Paul Ziche; Dept. of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Utrecht University; p.g.ziche@uu.nl

„World consciousness": Schelling on the transition from localized mythologies to an integrative rationality
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I. Reception history without a history of reception: Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology in outline

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854): "Philosophy of Mythology": 22 lectures + 3 introductions (on the historical-critical method, on "purely rational philosophy", and on monotheism); itself serving as an introduction into his "Philosophy of Revelation". Edition: In the "Sämmtliche Werke", ed. by K.F.A. Schelling, vols. XI and XII, Stuttgart/Augsburg 1856-7.
Important questions:
- Mythology and historicity; mythology and progress?
- Schelling does not tell a story of progress. Greek mythology clearly is the culmination of all mythologies (because it shapes the mythological figures into a 'system' of 'personalities'); but: Greek mythology has itself a history (Kronos-Ouranos-Zeus), and in his narrative, Greek mythology is interwoven with the presentation of the other mythologies
- Dionysos, in particular, is also referred to in the context of the other mythologies
Main theses:
- Schelling presents different mythologies, with a clear understanding of their differences, but *not* in the sense of a story of unilinear progress or of reception of earlier mythologies by later ones
- For Schelling, it is the *entire* sequence of mythologies that gives us an understanding of the complexity of human consciousness. Epistemologically, that means that we should understand mythology "in its own right" – mythology needs to be able to explain itself
- The concept that he needs in order to make this enormous project work do indeed come from / can be illustrated by references to mythological figures and episodes

II. Schelling on Eastern mythologies

Mythology: From an original monotheism to forms of polytheism and back again to monotheism. There has been no time without God – historicity comes with the introduction of Gods (as does the organization of humankind into states)

Mythology	Key terms	Mythological figures
'Zabism' (lecture 9)	First step towards "materialization", towards a consciousness-externality structure	"astral" religion: the Gods as the stars; One God realized in many stars
Persian mythology (lectures 10-12)	The originally "male" principle becomes "female"; Zabism still wanted to let the Gods remain "spiritual", now they become more concretely material; transition from non-historical into historical forms of mythology; Gods as mediators; Gods acquire control over processes of materialization by making themselves material; origin of genuine polytheism	Mother figures: Urania – Astarte – Mylitta Mithras (XII235: Mithras ‖ Buddha)
Phrygians/"orgiastic mythology" (lecture 16)		Kybele
Egyptian mythology (lecture 17-19)	Polytheism, but as a transition to a "real", "conscious" monotheism; monotheism as a result of Egyptian mythology; animal mummies: not about individuals, but the "general concept"	Osiris-Typhon Osiris – Isis Ammon – Phtha – Kneph Multiplication of Gods, including animals

Indian mythology (lectures 20-23)	Most extreme form of polytheism: Unity is maximally dissolved; consciousness not within, but outside of mythology	Brama – Vishnu – Rama, ... ("incarnations"), – Maja Buddha
Chinese mythology (lecture 23-4)	China is still pre-historical, not yet a nation; astral religion turned into the principle of the state	Confucius, Laotse

III. Concepts for a timeless reception history

Mythological figures serve the function of concepts!

Uncertain persons
Uncertainty in: kinship, names, functions, gender, animal-human boundary
"being in the middle": Demeter as being "originally" in the middle of the mythological cosmos ((pay attention to the complex temporalities here!)); other mediators: Poseidon, Janus, Mithras, the fourth Cabirian God Kadmilos, Dionysos, Christ
Some important phrases:
- earlier stages "make themselves susceptible of being overcome" ("sich zur Überwindung anlassen", XII,170; XII, 190)
- Demeter as a "mythological monstrum", Greek mythology as being of "inexhaustible volubility" (Ludwig Preller, Demeter und Persephone, ein Cyclus mythologischer Untersuchungen, Hamburg 1837)
- "Proserpina is nothing but Ceres, the daughter nothing but the mother in a different form, and their names, as also their images, have been mixed up" (VIII,355); in searching for Proserpina, Demeter is "flared up against itself, seeking herself" (VIII,453) ((Apply this to structures of consciousness and the concepts linking up the different mythologies!))
- Names of Gods: "the uncertainty of etymological explanations, in particular those of the names of gods, stems mainly from the fact that every god is capable of many and very different properties" (VIII,375)

Epistemological notions: Mythology as self-explanatory (deiknunai): "Tautegory"
Mythology "contains its own history" (XII,670) "which means that the very same principles that, taken materially, form its content are, at the same time, the formal causes of its formation and genesis"
Being real means: having become real; and: reconstruction of the genesis is the tool of understanding reality: "The immediate, external view [*Ansicht*] teaches the meaning [*Bedeutung*] of a state of affairs, whereas the explanation that follows *naturally* upon this first view relates to its genesis [*Entstehung*]" (XI,8)
Reconstructing processuality requires engaging with errors, falsehoods, wrong turns, etc.
Greek mythology "— standing in the middle between past and future – allows the consciousness a completely free relationship to itself" (XII,646)

IV. Summary

Despite his writing a history of mythology without a reception history, Schelling is not simply viewing mythology as one, indifferent project: The history of the mythologies is a rather dramatic history of ruptures, of communication among different discourses, of historical, moral and epistemological uncertainties: of a history leading towards/displaying a "world consciousness" (XIII,8). Yet, it does work.

Two final questions:
- In which other contexts besides analysing mythology can we work with the concepts he does offer us?

- Isn't he telling us a paternalistic discourse after all, in which the status of Greek mythology (and of Christian religion, which will be the next step) remains unaffected by the grand gestures towards more openness?

... and some final remarks, illustrating the difficulties and surprising options that Schelling gives us:
- the verbs "zergehen" ('dissolve', XII. 575) and "bewältigen" ('overcome', 'stand up to', IX,159-160)
- the idea of "regaining potentiality": the history of mythology is not a history from states that only potentially hold promise, or that hold promise only potentially; rather: having potential is an ultimate achievement; see also: "a retrieval of God" (XI, 557), "the possibility of being different" (XII, 141), an "explanation of what is hidden" (XIII,188).
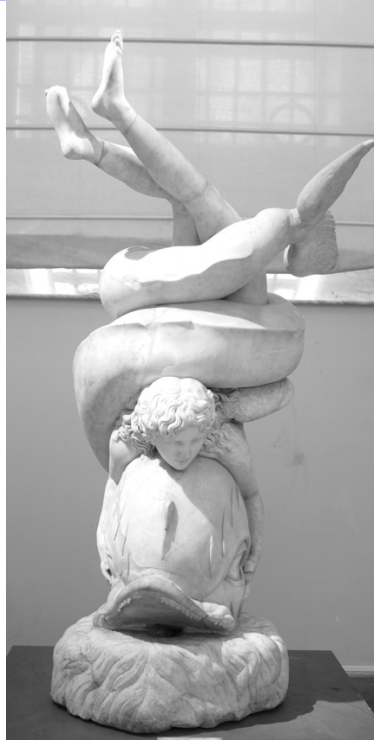
V. Illustrations
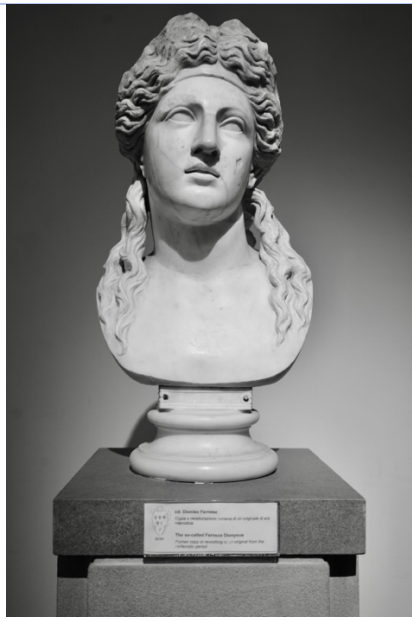
Dionysos

Dionysos/Narcissus of Pompeji	Roman marble relief (first century AD) from Naukratis showing the Greek god Dionysus, snake-bodied and wearing an Egyptian crown.	Relief of Dionysus, Nagarjunakonda, Southern India, third century
Toro Farnese		Fortuna/Isis/Demeter/Faustina
Dionysos, Isis and Artemis		