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The Organic Form of Time in Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology

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How must time be so that consciousness can emerge? As we can infer from the second part of this question, time is concerned here with the conditions for the appearance of consciousness. So, time does not question the fact of the existence of consciousness, but given the latter's fact, it looks for the grounds on which consciousness could have emerged. But it is not at all obvious what time has to do with the *coming-into-being of consciousness*. The question somewhat implies that time is one of the conditions for the becoming of consciousness, but it also posits a relation between the very idea of emergence and that of time. If we want to know the conditions in which consciousness can emerge at all, we have to look into the specificity of the relation between time and the conditions for consciousness' coming-into-being.

In this paper, I argue that these questions concern Schelling in his 1842–1845/46 Lectures on the *Philosophy of Mythology*. The lectures deal with the conditions for the coming-into-being of reason, with a focus on the emergence of self-conscious beings. But in doing so, the lectures look at the very idea of what it means for something to come into being. I would like to

put forward the thesis that Schelling's system of time in the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* is a theory of the form of time that would be necessary for self-conscious beings to appear. Since time is the very condition for the emergence of minded subjects, time itself must be prior to the emergence of self-conscious beings. Positioning himself against Kant, Schelling understands time not merely as a condition for subjective experience, but as the very condition for the subject. But since time is itself becoming, it is not possible to just situate time before the emergence of the subject. For time to be what it is, it must become itself. So, Schelling's presentation of the system of time in relation to consciousness does not situate consciousness after time; rather, the emergence of consciousness *is* the very process of time becoming what it is.

To address this, I will focus on Schelling's description of the system of time, according to which time has to be organic. I will suggest that the organicity of the system of time is not a metaphor, but constitutes the form of becoming of time at the point of the emergence of consciousness. I will then point to some consequences that this idea might have for Schelling's understanding of how anthropological plurality takes part in the process of the becoming of time and thus of the emergence of self-consciousness.

The Organic System of Time

That Schelling's late philosophy is less concerned with a *Naturphilosophie* than is his early work has been contested many times over the last years.¹ It is, however, enough to take a look at the 1843/44 *Darstellung des Naturprozess* to realize that excluding the philosophy of nature from the later work is a misconception of the development of Schelling's thought. As we will see, not only is nature a subject of the later works, but some topics and theses remain the same as in the early *Naturphilosophie*. Moreover, not only do I think that we find traces of a *naturphilosophical* thought in the mythological system of time, but that the *Naturphilosophie* is key for understanding how time operates in this system. To show this, I will start by looking at the passage of the *Historical-*

¹ Iain Grant's *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* has been central to the critique of the division of Schelling's work between the early and the later as one between Schelling's concern with *Naturphilosophie* as distinct from the rather anthropological-theological work. In Grant's interpretation, Schelling's interest in *Naturphilosophie* through all of his work should be read as motivated by an aprioristic materialist empiricism; the apriorism of this approach, however, must be distinguished from Kant's, since the empirical does not only work as a limit of that which can be known by the transcendental subject. According to Grant, the *a priori* of nature in Schelling is, rather, related to the inner logic of nature. See Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (New York: Continuum, 2006).



Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology in which Schelling refers to time as an organism.

After having differentiated, in Lecture Ten of the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, between prehistorical time and historical time, Schelling refers to the process of the emergence of history in the following way:

It is thus no longer a wild, inorganic, boundless time, into which history runs; it is an organism, it is a system of times, into which the history of our genus [*Gattung*] encloses itself; each member of this whole is an independent time of its own, which is limited by a time that is not merely preceding, but by a time that is set off from it and is essentially different, except for the last one, which no longer needs a limit, because in it there is no more time (namely, no more succession of times), because it is a relative eternity. These members are absolute-prehistorical, relative-prehistorical, historical time. (SW XI: 235)²

While the relation between the organic and time might appear to be a metaphor or a mere manner of speaking, I would like to argue, against such a thesis, that the organism is rather the form of time as it develops itself. Thus, understanding what the form of time is requires looking into Schelling's concept of the organic. It is in this sense that Schelling's *Philosophy of Mythology* is closely related to his *Philosophy of Nature*.

Hendrik Nikolaus has accurately pointed to the close relationship that the early Schelling's ideas on the organism—already in the *Identitätsphilosophie*—maintain in the later work. According to Nikolaus, this relationship is one of continuity.³ The organism is, in Nikolaus's interpretation, always differentiated from the mechanism. Organisms and mechanisms are distinguished from one another as relational structures with two different forms of causality. On the one hand, mechanisms are constituted in the fact that their parts are parts externally related to each other, where the effect on one of the parts is dependent on the intervention of an external object. In mechanisms, causality is external. On the other hand, organisms are whole-part systems, in which each one of the parts is dependent on relation to the whole. An effect on any of the parts of the organism is caused by the system as a whole. Causality is internal. Nikolaus further develops this: "The organism is therefore also not 'composed' of parts. Rather, it represents a part-whole structure in which the principle of the world of ideas manifests itself."⁴ Already in 1799, in *Introduction*

² All texts in German are my translation.

³ Hendrik Nikolaus, *Metaphysische Zeit. Schellings Theorie einer seelischen Zeit* (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Berlin, 1999).

⁴ Nikolaus, *Metaphysische Zeit*, 53.

to his *Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature, or on the Concept of Speculative Physics and the internal Organisation of a System of this Science*, Schelling works with a conception of the organism conceived as a whole-system. In this text, Schelling not only develops his theory of the organism and its distinction from the inorganic, but he also conceives of the whole of nature as a system. Thus, each phenomenon of nature must be related to nature as a whole (SW III: 279). The system of nature is constituted both by nature as an endless continuous productivity (*natura naturans*) and nature as concrete finite discrete points or natural products (*natura naturata*) (SW III: 284). Since nature is an organism, the form of the science that researches nature must be the same as the object of research. For this reason, according to the early *Naturphilosophie*, speculative physics must be a system, which is indicated in the title of the above-mentioned text (SW III: 280).

Already in this early conception of the organic form of nature, time becomes a fundamental element in Schelling's philosophy. Here time is defined as the evolution of the eternal development of the productivity in nature (SW III: 285). In this definition of time, it becomes very clear that this should be distinguished from any mechanistic conception: "Time, then, as the evolution of that activity, cannot be produced by composition" (SW III: 285). By defining time as the evolution of the endless productive force in nature, Schelling argues against any idea of time as merely dependent on minded subjects. Time is not a mere succession, or as he says, a composition of different moments, but rather the force of becoming of nature as a whole. If time were only a succession of moments, it would rather follow the form of the mechanism,⁵ so that each moment would be autonomous in relation to the other moments, and a third agent—a subject—would be necessary to hold them together. Each moment in time, as parts of an organism, must be related to the productivity of nature as a whole. Thus, the succession of moments is not given by a minded subject, but by nature itself. Nikolaus sees correctly that there is a close relationship between time and the organism that goes across Schelling's early and middle work, but his study only relates the early *Naturphilosophie* to the *Ages of the World* (1811). I am interested, however, in the later work. But Nikolaus does refer to the *Philosophy of Mythology* as one of the moments in which Schelling explicitly defines time as an organism.⁶ There, Nikolaus also states that the organicity of time should not be understood as mere metaphor, a thesis that is central to the argument of this paper: "In this context, it should be recalled once again that Schelling conceives the 'organism'

⁵ Arturo Leyte Coello, "Zeit-Denken. Zu einem nicht-begrifflichen Zugang zur Zeit bei Schelling und Heidegger," in *Heideggers Schelling-Seminar (1927/28). Die Protokolle von Martin Heideggers Seminar zu Schellings "Freiheitsschrift" (1927/28) und die Akten des Internationalen Schelling-Tags 2006*, ed. Lore Hühn (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2010).

⁶ Nikolaus, *Metaphysische Zeit*, 142.



ontologically as that form of nature in which the divine self-affirmation is directly present. And (actual) infinity is the only possible ‘form of reality’ of ideas.”⁷

With this in mind, we can now go back to the passage from the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*. As we see, the concept of the organism as a whole-system with internal causality seems to continue to be present there. The passage suggests that time is only what it is if firstly its parts are related to it as a whole, but also if time has its own internal causal principle. The question is, however, why does Schelling need to bring this organic system of time within the context of a text on mythology? Lecture Ten, to which the quoted passage belongs, is concerned with the relationship that the philosophy of mythology maintains with the philosophy of history. The thesis is that mythology is a limit for history since history only begins with the time in which we know about human actions and events related to those actions. As Schelling is looking for a realistic account of the relation of consciousness to mythology,⁸ he needs to account for the succession of events in the mythological form of reason. Although the kind of events that happen within mythologies are not of the same kind as the ones of history, they both share the quality of being successions of events. Actions within the mythological consciousness seem to have a different character than those that are told in history. The question thus is, how is mythological time organized and how does it relate to history? As we will see, mythological time and historical time are not only limiting to each other but related insofar as they concern the relation between history and natural history. This, however, does not only mean that the emergence of minded subjects has its ground in life, but—I would like to suggest—that time itself is what is organic here. In this sense, *history* is not a process derived from *natural history*; they are both parts of the process of the becoming of time. In order to grasp this organicity in becoming, I would like to look more closely at the elements of the organism and the limits determining the relations among them.

The Emergence of Consciousness

The *Philosophy of Mythology* has the task of developing a history of the emergence of consciousness out of mythological reason⁹—a history that is grounded in a

⁷ Nikolaus, *Metaphysische Zeit*, 142.

⁸ Markus Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos* (New York: De Gruyter, 2006).

⁹ Here I follow Markus Gabriel, who, following Jens Halfwassen and Walter Schulz, reads the *Philosophy of Mythology* as a history of consciousness (Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos*, 409). Such an epochal narration of the history of consciousness is considered as a response to Fichte’s attempt to account for the genesis of consciousness in his *Science of Knowledge* (*Wissenschaftslehre*) via a transcendental self-reflection of the synthetic “I.” According to

realist theory of revelation. In this sense, in the first lectures of the *Historical-Critical Introduction*, Schelling argues against other accounts of mythology according to which myths would be fictional stories intentionally narrated by persons, or poetic products appreciated for their aesthetic value. On the contrary, in Schelling's view, myths are a reference to a real experience that therefore has the power to bring people to act and organize the life of a community following that shared experience. In this sense, he says: "Mythology as the history of the gods, that is, mythology proper, could only generate itself in life; it had to be something experienced and lived" (SW XI: 125). Since myths are not mere aesthetic products but are experienced, they serve as grounds for action.¹⁰ But what exactly is meant by the idea that mythology is generated in life?

If consciousness has a history, the next question is, where does the beginning of that history occur? As we have seen, the point of emergence of consciousness creates a limit between that which is before consciousness and consciousness as self-reflective. The point at which something is delimited—and thus is not yet that which it is—is its point of emergence. If consciousness is, there must be a point at which it did not yet exist; its limit and point of emergence. This is what generates different periods in the history of consciousness. Since the history of consciousness is the history of its relation to being and to its self-reflection,¹¹ it coincides with different periods of divine revelation. The point of emergence concurs with the mythological form of reason and is, at the same time, its limit. Thus, the history of consciousness and mythology is a shared process:

Consider the following. Those real (actual [*wirklichen*]) powers by which consciousness is moved in the mythological process, whose succession is precisely the process, have been determined as the same by which consciousness is originally and essentially the God-positing. These powers, which create consciousness and, as it were, set it in motion, can they be other than those through which nature is also posited and created? (SW XI: 215)

Gabriel, the history of consciousness is self-reflective as well, since the object of reflection is consciousness itself, which has to constitute itself as object and come back to itself as an act of self-reflection. An important difference from Fichte's genetical method would be that "at the end of the history of his coming to himself, self-consciousness comes to the realization that in all knowledge there appears an unknown and unknowable" (Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos*, 382).

¹⁰ For a theory of action in Schelling's late philosophy, see Stefan Gerlach, *Handlung bei Schelling: Zur Fundamentaltheorie von Praxis, Zeit und Religion im mittleren und späten Werk* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2019).

¹¹ As Gabriel notes, this is a reflection of second-order, "in which world-consciousness is content" (Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos*, 392).



The shared process between mythology and history generates a new question: If mythology is beyond consciousness, how does the process of mythology have any power over the history of consciousness? As we can see in the passage above, both the process of positing god—the mythological process—and consciousness are part of the same process that produces nature. They both belong to an all-encompassing process of becoming: the process of being. So, although mythology is the history of the relationship between gods and the world that creates a limit for consciousness as a self-reflective process, it is also a moment in the larger process of becoming and being. It is in this larger process that history and mythology share the same generative power as nature, as we can see in this passage that I will quote at length:

It is not to be thought in itself that the principles of a process, which proves to be a theogonic one, can be other than the principles of *all* being and all becoming. The mythological process, therefore, is not merely religious; it has a universal meaning, for it is the universal process that repeats itself in it; accordingly, the truth that mythology harbors in the process is also a universal one that excludes nothing. Mythology cannot be denied *historical* truth, as is usually the case, because the process by which it comes into being is itself a true history, a real process. Nor can physical truth be excluded from it, for nature is as necessary a point of passage of the mythological as of the universal process. The content of mythology is not *abstract*-religious, like that of the common theistic doctrinal concepts. Between consciousness in its mere essentiality and consciousness in its realization, between the unity realized in it merely essentially laws and the unity realized in it, which is the goal of the process, the world lies in the middle. The moments of the theogonic movement, then, do not have exclusive meaning for that movement; they are of universal meaning. (SW XI: 216)

As we can see, mythology is part of the process of becoming of everything that is. The relation between gods, conscious beings, and world is not only self-referential and meaningful as part of a religious process or practices, but it has consequences for the larger process of becoming. As part of that larger process of becoming, mythology is part of history. But it is also part of nature as the productivity of nature is part of the becoming of everything that is as well. It is in this intersection between mythology, history, and nature that I think we can situate the organic character of time and its relation to the necessity of anthropological plurality.

As all of humanity emerges from this unitary process of becoming, a history of the development of humanity contains both the mythological

process and the natural one. But the process by which self-conscious beings emerge is a unitary one. So, the question is, if humanity shares a continuity in the form of its natural and theogonic process, how is it possible that the experience of the divine differentiates? How is a unitary form of consciousness pluralized in such a vast variety of forms of religious life, as attested by the history of mythologies? As Gabriel points out, the self-relation of consciousness as the process of knowledge of the self only contains time implicitly: “The noetic sequence of subject, object, and subject-object, regulated by the principle of contradiction, is therefore the still-implicit possibility of time, which is explicated by the fall of man into the multiplicity of a world, and, i.e., in particular into the temporally regulated multiplicity of history.”¹² This unitary form of self-knowledge is the first period of the history of consciousness. Since time is only implicitly contained in it, this is not history proper. History begins with the development of this unity into a plurality of systems of beliefs and thus of multiple experiences of the divine—that is, mythology proper. Accordingly, Schelling defines historical time as the moment of separation of the unity of humanity into many peoples (*Völker*). This separation coincides with the differentiation of language, so that a people (*Volk*) is identified as such by possessing a language. The emergence of anthropological plurality is thus described as a crisis (*Krisis*), a division in an original unity of humanity. Incisions always cut things into two. And although Schelling talks about a first unity that is transformed into a multiplicity with the emergence of many peoples (*Völker*), the cut in the unity of humanity should not be considered as one made into a given thing, but rather as separating time itself. It creates a cut between time as the general process of becoming and historical time or the time of consciousness. So, the differentiation into many peoples (*Völker*) not only gives way to anthropological plurality, but differentiates time itself. It cuts time in time before and after the emergence of consciousness. The differentiation of time corresponds to the differentiation of humanity.

The Emergence of Time

The task set by the *Philosophy of Mythology* is to develop a history of the emergence of consciousness, but the consciousness of time emerges with history. So, to avoid a vicious circle, we have to begin with the very fact of consciousness. Therefore, the question is a transcendental one: what are the conditions of possibility for consciousness to be? Or: how must time be so that consciousness can emerge? While this is a transcendental question, it is one that asks about that which conditions the subject. In *Presentation of the*

¹² Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos*, 369–70.

Natural Process, a later naturphilosophical text from 1843–44, Schelling clearly distances his position from Kant’s concepts of time and space. Central to this text is the question of the limits of the world, in reference to which Schelling analyzes the corresponding Kantian antinomy. Here it becomes clear that Schelling advocates for the objectivity of time and space: “we do not subscribe to [Kant’s] transcendental idealism, i.e., to the opinion that the external world as such—a completely indeterminable, absolutely unknowable, transcendental object, or as it is otherwise called, thing-in-itself set aside—does not exist at all apart from our representations” (SW X: 338). When, in this text, Schelling deals with the question of the limits of the world, he focuses on spaces and only briefly deals with it in relation to time. The antinomy concerning time is not as interesting for Schelling since, in his view, it does not constitute an antinomy:

[W]hat is the sense of the sentence, that the world has a beginning in time, as well as the contrary? Is the sense of the sentence, the one or the other [sentence], to have a beginning or not to have a beginning, that it is an essential, therefore really *a priori*, determination of the world, or should it be expressed with the thesis as a fact that the world has had a beginning, with the antithesis that it has not had one. Kant obviously avoids the last expression on purpose, with which the question passes into a completely different area than that of serving reason. For here we are speaking of something that has once taken place, but there of something lasting and eternal. (SW X: 344)

The sentence “the world has a beginning in time” refers to something that happens in a succession of moments, and the second sentence, “the world has no beginning,” refers to the eternal. There is no antinomy, since the first phrase relates to that which had a beginning at some point, and the second one to that which has no beginning in time. The eternal has no moment that precedes it; it is not limited by that which could have been before. But Schelling introduces here a difference between beginning once in time and an eternal beginning (SW X: 344). Beginning in time always implies a preceding moment. The eternal beginning of the world, however, refers to the transition from non-being into being: “The world is initial [*anfänglich*] by its nature, because it cannot be otherwise than by a transition *a potentia ad actum* [from potency to act], i.e., from non-being to being” (SW X: 344). The beginning of the world is an eternal beginning. Each passage from non-being into being is the eternal becoming of the world, each is its beginning. If the world would have begun only once, it would have to have stopped being at the moment in which the beginning stops being. Thus, the form of being of the world is of an absolute

becoming given by an eternal iteration of the transition from non-being into being:

It is [the world's] nature to be initial [*anfänglich*]. Here, therefore, the question is not whether it has begun at all once, but it is eternal, because according to [the world's] nature it is initial. The beginning that is assumed here is not a temporary one that once was beginning and then is no more, but a beginning that is always beginning because it is posited by the nature of the world. This Beginningness [*Anfänglichkeit*] has no contradiction. (SW X: 344)

That which has no beginning is not temporal in the sense of being conditioned by the subject. Time in the sense of the eternal iteration of the transition from non-being to being, that is, time as becoming, conditions the subject. It is in this sense that it becomes relevant to research the structure of time as it conditions the existence of minded subjects. So, in researching the conditions of possibility of consciousness, we are not so much concerned with the point in time before consciousness, but with the potential for its coming into being out of non-being. It is a question concerning the *emergence* of consciousness. The time before consciousness is thus strongly related to the question about that which constitutes possibility at all. If consciousness is, it must have been possible for it to come into being. So, a natural history of consciousness implies researching the very nature of the conditions for anything to come into being. The *Philosophy of Mythology* carries out a research of time departing from the history of consciousness. Although this history depends on the existence of consciousness, it has nothing to do with a subjectivist picture of time. However, it has a different starting point from the genealogy of time that we have seen in the philosophy of nature. Time analyzed from the point of view of the philosophy of nature has no limit, because it includes the meaning of being, the eternal process of becoming. Different from the eternal beginning of the world, the beginning of consciousness has a before—it has a limit. Understanding the form of that which precedes consciousness requires that we now turn to the organic form of time as it appears in the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*.

The Organic System of Time

The appearance of consciousness creates a division between, on the one hand, time before humanity is aware of its relation to time, and on the other hand, time after the consciousness of time appears. It is a split between time before the division into a plurality of peoples (*Völker*)—and time as it is consciously experienced as such, that is, history. History is a relation of consciousness to

itself, because it is a conscious relation to time in which the relationship itself is the object of reflection. In the relationship to itself, consciousness is processual. So, a reflection of consciousness on its relation to time is itself in time. This is why to research the relationship of consciousness to itself, it is necessary to carry out a genealogy of history as such. Accordingly, we have to divide time into time as history proper and time before history.¹³ We must assume that there is a time before the emergence of time, one that Schelling calls prehistorical time (*vorgeschichtliche Zeit*). This division emerges from questioning whether the time before history is essentially different from historical time. If the time before history were not essentially different from historical time, how could it be a limit of history? It would only be history expanded to a previous period (SW XI: 230). Prehistorical time must be one to which we do not have access via consciousness, since the conscious relation to time is that which we identify as history (SW XI: 232). But not having conscious access to that period does not mean that the period did not exist. Prehistorical time occurs within time as an eternal process, and not only as time appears to minded subjects. Since what is before history has occurred as well, it is not only necessary for limiting consciousness, but as consciousness' point of emergence, it is essential for the very development of consciousness. If prehistorical time is essential for historical time, it seems they must share something. The difference in the form of the relationship of consciousness to

¹³ This shows the previously discussed distinction between this realistic concept of time and Kant's. In this sense, Schelling can easily avoid any of the problems that Quentin Meillassoux has named under the rubric "ancestrality of time": "Let us call 'ancestral events' all events whose dating is said to be legitimate before the emergence of life on Earth. Let us call 'ancestral time' a time whose scientifically established chronology includes ancestral events, that is, a time of the physical universe in which the emergence of life and humanity form specific points in a chronology that contains and transcends them." Quentin Meillassoux, "Metaphysik, Spekulation, Korrelation," in *Realismus Jetzt: Spekulative Philosophie und Metaphysik für das 21. Jahrhundert*, ed. Armen Avanessian (Berlin: Merve, 2013).

Meillassoux presents ancestral time as an aporia in which we get trapped if we assume that existence correlates with thought. If we can only think of existence with the means of thought, how are we supposed to think of that which existed before the existence of thinking subjects. The question has a similar form to Schelling's inquiries on the genealogy of history. However, we should note that Meillassoux wishes to restrict the field of explanations with an epistemic value: "Under exactly what conditions can a philosophy give sense to the statements that refer to ancestral events (let's call them ancestral statements for the sake of simplicity) and to ancestral time? How to think about this relatively new fact, which is not the fact that people speak of what has preceded them (they always do), but the fact that they have inscribed the ancestral discourse in the field of scientific experiment and no longer that of myth, narrative or inconsequential hypothesis?" (Meillassoux, "Metaphysik, Spekulation, Korrelation," 26). In the context of Schelling's realist account of mythological reason, myths carry epistemic value since they inform the process of the genealogy of consciousness, thus the time before consciousness is not separated from natural history. The history of consciousness goes across both history and natural history.

prehistorical and historical time is given later *in time*—after the emergence of consciousness. So, it is a difference, but it is not an essential one. Thus, Schelling concludes that there is no real, essential difference between prehistorical and historical time (SW XI: 232). The essential shared core—the eternal process of becoming—only takes its form after the conscious reflection on the emergence of consciousness has happened. The time before history only becomes related to history after the emergence of history. But the shared essential core does not need minded subjects to exist; it only becomes part of history after the emergence of history:

Through the preceding investigations, directed towards a completely different object, the time of the past has, in the meantime, also gained for us a different shape, or rather a shape at all. It is no longer a boundless time into which the past loses itself; it is into times that are really and inwardly different from one another that history settles and structures itself for us. (SW XI: 232)

Given these considerations, prehistorical time is divided into *relative* and *absolute*. Relative prehistorical time names the time before time, but one in which the relation between consciousness and time is of the first order. Consciousness happens in the eternal process. But here it is identical to the eternal process:

Historical time, then, does not continue into prehistoric time, but is rather cut off and limited by it as a completely different one. We call it a completely different time, not that in the broadest sense it is not also a historical one, for great things happen in it, too, and it is full of events, only of a completely different kind, and which are under a completely different law. In this sense we have called it the relatively prehistorical. (SW XI: 234)

In the relation of first order, prehistorical time is relative because it is determined by the conscious relation to time, which, as we have seen, only emerges after the emergence of consciousness. Relative prehistorical time is bound to consciousness. Prehistorical and historical time must share the same essential core, thus the time in which that essential core already existed before being bound to history is what Schelling calls absolute prehistorical time or “the time of perfect historical immobility” (SW XI: 234). Absolute prehistorical time is, however, the one that has to be posited before the very division of time. But for it to be posited it must already have a relation to consciousness, since consciousness is the one positing such a relation. Thus,

absolute prehistorical time is the self-constitution of consciousness.¹⁴ It is absolute because the condition of possibility of history must always already have been there, but it only becomes absolute after that which it conditions has come into being. Here we can see the double side of the transcendental argument in which the ground becomes the grounded and the grounded becomes the ground. On the one hand, time is grounded in our conscious experience of it, that is, in the emergence of history. On the other hand, consciousness is grounded in time, as it becomes absolute time, that is, after becoming the condition of possibility for our conscious experience of it.

The relation between relative prehistorical time, historical time, and absolute prehistorical time is what constitutes the organic system of time in Schelling's *Philosophy of Mythology*. As an organic system, each part is related to the system as a whole. It makes no sense to produce a genealogy of time based on a linear narration of events: "A true succession is not formed by incidents which disappear without trace, leaving the whole in the state in which it was before" (SW XI: 234). The whole in this system of times is given by the history of consciousness, a process produced by consciousness itself. All periods in time are therefore somewhat related to consciousness. But it is not only in this sense that time is organic. As we have seen, time in all of its periods belongs to the process shared both by nature and history. It is at this intersection that anthropological plurality becomes necessary.

The Necessity of Anthropological Plurality

The last part of this paper is concerned with Schelling's argument for the necessary division of humanity into a plurality of peoples (*Völker*), an event that, as we have seen, is closely related to the emergence of history. Although in this paper this event has already been mentioned in the context of the genesis of time, I would now like to look closely at it from the anthropological side. As we have seen in the previous section, the organic system of times in the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* is constituted by three moments in the relation between time and consciousness: relative prehistorical time, historical time, and absolute prehistorical time. These moments are related to three periods in the history of consciousness and thus of the human relation to the divine. The first period is characterized by a unity of humanity with its genus and therefore with its nature. Here, consciousness is in an unmediated relation to the process of becoming in which it is immersed:

¹⁴ Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos*, 370.

The primordial being of man is, even according to the accepted concepts, if they seek to become reasonably clear, to be thought only as one still supratemporal and in essential eternity, which in relation to time is itself only a timeless moment. There is no room for a revelation whose concept expresses an event, a process in time; there could be nothing between man and God whereby man is kept separate and distant from God; and something of the sort must be in order for revelation to be possible; for revelation is an actual relation (based on an *actus*); but there only an essential relation can be thought; *actus* is only where there is resistance, where there is something that must be negated and sublated [*aufgehoben*]. (SW XI: 141)

In this period, expressions about the very facticity of being can only be immediately self-referential, since there is no reflection of consciousness toward itself. Thus, epistemic access is denied here. Only mere experience of the actuality of God is possible: “The God of the prehistoric times is an actual real God, and in which also the truth Is, but not known as such. Mankind thus worshipped what it did not know, to which it had no ideal (free) but only a real relation” (SW XI: 176). There is a single humanity and a single language as well. Schelling identifies this first period with a form of monotheism, but a relative monotheism—that is, one that did not emerge from a free decision but as given to humankind by its very nature. God is unified, but only because God cannot be otherwise for humanity in this period.

This period is interrupted by the crisis (*Krisis*) of history. With this rupture, not only does time get partitioned, but so too does humanity and its expressions. This is the period of the separation into peoples (*Völker*) (SW XI: 233). Here consciousness undergoes change; thus the previous unity of the genus becomes plurality (SW XI: 233). The emergence of different peoples (*Völker*) is simultaneous with the emergence of various languages and systems of belief. This generates plural forms in which the relation of consciousness to its own process can be declared and narrated. As different languages emerge, multiple signifiers can be assigned to the same referent. Since many expressions can now be given to the same facticity of being, the cut is the partition of being into being and thought (*Urteil*).

By multiplying the frames of reference for the divine, a plurality of options are opened for mankind. Since the absolute God is only recognized as such as the result of a decision, it must appear as different possibilities. If a unitary God should have needed to become absolute, all other options would have needed to be negated and sublated (SW XI: 127; SW XI: 141). This does not imply the necessity of going back to the non-mediated unity of relative prehistorical time. As the other possibilities are negated, they become part of a unity that contains a plurality. This complex unity of plurality corresponds to

absolute prehistorical time. The unity of the first period always already contains the potential for such a complex unity of plurality, but since the relation between consciousness and the divine is of the first order, this potential is not yet developed. Time is only implicit in the first period. Pure actuality does not constitute change, movement, or plurality. This is the point at which anthropological plurality becomes fundamental not only for the genesis of self-consciousness, but also for revelation to express itself in all its potential.

The relation between these periods in the development of humanity and natural history is better understood when looking at Schelling's reflections on the necessity of a plurality of beliefs. When dealing with the question of how polytheism appeared—considering that God is a unity—Schelling concludes that different gods could have only appeared if they did so in a succession. But if they were only a succession, they would be bound to the contingency of merely having appeared one after the other. However, if the plurality of systems of belief is necessary, it could not be subjected to mere contingency. On the one hand, it is this succession of plural mythologies that makes mythology a real process, one that can be reflected upon from the point of view of history (SW XI: 131). On the other hand, this process cannot be governed by mere linearity (SW XI: 129). Thus, the time in which humanity comes from a mere, immediate relation to its reality in historical time is bound by the organicity of time. In this form, that which appears to be before historical time is part of it as well, but only when it is absolute.

The organic form of time is Schelling's explanation for how human history is embedded in natural history, or how spirit (*Geist*) always appears in nature, a process that is at its core an anthropological development. I think this argument could be very fruitful for thinking about the necessity of a plurality of cultures—for example, in those cases where the idea of cultural identity is in dispute and it is relevant to know whether belonging to a culture is a quality given by nature or a historical category. But it is also relevant for debates on how we can justify different epistemic forms of access to truth without jeopardizing truth.¹⁵ In this context, the necessity of anthropological plurality grounded in a localized spirit (*Geist*) within nature could be very helpful to sort out the argumentation.¹⁶ But to work on that argument, one should first situate

¹⁵ For some examples of this debate, see Deborah Goldgaber, "Matter and Indifference: Realism and Anti-Realism in Feminist Accounts of the Body," in *Idealism, Relativism, and Realism*, ed. Dominik Finkelde and Paul Livingston (Berlin: De Gruyter 2020); Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Woman: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Sally Haslanger, "Feminism in Metaphysics: Negotiating the Natural," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, ed. Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ I think Deborah Goldgaber has done great work in this regard. See Goldgaber, "Matter and Indifference."

Schelling's racist remarks on the *Philosophy of Mythology* historically and critically and give them the weight they deserve: a task that I do not take to be a minor one since those remarks occupy no small place in Schelling's account of the natural history of humanity—about thirty pages on a defense of slavery¹⁷ and colonialism (SW XI: 509), to cite just some examples.¹⁸ They should also be put into the context of Schelling's reception of Linnaeus and Buffon,¹⁹ who, as we know, are the main characters in the genesis of the theory of human races. Schelling does not, however, argue for a natural differentiation of peoples (*Völker*), but one given by the difference in systems of belief and languages:

If now, by the way, also the facts presented above might even serve as proof that the process of races [*Racenproceß*], as we want to express ourselves for the sake of brevity, has extended into the times of the formation of the peoples [*Völker*], it is nevertheless to be noted that the peoples have not, at least not consistently, been divided according to races. (SW XI: 99)

One could therefore think that Schelling's position is free of racism, since anthropological difference seems to be only a difference in spirit (*Geist*) (SW XI: 129). Anthropological difference is necessary for the development of humanity. It might seem that Schelling is arguing for the absolute inclusion of all human beings in a single humanity, especially since Schelling's racist exclusion of some parts of humanity does not *start* with the division into a plurality of peoples (*Völker*). However, although Schelling's racism does not follow the structure of a biological argument, he nevertheless maintains a problematic division. He excludes some human communities, but does so a step before the emergence of human consciousness. Schelling distinguishes between humans and “human-like” beings (SW XI: 500). For example, when he talks about the habitants of the colonized territory in South America, he

¹⁷ See Lecture 21, special focus on SW XI: 513–15.

¹⁸ See also clearly racist remarks in SW XI: 503–506.

¹⁹ As Stella Stanford has shown, Kant introduced the term *race* in philosophical anthropology, after zoologists Louis Leclerc Buffon and Carl von Linné. Stanford shows that Kant uses the term *genus* (*Gattung*) to refer to humanity as a unity, a term he takes from Aristotle's logic. This is Kant's way to deal with the problem of the unity in diversity of humankind. So, according to Stanford, race is used to name the level at which humans are differentiated, while genus (*Gattung*) is used to refer to the level at which all humans are unified. Schelling thinks that the only condition for peoples (*Völker*) to be formed is their sharing the same system of beliefs and the same language. Thus, he does not pluralize humanity according to its different races. This, however, does not mean Schelling does not hold any racist view; rather, he holds such views at a different level. See Stella Stanford, “Kant, Race, and Natural History,” in *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 44: 9 (2018): 950–77.

speaks of a “human-like population” that is so “alienated from God in such a way that it is difficult, even impossible, to recognize here the soul that was in original contact with the divine” (SW XI: 501). Schelling thus denies the possibility for them to be a people (*Volk*). For Schelling, they do not seem to present any kind of human-like behavior, so no real language is present (SW XI: 505). In this context, he stays very clear that not all masses of “human-like population” are a race or a people (*Volk*). He takes the moment of establishing this exclusion from humanity a step further when, during his argumentation for the plurality of peoples (*Völker*), he lets us know that “the European Mankind should not be named a race” (SW XI: 98), thus reserving the term *race* for anything other than European, and mankind for the later ones. I think all of these performances of exclusion and violent speech-acts should not be ignored when considering Schelling’s argument for anthropological plurality and when considering the productivity of that argument, which I think is still possible precisely if we avoid neglecting these racist elements that are central to Schelling’s anthropology. So, the organic form of time might be productive when thinking about anthropological plurality, but it is necessary to remember the exclusions it presupposes—exclusions that happen in the determination of where and when is the point of emergence of humanity.