

The Tragic Dissonance

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To think is to linger on the conditions in which one is living, to linger on the site where we live. Thus to think is a privilege of that epoch which is ours, provided that the essential fragility of the sovereign referents becomes evident to it.

Reiner Schürmann¹

The Integrative Law of the Speculative

For some time now we have known that a certain dominant determination of the tragic, one that we name as an operation called “dialectical,” constitutes a philosophical thought-structure that we now refer to as “speculative.” Such speculative thought in its dialectical mode of operation does not merely remain satisfied by tarrying on dissolution and corruption of all that is called “actuality” but discovers therein the very logic of being by being able to convert the nothing into being, the negative into the positive. For such logic of being, nothing essentially “human” must be lost to dissolution and corruption, unless the speculative voyage of the negative by a default fails to arrive at its destination. The destination of this voyage of the speculative is the *pleroma* of a complete recuperation, of a full retrieval of self-presence, almost lost and yet always regained. The dialectical operation, with its integrative law of the negative, would then mean nothing other than, at least in its manifest desire, this desire of the retrieval or recuperation of self-presence through conversion of the negative into the positive. The voyage of this operation is tragic in the sense that it must undergo generation and corruption, of dereliction and dissolution precisely in order to reconstitute itself as subject. Can this voyage be named or denominated as other than “tragic”? Is there any other name or any other denomination, any other *nomos* (law) than “tragic” to signify the process whereby the restitution of the spirit is achieved precisely by undergoing an absolute agony of finitude, an inevitable apostasy in dereliction and abandonment? The “tragic” here would signify nothing other than the integrative law of a speculative restitution of the subject. Such tragic-speculative subject would then have to constitute itself as the ‘sovereign referent’ of the hegemonic discourse that is constraining upon

¹ Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 3.

thinking, for such a discourse would not tolerate the radical other outside the integrative law of dialectical opposition and subsumption.

At the heart of the speculative thought, then, lies a desire. Perhaps it is possible to say that the speculative is the *desire* par excellence. It is not any “this” or “that” desire but the desire of desire itself, the sovereign desire of restitution of a self-presence. In that sense one can even say that the speculative is the structural opening of desire as such, one that is always *in-sight* of the recuperation of a self-presence by passing through a lack of what it desires. It is desire for recuperation of a lost presence in the intimate gathering of the subject: to be able to find oneself in the intimacy of desire, to be able to caress oneself caressing, to be able to kiss oneself kissing. The speculative is the auto-mytho-poesis of desire: touch *touching* itself in the innermost intimacy of a self giving itself to itself. In this fundamental self-determination of the speculative as desire lies an erotic whose logic we should be able to articulate or describe in a phenomenological mode in such a wise that desire opens itself to the invisible and to the immemorial, to the excess of a giving never coming back to find itself in the intimacy of an interior subject. We should be able to dream of an erotic in-excess of the speculative in a phenomenological mode of opening where the voyage of the speculative receives a surplus or an excess never to be subsumed again in the speculative fold of self-presence. We should dream of an erotic that deprives the subject of its status as self-referring and self-grounding sovereign referent.

With a certain amount of reservation we may perhaps say that the mytho-poesis of this speculative desire also constitutes the structure of a thought called “theological.” This is so provided that we undertake here to open the theological to its innermost other, to its intimate neighbour, the holy. Such an other, the holy, is the differend which is unbearable to the theological ground of the speculative thought. The eschatological intensity of such difference of the holy tears apart the fundamental ground of the world and makes it incommensurable with any sovereign referent of the world or deprives it of its autochthony. It is in this sense we speak here of a speculative-theological desire, despite the infinitely complicated relation between the two whereby one inseparably conjures up the other while all the time insisting on a difference never to be bridged by a simple operation of negativity or positivity. Let me call it, by evoking Martin Heidegger here, as onto-theological structure of a thought or discourse² wherefrom a fundamental co-relation of *pain* and *logos*,³ and hence a certain *tragic* determination of metaphysics is inseparable. This tragic co-relation would be thought by Heidegger as an instance of an epochal closure of metaphysics and an occurrence of another inauguration beyond metaphysics in a *leap*. It is not the only way that Heidegger *undergoes* in order to hint or beckon towards an eruption that may occur at the closure of metaphysics. Hence there is no closure pure and simple without simultaneously opening us towards the

² Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

³ Martin Heidegger, “On the Question of Being,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998/1967), 291-322.

Abgrund into which we must leap. It is a hinting or beckoning (in the Heideggerian sense of *Wink*) towards the occurrence of the possibility of other thinking. From *Contributions to Philosophy* which is written in such a trembling language, Heidegger comes to think this occurrence with the name of *Ereignis* (the event of appropriation). Such *Ereignis* itself is tragic but in an entirely different mode, in a heterogeneous linguistic register that has remained unthought and unthinkable within metaphysics. In other words, for Heidegger, the name or word *Ereignis*, in its agonal double bind of appropriation-expropriation, would indicate or beckon towards an unthought tragic heterogeneous to its speculative investment of metaphysics. Here it is not merely the discourse called “idealism” that is put into question but the destiny of the occidental metaphysics as such in its fundamental gathering. There is, thus, for Heidegger *another* tragic thought than this speculative-theological investment of metaphysics, the other tragic thought that has to do with the destitution of a dominant metaphysics in order to open it up towards an inauguration which is to come. It is this other tragic that we propose to think here with the help of F.W.J. von Schelling.

The Tragic Caesura of the Speculative

As we remarked above, that at the heart of speculative thought lies a desire which is also theological, a desire for *pleroma* where the one finds oneself as found, touching oneself as touched in the intimacy of self-presence. Since this ‘finding oneself’ is a movement or a process, a voyage, it must undergo a passage of an inevitable loss, of a dereliction and dissolution. The *pleroma of logos* must not remain uncontaminated or untouched by the violence of pain. Since it must undergo the agony of finitude precisely to reconstitute itself, the speculative desire would not remain untouched by pain. Should we say here that the *logos* of metaphysics is a tragic theatrical representation of the speculative which paradoxically amounts to be nothing less than farce or comedy, as Georges Bataille shows in his unique analysis of Hegelian discourse of the speculative. In this justly famous analysis Bataille discovers a certain logic of the tragic (thereby comic) at work whose foundation is provided by rituals of sacrifice.⁴ In Bataille’s analysis it emerges that in this tragic desire, wherein *logos* is immersed without definitely being lost, the speculative thought arrives at a comic default. What remains unbearable for the Hegelian speculative discourse is what it from its innermost desire desires, namely the sovereign *pleroma* itself, which is un-economical and irreducible to the concept because it suspends itself out in the very instant of its arrival. The advent of *pleroma* without reservation is an unbearable excess that deprives the speculative subject its very status as sovereign referent. At stake here is nothing other than the foundational possibility of a speculative thought or rather the failure of itself wherein the onto-theological metaphysics founders, having reached its fulfilment.

⁴ Georges Bataille, “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice,” in *The Bataille Reader*, ed. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 279-295.

It is the merit of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's justly famous essay entitled "The Caesura of the Speculative"⁵ to show us more clearly than others the following two things:

(1) What is at stake in such determination of the tragic is not so much or not merely the tragic as a mere particular or specific treatment of a particular dramatic genre called "tragedy" within an aesthetic discourse that exists alongside other discourses such as "logic," "ethics," "politics" and "metaphysics." At stake here is rather the "thought structure," the foundational possibility of the "speculative" as such in its onto-theological constitution. The question of the tragic is now inseparably connected with the structural condition of (im)possibility of the "speculative" as such, with the structural condition of opening or closure (opening and closure at the same time) of metaphysics in its instance of achievement (*Vollendung*). In the tragic determination of the speculative, which is metaphysics onto-theologically constituted, metaphysics reaches its uttermost achievement and thereby confronts the instance of its default, its failure to fulfil the demand that the tragic itself imposes in its wake. Such default manifests, most painfully and tragically, as epochal dissonance, as eccentric opening and closure, as "empty measure of time"⁶ breaking into the Hölderlinian tragic theatre. What, then, Lacoue-Labarthe shows in his analysis of Hölderlinian tragic theatre is nothing other than the momentary default of metaphysics suddenly breaking into the discursive continuum of the historical as epochal break, which Lacoue-Labarthe called "caesura."

(2) That such eruption of the tragic-speculative is not limited merely to a specific and unique discourse called "German Idealism" at the onset of 19th century but has to do with the essentially *sacrificial* foundation of occidental metaphysics.⁷ And we know from Bataille's celebrated analysis that the tragic, at least in its dominant discursive appropriation, is constituted on such a sacrificial foundation. For Lacoue-Labarthe, so it will be for Heidegger, its poetic articulation is uttered in the most elaborated and systematic manner in the Aristotelean cathartic poetics. Thus at stake for Lacoue-Labarthe here is not merely the constitutive possibility of idealism but the destiny, or the default of a metaphysics whose foundation is provided by a sacrificial determination of the tragic. Such constitutive possibility of the speculative also carries its potential momentary advent of caesuras by an 'ineluctable logic' of 'always already' that refuses the ground of the concept. Philippe Lacoue calls such an ineluctable logic of the always already that undoes in advance the speculative logic of metaphysics as *desistance*.

Such caesuras mark the momentary breaking-in of the *other* tragic that remains potentially in the sacrificial determination of the speculative-tragic and yet it remains an excess over the later as an uncontainable surplus,

as an eccentric path, as an infidelity to the origin withdrawn from the

⁵ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "The Caesura of the Speculative," in *Typography*, ed. Christopher Fynsk (London & Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 208-235.

⁶ Veronique Fóti, *Epochal Discordance: Hölderlin's Philosophy of Tragedy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

⁷ On the question of sacrifice in relation to the metaphysical ground of community, see Jean-Luc Nancy's important essay on Bataille, "The Unsacrificeable," in *A Finite Thinking*, trans. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003/1990), 51-77.

immanence of a self-presence. Despite agreeing with Peter Szondi's analysis of tragic thought on many points, it is at this point Lacoue-Labarthe departs from him. This moment occurs when Lacoue-Labarthe perceives the tragic thought of Schelling and Hegel to be inseparable from the sacrificial foundation of a metaphysics whose philosophical articulation is provided in Aristotelean cathartic logic of tragedy.⁸ In his well known *An Essay on the Tragic*, Peter Szondi says:

Since Aristotle, there has been a poetics of tragedy. Only since Schelling has there been a philosophy of the tragic. Composed as an instruction in writing drama, Aristotle's text strives to determine the elements of tragic art; its object is tragedy, not the idea of tragedy. Even when it goes beyond the concrete work of art and inquires into the origin and effect of tragedy, the *Poetics* remains empirical in its theory of the soul. . . . The philosophy of the tragic rises like an island above Aristotle's powerful and monumental sphere of influence, one that knows neither national nor epochal borders. Begun by Schelling in a thoroughly non-programmatic fashion, the philosophy of the tragic runs through the Idealist and post-Idealist periods, always assuming a new form.⁹

For Lacoue-Labarthe it is the Hölderlinian tragic thought that brings caesuras to the speculative constitution of metaphysics and thereby stepping beyond, even though momentarily, the Aristotelean cathartic poetics of tragedy. This instance of the caesural occurrence brings into play, by a movement of regression, that which already haunts Plato "under the name of mimesis and against which Plato fights with all of his philosophical determination until he finds a way of arresting it and fixing its concept."¹⁰ This is the agonal play of mimesis which is unrepresentable and un-representable in the patience of the concept, that which haunts the philosophical dream of a mytho-poetic self-presence. The agonal play of mimesis brings an indiscernible fault line into the touch touching itself, in the poetological restitution of the subject as sovereign referent. It is the other tragic dissonance without *Aufhebung* and without dialectical resolution, destabilizing and destituting the speculative model of the tragic in advance, *always already*, even before it came into being. This other tragic, this destituting non-dialectical caesura of the speculative, this destabilizing always already of *difference* desists the speculative, which the speculative insists on governing in turn. Without being founded upon the self-presence of *logos*, the tragic pain of mimesis desists the gathering act of the subject in the intimacy of its work. For Lacoue-Labarthe, the Hölderlin's *Grundstimmung*

⁸ Thus Lacoue-Labarthe writes: "My ambition is simply to show that the so-called philosophy of the tragic remains in reality (though certainly in a subjacent manner) a theory of the tragic effect (thus presupposing the *Poetics* of Aristotle), and that it is *only* the persistent silence which this philosophy maintains in regard to its affiliation that allows it to set itself up, over and above the Aristotelian mimetology and theory of catharsis, as the finally unveiled truth of the 'tragic phenomenon.'" Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Caesura of the Speculative*, 215.

⁹ Szondi, Peter, *An Essay on the Tragic*, trans. Paul Fleming (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002), 1.

¹⁰ Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Caesura of the Speculative*, 227.

of mourning is this tragic pain which is irreducible to the speculative pain of the auto-engendering subject of work. The other tragic is worklessness, a dispersal that does not know the cathartic unification into the self-presence of the self-same. It is the tragic agony without *nomos* (law), without the *principium* of *arché*, deprived of its sovereign referentiality. Such an agonal phenomenology of the tragic *singularizes* each one of us in turn by exposing us to the undeniable, denied all the time, manifestation of mortality as mortality.

The Speculative Schelling?

How, then, is Schelling's philosophical problematization of the tragic to be understood in this context? At the most manifest level, it is unproblematic and self-evident enough. Schelling is generally considered to be the initiator of a distinct philosophy of the tragic which is inseparably bound up with the emergence of the speculative-dialectical thought called "German Idealism" at the fin-de-siècle of 18th century. This philosophy of the tragic is to be distinguished from the poetics of tragedy. This philosophy of the tragic is to determine to a great extent the course of the philosophies to come (the post-idealist) even if these philosophies are to turn away from the foundational questions of idealism in a fundamental manner. The latter is the case with Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard. In sum, this is the argument Peter Szondi puts forward in his *An Essay on the Tragic*.¹¹ According to this understanding, the position of Schelling in relation to the constitutive possibility of the speculative-dialectical discourse, or rather in the context of Idealist investment of the tragic is not very complicated. We must mark here that this is the very early Schelling that Szondi is concerned with. Szondi does not take into account that Schelling comes back once again to the problem of art, if not to much of the tragic, in his 1807 Munich lecture *On the Relationship of the Plastic Arts to Nature*.

According to the view just mentioned above, Schelling's tragic philosophy has never radically brought destabilization or interruption into the speculative, but far from it, Schelling rather is the institutive moment of the speculative on a new tragic foundation. The founding moment of the speculative, thus, has to be aesthetic, and more specifically, tragic. From this perspective it is possible to argue that Schelling can be conveniently seen, at least regarding the question of the deployment of the tragic, as inaugural or as transitional moment to the Hegelian dialectic determination of the tragic wherein the speculative thought-structure receives its most consummate articulation. This argument determines the Schellingian thought of the tragic as one of consolidation of the law of the speculative rather than pushing the law of the speculative to the point of its destitution. By textual analysis, such an argument can easily be supported by showing that Schelling, unlike Hölderlin, has never taken the problematic of the tragic too seriously, given that Schelling's meditation on the problematic of the tragic is limited to his early career, and that later the problematic of the tragic almost disappears from his works. One can thus argue that though initiating the speculative

¹¹ Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*.

model of tragedy he soon abandons the problematic and went on to deal with the most idiosyncratic and eccentric questions of philosophy such as the questions of evil, of mythology and of revelation, inspiring denunciation from the likes of Friedrich Engels who called him an obscurantist. It is said that Schelling's philosophy of the tragic emerging at the onset of 19th century, when the speculative-dialectical philosophy is only beginning to articulate itself, is nothing much more and nothing other than an initial formulation of the speculative-dialectical mechanism itself: the conversion of nothing into being, the work of *Aufhebung* (that is, bringing resolution to dialectical contradiction), and its hidden foundation on the rituals of sacrifice (where sacrifice does not go in vain but serves a 'meaning' and hence rightly is an 'investment'), dialectical reduction of difference into "identity of identity and difference" and the tragic restitution of the subject as the sovereign referent of modernity.

Despite his disagreement with Peter Szondi on the question whether the philosophy of the tragic can indeed be separable from the sacrificial, ritualistic foundation of tragedy on the one hand, and on the other hand, from the cathartic schema of dialectical resolution in terms of tragic effects, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe does not contest the incontestable place of the tragic in Schelling as the institutive moment and subsequent consolidation of the dialectical-speculative discourse. Schelling has remained understood as the constitutive moment of the speculative discourse of idealism, a moment of inauguration that is to reach its consummation Hegel and its destitution in Hölderlin.

It is the merit of Jean-Francois Courtine¹² and Jason Wirth's¹³ pioneering efforts to show us, or to rather to hint towards, in the Heideggerian manner of *Wink*, the other agonal tragic at work in the Schellingian discourse as a whole in its fundamental tonality. Such agonal manifestation the tragic is not just limited to the Schellingian meditation on the philosophy of art alone. Rather it infinitely contests the speculative form from within form in such a manner so as to expose us to that immeasurable excess of all forms, and of form as such. The mortal may participate in this divine excess only on the basis of undertaking a process of mortification of will and of egotism, by undergoing an eccentric path of *über etwas hinaus* (going beyond by going through it),¹⁴ by an indirection or a detour of *Wink*. Since this participation cannot be thought as *telos* of a dialectical process to be achieved by the labor of the concept, the immeasurable arrival arrives without destiny, for it is what sends destiny to the mortal¹⁵ in advance.

Here, in close proximity with Hölderlin's other tragic thought, a moment occurs in Schellingian work where there takes place an always already there potentiality of destitution of the speculative, a moment which, henceforth assuming ever new names and ever new manner of beckoning,

¹² Jean-Francoise Courtine, "Tragedy and Sublimity: The Speculative Interpretation of *Oedipus Rex* on the Threshold of German Idealism," in *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 157-176.

¹³ Wirth, Jason, *The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and His Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jason Wirth analyzes this beautifully in the fifth chapter of his book (Ibid), 131-153.

leads Schelling later to release dissolution to the speculative from within its fundamental ground. It is enigmatic and paradoxical that this instance of arrival is to occur at the moment of the birth of the speculative theory of tragedy itself, right at the moment of its consolidation and intensification. The tragic has never ceased to haunt the speculative from within its ground, even though the name or the word “tragic” itself disappears at least in its manifest form, from the Schellingian works. This unthinkable tragic agony always already has been unworking the speculative from within, leading ultimately to its destitution in a decisive manner, a destitution that at once brings caesura or halt to the foundational ground of metaphysics itself in a manner never to be bridged again, having lacked the absolute concept that will bring this agony once more to a speculative closure. Even though this name or the word itself has disappeared from the Schellingian discourse from the middle of his career the tragic remains, (un)working the Schellingian discourse from within under other names, each time newly named and abandoned soon. Hence is the protean nature of the Schellingian discourse where each name is a substitution of what a thought is incapable of naming and which it must always name in a renewed passion. For Schelling, “philosophy” is the name for this protean passion of naming the unnameable and a bearing witness to the ultimate failure of all nomination, denomination and all *nomos*.

This shows the extreme difficulty with which the Schellingian thinking confronts what is truly tragic, that is to say, the unthinkable excess of all being, that which is the remainder of all thought and which thereby can’t be incorporated into the integrative work of law without suspending that law from within. Hence, the necessity for Schelling to constantly undertake an ever renewed path of thinking. With Schelling philosophy becomes finite thinking withdrawing itself from the self-satisfaction of completion which system itself imposes upon it like an unnamed and unnameable categorical imperative. Such withdrawal or errancy at work in Schelling from the inception of his philosophical career, exercises upon his thinking like an attraction towards a death which is undeniable and which singularizes itself each time at each moment of its constitution. The Schellingian energy of thought and the protean passion that drives his thinking restlessly ahead towards what must be left unnameable and yet be named each time, and thus never reaching the self-satisfaction of the consummate expression called the “system,” such philosophical passion has to be constantly solicited by a death or madness, by an essential peril of being, though regulated each time anew. The Schellingian philosophy is a philosophy of death where death, instead of signifying a cessation of life and thinking occurring at the end of its possibility, rather opens thinking to the *taking place* of the unconditional which defines the tragic condition of the mortals as mortals. It is so because such a path of thinking, by an ineluctable law of necessity which also is its freedom, must follow the eccentric path of going through to go beyond, the *über etwas hinaus* wherein the immeasurable, the inscrutable abyss of freedom, the groundless exuberance of being, or the generosity of that anarchic is furtively glimpsed in a manner of momentary co-incidence. In his great *System of Transcendental Idealism* Schelling calls this momentary co-incidence, in a Leibnizian manner, “the pre-established harmony.” Such

coincidence is like an eternity of the transient that suspends, momentarily, the sacrificial foundation of the tragic-speculative thought-structure. Even though occurring momentarily and in an incalculable manner, there now takes place the other tragic agony that does not follow the dialectical logic of conversion, negation and preservation into the higher speculative truth of self-presence and the tragic restitution of the subject as sovereign referent of modernity.

This is the other divine mourning never attained by means of the law of sacrifice. Here the speculative is at default, failing to invest itself through a sacrificing scapegoat in order to recuperate the *pleroma* of its self-presence. The divine mourning, on the other hand, is the desert of an abandonment of possession, of mastery and of appropriation where something other than speculative interest is at stake. This other tragic is the agony of the mortal pulled apart or disjoined by the claims of singularization and universalization at the same time,¹⁶ two opposites which, in the desert of abandonment, suddenly coincide as the monstrous harmony of freedom and necessity. The pre-established harmony is never here pre-established in the determinate manner of the concept but in an absolute sense, in-excess of a causal connection between conditioned entities. Such a tragic lacks the patience of dialectical resolution, of *Aufhebung* in the concept, of conversion into the positive. The tragic interrupts the system in a manner of working and unworking within the system at the same time, disjoining, while joining the jointure of system at the same instance.

Contra the dominant understanding, it is in this sense possible to say that the tragic is the innermost attunement, the *Grundstimmung* of Schellingian thinking. Occurring in the beginning of his career, the tragic for Schelling beckons towards that which is yet to come and yet which is always already there in Schellingian thought. Here tragic always already beckons to the abyss of destitution at work at the moment of its institution, at the founding moment of the philosophical thinking called “idealism.” This is precisely because such thinking claims to think that which can’t be thought without being exposed to the abyss of a tragic belonging-together of the highest discordance of freedom and necessity. This belonging together of freedom and necessity is their very undeniable discordance where freedom is absolutely in an agonal *polemos* with an absolute necessity which, like the sacred fire of Heraclites, holds together life and death in equal measure and which, when it manifests itself as itself, strikes us with a mortality, like the fire-struck Semele suddenly exposed to the divine excess destructive to the mortal. One can only participate in it by abandoning one’s egotism and claims to self-mastery to an infinite abandonment. Therein the tragic pain touches the mortals with an infinite, divine mournfulness. The tragic figure of Oedipus here is no longer the figure embodying the acuteness of self-consciousness of speculation, a representative figure of the speculative tragedy embodying the integrative law of the cathartic-dialectical, but the other Oedipus, withdrawn to the singular and singularized by mortality, the

¹⁶ Thus “Antigone ends up broken, not exactly by disparate laws but—as we shall see— *singularized under one law, through a withdrawal toward the other*. The tragic condition inserts one into a constituted phenomenality, and yet wrenches one from this through an undeniable (but hubristically denied) allegiance to an other.” See Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, 3-4.

mournful Oedipus renouncing the work of law and giving oneself to utter abandonment, to the wilderness or desert of abandonment, to the non-condition of seeing without seeing. This strange or monstrous Oedipus, blinded by an excessive vision and abandoned in the desert of the world is not a 'figure' at all and above all is not the figure of the subject, the speculative and specular subject of the onto-theological metaphysics but the other 'one,' impoverished of all the predicates that make the subject a subject: the singular and solitary, exposed to a mortality that does not in turn convert itself into the positive, the one who is apart and departing from all that is constitutive of the universal consolidation of the laws of the city. Uprooted from all inhabitation and all denomination, this Oedipus is the errancy of law inside out.

The question here is: how could such an Oedipus at all occur in Schelling's tragic thought, given the supposedly 'incontestable' evidence that the early Schellingian tragic thought is modelled upon the integrative logic of the speculative-dialectical thought-structure that is, after all, onto-theologically constituted? Is there a tragic thought, or is it possible to think of the tragic that does not have to follow the model of the integrative logic of the speculative law, an agony that does not necessarily have to be the intimate gathering of the speculative subject, of tragic dissonance that does not have to be integrated into the vicious re-circulation of guilt and punishment? Is it possible to think the tragic without the specular law of restitution, being irreducible to the integrating function of the law as such? If yes, then the idea of the tragic here should be able to release, beyond the vicious re-circulation of guilt and punishment and of fate and atonement, that which withdraws from all integration as such in a manner of always already, of suspension or destitution of the law without assuming the dialectical resolution of opposites. What guarantees it such a possibility or impossibility? These are difficult questions, and yet precisely therefore we must now ask them ourselves, this time with the help of Schellingian tragic thought.

The Blind Oedipus

Commentators on Schelling's philosophy of tragedy almost unanimously agree that Schelling takes the figure of Oedipus as the tragic figure par excellence, which is also the prime example for Aristotelean cathartic tragic poetics. This coincidence of the figure of Oedipus in Schelling as well as in Aristotle is not supposed to be fortuitous or accidental. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of Schelling dwells on this co-incidence from which he infers the sacrificial, ritualistic, homeopathic or cathartic foundation of Schellingian tragic thought. Passing nameless through Schellingian tragic thought, according to this dominant incontestable interpretation, Oedipus remains the nameless name of the subject¹⁷ as the tragic-speculative restitution of the sovereign *principium* or the *nomos* of metaphysics in its onto-theological constitution. The tragic pathos of modern metaphysics, so

¹⁷ Though Oedipus remained unnamed in 1795 essay, Schelling names Oedipus in his 1804 lectures on *Philosophy of Art*, ed. Douglas W. Stott (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 1989), 251-261.

we read, is the Oedipal tragic pathos of the subject. The poetics of this metaphysics is a tragic poetics in a fundamental manner. It is the poetics of the subject dirempting itself through a necessary apostasy of suffering in order to reconfigure itself. It thereby wins for itself immortality precisely at the very moment of succumbing to mortal punishment for the wrong which it unwittingly inflicts. Through tragic pathos of guilt, suffering and punishment, the sovereign *nomos* of metaphysics de-configures and re-configures itself as the integrative law of tragic violence.

Who can contest here the ‘incontestable’ proximity of Schellingian tragic thought to the work of the integrative law of tragic violence? Does not the figure of Oedipus provide the uncontested evidence that here is at the stake nothing other than the sacrificial foundation of tragic law itself? To answer that it will be necessary to undertake an investigation not only of what is at stake in the tragic thought of Schelling but of art as such, in proximity and distance to what came to be called “philosophy” at the onset of Schelling’s philosophical career. We should thereby be able to show how philosophy, because of its proximity to the poetic, would enter into a constellation that would have marked the onto-theological foundation of metaphysics with an indelible fragility, with an inexorable insufficiency which will ultimately destitute the self-foundational speculative thought from within, leaving it with wounds of the caesuras never to be purified through the any conceivable cathartic process. The tragic will ultimately leave philosophy deprived of its sovereign referent.

Has philosophy ever been able to dissociate itself, in its very constitutive possibility, from this (de)constitutive weakness, from such a destituting fragility, if not in intention then at least in the fundamental task that it gives itself to itself, in the desire in which it moves, in the law by which it abides itself, in all the proliferating predicates in which it describes itself and knows itself to be itself? Would not that unnameable fragility or destitution of philosophy be that which precisely will have made this strange discourse called “philosophy” all the while necessary for a task, to be renewed and given up again, precisely to destitute itself so that we are exposed to that which is without law and without sovereignty, the un-predicative singular and the non-descript other time disjoined from itself? What other discourse is there, replacing whatever we call by the name “philosophy,” to envisage the tragic task of destituting the speculative of its ‘sovereign referents’? Is not philosophy in itself, even when it does not explicitly call itself by the name “tragic,” always already tragic in its very structural opening of itself to itself where this structural opening would be inseparable from an unspeakable difference always escaping the language of philosophy? An unheard of difference, an unthinkable caesura or disjuncture, irreducible to dialectical oppositions and sublation into the integrative fold of law, may have already made philosophy tragic and Oedipus blind who, when blinded, sees more lucidly than when he had his eyes,¹⁸ namely, the tragic

¹⁸ Heidegger writes of Oedipus, quoting Hölderlin: “In his poem ‘In Lieblicher Bläue Blühet.’ Hölderlin wrote keen-sightedly, ‘perhaps King Oedipus has an eye too many.’ This eye too many is the fundamental condition for all great questioning and knowledge and also their only metaphysical ground.” Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Delhi: Motilal Benarasidass, 1999), Indian edition, 107.

identity of an agonal difference. Such is the blind Oedipus, wandering in the desert of the unthinkable—singular, apart, lonely.

This is now a matter of showing, by going through Schelling's tragic thought once again, how this Oedipus finds himself at the threshold where destitution of the sovereign referent takes place at the very moment of their establishment, where the absolute is momentarily glimpsed as an incalculable passing, in a sudden co-incidence of the incommensurable, like a flickering light in the desert of abandonment at the limit of a speculative representation. In this glimpse or blink of an eye (the German word *Augenblick* literally means "blink of an eye"), there arrives at the scenic site of a tragic representation, incalculably though, that immeasurable excess which, exceeding all power of representation, is called by Schelling "sublime." The deployment of the tragic, at the very moment of its speculative investment, turns out to be the site, the open space where something else takes place otherwise than the return of a speculative investment. The tragic here turns out to be the *spacing* of a sublime excess giving us the world in intuition and withdrawing from the concept: a gift immeasurable and exuberant, which is the gift of the world itself.

After such a detour, it is time to read Schelling in his own light.

The Monstrous Jointure of the Opposites

In what discursive context does Schelling deploy the tragic figure of Oedipus?

The readers familiar with Schelling's works know that Schelling first raises the problematic of the tragic in his 1795 epistolary essay called *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. It is the work of a twenty-year old student. The importance and significance of the epistolary form which this essay assumes is well commented upon¹⁹ and there is nothing new that can be said here. What is attempted here is something different: to lay bare the fundamental philosophical context wherein the question of the tragic, and consequently the figure of Oedipus emerge and to hint towards the *taking place* of a tragic agonal difference that is irreducible to the investment of speculative thought: the taking place of the immeasurable, the de-figuring excess of the other.

What is the task that Schelling gives himself in his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* of 1795? It is to think in a fundamental manner the agonal holding-together of freedom and necessity, of death and life, of mortality and natality, of finitude and the infinite. A careful discussion of the Schellingian oeuvre in its entirety will reveal, despite the ever changing pathways of his thinking, that such agonal holding together of freedom and necessity, of death and life, of mortality and natality, of finitude and infinite is the fundamental trait of Schellingian thought as a whole. If what we call here "tragic" is nothing other than the unbearable agony of a difference holding-together whose discordant being-together is the undeniable truth, denied each time, then perhaps one can say that the tragic is the fundamental tonality of Schellingian thought. This is true, as we have said

¹⁹ See Courtine, "Tragedy and Sublimity"; Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life*.

before, despite the fact that the word “tragic” or “tragedy” itself disappears soon after 1804. One can say here that the tragic is the *rhythmus* of the Schellingian music as such. And we know from Emile Benveniste²⁰ and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe,²¹ the sense of the word *rhythmus* is inseparable from caesuras, from intervals or interruptions, from cision or the moment of cutting off, irreducible to the thought of a continuity whose image is that of the flow of a river.²²

The tragic is the *rhythmus* of difference. Difference is an agonal *rhythmus*. One can say here perhaps that *rhythmus* is in itself agonal, and hence is tragic. In *rhythmus* there is ‘expressed’ the agony of the disparate in its most tragic copulation: between the immeasurable, the excessive, the inexorable necessity, on the one hand, and the equally undeniable “no” saying of a freedom, rising each time in its very falling, always in its infinite contestation with the former, on the other. The *rhythmus* opens up a *play of space* between them, an *open space* or *spacing* of strife and agony, of mortification and winning immortality without subsuming one to the other, or both of them under a common denominator which will totalize their holding-together into a universal unity. The *rhythmus* is the undecidable limit, the undecidable as limit (the limit as undecidable) that holds together a difference whose belonging-together can only be a momentary coincidence, a sudden passing of the absolute without remainder. Unlike the Hegelian deployment of the concept of the limit, the limit here signifies less of a determinate negation constitutive of an ‘object’ of knowledge, of thought or even as an entity, than that of a differentiation that becomes indiscernible at the sudden eruption of an incalculable coincidence.

What, then, Schelling attempts to think in this work and also in all his works under new names and on ever new pathways of thinking, is nothing but this tragic *rhythmus* of freedom and necessity which, within the aesthetic field, is glimpsed in *aesthetic intuition* (best exemplified in tragedy as a poetic genre) and in philosophy as *intellectual intuition* (at least this is what the early Schelling says). While tragedy is the privileged site of the glimpse into the momentary passing of the absolute or the unconditional within the aesthetic field, the same agonal manifestation of the absolute is momentarily glanced in the intellectual intuition in philosophical marvel or astonishment at the generosity of an exuberant being, the un-representable excess of all that is thinkable under the sovereign law of the concept. Each of them in its singular manner is singularly *tragic* in its fundamental trait, in its fundamental tonality and each in its own manner refuses to be integrated into the speculative mediation of *Aufhebung*. In Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800, written five years after *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* and four years before his lectures on *Philosophy of Art*, art is thus

²⁰ Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables & Florida: University of Miami Press, 1973).

²¹ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*.

²² Similarly Heidegger writes of rhythm: “Rhythm, *rhythmos*, does not mean flux and flowing, but rather form. Rhythm is what is at rest, what forms the movement of dance and song and thus lets it rest within itself. Rhythm bestows rest.” Martin Heidegger, “Words,” in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (Harper Collins, 1982), 149.

considered to be the paramount to the philosopher.²³ Schelling thinks of art as the privileged site of disclosure, as the *spacing* of the everlasting revelation of that supreme event of the unexpected and un-expectable absolute concurrence of what is in absolute *polemos*. Surprisingly, Schelling calls this disclosure an utterly “unaccountable” and “incomprehensible” phenomenon, and yet the undeniable *taking place* of the unconditional *event*, eliciting from us astonishment or marvel:²⁴ the *taking place* of the infinite in the finite itself before and in excess of all predication, before and beyond the cognitive categorical grasp of entities. The aesthetic intuition or the intellectual intuition that allows us a glimpse into that *taking place* of the unconditional, or wherein the absolute momentarily and unexpectedly *gleams* through as that which makes in advance all phenomenality possible, is a disclosure, not of entities in the predicative-categorical manner of subject-predicate co-relation (which sensory intuition discloses), but of the inapparent itself. Being in excess of all denomination and the nominative and withdrawing from the simple oppositions of the empirical and the ideal, the aesthetic intuition and intellectual intuition—each in its own manner—disclose for us the agonal holding together in the tragic *verbality* of *showing*. In that sense the disclosure of art as such is a tragic disclosure, a tragic phenomenology of an unexpected event of concurrence of opposites.

In that sense the task of thinking and of the discourse called “philosophy” for Schelling in itself should be said to be a tragic task, namely, to think the agonal manifestation of the absolute as the highest coincidence of freedom and necessity. Such an agonal manifestation of the opposites occurs at the limit of all representation as an indiscernible *passing* where this instance of occurring can only be, at the same time, the highest *partitioning of being*, an instantaneous occurrence without being fused into the synthetic mediation of an absolute concept. Therefore the question of the tragic occurs in his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* in the philosophical context of a discussion of freedom and necessity whose tragic holding-together is denied, being un-representable to thought, when each time one form of thinking makes exclusive claims over the other, thereby elevating one particular claim into the status of an exclusive, overarching, universal and sovereign presence-at-hand. The result is what Reiner Schürmann²⁵ calls “tragic denial,” which is not the denial of *this* or *that* but the denial of the tragic itself in its agonal manifestation of the holding-together without a common denomination. Schelling’s essay traces this tragic denial, this reduction of this agonal coincidence of the opposites at work in various

²³ “If aesthetic intuition is merely transcendental intuition become objective, it is self-evident that art is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely, the unconscious element in acting and producing, and its original identity with the conscious. Art is paramount to the philosopher, precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart.” Schelling, F.W.J. von, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 231.

²⁴ Ibid., 223.

²⁵ Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*.

philosophical systems with special reference to the philosophical systems prevalent in his times, namely, dogmatism and criticism.

The first letter of the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* therefore begins with a critique of a certain mode of thinking, namely, dogmatism, for surrendering the living, irreducible agonal strife of the mortal against the immeasurable into “quiet abandonment of oneself to the absolute object.”²⁶ The greatness of the sublime, which is the tragic *par excellence* is thereby denied or is subsumed under the posited sovereign referent of the moral God who now is shown to fulfil his legislative function of guaranteeing the unity of the world. This is so in so far as the very ground of the sublime consists in this “struggle against the immeasurable.”²⁷ In this quiet denial of the tragic strife, the moral God acts as *nomothetic* (legislative) referent of the world. With this subsumption of God to a legislative function, God who now becomes nothing other than the guarantor of a representable unity of the world and the sovereign referent of a moral world-order, there is now born “ethics,” that philosophical discipline of practical reason whereby one can hope to discern the moral good from the morally bad. Schelling here subjects to a deconstructive reading the Kantian, or better the Kant-inspired thetic positing of a sovereign referent called “the idea of a moral God” whose empty place—precisely by virtue of the emptiness of its site—supports the legislative order of the universal morality and the inexorable insistence of necessity. It thereby denies the other claim of the singular with its equal insistence of freedom in its forever “nay” saying, of its forever refusal to surrender to the immeasurable without the sublimity of strife.

Thus in this first letter itself Schelling shows the aporia or the double bind that adheres in the dogmatist’s insistence on “practical reason” alone while all the time presupposing precisely that which it must exclude, namely, all the works of “theoretical reason.” Such insistence is based upon its false claim of independence from theoretical reason, upon its denial of the tragic *jointure* of freedom and necessity. Schelling interrogates his interlocutor:

For what *you* think when you speak of a merely *practical assumption*, frankly I cannot see. Your phrase cannot mean more than the acceptance of something as true. And that, like any other acceptance of a truth, is theoretical in form; in its foundation or matter, however, it is practical. Yet, it is precisely your complaint that theoretical reason is too narrow, too restricted, for an absolute causality. If so, from where can it receive the theoretical justification for accepting as true that assumption for which, as you say, your practical reason has given the ground; from where a new form broad enough for an absolute causality?²⁸

If the possibility of the sovereign referent of the moral law is based upon the unbinding of the practical reason from theoretical reason, such a constitutive

²⁶ Schelling, “Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism,” in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays*, trans. Fritz Marti (London: Associated University Presses, 1980), 157.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 159.

or institutive functionality of this moral God is always already haunted by the other insistence, the later contaminating in advance, albeit potentially, the practical reason's "quiet abandonment" to the "arms of the world."²⁹ Each time the moral law seek to formulate itself, and it must be formulated in language so as to elicit from us obligation, it ineluctably assumes the form of a theoretical statement. That means, reduction of the singular actuality of the divine to the legislative functionary of humanity and to the guarantor of the unity of the world, is haunted by an irreducible, undeniable claim of the singular. This haunting of the singular in turn will always return, like an ever recurring spectre, contaminating thereby the pure, practical order of moral, objective necessity. The generous actuality of the divine, who is always this singular, refuses to be enclosed into the functionary of being administrator of the world. The divine refuses to align himself with the dogmatic legitimization and legislative domestication of the world on a theological foundation. As an excess to this nexus of the moral-legislative functions, God is not the sovereign referent here but is rather the eternal foreigner, an eternal remainder to all moral distinction between good and bad, the irreducible groundless ground of the world.

Thus the dogmatist's attempt to elicit from us obligation to their moral-legislative order (their imperative: "surrender to the arms of the world without struggle!") on the basis of their reduction of God into guarantor of their world ends up in the tragic denial of the sublime coincidence of the agonal difference between freedom and necessity. This is so in so far as the actuality of God itself refuses such denial. Being a remainder of all predicates of the world and as the irreducible excess to the world, the divine is an infinite withdrawal from the *potentia* (powers) that manifests on the profane order of the world. Later in his fascinating 1810 private lecture at Stuttgart, Schelling meditates on this actuality of God as an unthinkable excess of a generosity that never belongs to potentiality, and who as such cannot even be thought as 'being' but is over or beyond-being (*Überseyn*). The moment the generosity of the actuality of God is acknowledged, the dogmatist cannot begin with the thetic positing of the pure order of moral necessity, and that very moment the obligation to their legislative ordering of the world also ceases. Therefore dogmatism on a profounder basis must begin neither with pure, practical thetic positing in its empty universality nor with theoretical reason alone but with existence (*Dasein*) itself. Such dogmatism must acknowledge the exuberance of the world whose unity is not guaranteed by a mere conceptual God, deprived of his generous actuality of *Dasein*. The other insistence contaminates in advance the dogmatic legitimizing order of the moral law in such a way that the tragic agony of freedom and necessity itself remains inexorable. Despite the minimizing operation that dogmatism puts into play that seeks to reduce the agonal manifestation of a difference by eliciting obligation to the empty, formal order of universal necessity by our quiet surrender, this irremissible tragic strife of freedom and necessity remains operating all the while, albeit denied each time. The attempt to minimize the agony of tragic strife between freedom and necessity does not really resolve their strife, because such "quiet abandonment" to "the arms of

²⁹ Ibid., 157.

the world” bears witness to the exuberance of the divine whose actuality remains irreducible to the unity of the world. For Schelling, the divine in its singular ecstasy of existence, is this extra-world of moral postulates, and this excess impoverishes the moral law of its ultimate character in each turn of the world.

Dogmatic insistence on the universal power of necessity hides from itself its innermost anxiety. This is an anxiety of any discourse of morality that aligns itself with the legislative act of norm positing operation, namely: the anxiety in the face of the immeasurable, the inexorable and the agonal, and its quick subsumption or surrender to the arms of the world, thereby foreclosing the sublimity of the tragic-agonal manifestation of phenomena in advance. In this tragic denial, the sovereignty of the legislative order or the order of the absolute object restitutes itself. The sublime tragic strife is now reduced into a representable phenomenon within the given unified world present-at-hand whose unity is determined to be guaranteed by a moral God. The subject now has to subject itself to the universal law of necessity that is applicable to all, to the order of generality where particulars are bound under the obligation to the common. It thereby abandons itself to a quiet resignation, and thereby gives up the nobility and sublimity of saying “no” out of its groundless freedom. Schelling sees this conjunction of “ethics” and “legal” to be constitutive of the matrix of the juridico-political administration of the world. This ordering of the world legitimizes the claim of the universal as an immeasurable “objective” necessity, an anarchic power which now strikes the subject as “fate” or “destiny.” It comes with the terror of an imperative, with the power of command: “surrender quietly to necessity, otherwise you are guilty of crime and the fate of law (and the law of fate) will befall you inevitably.” Fate-struck, the singular is now rendered particular, subsumable under a “common” law which is supposed to expiate the crime by punishment. The law of this tragic, this *nomothetic-tragic* that bases itself upon the logic of equivalences of values between the crime and punishment (the punishment must be equivalent to the magnitude of the crime committed) is now understood to have a significance exceeding beyond the aesthetic to the domains of the “ethical” and the “legal.”

Schelling sees in this dogmatic installation or establishment of the universal as objective necessity—which in turn obliges from us quiet resignation—a unilateral act of subsumption by means of which the power of the law asserts itself. Reiner Schürmann calls this trait of unilateral act of subsumption by the name “natality”: the pure power of institution and subsumption of mortality within the universality of the law. It is the power that institutes, through the violence of a positing, an order of totality where “all” will find “quiet abandonment” and their sense of being alive. The other attraction, that of mortality as impoverishment and consequently their tragic-agonal matrix is denied. There now arises the illusion, given by the *nomos* of necessity, of pure life of founding and positing, of “quiet abandonment” untouched by the depositing, destituting, unworking mortality. Here the power of the law renews itself by constantly equalizing crime and punishment, between the work of fate that strikes the one with crime and at the same time and in the same gesture punishes for this crime. Thus the juridico-political nexus which dogmatism propagates, the nexus between

“ethics” and “legal,” constitutes itself by a fiction, by mysticism, by a fable or a deception. It invents the logic of economy between the supposed crime and its punishment in order to minimize the agonal coincidence of freedom and necessity. It does this by emphasizing an immeasurable necessity in one sided manner to which one must succumb without sublimity, without struggle, without saying “no.” As reward for our succumbing in quiet resignation into “the arms of the world,” dogmatism offers us the cheap award, not of life as such but the feeling of merely being alive.³⁰ Thus the agonal coincidence of freedom and necessity exceeds beyond the order where the logic of equivalences of values—the equivalency of crime and punishment, between fate and the guilt—allows the legitimacy of the legal order possible.

This fable, this fiction of the juridico-political is necessary for legitimizing the dogmatist’s restitution of a hegemonic sovereignty. The particular, having bought the illusion of pure life at the cost of sublimity, is now self-satisfied with the sovereign repose of life and prefers to “abandon(s) himself to the youthful world” than to affirm a freedom that singularizes him by a tragic struggle to death. Schelling writes:

While the spectacle of the struggle presents man at the climax of his self assertion, the quiet vision of that rest, on the contrary finds him at the climax of simply being alive; he abandons himself to the youthful world in order to quench his thirst for life and existence as such. To be, to be! is the cry that resounds within him; he would rather fall into the arms of the world than to the arms of death.³¹

The law strikes the one who seeks his life. Such a one, who seeks life, knows life in no other way than simply being alive. Life is here being equated with ‘simply being alive.’ This ‘simply being alive’—like what Benjamin speaks of as “mere life”³²—is only possible when the tragic agonal holding together of life and death is already uncoupled by the violent act of law. The dogmatic system, according to Schelling, achieves this by uncoupling practical reason from theoretical reason. Death is now deprived of its eventive character of jointure that inwardly constitutes and deconstitutes life in a primordial manner. As a result, the one who is only ‘simply being alive’ is not a life, will never live life in true greatness. The life of the one who is ‘simply being alive’ is only the site of the law. The law neutralizes the greatness, the sublimity and the tragic of a life by giving to the particular beings the life of ‘simply being alive,’ a petrified life, life without life. The uncoupling of the agonal difference of life and death can think of one over the other, one at a time, either as ‘merely alive’ or as ‘lifeless.’ As against it, Schelling dreams of a tragic thought that joins the opposites in their very discordance: “Man ought to be neither lifeless nor merely alive. His activity is necessarily intent upon objects, but with equal necessity it returns into

³⁰ Walter Benjamin’s following remark illuminates this problem with a peculiar intensity here: “mythical violence is bloody power over mere life for its own sake.” Walter Benjamin, “The Critique of Violence,” in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Press, 1986),

³¹ Schelling, “Philosophical Letters,” 157.

³² Benjamin, “The Critique of Violence,” 297

itself. The latter distinguishes him from the merely living being, the former from the lifeless.”³³ Because the law of fate strikes in equal measures both the ‘lifeless’ and ‘merely being alive’ without expiation, only life appearing as tragic radically opens itself to the mode of being where it is freed from the cages of the law and from the vicious circle of guilt and fate.

In the similar way, in the positing of a moral God, the exuberant and the generous life of the divine is emptied out *in sight of* making such life the figure of a sovereign referent at the service of an objective order of a juridico-political-moral necessity. The elevation of the figure of God into the universal guardian of the world-order at once deprives the life of the divine of its very exuberance. The universal order of an objective, immeasurable necessity with its pure power of life over the particulars remains insufficient to measure the life of the divine or of the mortal, life whose tragic sublimity consists of an *irreducible non-coincidence of life with mere law*. As a result, existence itself, which is the site of freedom-necessity agon holding-together, un-works in advance any attempt of making the law at one with the will.

The last point is important for Schelling. This aporia of law’s relation to the will destitutes in advance the dogmatic attempt to think the world and life under the denomination of a representable world-unity and to think the singular as mere subsumable particular to the objective necessity of a juridico-political-moral order. There is something excessive about the will that renders the conformity to the law, that “quiet abandonment,” impossible. One of the greatest contributions of Schelling to philosophy lies here: that is, to think will irreducible to choices exercised by the subject. Schelling interrogates his interlocutor once again,

How can you be convinced that the will of that being is in conformity with this law? The shortest reply would be to say that that being is itself the creator of the moral law. However, this is against the spirit and the letter of your philosophy. Or, is this moral law simply to exist, as independent of any will? That puts us in the domain of fatalism. For a law that cannot be explained by anything that might exist independently of that law, a law that dominates the greatest power as well as the smallest—such a law has no sanction other than that of necessity.³⁴

If the conformism of will with the moral law is the grounding presupposition of the dogmatist’s position, then dogmatism is always already self-refuted by this very grounding presupposition, for this presupposition can present itself only as an unavoidable aporia of law. What is it that escapes, if not from the immeasurable power of law posited or positing itself as necessity over particular life then at least from the dogmatist’s reduction of “the despairs of his *Existenz*”?³⁵ Is it anything other than freedom itself, the other irresistible

³³ Schelling, “Philosophical Letters,” 185.

³⁴ Ibid., 159-60.

³⁵ Ibid., 160.

claim of mortality, the forever “nay” saying of the singular, the destituting—undoing work of death, the desert and solitude of the finite?

In his 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism* Schelling displays the correlation of aesthetic intuition and intellectual intuition in the following terms: aesthetic intuition is the intellectual intuition objectified. The aesthetic and intellectual intuition of the inward principle of beauty is the momentary coincidence of two opposite principles in contest. The dogmatist’s positing of a moral God at the service of a moral law forecloses the very possibility of such a glimpse into the momentary eruption of the agonal coincidence. With the idea of a moral God as the guardian of a moral order, the agonal manifestation of the world is taken away. The world becomes now a representable unity where the law in a sovereign manner presents itself, giving us the consolation of a quiet repose in the arms of the world. In such an order everyone finds life in the arms of the All. Such a life, subsumable to the law, is life as ‘merely being alive.’ It is pantheism in a simple sense where the divine, as moral source, finds embodiment in the universal, objective order of history now made absolute, deified, and irresistible.

Schelling’s deconstruction of the one-sided claim of the supposedly universal dogmatist position shows that the tragic is to be thought otherwise than such a pantheistic theodicy of history. What is at stake here, and we will see it soon, is other than the speculative subject or the speculative object. The apparition of the absolute in such instantaneous coincidence is tragic because it marks the most painful intensification of a difference un-subsumable under the law of one sided unity. Such instantaneous coincidence marks an abyss of a caesura that will render impossible the embodiment of the *theos* on the immanent plane of the profane history. The tragic here turns out to be the most agonal delegitimation of each and any hegemonic assertion of earthly sovereignty. For Schelling as for Hölderlin, such caesura presents itself in the most intense form of tragic presentation. One must now be able to display how such hegemonic assertions of the power of the law deny the sublimity of the tragic caesura which, being caesural, makes possible the momentary, almost monstrous coincidence of freedom and necessity.

Mysticism of the Law and the Tragic Denial

Criticism’s deconstruction of the dogmatic order of the juridico-political remains incomplete if criticism remains satisfied by merely showing that the dogmatic uncoupling of the practical reason from the theoretical reason remains unachievable. The indemonstrability of a constituted order of moral law uncontaminated by the theoretical insistence remains entrapped in the aporia of the law. This is because such a mode of deconstruction, like dogmatism, remains one sided and remains within the subject-object reduction of existence (*Dasein*) into either an object of knowledge or an idea of a moral postulate. Whether in dogmatism or in criticism understood in the manner above, *existence as existence* does not manifest in its true sublimity and in its tragic nobility, that is, irreducible to the alternate determination of existence either as lifeless or merely being alive. Schelling here tacitly distinguishes the singularity of existence in all its exuberance from the mere subject-object opposition between mere being alive and the lifeless. Where

the tragic must manifest in its true sublimity, it must appear as *existence* which is irreducibly singular, irreducible to the conceptual determination of the theoretical reason or the moral determination as subsumable to the universal, merely formal law of the objective. Only when criticism occurs at the level of existence and itself assumes the task of existence in all its exuberance, can it come to the fruitful confrontation with dogmatism. Here dogmatism itself is elevated from mere dogmatizing tendency. Only then does it become possible for the first time for criticism to confront the mysticism of the law on a new basis. Schelling's juxtaposition of dogmatism and criticism is not posed at the merely theoretical level but as existential confrontation with the tragic strife of freedom and necessity.

The maximization of the universal, objective power of necessity as law is, paradoxically, also a certain *ecstasy* of mysticism (*Schwärmerei*). There is, thus, an intriguing connection of the law with mysticism. The law mystifies, dupes and subsumes the particular under the universal form of necessity by injecting daily doses of sedatives, of opium and of false utopian dreams of a "youthful world" of quietude.³⁶ It is against this mysticism of the law that Schelling poses the ontological problematic of the tragic relation of man to the world. Hence the problematic of the tragic can only be understood with the background of the highest ontological question, namely, the question regarding the "riddle of the world":³⁷ "How could the absolute come out of itself and oppose to itself a world"?³⁸ Schellingian tragic thought responds to this highest ontological problematic in such a manner that un-works the mysticism of the law and thereby beckons us, in the momentary glimpse, to the passing of the unconditional which is the sudden coincidence of the agonal strife of necessity and freedom.

It is this "riddle of the world" that must be the meeting point of the *polemos* between dogmatist and the critical philosopher: it is where they meet, clash with each together, and it is where they (must) remain apart. It is where the possibility of true contestation against the mysticism of the law arises in a primordial ontological manner, namely, in the mode of questioning: how the absolute or the unconditional can at all be seen in relation to the world? In the text which is under discussion here, Schelling juxtaposes the two-fold responses to the above question: there is, on one hand, the dogmatic-pantheistic response that understands the divine on the basis of the world and thereby legitimizing in advance a certain theodicy of history; there is, on the other hand, criticism responding to it in an equally one-sided manner by asserting the unconditionality of an inscrutable freedom without necessity on the basis of a forever rebellious "nay" saying. In both responses Schelling perceives a twofold danger at work accompanied by the tragic denial: on one hand, there is the danger of legitimization of an objective world-order on a theological foundation wherein the mysticism of the law unleashes its horror; and on the other hand, the danger of a demonic freedom without the soberness of justice, freedom without necessity. In a

³⁶ It is Nietzsche more than anyone else who has brought to our notice the sedative character of the occidental metaphysics, aesthetics and politics. Against such decadent morality of sedatives, Nietzsche advocates an aesthetics of stimulants.

³⁷ Ibid., 173.

³⁸ Ibid., 174.

manner of double reading, Schelling asks us not to give up the tragic double bind of freedom and necessity, and thereby asking us to attend the dangers arising from tragic denial. Here is Schelling:

If it were really the destiny of our race to be tormented by terrors of an invisible world, would it not be easier to tremble at the faintest notion of freedom, cowed by the superior power of that world, instead of going down fighting. . . . The man who would obtain his existence in the supersensuous world by begging, will become tormentor of humanity in this world, raging against himself and others. Power in this world will compensate him for the humiliation in that. Waking up from the delights of that world, he returns into this one to make it a hell.³⁹

Here freedom, freed from its own necessity, turns demonic⁴⁰. There is an arbitrariness that belongs to freedom as its inherent ontological possibility, and hence the necessity of necessity, given by freedom to itself out of its *abgrund*, that is justice which alone will make the demonic freedom bearable to us. Here Schelling truly fights on many fronts against more than one adversary. One must constantly rise against the reduction of existence into ‘merely being alive,’ against the mysticism of the law that subsumes the particulars (already no longer singular) belonging to the empty, formal universality of objective necessity; and on the other hand, one must also constantly regulate the danger of a demonic freedom that constantly threatens to degenerate into the most terrifying arbitrariness. The very source of life, the fire of possibility when it seeks to actualize itself without regulation and without the measure of justice, turns against life itself and becomes the most devouring fire.

The question here cannot be that of a simple opposition and choosing between the alternatives of dogmatism or criticism, dogmatism in the name of criticism or criticism in the name of dogmatism. It is rather the task of thinking their ground in the unconditional belonging together of freedom and necessity in their irreducibility of strife. Hence is the Schellingian double reading that cautions us against the dangers coming from two sides that are opposite to each other like two monstrous enemies. The tragic task of thinking and existing would not have to choose the alternative between these two but to think of still another task, which is the unconditional task of welcoming an agonal manifestation of the incommensurable difference at their most un-thinkable coincidence that sets them apart at the same time.

The Enthusiasm of Spinoza

³⁹ Ibid, 194.

⁴⁰ Elsewhere Schelling writes: “Everything about man has the character of freedom. Fundamentally, man is a being that inanimate nature has released from its guardianship and thereby entrusted to the fortunes of his own (internally conflicting) forces. His fundamental continuity is one of *danger*, forever recurring and forever to be mastered anew, a danger that man seeks by his own impulse and from which he saves himself anew.” F. W. J. von Schelling, *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory*, trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 94.

One of the profoundest insights that German Idealism has bequeathed to subsequent thinking—an insight whose initial formulation and articulation arrives in this essay of Schelling’s—is this: an unmediated access to the absolute, to the unconditioned, is not only impossible but undesirable itself, being destructive to the life of mortals. While it can actually be the very source of life when it is approached with the sober measure of justice, it turns demonic when it is approached in an unmediated manner, resulting in the most unthinkable evil unleashed on the profane order. It is this measure of justice that poetic works, most specifically Greek tragedy exemplifies for Schelling. The Greek tragedy thus presents for us, within the limit of aesthetic representation, the measured and regulated participation in the unconditional which, precisely through this presentation never reaching closure, exposes us to that which is the irreducible excess of all representation. The question here is of a regulated participation, by virtue of a sobriety given by an aesthetic mode of presentation, with the infinite, with the sublime and with the immeasurable excess, failing which either the “horrors of ecstasy”⁴¹ is let loose or “the terrors of the objective world” befalls us.⁴² But this is also the risk, the wager that the Greek tragedy assumed, for the limit is never fixed once and for all and that limit may, at any incalculable moment, be uplifted, thereby exposing us to the abyss without measure. In this risk lies the courage of the Greek people, and this where their sublimity consists of, not to quietly abandon themselves into the arms of the objective necessity of the universal power.

From this insight Schelling develops the possibility of a tragic thought that is to constitute the fundamentality attunement of his entire existence and philosophy to come. Later his friends, Hölderlin and Hegel, in their different manners and in their singular linguistic and existential gestures, develop this tragic insight and make it their own. Readers of Hölderlin know that we are here not very far from the Hölderlinian tragic insistence on poetic measure, on the soberness of justice, on cultivation of the formative drive so as not to fall into the demonic excess of fiery passion. The tragic glimpse into the unconditional can only be the indirection of an exposure to an event of an excessive manifestation, an excess which is unbearable to finite beings like us and even to the grand tragic heroes of Greek tragedies. It is this excess that tragedy bears witness to by passing through the limit of aesthetic representation and yet opening to the unrepresentable and immeasurable event in a manner of a tragic double bind: we must cultivate, which means one must regulate, what present themselves

⁴¹ Schelling, “Philosophical Letters,” 189.

⁴² “As long as man remains in the realm of nature he is *master* of nature, in the most proper sense of the word, just as he can be *master* of himself. He assigns to the objective world its definite limits beyond which it may not go. In *representing* the object to himself, in giving it form and consistency, he masters it. He has nothing to fear, for he himself has set limits to it. But as soon as he does away with these limits, as soon as the object is no longer representable, that is, as soon as he himself has strayed beyond the limit of representation, he finds himself lost. The terrors of the objective world befall him. He has done away with its bounds: how shall he now subdue it? He can no longer give distinct form to the boundless object. It is indistinctly present to his mind. Where shall he bind it, where seize it, where put limits to its excessive power?” Ibid., 193.

as *agonal* and as in *polemos*. The entire deception that mysticism of the law seduces us into is the belief in the unmediated access to the measurelessness of the divine excess, a deception that seduces even the noble and the great, for it promises them (even though vainly) that they thereby achieve what is the profoundest and highest in existence, that is, unity with the divine excess, attainment of absolute beatitude in its unity with absolute morality, and to achieve the synthesis in one's own existence between the absolute and the world. They thereby forget that such synthesis can only, at its best, be the task which, *as* an infinite task, does not present itself as pure, unmediated participation with the absolute present-at-hand. In a mediatory manner mediated through the sobriety of form and poetic measure, it lets us have a glimpse into the passing of the unconditional which erupts incalculably and unforeseeably in the midst of existence.

It is this deception mentioned above that, according to Schelling, led even a great philosopher like Spinoza to a certain mysticism of the law. It is at this point, in this reference to Spinoza, that the Schellingian deconstructive reading reaches its utmost intensity. Since the task of participating in the divine excess cannot begin like a transition from infinite to the finite, it can only be understood as a tendency of the finite being itself towards the infinite, "a perpetual striving to loose itself in the non-finite."⁴³

This is dogmatism at its best: In demanding that the subject lose itself in the absolute, he had demanded implicitly the identity of the subjective with the absolute causality. He had, decided, practically, that the finite world is but a modification of the infinite; finite causality is merely a modification of infinite causality. That demand was to be fulfilled, not by the subject's own causality, but by a foreign causality in the subject. In other words, the demand was this: Annihilate yourself through absolute causality! Be absolutely passive towards absolute causality!⁴⁴

"Annihilate yourself through absolute causality!"—a far more profounder version than that of dogmatizing: 'Quietly resign yourself to arms of the world!' This is ultimate fantasmagoria of all mysticism, including the mysticism of the law. The sovereign referent of all hegemony is this ultimate fantasy, the intellectual intuition eliciting obligation from us in the form of a moral demand: "Annihilate yourself" to the objective, ineluctable necessity without a struggle, without the sublimity of a tragic freedom. *The mysticism of the law denies the tragic by refusing the sober measure of justice*. Schelling thus addresses his interlocutor: "Here, my friend, we have the principle of all eccentric fantasy (*Schwärmerei*). Whenever such fantasmagoria becomes a system, it arises from nothing but the objective intellectual intuition, from the fact that one would take the intuition of oneself for an intuition of an object outside of oneself, the intuition of the inner intellectual world for an intuition of a supersensuous world outside of

⁴³ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 178-9.

oneself.”⁴⁵ In such fantastication, lacking a resistance in the objective, it never returns to itself: an abyss of intuition opens up, subsuming all singularity into particulars wherein the particular is determined beforehand as mere modification of the infinite and of the universal. The eternity of this abyss is not the eternity that suddenly erupts as tragic temporality of the instantaneous breaking through of the absolute, but the abyss of eternity as mere expansion without limit of a poetic form, without the measure of justice, without determination of a halt where everything that is singular is annihilated into a fantasmatic space of empty universality. Here, as Hegel says, is the absolute night where all cows are black.

As against this eternity as mere expansion which is supposed to be achieved by the mysticism of annihilation, or against the eternity of the one embodying itself as omnipresence in the pantheistic mysticism of history whereby, in both cases, the coincidence of the opposite is immediately reduced or annulled, Schelling evokes the tragic occurrence of eternity breaking through in an instance when freedom and necessity come to coincide with each other. While such coincidence is the very *telos* even of the dogmatic mysticism, the tragic is at once denied the moment the unconditional is seen as a self-presence present-at-hand. What the dogmatic mysticism of the law cannot tolerate, what remains unthinkable for such *Schwärmerei*, is the agonal manifestation of freedom and necessity in their coincidence wherein alone lays the sublimity of their strife. Hence the tragic agonal opening of freedom to necessity and vice-versa is immediately subsumed to an ethical universality in-nexus with the legislative thetic positing, emphasizing one over the other but never their irreducible agonal strife. The result is either fanaticism, close to mysticism of a sort, or the arbitrariness of a demonic freedom. In either case, the tragic agonal coincidence of freedom and necessity remains unbearable. The irreducible and highest tragic task of existence itself, that of thinking together freedom and necessity as the unconditional occurrence of the event, remains withdrawn from both. Thereby this task *as* task, an infinite task, loses its task-character and immediately becomes included in the integrative fold of the law present-at-hand. The ‘ethical’ and ‘legislative’ nexus in this manner is secured from the unbearable agony of the tragic. The unbearable character of tragedy drives philosophy itself to abandon itself “to all the horrors of ecstasy (*Schwärmerei*),”⁴⁶ to the fantastication of the ethical and legislative nexus, to the arbitrariness of a demonic freedom which one does not how to regulate. In either case, what remains unthinkable is the freedom in its unconditional manifestation coinciding with the highest manifestation of necessity. Not being able to bear this contradiction in coupling, mortals take shelter in hypostatizing, fantasizing ‘one’ over the ‘other’ (subject over the object and vice-versa) to such an ultimate degree that the horrors of evil break through on earth and unregulated violence of power is unleashed.

This is why Schelling does not, strictly speaking, support one system over the other, criticism over dogmatism, as the only possible system. The moment one system is considered to be the only system possible, the ethico-

⁴⁵ Ibid., 182.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 189.

legislative fantasmagoria takes place and the potentiality of its violence is immediately present before the eyes. Long before Hegel came to constitute his system, the following remark already warns us of the danger that lies in this desire for system and pre-intimates the eventual Schellingian deconstruction of the Hegelian speculative onto-theology:

The genuine philosopher has never felt himself to be greater than when he has beheld an infinity of knowledge. The whole sublimity of his science has consisted in just this, that it would never be complete. He would become unbearable to himself the moment he came to believe that he had completed his system. That very moment he would cease to be *creator* and would be degraded to an instrument of his own creature. How much more unbearable he would find the thought if somebody else should want to force such fetters on him.⁴⁷

This remark belongs to the very essay that is considered to be the first articulation of the tragic-speculative matrix constitutive of the movement of German Idealism. An attentive reading of Schelling reveals that the tragic thought of Schelling has already departed from the integrative logic of the speculative thought at the very moment when the speculative is first to rise as possibility at all. At the very moment of a speculative possibility, the tragic presents itself only as default, defaulting the logic of present-at-hand, for the tragic can only be at best a task never realized in any immanence of self-presence. Therefore the tragic task of philosophical presentation (*Darstellung*) can only be an infinite one; it is the infinite presentation of the default, and thereby the opening to an excess never presenting itself as present-at-hand. One can say here, with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, that the tragic is the “desistance” of the speculative. The legislative, the *nomothetic* desire of the speculative fantasmagoria, is momentarily disrupted, delegitimized, deferred and differed by the caesura opened up by the tragic. The tragic as the infinite task, never realized in any immanence of self-presence as present-at-hand, desists the *Schwärmerei* of all conditioned politics and totalizing ethics. In Schellingian tragic thought, one can hear the resonance of the sober measure of justice that must invigilate, almost like an insomniac and be concerned so that that the irresistible power of the law with its objective drive of thetic positing must not end up assuming the name of justice without remainder, for the moment such a name is seen as presently realized, the “horror of ecstasy” takes place. The power of violence is immediately legitimized and annihilation of oneself in the supposed name of objective necessity is immediately sanctioned. The mystic is enthusiastic in annihilating himself because somehow he confuses the intellectual intuition taking place in the open site of freedom and necessity as to be taking place in the absolute object itself, the infinite ‘there.’ This ‘there’ is the exceptional site of the opening of the law which encloses us in turn in pure ecstasy and madness of annihilation. The deeper ground of Spinoza’s mysticism lies here.

In that sense, Schelling thought of the tragic task as an impossible task of existence, beyond the capacity or power of any mortal subject and of

⁴⁷ Ibid., 172.

subject as such, unless such a subject belongs to a race of titans. It must rather occur as an event itself, beyond the subject-object matrix of speculative metaphysics, an event which incalculably manifests itself by passing through form to go beyond form as an excess of a paradox, indemonstrable either in the propositional form of the theoretical reason or in the moral postulates of mere empty universality. Such a coincidence of the opposites strikes existence itself *as* existence in its utter nakedness, exposing the very ground of a naked being to the sublimity of an inexorable strife.

The Unbearable Agony of Greek Tragedy

“How could Greek reason bear the contradictions of Greek tragedy?”—this is the question that Schelling asks in the last letter of his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. The remark here deserves to be quoted completely.

A mortal, destined by fate to become a malefactor and himself fighting *against* this fate, is nevertheless appallingly punished for the crime, although it was the deed of destiny! The ground of this contradiction, that which made this contradiction bearable, lay deeper than one would seek it. It lay in the context between human freedom and the power of the objective world in which the mortal must succumb *necessarily*, if that power is absolutely superior, if it is fate. And yet he must be *punished* for succumbing because he did not succumb *without a struggle*. That the malefactor who succumbed under the power of fate was punished, this tragic fate was the recognition of human freedom; it was the *honor* due to freedom. Greek tragedy honoured human freedom, letting its hero *fight* against the superior power of fate. In order not to go beyond the limits of art, the tragedy had to let him succumb. Nevertheless in order to make restitution for this humiliation of human freedom extorted by art, it had to let him *atone* even for the crime committed by fate. As long as he is still *free*, he holds out against the power of destiny. As soon as he succumbs he ceases to be free. Succumbing he still accuses fate for the loss of his freedom. Even Greek tragedy could not reconcile freedom and failure. Only a being *deprived* of freedom could succumb under fate. It was a *sublime* thought, to suffer punishment willingly even for an inevitable crime, and so to prove one's freedom by the very loss of this freedom, and to go down with the declaration of free will.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ibid., 192-3. In his 1804 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*, Schelling writes in a somewhat similar vein: “The possibility of freedom being overcome by necessity is a thoroughly repugnant thought; just as little, however, can we desire that necessity be overcome by freedom, since this offers to us a vision of the highest anarchy. There thus remains quite naturally no other alternative in this contradiction than that *both*, necessity and freedom, emerge from this struggle simultaneously as victorious and vanquished, and accordingly *equal* in every respect. But precisely this is doubtlessly the highest manifestation of art, namely, that freedom elevates itself to a position of equity with necessity, and that necessity appears as the equal of freedom without the latter losing in significance in the process. For only within such a relationship does that true and absolute indifference become objective, that indifference

This is one of the most cited paragraphs of Schellingian works, and it is most often cited to support the view that here Schelling offers the tragic matrix of the speculative thought. According to this view it is incontestable that Schelling indeed offers here the first speculative, cathartic determination of the tragic (inheriting thereby the Aristotelean legacy of occidental poetological-metaphysics of tragedy), or the first tragic determination of the speculative logic: the conversion of the negative into the positive through representation of a dialectical contradiction to be resolved by the synthesis. The problem for us here is not to contest this 'incontestable' evidence so as to spare Schelling from the speculative closure of metaphysics, but rather to show that at the very constitutive moment of the speculative, that is Schelling here, the tragic has already brought a fissure that has remained open in Schellingian thought to come, tearing the fabric of Schellingian thought in the most painful manner. The wound of a painful *rhythmus* will henceforth never cease to haunt, like a spectre, the Schellingian music to come. We will see that this wounding *rhythmus* has to do with the event of speech in the mode of declaration of a refusal occurring as an instance which marks the tragic being with the indelible mark of a mortality escaping the speculative logic of *Aufhebung*. As a result, the Schellingian speculative system could never achieve its completion. It is as if thinking, more and more it strives with the inexorable pain of its fissure, more and more it must abandon the *nomothetic* desire of a systematic completion. That fissure, that fracture, that wound occurs precisely at that moment when declaration of free will transforms the language of the law into *an event of declaring*, which also happens to be the very instance of death, the death of Oedipus.

The tragic hero here does not so much sacrifice in order to be reconciled, voluntarily, with the *nomothetic* order of the law nor does he here constitute itself as sovereign, being exceptional, subject that returns to itself as master of free will. Here both the situation and response to the situation are different from the context of mysticism of the law where the subject sacrifices himself so as to find himself in the absolute object. The tragic hero is atoned not in the sense he is reconciled with the objective order of necessity in the form of fate but rather in the sense that he *declares at all*, even at the last moment of his existence, the event of language that affirms a freedom to say "no." It is this *declaring* itself, this event of *uttering* itself (even when one is silent) that singularizes him at this indiscernible instance of the taking place of death. The tragic hero, Oedipus, is singularized by his mortality and thus singularized, he abandons the juridico-legislative nexus of the world. "The riddle of the world" is neither here minimized nor made bearable by the event of *declaring* in the mode of a refusal, but rather is intensified to the utmost instance of occurrence where the life of the tragic being touches death. At this indiscernible moment of occurrence where life touches death, he is neither particular, subsumable to the universal order of the law, nor is he assuming the name of universality himself as sovereign

inhering with the absolute itself and resting on equality in being rather than simultaneity in being . . . The highest manifestation of art is thus the one in which necessity is victorious without freedom succumbing, and in a reverse fashion in which freedom triumphs without necessity being overcome." Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, 249.

rereferent. He loses his entitative, attributive, predicative modes of being in the world and is exposed to the event of being breaking into him as this singular being through whom declaration *passes* through as event. Here free will is not something that belongs to the tragic being as property, but it is through which the singular being occurs to Oedipus as event.

Now this is significant. Precisely at this indiscernible instance wherein his life touches death, Oedipus is exposed to the truth that the necessity of freedom is freedom's own-most necessity itself. This is all the more reason why he does not succumb without struggle, for the arrival of this tragic truth does not lie so much in a victory of his or in the victory of fate but rather in this adamant event of *declaring* itself, exceeding the predicative structure of his mere entitative mode of being. To declare it, one does not have to succumb, and to declare it is not to reconcile to the law as an external necessity imposed as fate or destiny. "As soon as he succumbs he cases to be free. Succumbing he still accuses fate for the loss of his freedom. *Even Greek tragedy could not reconcile freedom and failure*"⁴⁹—this is Schelling. That is why it is an atonement that releases us from the vicious guilt-context⁵⁰ of law incorporating and denominating each one of us as 'criminal.' The recognition that the necessity of freedom is its own necessity out of its groundless ground is the unconditional sublime gift of releasement. But this is not mere a negative result. It occurs out of the originary affirmation of an absolute beatitude which is not happiness but a severity of a desert where all the predicates of the law, all the normative referents undergo *kenosis*. The coincidence of freedom and necessity here is not subsumption of the particulars to the cathartic law of *Aufhebung* but remains agonal as long as *declaring* remains resounding.

What Schelling attempts to think here is a tragic coincidence of the agonal opposites without following the logic of subsumption. How to think of the coincidence of freedom and necessity in their agonal manifestation without subsumption, that means, without reduction of tragic strife? That is the question Schelling seems to be asking here. Oedipus rejects even the reward or consolation of happiness. Abandoned to the desert of the world, Oedipus is not even rewarded with atonement as consolation. The gift of the tragic knowledge for Oedipus lies in the fact that he declares *at all* his refusal and that he refuses at all while declaring the law of a necessity proper to freedom itself. This refusal is the instance of *kenosis* that is his emptying out of all predicates of the law, which marks him as so irreducibly singular and mortal. Or better, the *kenosis* is this instance itself, this instance of mortality taking place that singularizes Oedipus as outside the law. It manifests itself as the mortality to Oedipus.⁵¹ Here Oedipus is not a subject assuming his

⁴⁹ Ibid; italics mine.

⁵⁰ In his essay "Fate and Character," Benjamin writes, "Law condemns, not to punishment but to guilt. Fate is the guilt context of the living." See Benjamin *Reflections*, 308. Also see Alexander Garcia Düttmann's analysis of this problem in his *The Memory of Thought: An Essay on Heidegger and Adorno*, trans. Nicholas Walker (London & New York: The Athlone Press, 2002).

⁵¹ Quoting Hölderlin, the same lines that Heidegger quotes, Schürmann could say, "The excess of a nocturnal knowledge in daylight, which defined the tragic hero (Oedipus, blinded, 'has perhaps an eye too many . . . to live is death, and death is also a life') has become our own

freedom on the basis of capacity or possibility by means of which he declares his non-subjugation to the objective necessity of the law. He is rather this *instance* itself, the instance of an agonal coincidence of freedom and necessity by virtue of he is *Dasein*, an *existence*, neither mere practical reason nor theoretical reason, neither object nor subject, but existence as *ex-sistence*: instance of excess, generosity of actuality, exuberant being, which is also an utter impoverishment and nakedness of a tragic confrontation that empties out all the given predicates of the world. This instance of mortality and mortification releases the being now abandoned, namely, Oedipus, from the originary guilt-context of fate and opens him to the desert of beatitude wherein virtue unites itself.⁵²

That is why the Schelling's Oedipus rejects happiness. He leaves behind the realms of profane happiness and enters into the severity of the desert where alone absolute beatitude coincides with virtue.⁵³ This virtue is not the morality that constitutes its nexus with the legislative desire of the political, in the way that absolute beatitude of the desert is not happiness realized on the conditional realm of pragmatic politics. Influenced by Meister Eckhart's notion of *Gelassenheit*, Schelling affirms here a mortification of all egoism and abandons even the claims of happiness and morality.⁵⁴ One must abandon morality itself, and not merely morality but even the claim of happiness. Here is to be found the profoundest moment of Schellingian tragic thought:

Morality itself cannot be the highest, it can be only an approximation of the absolute state, only a striving for absolute freedom which no longer departs from any law, yet which also does not know any law but the unalterable, eternal law of its own essence. If it is to be thought of as morally possible, happiness can be thought of only as approximation to a beatitude which no longer differs from morality and which therefore can no longer be a *reward* of virtue. As long as we will believe in a rewarding happiness we also presuppose that happiness and morality, sensuality and reason are conflicting principles. But we *ought* not to do this. That conflict ought to cease, absolutely. Happiness is a state of passivity: the happier we are, the more passive we keep ourselves toward the objective world. The

excess. We owe it to the *kenosis*, to the emptying out of normative representations." Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, 4.

⁵² Walter Benjamin thought of beatitude in a messianic manner as sudden, incalculable eruption that manifests itself like the shooting star, released from the cages of the law and from the originary guilt context of fate. Such incalculable arrival of messianic happiness is incommensurable with the profane happiness that man pursues in the conditioned, pragmatic order of earthly sovereignty. It rather manifests itself as the manifestation of the unconditional in the messianic instance breaking into the order of historical continuum as sudden coincidence or harmony. It is not for nothing that both Schelling and Benjamin evoke Leibniz to think of this harmony or coincidence as sudden, unexpected coming together of the incommensurable. Stéphane Mosès' discussion of Benjamin here is illuminating. See Stéphane Mosès, "Metaphors of Origin: Ideas, Names, Stars," in *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 65-83.

⁵³ Schelling comes back to this problem once again in his 1804 essay *Philosophy and Religion*, trans. Klaus Ottmann (Putnam, Conn.: Spring Publications 2010/1804).

⁵⁴ See Emmanuel Cattin, *Sérénité: Eckhart, Schelling, Heidegger* (Paris: Vrin 2012).

freer we become, and the more closely we approach reasonableness, the less we need happiness, that is a beatitude which we owe not ourselves but to luck. The purer our concepts of happiness become, and the more we gradually separate from them whatever is contributed by exterior objects and by sense gratification, the more closely happiness approaches morality and ceases to be happiness.⁵⁵

This beautiful passage demands thoughtful attention from us. Beatitude in the true sense of the term is not a reward of virtue. It is neither to be called “happiness” nor can it be the consolation or consolidation of the law. The absolute beatitude is rather the absolute desolation bereft of all consolation, the instance of a breaking into of mortality touching the highest intensity of life. The desert of singularity when the absolute may arrive in an incalculable instance is this monstrous juxtaposition of what comes together. This occurrence of their coming together does not allow itself to be thought in term of a higher unity of dialectical synthesis, an *Aufhebung* of their opposition, but is the instance of death taking place. Their coming together is death itself which does not in turn convert itself into the third, the positivity of the subject. The tragic being abandoned to the desert of the absolute beatitude must therefore reject the ecstasy of mysticism of the law with horror. It must abandon all rewards of the law, all consolation of happiness, all consolidation by means which one buys the quiet resignation into the arms of the world. In the desert of abandonment, one abandons even God.

The Instance of Death

In his 1804 lecture on *The Philosophy of Art*, written almost a decade after the *Philosophical Letters*, Schelling returns to these questions once again. Taking the example of Niobe whom he takes to be the archetype of sculpture, Schelling now extends this juxtaposition of the opposites and their coming together to the very characteristic of life as such. I quote Schelling:

All life is based on the joining of something infinite in itself with something finite, and life as such appears only in the juxtaposition or oppositions of these two. Wherever its highest or absolute unity is, we also find, viewed relatively, death, and yet for just that reason also the highest degree of life. Since it is indeed the task of sculpture to portray that highest unity, then the absolute life of which it shows reflections already appears in and for itself—also compared with the appearance itself—as death. In Niobe, however, art itself has uttered this mystery by portraying the highest beauty in death. Furthermore it allows that *particular* peace—the one inhering only within the divine nature itself and completely unattainable to mortals—to be gained in death itself, as if to suggest that the transition to the highest life of beauty, at least as far as that which is mortal is concerned, must appear as death.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Schelling, “Philosophical Letters,” 183.

⁵⁶ Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, 197-98.

The highest intensity of life is not attained by Niobe out of her capacity or possibility of being 'human' or being 'subject' whereby the subject would return to itself as itself, that is, as master of the agonal difference. The occurrence of the highest intensity of life is rather the gift of death, an impossible gift in-excess of all possibilities and all capabilities of the mortals. This gift *joins* itself to life like an excess which, while potentially is there all the while, does not occur everywhere and all the time. Only at the utmost intensification of time which is the instance, which is also the highest intensification of difference as difference, the excessive gift occurs incalculably. It is the highest task of art through aesthetic intuition and the task of philosophical thinking through intellectual intuition to beckon towards this indifference that is coming together of an agonal difference in their apartness.

Hegel's remark on Schelling in *Phenomenology of Spirit* is therefore misguided: indifference is not a dark night where all cows are black. The Schellingian indifference is not indifference in the sense of an absence of difference; nor is it a dialectical subsumption of differences within the unity of synthesis. What Schelling here attempts to think is rather the unconditional *coming together*, the *jointure* of an agonal difference that is mortality, and to think of an excessive gift of the absolute beatitude without consolidation of the law. This gift cannot be thought within any system but only as the *event of existence*, as *Dasein* out of its innermost finitude. *Dasein* itself is nothing other than this tragic-agonal *jointure* of infinite and finite, life and death, eternity and time. This jointure is haunted by its fundamental dissonance, by a tragic discordance which arrives as death arrives in life. Later in his reading of Schelling⁵⁷ and in his reading of Anaximander, Heidegger⁵⁸ too attempts to think—inspired by Schelling and yet in his own manner—this jointure in terms of *Ereignis*, the event of appropriation at the limit of occidental metaphysics and understands this *Ereignis* as *tragic* manifestation of an agonal difference as *belonging* together that giving itself withdraws itself in each of its epochal manifestation. Here Being that gives itself is a giving; or, rather it gives nothing other than itself: this Being giving itself to us and coming to us as *presencing* is *Ereignis*, the event that brings together the discordance of concealment and unconcealment. The early Schelling thinks the jointure of the highest discordance of freedom and necessity as unconditional event that erupts and passes away. Being excessive to concept and its categorical grasp, such unconditional arising and passing of coincidence can only be thought as a tautology of intuition, which being no empirical intuition is understood by the early Schelling to be intellectual intuition: *intuition intuiting* itself, intuition *giving* itself to itself. Such is the tautology of absolute freedom. At the highest instance of manifestation, freedom gives itself the law which, being otherwise than this or that law is the law without law, law that does not found in turn the ethico-legislative nexus and does not give itself to the mysticism of surrender. The inscrutable,

⁵⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985).

⁵⁸ Martin Heidegger, "Der Spruch des Anaximander," in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1980).

groundlessness of freedom coinciding itself with the highest necessity is tautology before which all predication ceases because it is before all predicates, an actuality before any potentiality.

Such tragic thought is an infinite task of thinking that we call “philosophy.” That it is a task and not an achievement or accomplishment, already discloses finitude of all thinking that de-links us in advance, while linking all the while, from obligations by means of which the law of a constituted order integrates us in its fold. This de-linking or un-binding in respect to the law of the metaphysical foundation of all politics, perhaps, is the highest task of thinking freedom where freedom would mean not just in the negative and privative sense of it as freedom from . . . but in a sense that is far more ‘originary’ (without ‘origin’) and a priori, as structural opening of the world as such, of politics and ethics and of the occurrence called “man.” It is as if an agonal difference, strife of the discordant, an infinite contestation of the formless from within form without dialectical resolution would make possible in advance all (de)phenomenalization as such. Speaking under the name of *Alētheia*, the later Heidegger would think such a paradoxical phenomenology in the primordial and true sense of phenomenology as the “phenomenology of the inapparent.”⁵⁹ In this primordial sense, phenomenology is essentially tragic; or, rather, the tragic is that what strikes the phenomenality itself in all phenomena in its agonal holding together of inapparent in apparition, apparition in the inapparent. Such tragic dissonance would mean, then, nothing other than the event of phenomenizing itself. The inapparent here is not a speculative potentiality passing over, thus sublating or converting into what is called “being” or “actuality” but that which, while passing over, does not phenomenize itself without a remainder, without a withdrawal from all phenomenality, and thereby sheltering from the phenomena of the world its excess over the integrative law of the manifest. The inapparent freedom, which is an excess over the integrative law of the manifest-constituted order, gives us the gift of the world, the gift of phenomenality as such. By de-linking us from the integrative violence of the manifest law, it leaves or rather it abandons the law, that is, without subsuming us in a manner of obligation or sacrifice to the constituted order of politics. The event of freedom is thus the appropriating-expropriating agony of phenomenality on the basis of which alone there can be politics and ethics at all. If the task of thinking for us remains “to linger on the conditions in which one is living,” “provided that the essential fragility of the sovereign referents becomes evident to it,”⁶⁰ then the Schellingian tragic philosophy remains for us an indispensable moment of conversation to come in order to linger on the conditions we are living without the consolations that the sovereign referent of the world provides us.

⁵⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and Francois Raffoul (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003), 79-80.

⁶⁰ Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, 3.