

## Schelling and the Future of God

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*For Sean McGrath and Andrzej Wiercinski*

It seems, at least largely among the world's educated, that Nietzsche's prognosis of the death of God is coming to pass. Not only is belief in a transcendent being or a grand, supremely real being (*ens realissimum*) waning, but also the philosophical grounds that made such objects in any way intelligible are collapsing. In such a situation, despite the recent and quite scintillating renaissance of serious interest in Schelling's philosophy, his various discourses on the Godhead (*die Gottheit*) are generally ignored, perhaps with mild embarrassment. For better or worse, however, what Schelling understood by the Godhead and even by religion has little in common with prevailing theistic traditions. Schelling did not take advantage of the great ontological lacuna that opened up with the demise of dogmatism in critical philosophy after Kant to insist on an irrational belief in a God that was no longer subject to rational demonstration. Schelling eschews all dogmatic thought, but does not therefore partake in its alternative: the reduction of all thought regarding the absolute to irrational beliefs in (or rational gambles on) the existence of God and other such absolutes. As Quentin Meillassoux has shown, "*by forbidding reason any claim to the absolute, the end of metaphysics has taken the form of an exacerbated return of the religious.*"<sup>1</sup> This gives rise to the reduction of religion and anti-religion to fideism. Since both theism and atheism purport to believe in a rationally unsupportable absolute position, they are both symptoms *of the return of the religious*. In its return, however, such religion is as vague as the opening that permits it. Shorn of rituals or specific theological commitments, we speak in murky and suggestive terms of the "divine," the "mystery," etc.

Schelling was not and is not a religious reactionary, demanding a return to a dogmatic God at the very moment in which we are finally done with God. Nor was he trying to sneak God back into the conversation amid the collapse of all rationally defensible knowledge of the absolute, repackaging everything as beliefs or practical postulates. In fact, as Schelling complained to Hegel in a letter

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<sup>1</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 45.

in 1795, this was what the odious and reactionary Tübingen theologians were doing. Rather than take seriously the collapse of the repository of traditional theological knowledge after the advent of critical philosophy, they were retaining the entire enterprise whole hog by re-spinning it into the idiom of practical reason. “On this point they have implanted themselves, settled and built huts in which it is good to live and for which they praise God.... Every possible dogma has already been stamped as a postulate of practical reason and, where theoretical-historical proofs are never sufficient, practical (Tübingen) reason chops the knot in two.”<sup>2</sup> Schelling opposed theological business as usual from the get go.

This did not mean, however, that Schelling thought we could just start over and out of the blue come up with something completely different. Schelling evoked an ancient sense of religion—so ancient that it must be excavated from its oblivion in human history—that is at the same time, given the supreme strangeness and unfamiliarity of what is unleashed in such an excavation, the coming of a new kind of future or, in a word, the coming of coming itself, the advent of perpetual advent, the future in which the future really has a future.

In this essay, I will attempt to sketch some small hints about the future of philosophical religion in Schelling’s thinking, that is to say, of the temporality and spatiality at the heart of such a thought. What is announced in the coming of philosophical religion and what manner of announcement is it?<sup>3</sup>

## 1.

The short answer is that it is a spiritual announcement, an announcement of the coming of the spirit (*Geist*), much like the medieval Calabrian prophet Joachim of Fiore who had intimated the incarnational coming of a third age. In Schelling’s reading of Joachim, God is the potency of the past, and this is the great wisdom of the Old Testament. The son is the potency of the present and this is the great wisdom of the New Testament. The spirit, however, is not only to come, but the coming of the future as such. “A third economy, the advent of a third time, the time of the spirit ... as Joachim figured.”<sup>4</sup> Such spiritual announcements are prophetic. As Schelling already argued in the initial (1811) draft of *Die Weltalter*:

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<sup>2</sup>Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz, eds., *Materialien zu Schellings philosophischen Anfängen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), 118.

<sup>3</sup>For more on the problem of Schelling’s conception of philosophical religion, see my *Schelling’s Practice of the Wild: Time, Art, Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), esp. chapter two.

<sup>4</sup>SW II/4, 72. For better or worse, all translations are my own responsibility. Citations follow the standard pagination, which adheres to the original edition established after Schelling’s death by his son, Karl. It lists the division, followed by the volume, followed by the page number. Hence, (SW I/1, 1) would read, division one, volume one, page one. This pagination is preserved in Manfred Schröter’s critical reorganization of this material. *Schellings Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart-Augsburg: J. G. Cotta 1856-1861); *Schellings Werke: Nach der Originalausgabe in neuer Anordnung*, ed. Manfred Schröter (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1927).

The science of the coming things rests in the spirit alone. Only the spirit is entitled to loosen the seal under which the future lies decided. For this reason the prophets are driven by the spirit of God, because this alone is the opener of times: for a prophet is the one who sees into the belonging together of the times.<sup>5</sup>

A prophet is not, therefore, someone who *sees* the future by ignoring the past and present in order to magically discern what will happen. Rather, a prophet sees the future by seeing the “belonging together of the times.” The capacity to appreciate the whole of time—the inseparability and interpenetration of the past, present, and future—would develop into what Schelling later called philosophical religion. Its rudiments can be detected throughout Schelling’s early and middle period writings before it became an explicit theme in his late philosophy. The future possibility of religion drove Schelling to excavate a primordial and abyssal past (starting already with the 1815 Munich lecture *On the Deities of Samothrace*). The excavation of the past, however, is not an issue only of the past. It is also a radical critique of the present (the loss of nature, the partition of thinking into minutia obsessed fragments, the enduring inability of Western religion to produce a new mythology that moves beyond its traditional abdication of the earth and obsession with transcendence) as well as a utopian intimation of a different manner of being to come.

The movement toward the buried, obscured and repressed center of the past is the movement toward the vitality at the ungrounded ground of the past, an always past life expressing itself in and as all beings. As is well known, this is also the destination of what Schelling came to call negative philosophy, which moves through the things of nature to the living ground of nature, moving always *über x hinaus*, through x to get beyond x. In this movement, thinking arrives at “*das Urlebendige*,” “*das Wesen, dem kein anderes vorausgeht, also der älteste der Wesen* [what is primordially living, the being that is preceded by no other and is therefore the oldest of all beings].”<sup>6</sup> Modernity, however, presents a specific block, a deep repression that is constitutive of modernity, namely, the lack of a relationship to the vitality of the oldest of all *Wesen*, the groundless ground at the heart of the past. As Schelling famously claims in the *Freedom* essay, “nature is not present to it,” for modernity “lacks a living ground [*die Natur für sich nicht vorhanden ist, und daß es ihr am lebendigen Grunde fehlt*].”<sup>7</sup> As such, nature is detached from the natality after which it first received its name; its potencies become inviolable operators, mere repetitions of the same.

Negative philosophy, one could further say, is also a preparation for the living ground of positive philosophy, which no longer thinks toward freedom as the living ground of nature, but rather *from* it:

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<sup>5</sup> *Die Weltalter in den Urfassungen von 1811 und 1813 (Nachlaßband)*, ed. Manfred Schröter (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1946), 82-83. Henceforth WA.

<sup>6</sup> SW I/8, 199.

<sup>7</sup> SW I/7, 361.

What we have described up until now (insofar as possible) is only the eternal life of the Godhead. The actual history that we intended to describe, the narration of that series of free actions through which God, since eternity, decided to reveal itself, can only now begin.<sup>8</sup>

The excavation of the past, such as found in *On The Deities of Samothrace* or in the subsequent philosophy of mythology, narrates the history of the ongoing return of the repressed. The way to the future return of the golden age that is, as Schelling tells us in the famous opening lines of all of the *Weltalter* drafts, now only “*geahndet*” and “*geweissagt*,” intimated and prophesied,<sup>9</sup> first necessitates that one go directly into the center of the past, much like Schelling’s hero, Dante, who could only reach *paradisio* by going directly into the deepest center of the *inferno*.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.

In a sense, Schelling’s audacious experiment is the endeavor to think the future of God, that is to say, the possibility of God having a future. Such a future does not reduce to speculating whether or not in the future we will be entitled to speak of God. What can we say tomorrow of God? What can we, sobered by the death of God, by the putrefaction of the theological comforts that once spoke directly to our aspirations for ourselves and for nature itself, still say in today’s spiritual climate? I am not a sociologist nor am I concerned with prognostication. I am concerned, however, with thinking the future of God as, antiquated and quaint as such terms sound to contemporary ears, part of the experience of revelation at the heart of philosophy’s temporality and spatiality. In *The Ages of the World*, Schelling speaks of the temporality of revelation:

These are the forces of that inner life that incessantly gives birth to itself and again consumes itself that the person must intimate, not without terror, as what is concealed in everything, even though it is now covered up and from the outside has adopted peaceful qualities. Through that constant retreat to the beginning and the eternal recommencement, it makes itself into substance in the real sense of the word (*id quod substant*), into the always abiding. It is the constant inner mechanism and

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<sup>8</sup> SW I/8, 269: “Was wir bisher (soweit möglich) beschreiben, ist nur das ewige Leben der Gottheit; die eigentliche Geschichte, die wir uns vorgesetzt zu beschreiben, die Erzählung jener Folge freier Handlungen, durch welche Gott von Ewigkeit beschlossen sich zu offenbaren, kann erst von jetzt an beginnen.”

<sup>9</sup> SW I/8, 199: “The past is known, the present is discerned, the future is intimated. The known is narrated, the discerned is presented, the intimated is prophesied. [*Das Vergangene wird gewußt, das Gegenwärtige wird erkannt, das Zukünftige wird geahndet. Das Gewußte wird erzählt, das Erkannte wird dargestellt, das Geahndete wird geweissagt*].”

<sup>10</sup> For more on Schelling’s relationship to Dante, see my “*Das Gewußte wird erzählt*: Schelling on the Relationship between Art, Mythology, and Narrative,” *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 25, forthcoming.

clockwork, time, eternally commencing, eternally becoming, always devouring itself and always again giving birth to itself.<sup>11</sup>

Time in its auto-consumptive potency was, for example, revealed to Arjuna when he beheld Krishna as *Kala*, time, the world destroyer.<sup>12</sup> In India, *Kala* survives to this day in its female revelation as *Kali*, the great destructive mother, prompting Sri Aurobindo to challenge us to speak, “not only of the beneficent Durga, but of the terrible *Kālī* in her blood-stained dance of destruction and to say, ‘This too is the Mother; this also know to be God; this too, if thou hast the strength, adore.’”<sup>16</sup> Schelling, in *The Ages of the World*, reflects that, “If we take into consideration the many terrible things in nature and the spiritual world and the great many other things that a benevolent hand seems to cover up from us, then we could not doubt that the Godhead sits enthroned over a world of terrors.”<sup>13</sup>

The world of terrors, however, is only part of the wheel of time, the wheels within wheels that Ezekiel’s dream intimated. Their movement, in the perjury of the human’s flight from freedom to the periphery of the self, is the awakening of the responsibility, the revelation of the pledge that stands outside of the seemingly mechanical spell of time. As this spell is broken, the Godhead reveals itself beyond Being yet within Being not only as what is oldest in nature, but as the future of nature. It is again important to insist here that this is not a reactionary insistence on the verticality of God. As Jean-Luc Nancy has argued, the “distinctive characteristic of Western monotheism is not the positing of a single god, but rather the effacing of the divine as such in the transcendence of the world.”<sup>14</sup> For Nancy, the very notion of creation, which for Schelling is critical to the very idea of nature, “contributes to rendering the concept of the ‘author’ of the world untenable. In fact, one could show how the motif of creation is one of those that leads directly to the death of God understood as author, first cause, and supreme being.”<sup>15</sup>

The death of God is the awakening from the repressive slumber of the verticality of being. In evil, for example, it is I, fleeing the world of terrors, that either imagines that I am God or that I am simply myself. In the first scenario, played out powerfully, for example, when Augustine realizes that he wanted to be God, the self in evil subsumes everything to itself. The evil will, left unchallenged, consumes everything that is not itself and, in the end, it affirms solidarity with no thing and no one but itself; in the end, there will have been no world that is not my world. Evil in its imperiousness recognizes nothing but itself without end and would do so until there is nothing left to recognize. In the second scenario, in melancholy and depression, I bemoan the fact that I am only myself. As an immense and abyssal lack, I am never enough for myself, paradoxically

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<sup>11</sup> SW I/8, 230.

<sup>12</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, XI, 32.

<sup>13</sup> SW I/8, 268.

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 15. Henceforth BSP.

<sup>15</sup> BSP, 15.

hating myself for being myself. In awakening I turn to the ground right in front of me, otherwise than me, yet still caught up in me. As Nancy articulates it, “‘God’ is itself the singular appearance of the image or trace, or the disposition of its exposition: place as divine place, the divine as strictly *local*.”<sup>16</sup>

But animals and rocks do not *know* the Godhead. In a sense, “God” does not belong to any kind of knowledge, nor does God magically appear to thinking in faith if we imagine that the latter is a surrogate for thinking. Only humans, yes, alas, only humans, have God as an issue and in so doing are themselves at issue. This is true even for those to whom it will never occur even to think of something called “God,” or to those for whom the traditions of speaking of and for God are repellent. “This thinking is in no way anthropocentric; it does not put humanity at the center of ‘creation’; on the contrary, it transgresses [*traverse*] humanity in the excess of the appearing that appears on the scale of the totality of being, but which appears as that excess [*démasure*] which is impossible to totalize. It is being’s infinite original singularity.”<sup>17</sup> When Schelling embraces guilt on behalf of all of nature, this is precisely to reject the centrality of human beings (this was the experience of evil as consciousness became the ground of nature). The claim is quite unexpected, given the dreary history of the elevation of the human over the non-human. In guilt, humans can embrace all of nature as the solitude, the being-singular-plural, if you will, of revelation. Nancy again: “If existence is exposed as such by humans, what is exposed there also holds for the rest of beings.”<sup>18</sup>

This does not, however, bifurcate appearance into two hierarchically opposed camps: a privileged space of appearing for humans, and a dumb, starry-eyed prison of presence for everything else. Hence, in a line, hard to appreciate, and no doubt immediately off putting to contemporary sensibilities, Schelling, borrowing the line from his Munich colleague and one time friend, Franz von Baader, insists that humans can only stand below or above animals.<sup>19</sup> To stand above nature is not to flee nature nor is it to elevate the existence of humans as supreme. “On the contrary, in exposing itself as singularity, existence exposes the singularity of Being as such in all being.”<sup>20</sup>

Finally, it is important to say that revelation is not mythic. It is not a return of the naiveté of a world unselfconsciously populated by the gods. It is the overcoming of the mythic, or better, it belongs *to a new mythology that is born of revelation*, that knows that revelation is now at the heart of all myths. A new mythology is not the absurd return to the mythic age—the old gods have died— but a new kind of mythology, the coming of the gods to nature, the repopulation of the earth by divine forces. It has nothing to do with the *mythologische Gewalt*, the mythic, self-grounding violence that Walter Benjamin in *Zur Kritik der Gewalt* detected in modern myth and which is exemplified with horrifying clarity

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<sup>16</sup> BSP, 17.

<sup>17</sup> BSP, 17.

<sup>18</sup> BSP, 17.

<sup>19</sup> SW I/7, 373.

<sup>20</sup> BSP, 18.

in works like Rosenberg's infamous *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, or the reactionary and opiating mythology of someone like Ludwig Klages. The new mythology is divine, but unlike classical Christianity, it does not evacuate the earth in its lopsided obsession with transcendence. A new mythology can never shed its allegorical element, the unimaginable ground of any possible image. A new mythology presents the unrepresentable in its unrepresentability, albeit with the science and art of its age.

This is what Schelling thought that Dante did. Taking "science of the time," it became "*gleichsam die Mythologie und der allgemeine Grund* [the mythology, so to speak, and the universal ground]"<sup>21</sup> upon which he built his inventions. The cosmology of Dante's time is "clothed [*bekleidet*]" "with mythological dignity."<sup>22</sup> In Dante's art, science becomes part of a new mythology through which the unsayable can somehow be said through the creation of a new language that nonetheless resonates within (even while contesting) its prevailing linguistic conditions. In a way, Dante modeled what Māhāyāna Buddhism calls *upāya*, the skillful means by which the prevailing means of speaking can be creatively refashioned to hear the soundless sound at the heart of speaking itself. Dante's intention? "*Allegorisch zu sein, ohne daß er aufhörte historisch und poetisch zu sein* [to be allegorical without ceasing to be historical or poetic]."<sup>23</sup>

This is explicitly not to distance myself altogether from recent accounts that recognize something mythic in Schelling's essay,<sup>24</sup> but rather to be more explicit about the nature of a new mythology. In the end, it is not enough, for example, to speak of the *Freedom* essay as a myth of love, a bastard reckoning of something that we cannot precisely think. That is, of course, to some extent true, but it risks obscuring that this is not just a myth of love, but rather the revelation of love: the conversion to the ground of existence as the affirmation of nature itself in all of its solitude.<sup>25</sup> It is out of love and the creativity that it engenders that new myths arise. This is the revelation to humanity of the very humanity of humanity as the solitude of God as the shared solitude that extends throughout all of nature, that is to say, which is coextensive with Being itself. It is the simultaneous appearing together in the singularity of its solitude of all that is.

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<sup>21</sup> SW I/5, 158-159.

<sup>22</sup> SW I/5, 162.

<sup>23</sup> SW I/5, 159.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Bernard Freydberg's thoughtful study, *Schelling's Dialogical Freedom Essay: Provocative Philosophy Then and Now* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008). His point about the mythic quality of the essay, especially in the Platonic sense of myth as a likely story, is well taken. It is also important to consider the extent to which the *Freedom* essay is not just a "likely account" or a story about human freedom any more than it is theory of human freedom. It is the revelation of freedom, a *tautegorical* revelation of the Godhead. The Godhead reveals itself in the consuming fire and Great Death of nature. In mythology, the gods may come as themselves, but the revelatory character of appearance is not itself revealed. Nonetheless, revelation needs its own mythology.

<sup>25</sup> In the first draft of *Die Weltalter*, Schelling speaks of God's stultifying solitude: "For human beings are helped by other human beings, helped even by God; however, there is nothing whatsoever that can come to the aid of the primordial being in its stultifying solitude [*in seiner schrecklichen Einsamkeit*]; it must fight its way through chaos for itself, utterly alone" (WA, 43).

“Existence, therefore, is not a property of *Dasein*; it is the original singularity of Being, which *Dasein* exposes for all being.”<sup>26</sup>

Love is born of the becoming guilty of consciousness in the dawning of its elemental perjury. If death is revelatory of the eternal beginning of life, life itself first demands the mortification [*Absterbung*] of the false life on the periphery. Life is only possible through what Hakuin and the Zen tradition called the Great Death, the dying to oneself in the coming to life as love. Hence Schelling warned that anyone “who wants to place themselves at the beginning point of a truly free philosophy, must abandon even God.”<sup>27</sup> To be clear: *revelation does not begin first with the assumption of religion*. It is the moment in which the love of wisdom is the wisdom of love, its turning away from itself to the ground of nature. Such a return is only for one who “had once left everything and who were themselves left by everything” and who, like Socrates on the brink of his death in the *Phaedo*, “saw themselves alone with the infinite: a great step which Plato compared to death.”<sup>28</sup> Hence:

What Dante had written on the gate of the Inferno could also in another sense be the entrance into Philosophy: “Abandon hope all you who enter here.” The one who wants truly to philosophize must let go of all hope, all desire, all languor [*Sehnsucht*]. They must want nothing, know nothing, and feel themselves bare and poor. They must give up everything in order to gain everything.<sup>29</sup>

If one wants to gain nature, one must first lose nature. If one wants to lose nature, one must first lose oneself. Beyond all hope, one finds the solitude of God and the infinite singularity that is the being together of nature. This is philosophy’s own “conversion” through guilt and mortification to the religiosity of nature’s immanence, to *Deus sive natura*.

### 3.

In his still poorly understood turn to the philosophy of mythology and revelation, Schelling does not introduce a reactionary version of Christianity in order to recoil from the problem of revelation. Schelling had no interest in orthodoxy and did not associate Christianity with a doctrine (*Lehre*), but rather considered it a matter for thought (*eine Sache*).<sup>30</sup> Schelling’s lectures explicitly did not seek to “establish any actual doctrine or any kind of speculative dogmatism for we will

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<sup>26</sup> BSP, 18.

<sup>27</sup> *Initia Philosophiae Universae* (1820-21), ed. Horst Fuhrmans (Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1969), 18. Henceforth IPU. This is an early critical edition of the *Erlanger Vorlesungen*. These lectures formed the basis of Schelling’s essay, *On the Nature of Philosophy as Science* (1821). A new and more complete version is now in the works.

<sup>28</sup> IPU, 18-19.

<sup>29</sup> IPU, 19.

<sup>30</sup> SW II/4, 228.



not in any way be dogmatic.”<sup>31</sup> At issue is not any institution’s promulgation of any particular doctrine of revelation. “The matter for thought [*Sache*] of revelation is older than any dogma and we will simply occupy ourselves with the matter for thought and not with any of the various ways it has been subjectively conceived.”<sup>32</sup>

This did not mean that Schelling went to war against established or “understood” religion—he attempts to maintain a healthy respect throughout. This is nonetheless a radical genealogical retrieval of the possibilities of religion. Schelling associated the historically domineering (universalizing by way of the sword) Catholic Church with Peter, and, the refreshing Pope Francis notwithstanding, one day, just as Peter wept tears of remorse for betraying Christ, the Catholic Church will do likewise. Although the Catholic Church possessed the mystery, they did not understand it and were given to “abiding, constant domination.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, “the Pope is the true antichrist”<sup>34</sup> and the Petrine Church is “in the city,”<sup>35</sup> that is, it is the Church of empire.

If Peter is the official Church (A<sup>1</sup>) and the hold of the *past*, then the Pauline Church, is the hidden Church (A<sup>2</sup>), <sup>36</sup> “external to the city [*in der Vostadt*].”<sup>37</sup> Just as Dionysus in the mystery religions brought the real back to its soul,<sup>38</sup> the Pauline retrieval of the esoteric dimension is the revelation of the *present* as grounded not in any particular thing or event, but abysmally rooted in the still creative depths. Not only does Paul challenge the Petrine Church, he foreshadows the power of the Protestant revolt. “In Paul lives the dialectical, limber, scientific, confrontational principle.”<sup>39</sup> It is, however, only a “transitional form,”<sup>40</sup> although “Paul’s lightening strikes of genius ... liberated the Church from a blind unity”<sup>41</sup> and revealed the ideal within the real. Protestants and their affirmation of knowledge counter the universality of the Catholic real, which was already contested within itself by its own mystical traditions.

If Schelling were to “build a Church in our time, I would consecrate it to Saint John the Evangelist. But sooner or later there will be a Church in which the three above named apostles are united; this Church will then be the true be the true pantheon of Christian Church history”!<sup>42</sup> The Church to come is the Church not merely *in* the future but *of* the future, that is, a Church that liberates time and

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<sup>31</sup> SW II/4, 30.

<sup>32</sup> SW II/4, 30.

<sup>33</sup> *Philosophie der Offenbarung* (1841-42), ed. Manfred Frank (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977),

316. Henceforth PO.

<sup>34</sup> PO, 318.

<sup>35</sup> *Urfassung Philosophie der Offenbarung*, two volumes, ed. Walter E. Ehrhardt (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1992), 708. Henceforth U.

<sup>36</sup> SW II/4, 707.

<sup>37</sup> U, 708.

<sup>38</sup> PO, 239.

<sup>39</sup> PO, 317.

<sup>40</sup> PO, 320.

<sup>41</sup> PO, 322.

<sup>42</sup> U, 708.

activates the creativity of the future, a Church *of the whole of time*, a Church of the A<sup>3</sup>. John is the “apostle of the future”.<sup>43</sup> “One is not merely an apostle in the time in which one lives” and John was “actually not the apostle for his time.” Paul would first have to come, but the “Lord loved” John, “that is, in him he knew himself.”<sup>44</sup> The Johanne Church, the Church for everyone and everything—for all things human and for the mysterious creativity of the earth itself—is the “being everything in everything of God,”<sup>45</sup> a “theism that contains within itself the entire economy of God.”<sup>46</sup> This religion, what Bataille would later call “radical economy,” not only excludes nothing, but also includes everything as alive, where “everything has its inner process for itself.”<sup>47</sup> This is religion beyond Petrine empire (the imposition of external forms of religion) and Pauline revolt (the recovery of the esoteric soul of religion). This is the advent of a new mythology of Christianity and the liberation of a Christian creative ἀγάπη, the life of “a *revealed* God, *not an abstract idol*.”<sup>48</sup> This is religion that artistically participates in the creativity of the universe’s auto-genesis.

Schelling concluded the first version (*Urfassung*) of the *Philosophy of Revelation* lectures by remarking that he would have liked to have included some meditations on the “development of Christian poetry and art overall. It would have been remarkable—but the time does not permit it.”<sup>49</sup> Certainly, such art would no longer have been the dreary illustrations of the orthodox forms of religion. Indeed, this was the liberation of religion’s sublimated creativity as well as the cessation of its bellicose domination of all opposing forms. But perhaps not only did the remaining lecture time not permit such considerations, but also the times *themselves*. As Schelling mused in *The Ages of the World*: “Perhaps the one is still coming who will sing the greatest heroic poem, grasping in spirit something for which the seers of old were famous: what was, what is, what will be. But this time has not yet come. We must not misjudge our time.”<sup>50</sup>

Certainly, whatever its merits, pitching the problem of philosophical religion in exclusively Christian terms, despite Schelling’s radical repurposing of them, remains problematic and to pursue this vision exclusively in such terms seems doomed to failure. Schelling, for example, generally ignores the Islamic tradition and he remained deaf to the power of many so-called indigenous religions. No doubt the project would rightly now have to take up a language that emerges within a broader consideration of the immense variety of living religious experience all over the world. But then again, this a question of philosophical strategy, of how best to speak in one’s time of philosophical religion. John’s time, the future of religion as such, can only be intimated. Nonetheless, it is also

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<sup>43</sup> PO, 317.

<sup>44</sup> U, 703.

<sup>45</sup> U, 708-709.

<sup>46</sup> U, 709.

<sup>47</sup> U, 710.

<sup>48</sup> PO, 324.

<sup>49</sup> U, 710.

<sup>50</sup> SW I/8, 206.

worthwhile to appreciate how extraordinarily rare and generous Schelling's gesture of non-coercive and radically inclusive religiosity is:

John is the apostle of a future and for the first time truly universal Church, this second, new Jerusalem that he saw descend from the heavens prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband,<sup>51</sup> this no longer exclusive City of God (until that time there is an enduring opposition) in which Jew and Pagans are equally received. Without narrow coercion, without external authority, Paganism and Judaism are equally embraced for what they are and the Church exists through itself because each person voluntarily partakes in it, each through their own conviction that their spirit has found a homeland [*Heimat*] in it.<sup>52</sup>

This is the kind of Jerusalem of which William Blake wrote and no doubt Schelling's words also have this kind of lonely imperceptibility. This "truly public—not state, not high church—religion"<sup>53</sup> is the utopian promise nascent within philosophy, religion, and art. "It is the religion of humankind [*Menschengeschlecht*]," <sup>54</sup> a "structure which encompasses everything human [*alles Menschliche umfassender Bau*]" and "in which nothing may be excluded and in which all human striving, wanting, thinking, and knowing are brought to consummate unity."<sup>55</sup> This is no longer natural or mythological religion (A<sup>1</sup>), the coming of the gods as themselves, nor is it a religion of revelation (A<sup>2</sup>), but, finally, what Schelling called *philosophical religion* (A<sup>3</sup>), a religion and a philosophy of and from the future: "this *philosophical religion does not exist*" and "it could only be the last product and the highest expression of the completed philosophy itself," <sup>56</sup> a widening and expansion, beyond mere rational considerations of supposedly religious objects, "of *philosophy and philosophical consciousness* itself."<sup>57</sup> Schelling's dream assumes the death of God (an idea or belief to be externally imposed) without settling for the mystical mysteries repressed within the vertical depths of an imperial religion. Schelling's dream is the dream of the promise of a new sense of religion—the future return of a deeply repressed golden age—in which one form of human life need not declare war on all other competing forms of life. This is the golden age of curiosity, of all things human, of the depths of the great earth, of the liberation of the utopian impulse concealed within the depths of the philosophical mood itself.

Perhaps we could call this the dream of a new age of the coming of the Dharma and the great Buddha sea in which the singularity of each and every

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<sup>51</sup> Schelling is referring to the Book of Revelation 21:2.

<sup>52</sup> SW II/4, 328.

<sup>53</sup> SW II/4, 328.

<sup>54</sup> SW II/4, 328.

<sup>55</sup> SW II/4, 296.

<sup>56</sup> SW II/, 250. This is from the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (1842), trans. Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 174.

<sup>57</sup> SW II/1, 252; HCI, 175.

being is granted its space and time, or the awakening of consciousness to the full expanse of the spatial and temporal life of the earth, or perhaps there are still better ways of speaking to come—we must not misjudge our time nor confuse intimations with knowledge. Nonetheless, the utopian impulse should not be confused with idol dreaming or the reactionary mythology of an idyll. It is simultaneously a creative impulse, the dream of a new earth, a new people to come, and, for want of a better word, the future of God.