materialism that reconstructs Leibniz’s monads as products composed by an “infinite multiplicity of . . . tendencies”; hence monads, or whatever generally appears as monadic in the broad sense (unified, simple, whole, a “thing”) is only ever “*apparently simple*” since “no substance is simple” (Schelling, 2005: 19, 31). Contrary to the prevailing discourse of positivism and narrowed versions of materialism that began to arise in the 1840s, which dismissed Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* as a wild mysticism, recent critics such as Robert Richards (2002), Arran Gare (2011), and Iain Hamilton Grant have recognized that Schelling’s speculative physics is not only full of “citations of the most recent, up-to-date experimental work in the sciences” in his own time, but also pursues a vital materialism that anticipates more recent physics of complexity and self-organizing systems (Richards, 2002: 128; Grant, 2009: 11). Nonetheless, the overall purpose of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* was less to explain how nature itself functioned than “to allow natural science itself to arise philosophically” (Schelling, 1988: 5)—that is to say, to provide the philosophical or metaphysical framework through which the sciences are pushed beyond their own positivity.

In pursuing this line of thinking, however, Schelling also detects a crucial problem, what Schelling calls “the most universal

problem,” that will come to preoccupy both his essay on freedom and his book *Ages of the World*: how does the unconditioned or infinite activity submit itself to become determined or inhibited into finite products? The problem, for Schelling, is nothing less than the very problem of *archē*, of discerning the origin, cause, and principle of everything that is: “what cause first tossed the seed of motion into the universal repose of nature, duplicity into universal identity, the first sparks of heterogeneity into the universal homogeneity of nature?” (cited in Krell, 2004: 135). Yet Schelling also admits that his wording of the problem may be imprecise, since it becomes apparent that these initial “sparks of heterogeneity” could not simply be “tossed” into an archaic, pre-existing, self-identical absolute. Rather, Schelling comes to realize that in order to explain the relationship between the unconditioned and the conditioned, infinite activity and finite inhibition, freedom and nature, ideal and material, the latter term must be intrinsic, indeed, “co-absolute” with the former. “If nature is absolute activity,” Schelling avers, then “such activity must appear as inhibited into infinity” and thus “no homogenous state can be *absolute*” since “the homogenous is [always already] itself split *in itself*.” And this discovery leads Schelling to conceive of the absolute as *originally* split in itself, for “to *bring* heterogeneity *forth* means to create duplicity in identity. . . . Thus identity must in turn proceed from duplicity” (Schelling as cited in Krell, 2004: 139).

Nonetheless, the early Schelling, especially the Schelling of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), remains idealist in arguing that these purportedly opposed principles of function as complementary and thus arise from an unconscious identity, a “pre-established harmony” that is neither real nor ideal but their “common source” or *archē* (1978: 208). Positing the Absolute as the hidden *archē* behind exterior manifestations of the disjunction of subject and object, Schelling proposes a providential, teleological idea of history that closely approximates Bakunin’s view of history in the first chapter of *God and the State*. There, Bakunin argues that while “humanity [is] the highest manifestation of animality,” it is also “the deliberate and gradual negation of the animal element” (Bakunin, 2009: 9). This negation, Bakunin continues, is “as rational as it is natural, and rational only because natural—at once historical and logical, as inevitable as the development and realization of all the natural laws in the world” (Bakunin, 2009: 9). In his *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling deploys a similar conception of history as a “progressive . . . reve-

lation of the absolute” which manifests humanity’s “first step out of the realm of instinct” and culminates in a “universal constitution,” or, as Schelling puts it in *On University Studies*, a “world order based on law” (Schelling, 1978: 209, 199–202; Schelling, 1966: 79). As Schelling writes in his Stuttgart Lectures of 1810, this process effectively alchemizes the materiality of history so as to give birth to “an entirely healthy, ethical, pure, and innocent nature . . . freed from all false being,” a description that would appear to link Schelling and Bakunin both to the “uncontaminated point of departure” that Saul Newman criticizes in classical versions of anarchism (Schelling, 1994: 242; Newman, 2001: 32–52).

When Schelling writes his 1809 Freedom essay, however, he returns to the problem of an “original duplicity” at the heart of Being and so instigates what I am calling the second major scandal of his thought: the attempt to think a system of freedom. For if the prevailing opinion has always been that freedom and system are mutually exclusive, Schelling writes, “it is curious that, since individual freedom is surely connected in some way with the world as a whole . . . , some kind of system must be present” (Schelling, 2006: 9). This scandal could also be the theoretical scandal that resides at the very heart of ontological *anarchē* as such—that is to say, ontological *anarchē* is by definition traversed by the paradox of a system whose very principle is the freedom from all principle or system. What is distinctive of anarchism, as opposed to various other political systems that claim freedom as a principle, is precisely the attempt to think what Proudhon famously calls the “union of order and anarchy” as the “highest perfection in society” (Proudhon, 1995: 286). In so doing, Schelling will effectively challenge both the self-founding rationalism that runs through the entirety of the “new European philosophy since its beginning (in Descartes),” which perceives the Absolute as “a merely moral world order,” and the equally untenable view of “God as *actus purissimus*” (Schelling, 2007: 26). Indeed, from the outset, Schelling endorses the very realism that Bakunin later champions against the idealists. For Bakunin, idealism bears an unscientific hatred of matter. The “*vile matter* of the idealists,” Bakunin avers, “. . . is indeed a stupid, inanimate, immobile thing, . . . incapable of producing anything” and thus requires the external hand of God to set it in motion. Matter thought in this way is stripped of “intelligence, life, all its determining qualities, active relations or forces, motion itself . . . leaving it nothing but impenetrability and absolute immobility” (Bakunin, 2009: 12–13). Simi-

larly, Schelling argues against the tendency of modern philosophy to seek to

remove God quite far indeed from all of nature. God . . . has entirely different and more vital motive forces in himself than the desolate subtlety of abstract idealists attributes to him. . . . The entire new European philosophy . . . has the common defect that nature is not available for it and that it lacks a living ground. (Schelling, 2006: 26)

In the Freedom essay, Schelling turns to explicate this “living ground” as the very basis for understanding the nature of human freedom itself.

In order to think through the ontological co-existence of freedom and system, Schelling proposes a reinterpretation of a logic of identity that would be capable of bringing these two principles together without subordinating one to the other. According to Manfred Frank (1991), Schelling’s ontology is best understood as a theory of predication. The copula “is” that links a subject to its predicate in the identity judgement is conventionally understood as intransitive: static, fixed, or—to make use of a term Schelling often refers to—“dead” in its own self-sameness. Conversely, Schelling understands the copula as transitive, living, creative. The law that differentiates subject and predicate is expressed not as static, but “as what precedes and what follows,” “ground” and consequent (Schelling, 2006: 14). Hence the law of identity does not “express a unity which, turning itself in the circle of seamless sameness [*Einerleiheit*], would not be progressive and, thus, insensate or lifeless. The unity of this law is an immediately creative one” (Schelling, 2006: 17). The subject (Being) is the ground of its predicate (existence), and the predicate is the consequence of its ground. However, insofar as the identity of subject and predicate is transitive, Schelling argues that the predicate’s dependence on its ground “does not abolish independence, it does not even abolish freedom,” since “dependence . . . says only that the dependent, *whatever it also may be*, can be a consequence only that which it is a dependent; dependence does *not* say what the dependent *is or is not*” (Schelling, 2006: 17; emphasis added). Schelling demonstrates how dependence on a ground does not abolish independence through the example of the statement “this body is blue.” If we understand the identity relation or the copula as intransitive, then the statement would posit that “the body is, in and through that in and through which it is a body, also blue.”

However, Schelling argues that what the statement actually says is only that “the same thing which is this body *is also* blue, although not in the same respect” (Schelling, 2006: 13; emphasis added). Thus to make an identity statement is to already say that what something *is* means that it can also be otherwise.

Though Schelling’s discussion of the law of identity may appear abstruse, it has important consequences for his attempt to to understand system as coexistent with human freedom. What the copula reveals is that there can be never any complete system in itself, precisely because the system is nothing other than its own contingency or freedom, nothing other than its own ever-present possibility of being other than it is. In his later 1821 essay “On the Nature of Philosophy as Science,” Schelling speaks of this possibility as the “*asystaton*” or a-systematicity always lodged at the heart of system: “the endeavour . . . of contemplating human knowledge within a system . . . presupposes . . . that originally and of itself it does not exist in a system, that it is an *asystaton* . . . something that is in inner conflict” (Schelling, 1997: 210–11). In the Freedom essay and in the *Ages*, this inner conflict is the “contradiction of necessity and freedom,” a contradiction without which not only all philosophy but all “higher willing of the spirit would sink into the death that is proper to those sciences in which this contradiction has no application” (Schelling, 2007: 10–11). Thinking unconditionally is precisely not to resolve this contradiction, but to ceaselessly reassert it, since contradiction is the *sine qua non* of life itself.

Schelling thus begins to think of the Absolute itself less in terms of a harmoniously unfolding *archē-telos* than something radically self-divided, “subject to suffering and becoming” (Schelling, 2007: 66). Insofar as “nothing is prior to, or outside of, God, he must have the ground of existence in himself” (Schelling, 2007: 27). This ground is nature or actuality (*wirklichkeit*); rather than a mere concept, the ground is the living basis through which the Absolute creates itself. However, this ground is not rational but a *desire*, the “yearning the eternal One feels to give birth it itself[,] . . . not the One itself but . . . co-eternal with it.” As co-eternal with the One, but not the One, the ground is therefore “something in God which is not God himself” (Schelling, 2007: 28). As such, Schelling contests secular-Enlightenment notions that posit rationality as coextensive with the Absolute. Schelling writes:

[N]owhere does it appear as if order and form were what is original but rather as if initial anarchy (*das Regellose*)

had been brought to order. This is the incomprehensible base of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in understanding but rather remains eternally in the ground. (Schelling, 2006: 29)

In questioning what precedes the rational organization of the world, Schelling places this organization in question by dissociating *archē* from its traditional association with order and form. As the incomprehensible but “necessary inheritance” of existing beings, Schelling’s “initial anarchy” bespeaks an anarchy prior to rational foundations that, appearing to have been brought to order, nonetheless “still lies in the ground, as if it could break through once again” (Schelling, 2006: 29). As the indivisible remainder that conditions order and form, the anarchy of the ground is a negativity that at once precludes freedom to completely free itself from its dark necessity and radically unsettles modern rationality’s founding myth of a completely self-founding rationality.<sup>2</sup> Rather, this “irreducible remainder” within the dark ground means that the order of rationality itself emerges “only from the obscurity of that which is without understanding (from feeling, yearning, the sovereign mother of knowledge)” (Schelling, 2006: 29).

Schelling transposes the tortured relation within the Absolute between its self-revelation and the dark ground into the ontological structure of human freedom as such. Human freedom is distinguishable from that of other creatures, Schelling argues, insofar as humans have the capacity for the decision between good and evil. Yet freedom is not, Schelling insists, the ability to choose rationally between alternatives, which presupposes a the *archē* of a subject who chooses. This conception of freedom is actually the death of freedom, Schelling argues, because it treats freedom instrumentally as a means to the subject’s ends. For Schelling freedom is not the property of a subject; as Martin Heidegger points out, for Schelling freedom is never *mine*, but rather *I belong to freedom* (Heidegger, 1985: 9). Freedom is therefore never the predicate of the human; rather, Schelling inverts the relation to question the human as a predicate of freedom, which is *an-archically* “before every ground . . . the primordial ground and therefore non-ground,” or what Jason Wirth calls the the “infinite power otherwise than every beginning and ending but given within and

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<sup>2</sup> On the myth of a self-founding rationality as the “founding” myth of modernity, see Hans Blumenberg’s *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1985).

thereby dis-completing every beginning and ending” (Schelling as cited in Wirth, 2007: x).

The freedom to which I belong, the radical contingency that my subjectivity *is*, is an ever-renewed struggle between our own particular self-will and the universal will of the Absolute. Where the Absolute “necessarily” reveals itself as order and form by repressing the anarchy of its dark ground, the contingency of human freedom allows for this relationship to be overturned, such that the ground itself can appear as the highest value. Schelling inscribes a proto-deconstructive potential within human freedom as a freedom for evil. In its simplest terms, evil describes the freedom to elevate the individual or the part over the organic harmony of the whole, such as when a part of the body becomes diseased and begins to function “for itself” rather than in harmony with the rest of the organism (Schelling, 2006: 18, 34–38, 66). It would be an oversimplification, however, to see Schelling’s conception of evil in simply moral terms, in the sense of evil as that which simply lacks, or is deficient in, the good. As Johannes Schmidt and Jeff Love (2006) point out, Schelling’s innovation is his attempt to think the problem of evil as something rather than nothing, and therefore as part of God’s very essence. Because evil is associated with the materiality of the ground, it has a “positive, vital force” in which “all the powers that are typically associated with the good, such as rationality, rigour, and probity, come to serve the most brutal and selfish impulses, the ever-varying whims of physical desire” (Schelling, 2006: xxiii).

On the one hand, Schelling’s conception of evil overturns prior theological conceptions of evil, and in doing so avoids the metaphysical quandary which fails to explain evil’s reality. On the other hand, however, because evil has a kind of vitality, it might also name a more subversive potentiality “that threatens actively to undermine” the “palliative normativity that legitimates the whole” (Love and Schmidt, 2007: xxiv). As such, evil may very well describe a negativity that resists inclusion into the whole and thus forces a rethinking, and potential reorganization, of what legitimizes itself as whole. “Evil” emerges as a potentiality within human freedom that bears a striking resemblance to what Bakunin identifies in the Biblical figure of Satan as “the negative power in the positive development of human animality,” the “power to rebel” as a native human faculty (Bakunin, 2009: 10). Indeed, by the time of his 1815 *Ages*, Schelling will criticize the “palliative normativity” of contemporary idealisms that show a “predilection for the affirmative” and deny or repress the exist-

ence of “something inhibiting, something conflicting . . . this Other that which, so to speak, should not be and yet is, nay, must be . . . this No that resists the Yes, this darkening that resists the light” (Schelling, 2001: 6). As Joseph P. Lawrence points out, humanity today and in Schelling’s time is all too willing to take refuge in the affirmative, whether it be Enlightenment rationality or the incessant Yes of consumer capitalism (Lawrence, 2005: 14–17). Such forces incessantly deny the anarchic ground that serves as the basis for their own freedom in order to re-conceive evil as an external, hence removable, threat to the good. For Schelling, however, freedom necessitates an ever-renewed confrontation with the irreducible remainder of this Other that is always already the other within oneself, an Other that exposes the subject to its radical absence of foundations and that subject “feels his naked impoverishment” before the chaos of eternal creation (Schelling as cited in Lawrence, 2005: 22).

#### ANCESTRALITY AND THE *AGES OF THE WORLD*

The Freedom essay poses the vexed question of an originating ground that challenges the utopian expectations of modern rationality and introduces metaphysical entanglements that lead Schelling to complicate his earlier idealism. In the *Ages of the World*, Schelling carries these entanglements beyond the question of human freedom and into the fractured origins of the cosmos itself. One useful way of engaging Schelling’s concerns in the *Ages* is to see it as an early attempt at what Quentin Meillassoux (2008) has identified with the task of thinking “ancestrality.” To think ancestrality, according to Meillassoux:

is to think a world without thought—a world without the givenness of the world. It is therefore incumbent upon us to break with the ontological requisite of the moderns, according to which to be *is to be a correlate*. Our task, by way of contrast, consists in trying to understand how thought is able to access the uncorrelated, which is to say, a world capable of subsisting without being given. But to say this is just to say that we must grasp how thought is able to access *an absolute*, i.e. a being whose severance (the original meaning of *absolutus*) and whose separateness from thought is such that it presents itself to us as non-relative to us, and hence as capable of existing whether we exist or not. (Meillassoux, 2008: 49)



Ancestrality marks a key concern for philosophy's attempts to understand nature as what Schelling calls the "abyss of the past" (Schelling, 2001: 31). Insofar as empirical science now makes speculative statements about "events anterior to the advent of life and of consciousness," philosophy must in turn create the conceptual tools needed to think this *an-archic* anteriority (Meillassoux, 2008: 20).

In an uncanny parallel of Bakunin's wholesale dismissal of idealism, Meillassoux dismisses "Schelling's Nature," along with "Hegelian Mind; Schopenhauer's Will; the Will (or *Wills*) to Power in Nietzsche; perception loaded with memory in Bergson; Deleuze's Life, etc." as incapable of overcoming correlationism (Meillassoux, 2008: 64). Yet what Meillassoux dismisses in Schelling, namely the latter's earlier view of nature as the "objective subject-object," artificially limits Schelling's position to one that he had substantially modified after 1809. As we have already indicated above, some of Schelling's early attempts to go beyond Kant's correlationism do indeed seek to posit the Absolute as a kind of ur-correlate, the subject-object/object-subject. With the *Ages*, however, Schelling broaches the problem of ancestry so as to unbind "both [history and nature] from the teleology through which [his earlier] Idealism had configured them" (Rajan, 2007: 319).

In each of the three drafts of the *Ages*, Schelling begins by staging his history of nature as a teleological unfolding of the Absolute through the its past, present, and future (Schelling, 2001: xxxv). Yet, as Schelling passes through three unsuccessful attempts at moving beyond the first book of the past, this teleology gives way to a progressively darker, more traumatic, vision in which both history and ontology are reconfigured around the ancestry of geology. As Hans Jorg Sandkuhler points out, "the real basis of the theory of the *Ages of the World* is modern geology" (Sandkuhler, 1984: 21). Modern geology, with its discovery of a "deep time" that radically extends the earth's history beyond the time given by Biblical accounts, "defeats *a priori* the prospect of [nature's] appearance for any finite phenomenologizing consciousness" (Grant, 2008: 6).<sup>3</sup> Placed under the sign of modern

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed exploration of the revolution in the earth sciences after the French Revolution, see Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time: The History of the Earth & The History of Nations from Hooke to Vico* (1984) and, more recently, Martin Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (2006).

geology, whose materiality pushes consciousness beyond its finite origins towards the abyss of the geotemporal past, the *Ages* marks an early attempt to engage ancestry as a form of unconditioned thinking what Adorno and Horkheimer call “natural history,” or “the self-cognition of the spirit as nature in disunion with itself” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1987: 39).

Schelling’s characterization of this “deep time” shifts from the first to the third drafts of the *Ages*. As Rajan points out, the first and second drafts of 1811 and 1813 largely repress the *an-archic* potential within geological ancestry by understanding the past in theological and idealist terms, respectively. In 1811, Schelling still conceives of the “time before the world” as an untroubled indifference to which the world will ultimately return in the “completed time” of the future, that is, in quasi-Hegelian fashion, a time that marks the culmination of all history (Schelling as cited in Rajan, 2008: par. 8). In that text, the unsettled “rotary movement” of the instinctual life is limited a historical and cultural stage of development that Schelling, like Bakunin after him, sees as finished. In the 1813 draft, Schelling actually removes any reference to the “rotary movement” and hence interprets history as the uninhibited development of Spirit through a “ladder of formations” that will “unfold a complete image of the future world” (Schelling as cited in Rajan, 2007: 322–23). Conversely, the traumatic figure of the “rotary movement” is not only reintroduced for the 1815 version, but becomes the very focal point of Schelling’s conception of the deep time. Schelling returns to his view of an “original duplicity” in nature by positing a primordial antithesis of two contesting wills or potencies within the eternal past, or the ground, of Being itself: a negating or inhibiting force and an affirming or free principle (Schelling, 2001: 18). These two wills are not reciprocally exclusive, rather, “they come together in one and the same because the negating force can only feel itself as negating when there is a disclosing being and the latter can only be active as affirming insofar as it liberates the negating and repressing force” (Schelling, 2001: 19). In turn, the force of these two contesting potencies or wills therefore “posit outside and above themselves a third, which is the unity” of the two (Schelling, 2001: 19).

So far, what Schelling imagines appears to be a very orthodox dialectic in which the negating force, like the negation that serves as the base or point of departure for humanity’s emergence from animality in Bakunin, constitutes for Schelling an eternal beginning that operates as the ground of an inexorable progression

towards a moment of synthesis: “When the first potency is posited, the second is also necessarily posited, and both of these produce the third with the same necessity. Thereby the goal is achieved” (Bakunin, 2009: 9; Schelling, 2001: 19). However, Schelling immediately deconstructs this synthesis, writing that “having arrived at its peak, the movement of itself retreats back into its beginning; for each of the three has an equal right to be that which has being” (Schelling, 2001: 19). Hence, the rotary movement neither gives birth to any *archē*, since “a true beginning is one that does not always begin again,” nor reaches any ultimate conclusion, but continues in a ceaseless displacement of one potency by another. Moreover, since each of the three potencies has an equal right to exist, “there is [also] neither a veritable higher nor a veritable lower, since in turn one is higher and the other is lower. There is only an unremitting wheel, a rotatory movement that never comes to a standstill” (Schelling, 2001: 20). In order to posit the synthesis as above the ceaseless contest of the negating and affirming potencies, this would mean positing the synthesis as an antithesis; hence the former falls back into the very contest it claims to have overcome:

Just as antithesis excluded unity, unity excluded antithesis. But precisely thereby the ground was given to that alternating movement, to that continuous revivification of the antitheses . . . since neither unity nor antithesis should alone be, but rather unity as well as antithesis. (Schelling, 2001: 36; Rajan, 2008: par. 9)

Schelling’s revised view of the role of the negating potency in the 1815 *Ages* lodges an *aystaton* within cosmic history itself, an obliquity within Being to which Schelling compulsively returns as a site of madness and self-laceration that precludes understanding this history as unfolding progressively from *archē* to *telos* (Schelling, 2001: 43, 102, 148). Where in the 1813 version Schelling equated original will with a quiescent “will that wills nothing,” in 1815 the annular drive is now “among the oldest potencies,” an eccentricity within the very foundations of existence that “seeks its own foundational point” and thus decenters the point of origin itself (Schelling, 2001: 92). At the same time, we have already seen how the rotary motion is not a whole in the sense of a totality in which individual parts are subjected to a principle or *archē*. Rather, as Rajan argues, the rotary motion is a “[self-]critical trope in which the circulation of potencies never

allows for a single principle to posit itself without being subject to its own deconstruction” (Rajan, 2008: par. 32).

The “rotary movement” trope in the *Ages* can therefore be read alongside the figure of evil from the Freedom essay. Where the freedom for evil manifested itself in the part’s capacity to undermine the normativity of the whole, the rotary motion “commences with a rotation about its own axis,” an involution of itself within itself and hence away from whole (Schelling, 2001: 92). The rotary movement is not simply (self-)destructive, but also creative: in its involution away from the normativity of the universal, rotary movements create new wholes that are themselves capable of being deconstructed, pushing forward Schelling’s demand “that nothing in the universe be oppressed, limited, or subordinated. We demand for each and every thing its own particular and free life” (Schelling as cited in Lawrence, 2005: 19). At the same time, the rotary motion suggests that the history of the cosmos is a non-linear movement in which the past can never be entirely overcome, since it will always return to force us to re-interrogate its foundations through a continuous revivification of antitheses. For Schelling, this rotary movement is as much epistemological as it is ontological, for whomever wishes to understand the history of the cosmos must face “what is concealed in themselves . . . the abysses of the past that are still in one just as much as the present” (Schelling, 2001: 3–4).

#### FROM NEGATIVE TO POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY: SCHELLING’S PHILOSOPHY OF MYTHOLOGY

However, insofar as the abyss of the past remains concealed as both history’s unconscious and that of the subject, Schelling broaches a fundamental non-knowledge that does not exactly follow the ancestral project as conceived by speculative realism. Perhaps most glaringly, Schelling’s explicitly mythopoetic, rather than objectivist, approach to geo-cosmic history runs counter to Meillassoux’s “naturalistic” ontology, and his emphasis on mathematics as the basis for a naturalistic, scientific philosophical ontology. Thus appears the third scandal of Schelling’s late, ostensibly conservative, philosophy: a recourse to mythology and religion as a viable discourse of ancestry in the face of both the positivism of his time and the scientism that has rooted itself in our own. Speculative realism takes a resolute stand against any metaphysics that relies on some form of non-knowledge or mystery, which always harbours the temptation to invest this non-

knowledge with transcendent divine power. If one allows for any mystical transcendence beyond rational thought, we re-establish an onto(theo)logical *archē* that, by definition, does away with the contingency fundamental to the very idea of a radical democratic politics. For Meillassoux, the ancestral project is at one with that of radical democracy in arguing for what he calls the “necessity of contingency.” According to Meillassoux:

there is no reason for anything to be or to remain thus and not otherwise, and this applies as much to the laws that govern the world as to the things of the world. Everything could actually collapse: from trees to stars, from stars to laws, from physical laws to logical laws; and this not by virtue of some superior law whereby everything is destined to perish, but by virtue of the absence of any superior law. (Meillassoux, 2008: 88–89)

However, Markus Gabriel points out that “despite [Meillassoux’s] actual commitment to absolute contingency he believes there must be an ultimate law, a *principle* of unreason that necessarily governs the auto-normalization of chaos” (Gabriel, 2009: 85). Following Alain Badiou, Meillassoux equates ontology with mathematics, a move which Schelling had criticized in Kant’s preference for mathematics over philosophy as analogous to the preference for a “stereometrically regular crystal” over the human body because “the former has no possibility of falling ill, while the latter hosts germs of every possible illness” (Schelling, 1997: 212). As such, Meillassoux’s approach to speculative realism threatens to become an ideology “that endows ‘science’ with the magical power of *getting it right*” and thus could be charged with serving “the existential project of making the human being at home in the world” (Gabriel, 2009: 86–87). In turn, although ancestral statements ostensibly divest the world of mythological consciousness they are strictly mythological by definition, insofar as mythology deals precisely with “origins that no one can have been present at” (Cavell as cited in Gabriel, 2009: 89). And if ancestral statements are mythological statements, then a philosophy of mythology can explore ancestry so as to disclose the necessity of contingency, or ontological *anarchē*.

It is in this context that Gabriel proposes we return to Schelling’s late philosophy of mythology. Schelling had already positioned the *Ages* as a mythological poem in which the past is narrated (Schelling, 2001: xxxv), and I have already intimated in pre-

vious sections how both the ancestrality of the *Ages* and the Freedom essay's exploration of the system of freedom could disclose the necessity of contingency. But these prior texts remain under the sign of what Schelling calls his negative philosophy, that is, the attempt at a science of the essence and of the concept of beginnings, a science that ascends from necessity to freedom, the real to the ideal, in an attempt to unify these terms in the Absolute. The failure of the *Ages* demonstrated the radical limits of what a negative philosophy could accomplish. At the same time, as Jason Wirth points out, Hegel himself may have helped "reveal to Schelling the limit[s] of negative philosophy . . . by perfecting it" in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Wirth, 2007: ix). For in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel articulated the grand march of spirit from its lowest forms in sense-certainty to its highest manifestation in the reflexivity of the Absolute through the inexorable logic of the dialectic. It is with the positive philosophy *qua* philosophy of mythology that Schelling undertakes his most explicit critique of Hegel's philosophy of essence in favour of mythology as a philosophy of existence.

Schelling's critique of Hegel detailed and complex, but it can be said to center on what Schelling calls Hegel's "one mistake" (*von dem Einen Mißbegriff*): his confusion of logical relationships between concepts with actual or existing relationships (Schelling, 1996: 160). In turn, Schelling will argue that Hegel removes the facticity of existence as the basis upon which logic is grounded and reduces the real to logic, which then functions as the totalizing principle for all of knowledge. Hegel, according to Schelling, fails to perceive that negative philosophy or logic can only treat of the possible and not the actual (Schelling, 1996: 135). For Schelling, conversely, the facticity of existence always precedes logic, and it is only from this living ground that one can develop a genuine movement through which the abstractions of logic emerge. By beginning with logic, Hegel thus presupposes an already developed subject that implicitly determines the process (Schelling, 1996: 138, 145). For similar reasons, Schelling also questions the totalizing purview of Hegel's logic; for Hegel subsumes every particular within the circular system of the pure Concept and in doing so, assumes that no extra-logical concepts exist. Yet, as we have already seen, for Schelling the very notion of a system presupposes its *aystaton*, some contingency that makes the system fundamentally incomplete in itself (Schelling, 1996: 144). For Schelling "the whole world lies, so to speak, in the nets of the understanding or of reason, . . . the question is how exactly it got

into those nets, since there is obviously something other and something more than mere reason in the world” (Schelling, 1996: 147).

Though it is debatable as to whether Schelling is entirely correct in his assessment of Hegel,<sup>4</sup> the critique itself allowed Schelling to clarify the direction of his positive philosophy. Rather than begin with logic, then, Schelling begins with what he calls the “*unprethinkable*” ground of Being. The *unprethinkable* is pure actuality or facticity, but it is not, as in Hegel, (logical) necessity. Rather, as *unprethinkable* the ground is not preceded by any rationality that would be able to distinguish the conceptual oppositions that would allow it to become thinkable. The *unprethinkable* is neither necessary nor contingent, but the very indifference of necessity and contingency, the groundless ground that the thinkable must presuppose precisely in order to think it. The *unprethinkable*, like the “unconditioned” in Schelling’s earlier *Naturphilosophie*, is therefore not directly accessible to concepts since it is the very condition upon which concepts can be articulated. The paradox is that the *unprethinkable* becomes necessary as the condition for thinking only through the movement of thinking itself, and thus simultaneously contingent. This is why Schelling will characterize the *unprethinkable* as “that which is unequal to itself,” an “uncanny principle” which cannot ever be fully grasped in reflection (cited in Žižek and Gabriel, 2009: 19–20).

Since the *unprethinkable* is not directly accessible to concepts, it cannot be expressed in the propositional language of reflection but rather expresses itself in and as mythology. What mythology means for Schelling, however, is not simply ancient pre-scientific narratives about the gods. Schelling’s interest is not simply in myths but in mythology as such, “the brute fact of [the] existence of a logical space which cannot be accounted for in logical terms” (Gabriel, 2009: 20). For Schelling, myths are not what Hegel identifies as allegories of logic—that is, failed or partial expressions of reason’s coming to know itself, delusion, proto-science, or proto-philosophy, and so on. Instead, Schelling claims that mythological “ideas are not first present in another form, but rather they emerge only in, and thus also at the same time with, this form. . . . mythology is thoroughly actual—that is, everything in it is thus to be understood as mythology expresses it, not as if something else were thought, something else said” (Schelling, 2007b: 136). Myth-

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<sup>4</sup> For a more thoroughgoing examination of the Schelling-Hegel debate see John Laughland, *Schelling versus Hegel: From German Idealism to Christian Metaphysics* (2007).

ological content and form are not separable: there is no content that would serve as mythology's hidden *archē*, but rather form and content emerge simultaneously to constitute the "living and concrete differences" that condition the heterogeneity of peoples, differences which are "preserved in language only in abstract and formal differences" (Schelling, 2007b: 40). In this respect, mythology refers directly to the non-reflective ground of "theogonic powers," the very potencies which organize experience itself.

Significantly, one of the mythological figures Schelling emphasizes is Chaos in Hesiod's *Theogony*, a reference which he shares with Hakim Bey's (1993) similarly mythological description of "ontological anarchy." For Bey, ontological anarchy expresses itself mythologically in "the great serpent (Tiamat, Python, Leviathan), Hesiod's primal Chaos, presides over the vast long dreaming of the Paleolithic—before all kings, priests, agents of Order, History, Hierarchy, Law." Likewise, Schelling stresses Chaos' etymological meaning as the "expanse . . . that which still stands open to everything," or what Schelling earlier called the unconditioned (Schelling, 2007b: 30). Chaos thematizes mythology as the necessity of contingency, its dual status as facticity and the unconditioned or the open that constitutes the very coming into being of a world, and whose being can only be proven *a posteriori* once the world is itself manifest. Hence mythology discloses the fundamental inability for Being to grasp itself reflexively; rather, mythology functions for Schelling as the irreducible remainder that remains irresolvable into reason, not in the form of a transcendent *archē* (Meillassoux's worry), but as an exuberance of being itself that exposes us to the radical contingency of our finitude and to the ceaseless creativity of the unconditioned that frees itself from its positivity in an "ongoing process of creative development" (cited in Matthews, 2007a: 5).

## CONCLUSION

In many ways, the preceding discussion is something of a prolegomena to an anarchistic reading of Schelling. What I have attempted to do here in explicating the three scandals proper to Schelling's philosophy is to lay the philosophical groundwork by which Schelling can be said to anticipate a theory of ontological *anarchē*. By focusing on this particular aspect of Schelling, I have established a number of threads that bear further examination, including a more thorough account of Schelling's influence on Bakunin, his critical discussions of the state, and his own shifting



views of the ideal society. Another potentially rich vein of thinking not addressed here is Schelling's influence on Heidegger, which in turn might yield new readings of Reiner Schürmann's *an-archic* ontology. Undoubtedly, there also remain elements of Schelling's thinking incompatible not only with an anarchistic politics but with contemporary values more broadly, such as his repulsive view of South Americans as animals in the third lecture of his *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (Schelling, 2007b: 48); a particularly odd lapse in judgement given Schelling's otherwise respectful treatment of the mythologies of eastern cultures. Nonetheless, Schelling's philosophy does provide a particularly compelling account of the groundlessness of Being which resonates with a number of contemporary concerns, such as the problem of ancestrality and the task of thinking the necessity of contingency as a critical tool against all forms of totalizing ontology.

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