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THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE REAL AND THE REALITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology as an Emergentistic Approach to the History of Consciousness and as a Contribution to Documentality

Abstract

With reference to Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology (PoM) in my paper I will address three points, namely: To what extent Schelling's PoM provides us with arguments in favour of 1. Realism, 2. Emergentism and 3. Documentality (Ferraris 2009). Accordingly, in the first section, *Reality*, I will present Schelling's PoM as realism, arguing that in mythology Schelling finds the traces of the developing of consciousness, regarded as a real fact. But, as this latter can only be real if having a history, i.e. if emerging from a previous natural status, which is devoid of any consciousness, PoM should be regarded as strongly related with a sort of *emergentism*. This will thus be the object of the second section, where I will investigate the genetic interpretation of Schelling's *Weltalter* proposed by Wolfram Hogrebe (Hogrebe 1989) and suggest that precisely this analysis of the *Weltalter* explains also why Schelling's project couldn't but fail. In fact, against its intention, the *Weltalter*, as it was trying to explain the rise of semantics together with it the true genesis of the our acknowledgment of the world, still remains affected by an idealistic stance and hence couldn't succeed in becoming positive philosophy. Eventually, in the third section of this paper, *Documentality*, I argue, that a solution of the problems left open by Schelling's *Weltalter* and positively addressed in the PoM is offered by the interpretation of this latter as a contribution to Documentality. Even if created before and apparently independently from the act writing, in fact mythology relies on the possibility of recording tales, hence it is made of and eventually ends up in a written corpus. This means that the consciousness mythology gives us an account of, is the one that for the first time is able to present itself in narrated tales. It is not the mere possibility of acknowledging something, but in fact the possibility of binding our will to a freely formulated law through our memory, i.e. the birth of *conscience* upon consciousness, which is the real sense of religion. In this sense Ferraris' concept of documentality provides us an important theoretical framework to understand the hidden presuppositions of Schelling's PoM and to relate this latter to its realistic and emergentistic character.

1. Reality

Although in its roots Schelling's philosophy remains idealistic, the *Philosophy of Mythology* adopts undoubtedly a realistic stance, and that this is related to his interpretation of the content of mythology.¹ Schelling's *Philosophy of Mythology* reflects on the condition of possibility for the truthfulness of mythology. At first one may think that the content of the *Philosophy of Mythology* are the myths themselves, since these are mythology's content. Nonetheless, if myths are for Schelling a very serious topic ever since his time as a student at the *Stift*, and although they are, as tales, *real*, the *real object* Schelling means they are talking about does not coincide with the subjects addressed in the tales themselves, i.e. gods, heroes and their doings. Assuming that mythology is true if there is a real object it refers to, this reference is evidently not a direct one, i.e. mythology does not *speak* explicitly about its object, and therefore a *philosophy of mythology*, i.e. a philosophical informed hermeneutic of these tales is necessary. Schelling gives a first answer to the question: "what is mythology really talking about?", at the end of the *Historico-Critical Introduction*,² where he answers what kind of "genitive" is intended in the formulation *Philosophie der Mythologie*. Here he suggests that we can speak of a philosophy of mythology in the same sense in which we speak of a philosophy of nature, arguing that:

[M]ythology is a natural, a necessary growth; [...] [it] did not come into existence through corruption, but through the original production of the consciousness striving to re-establish itself. [...] [M]ythology is a true totality, something self-contained and held within certain limits, a world in itself; the mythological process is a phenomenon, which runs just as complete a course as does, for instance, in the physical world, an illness running its course in a ordered and natural way, eliminating itself, that is to say, by way of a necessary effort and restoring the patient to health; a movement which, passing from a specific beginning through specific intermediate stages into a specific end, is rounded off and completed. [...] [M]ythology is something essentially mobile, and indeed, in accordance with an inherent law, something which moves of itself, and *it is the highest human consciousness which animates it and* (through the very contradiction in which that consciousness is enmeshed, in that the consciousness overcomes the contradiction) *shows itself to be real, to be true, to be necessary.*³

It follows that, although mythology is a real fact and as such historical, Schelling is not concerned by the reality of the entities described in it, and

¹ From another point of view Maurizio Ferraris presents the latter philosophy of Schelling as realistic in Ferraris 2013: 187-203.

² Schelling 1979.

³ Schelling 1979: 222.

not even by the reality of mythology as such, he rather speaks about the reality of what mythology gives us an account of, and this is – as above stated – “the highest human consciousness which animates it”. Hence, if for Schelling the real object that mythology is referring to is human consciousness, then the true way adopted by mythology in order to speak about this peculiar object is telling its history, that is giving us an account of the fact of the emergence and the progressive improvement of consciousness. But it is also evident, that mythology does not explicitly address consciousness as its topic. We do not find in mythological tales consciousness as an actor, there is no tale telling us the history of consciousness as such. Mythological tales, and so the mythological world, are rather populated by gods and human beings interacting with each other. Hence what Schelling means is that mythology adopts a sensitive, but in fact unrealistic way to refer to something highly real, i.e. the powers, which are at work in the heightening of consciousness. In fact, consciousness is not even an actor inside mythology, rather it is the agent of it, it is its hidden creator and as such it is also immediately involved in the products of this activity: consciousness shows itself at work in this process by encountering narratives that are its products. Accordingly mythology demonstrates the reality of consciousness, thanks to the exhibition of its historical emergence. The truth that mythology grants is one and the same with its symptomatic function, that is to attest the emergence of consciousness as an acting power and to show the history of its progress along the history of the human being. When consciousness is faced with myths, it is always dealing with representations that are produced in itself, although in fact *not by itself*, as they appear at once only with its own heightening and according to its evolving.

In this way we can also understand the true meaning of the word *tautegory* Schelling originally borrowed from Coleridge.⁴ It indicates that mythology does not refer to something else than to what mythology manifests in itself. More than a pure realism it seems that we are dealing with one of the best examples of Schelling’s ideal-realism or real-idealism, to which the idea of *tautegoricity* refers. Mythology is a perfect symbol of ideal-realism, insofar as it is a narrative – hence it has an idealistic form, which strictly depends on our representational power – but this form expresses as such, in the very fact of the narration, the reality of which it gives an account: namely the mean-

⁴Schelling 1979: 195-196. “Mythology is not *allegorical*, it is *tautegorical*.” In a footnote Schelling adds: “I borrow this expression from the renowned Coleridge, the first of his countrymen who has understood, and used in a meaningful way, German poetry, science, and especially philosophy. [...] Incidentally Coleridge uses the word “tautegorical” synonymously with the Latin “*philosophem*”, which would admittedly not accord with my meaning, but he only wishes to say, perhaps, that mythology must be taken just as literally as a philosopheme is usually taken, and he gathered this quite correctly from the above-mentioned dissertation [i.e. the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature*, NdA]”.

ing the different gods have for consciousness while this is still subjugated to them but also increasingly emancipating from them. The possibility to tell stories about the gods is indeed a progressive breaking free from these gods, by gaining a critical distance. And again this becoming aware of the freedom is at once idealistic, if regarded as the content of consciousness, which becomes aware of its own freedom, but also realistic inasmuch as precisely this awareness sets off real effects.⁵

Schelling's realism is in fact not totally devoid of idealism, as it always considers representational conditions for reality to come to expression. Hence we could define his realism as a kind of critical realism. It is a position that, without falling into representationalism, aims at accounting for the positive contribution that representations have for the emergence of consciousness as a real fact. Schelling's realism, as it is presented in the PoM is hence strictly related to emergentism, inasmuch as his realistic claim is made true precisely by the emergence of consciousness, and for this reason philosophy of mythology is accounting for something real. Thus we come to the second point of this paper, that is, the relation between PoM and emergentism.

2. *Emergence*

PoM shares the fundamental idea that Schelling has defended since his Philosophy of Nature (PoN) that human reason has somehow arisen from a previous irrational status, and is based upon it. In being so we can quite easily consider it a kind of emergentism. It is a position deeply rooted in the tradition of Rousseau, whose pessimistic diagnosis of the status of the mankind Schelling wants to correct in the light of Kant's philosophy of history: thanks to civilisation, liberty is increasing, not decreasing, hence the attainment of reason – something that human beings do not possess since the beginning of time, but acquire over the course of history – is to be regarded as an attainment, not as a loss of freedom.⁶ Mythology conveys the status of our consciousness, at a moment in the history of human beings, when the drive to freedom is already present and active, whereas rationality, which

⁵ On this aspect focuses precisely the critique Cassirer moved to Schelling beside his appreciation of the attempt he did, in order to grant to mythology its own value: "The characteristic merit and limitations of Schelling's idealism appear clearly in this passage. It is the concept of the unity of the absolute, which truly and definitively guarantees the absolute unity of the human consciousness by deriving every particular achievement and trend of spiritual activity from a common ultimate origin. The danger of this concept of unity is however that it will ultimately absorb all concrete, particular differentiations and make them unrecognizable." Cassirer 1955: 9.

⁶ For the importance of Rousseau's and Kant's Philosophy of history for Schelling, see Moiso 2014: 191-229.

demonstrates our independence from sensibility, is not yet fully developed, e.g. it still lacks the power of abstraction.

We can consider the PoM as related to the PoN because mythology is part of the history of nature, expressing precisely that part of the natural history, when consciousness separates itself from nature ushering in culture. The birth of culture as a sort of second nature, which as such can be seen as opposed to the first Mother Nature, is in fact to be regarded as nothing but a natural achievement. Thus mythology lies exactly at the border between nature and culture and, properly speaking, it at once discloses this border and establishes it. Mythology has to be regarded as a natural phenomenon expressed in cultural form and conversely as a cultural product embedding a natural evolutionary step of mankind. Only since mythology has entered upon the scene of the world we can properly speak of a *living history* and not just of a *dead time flow*, so that it seems that according to Schelling we should consider *history* as just emerging from time. This is the property that mythology shares with consciousness and precisely this historical emergence of consciousness, and subsequently reasoning, from the mere dynamism of nature is the fundamental reason why Fichte eventually rejected Schelling's *Transcendental System* in 1801.

The sense of Schelling's reflections on the dynamical structure of nature in the Philosophy of Nature was in fact to show that emergentism is the key feature of Nature. But: does this mean that Schelling is *emergentistic* in the sense Maurizio Ferraris uses this word?⁷ In fact, Schelling's emergentism is problematic as it is embedded in a process headed by a foreign force, seeming to be progressively led by a sort of hidden mighty hand. As Ferraris puts it, it is the abundance of time (and space) alone, which makes at once either a creating and ordering God no longer necessary, nor even interesting any more,— or responsible for all the good things present in the world – and neither a theodicy, a justification of evil.

[E]volution, or the biological equivalent of the metaphysical emergentism, which I defend in this book, could have been proposed only once people got acquainted with the temporal immensity that is settled at the bottom of history. ... So just give it time to time and space to space, and from the interactions between individuals any sort of thing will be able to come out ... [or] is do we still need to postulate the intervention a *logos* (or even more modestly of any sense whatsoever) to account for a world that owes the contingency of its emergence only to an incalculable amount of time, matter and energy?⁸

I do not believe that Schelling shares this view of things. He is well aware of the fact that the world exists since time immemorial, and insofar he is

⁷ See: Ferraris 2016.

⁸ Ferraris 2016: 57.

also very aware of the fact that time is also *subject-independent*⁹. But, if we trust Schelling's assumption, that time, or better, temporality is an immanent ingredient for the development of nature, a development that eventually will end up with the raising of consciousness and above all the consciousness of its own temporality hence with the emergence of history from time – can we then call this perspective “emergentistic” in the sense in which Ferraris employs this word? I do not think so. Because Schelling obviously does not believe that time (plus space and matter) alone suffices to allow, barely by chance, something like consciousness to emerge, the senses and so on. No matter how many of these ingredients we assume: this *qualitative* gap will never be filled by a mere *quantitative* accumulation. Schelling states this very clearly in the last pages of its *Historico-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, where he says:

Works like the monuments of the Hindus or the Egyptians do not emerge like stalagmites in grottos do, just waiting for time to go by. Rather it had to be the same power, which has internally brought into life the quite colossal representations of mythology, that externally produced some intrepid artistic achievements that overwhelm every criteria of the following eras. This power, which together with the mythological representation has enhanced human consciousness beyond the border of reality [...] has guided humanity, *like a divine hand*, to jump over its previous stages.¹⁰ (my emphasis)

⁹ This is also part of the reason for his break with Fichte. One of their last letter exchanges specifically focused on the deduction of space (and insofar also time), that is whether they have to be considered as a function of the I in its relational exchange with the Not-I, or whether they are part of the dynamic evolution of the nature, which in the I is only consciously lived anew. Schelling thinks that time is already and as such part of the development of the nature and this far independently from the existence of any I or a subject, who is in possession of a cognitive power. His statement against Fichte in his *General deduction of the dynamic process* (1800) sounds like follows: “This is precisely what the philosopher doesn't see, for the very simple reason that he receives his object already at a higher degree of power – as an I, as something, which is already equipped with consciousness –, so that the physicist alone detects the fallacy. [...] [T]he idealist is surely entitled to fashion out of reason an autonomous creator of the whole; in doing so he is supported by the genuine intention that nature bears for the human being, but for the very reason that this is an intention of nature [...] that idealism becomes eventually an appearance again; it becomes something explainable; thereby any cognitive (theoretical) reality of idealism falls apart”, Schelling 2004: 365. Hence he could introduce his “general remarks on the nature of the dynamics and its relationship with philosophy of nature and idealism with following words: “The dynamical is in physics, what the transcendental is in philosophy, so that to explain in a dynamic way has in physics the very same meaning as what in philosophy it means to explain in a transcendental way” Schelling 2004: 364. Here I believe has to be found the beginning of Schelling's struggle with negative philosophy, even though, as we will see, the road to his positive philosophy still has to be paved.

¹⁰ Schelling 1979: 240.

Hence we have to understand the sense of emergentism Schelling can be said to have adopted, and also whether the elements Schelling believes to be indispensable for his kind of emergentism are not more in general essential for any emergentistic position, even if not declared. Indeed, although in the form of an “*als ob*”, Schelling also postulates as a condition of the emergence, together with time, the cooperation of a power aiming at expressing itself. It is a power, which, as such, is independent of consciousness, but as it is constantly seeking ways to manifest itself, will necessarily end up by generating: 1. an autoepistemic structure like consciousness is; and 2. a semantics, as the deployment of its epistemic. Now, this aspect, which is Schelling’s reflection on the emergence of semantics, has been deeply investigated by Wolfram Hogrebe in his *Prädikation und Genesis*.¹¹

What is so interesting about Hogrebe’s interpretation of the *Weltalter*, when asking the question about Schelling’s emergentism in relation to the PoM, is the fact that starting from the later perspective of the PoM, Hogrebe’s interpretation of the *Weltalter* (WA) can give us an explanation why Schelling’s major project of WA eventually failed. If the main thesis of *Prädikation und Genesis* holds, the genetic process presented in the WA tried to explain too much at once and hence remained negative philosophy.

I shortly recapitulate Hogrebe’s argument. WA articulates in its essence the very logic of the emergence of semantics – so in fact the very logic of emergentism –, which is founded on what Hogrebe calls the predicative rotation and its fortunate collapse. This conclusion should now provide an answer to the following fundamental question formulated by Schelling: “The entire world is trapped in the net of reason. Now the very question is how did it get in there?”¹² Hogrebe’s argument proceeds as follows. We have to start by considering that Schelling, against the more usual theory of the inherence of the attributes to the subject of which they are predicated, defends a theory of the identity of predication. This states that *what applies to the expression of the subject is one and the same with that what applies to the expression of the predicates*. In Schelling’s words: “The very meaning of judgements like ‘A is B’ can only be the following: *that which A is, is that which B is*, or else, the one being A and the one being B are one and the same, i.e. $Fa \rightarrow (\exists x) (x = a \wedge Fx)$ ”.¹³

According to Hogrebe, the genesis of the very basic judgment Fa , the one which carries the minimal unity of meaning, is sketched by Schelling in the form of the successive appearance of three potencies. The first one is the pure *something*, “x” without any specification, what Hogrebe calls “pronominal

¹¹ Hogrebe 1989.

¹² F.W.J. Schelling, *Grundlegung der positiven Philosophie* quoted in Hogrebe 1989: 39.

¹³ Hogrebe 1989: 81.

being". The second one, is *that which* the x could be, the "predicative being", the function F, x's potential quality. Each of them currently pretends to reign alone on the scene, until eventually a third potency also enters the scene, the "propositional being": Fa. These are all possible, potential beginnings for the world, but any of them, taken as such, prevents any other descending into real being, so that the process gets stuck. Hoguebe names this arresting at the stage of mere potentiality *predicative rotation*. The predicative rotation does not allow that *something* becomes a *such-and-such*. In order to do so, it must be taken out the pronominal, the predicative and the propositional being from this perpetual alternating of mere potencies, giving each of these its own fixed place so that they can cooperate to build a meaningful proposition. Now, this breakdown of the potencies into the realisation of the meaning, this sort of semantic *big-bang* is also the moment for time and space to arise, allowing precisely the articulation of the emergence of consciousness and meaning. Hoguebe concludes:

The genesis of the universe is *sub specie praedicationis* the process through which structures emerge of the kind that can 'grasp' singular terms and predicates, i.e. individual things that have capacities and stand in relations. We have no concepts of these entities besides the rules of employment of our concepts, however these rules presuppose a compatible universe. But such a universe has not fallen from the sky but is *sub specie existentiae* the realization of a possibility that we can infer along the lines of the formal structure of the incomplete predicate Fx.¹⁴

Now, if this interpretation of the WA holds, its effect is to downgrade Schelling's realism anew to a form of idealism, which is the only meaning I can ascribe to the statement: "The genesis of the universe is *sub specie praedicationis*". If existence depends on predication, as predication cannot be subject-independent, then nothing exists independently from a subject, or a mind. Hence the problem of the WA, is that the it explains too much and above all too much at once. In the *story* that Hoguebe reconstructs there is eventually no room left for *history*, because cosmos, consciousness and semantics arise all together at once, in one and the same moment, in one shot. In fact, the whole temporality relating to the predicative rotation, which is an eternal era, remains empty: during the predicative rotation no real evolution occurs, because at that immemorial stage there is a mere contraposition of potential beginnings that are not able to run into being. But indeed, also the time passed in human history after the resolution of the predicative rotation appears quite empty, because everything that really counts has already happened. There can be just smaller adjustments.

Thus, real history becomes again but a gunshot and Schelling seems to have understood this failure, given the fact that he eventually recalled the

¹⁴ Hoguebe 1989: 69.

printed version of the WA. Schelling could not but refuse his attempt and abandon it because the basis for distinguishing the positive philosophy from the negative was that it had to address reality exactly giving an account of a historical, that is, not a mere logical, genesis. On the contrary, the WA remains still too logical, and the very merit of Högberg's interpretation of it is to shed light precisely on this aspect; that is to say, on the weakness of the project, through all its power and indeed because of its excessive power. So only by proceeding to the PoM and addressing the reality of mythology in its concrete historicity did Schelling make his very first step towards a positive philosophy. And he might also have been very aware of this, if in the end the only text that he published of the whole project of the WA was the *Deities of Samothrace*, i.e. a mythological account that goes far beyond an apparently mere erudite interest. And so, now that the domain of the history and hence of the proper philosophy of mythology has been entered upon, we can also move to the last point, concerning documentality.

3. Documentality

The last thesis I wish to defend is that the PoM, insofar as it is positive philosophy, is strongly dependent on documents because mythology cannot then result in a document. Schelling seems to have presumed this from his youth, but for sure elderly Schelling in the PoM explicitly connected his genetic inquiry of the origin of consciousness with the investigation of the first human written documents containing mythological tales. The beginning of Schelling's reflections on Mythology is marked by the concept of *Urkunde*, which means: document, attestation, certificate. His two writings at the *Stift*¹⁵ are a first consideration of the history of mankind starting from those particular documents called *myths*. Indeed if mythology is situated at the border between nature and culture then it is not just a natural achievement, a kind of *physical object*, but it has to be at the same time a *social object*, and as such it has to strictly depend, not alone on an inscription but also on the writing.¹⁶ It is hence not surprising that mythology results in poetry, which was first sung and orally transmitted, but eventually also written down: that is the reason why we are still today able to know it and Schelling was in a position to reflect on a philosophy of mythology.

For Schelling, myths are in fact *Urkunde*, i.e. the very first and "original documents" that can be accessed in human history. Actually, Herder had already emphasized the importance of religious narratives concerning descriptions of the

¹⁵ Schelling 1993; 1979a.

¹⁶ I borrow the difference between inscription and written text from Ferraris 2013: 263-269.

first stages of human life, giving them the status of a document, *Urkunde*. In his *Oldest Document of Humankind*¹⁷ he speaks of *Genesis* as a useful document for reflecting on the beginning of human history. Some years later Kant, who originally had reacted quite negatively to Herder's text, stated in his *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*¹⁸ that when we search for a beginning of history, we can't but formulate conjectures, *Mutmaßungen*, but we can nevertheless feel authorized to:

use a holy document (*Urkunde*) as [a] map and at the same time to imagine that the flight [it] makes on the wings of the power of imagination [...] eventually meets precisely that line that is historically pre-designed in the map. The reader will open up the pages of that document, (1 Genesis II-IV) and will see step-by-step whether the path that philosophy traversed along with the concepts matches the one given to us by history.¹⁹

Schelling never abandons this interpretation of the documental status of mythology, which for precisely this reason has such a high value for mankind. This aspect can be related to his later endeavour to find a foundation for positive philosophy. Positive philosophy, as we know, is that kind of philosophy that does not retrace the mere logic behind a fact – which Schelling considers useful only for the description of what is dead and hence characterizes negative philosophy; positive philosophy, on the contrary, deals with living beings and the description of life, which cannot be replicated by logical explanations, but only by the re-enactment of its history. Now, history strictly depends on documents, and the documents tracking the history of mankind considered as a whole are *written* documents, i.e. not just inscriptions or traces, but writings, written texts. So that the birth of mythology goes hand in hand with the birth of writings, i.e. not of the mere meaning, but *of mankind as something meaningful*, of mankind explicitly leaving traces of its life in the world and of the value that this being has for itself in the world.

So if myths can be regarded as documents, and documents are strictly linked to writing, wherein myths are originally the expression of our religious feelings, then religion too – at least in Western tradition – has to be regarded in its relationship to writing. We can support this statement just by reflecting on the etymology of the word 'religion' in the tradition. There are historically three important divergent hypotheses on this, made respectively by Cicero, Lactantius

¹⁷ Herder 1774-1776.

¹⁸ Kant 1786.

¹⁹ Kant 1786: 2-3.

and Augustine.²⁰ Cicero states that *religio* comes from *relegere*²¹, *re* + *legere*, which would mean “to go through or over again in reading, speech or thought”²²; on the contrary Lactantius following the Roman Grammarian Servius, formulates another hypothesis, asserting that *religio* derives from *re-ligare*, *re* + *ligare*, to bind strongly.²³ Eventually Augustine began by adopting the Lactantius’ etymology²⁴ but later on changed in favour of a third proposal, deriving *religio* from *religere*, *re* + *eligere*, to choose again.²⁵ Looking at the period much closer to Schelling, we find that Fichte in his very first publication, *An Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (1792) reports the Lactantian-Augustinian etymology, asserting explicitly, that: “Religion (*religio*) following the meaning of the word, should be something that binds us and actually binds us more strongly than we would be without it”²⁶ Last but not least we must remember that Schelling himself refers to the etymology of religion in his *Philosophy of Mythology* (1842) where he states “[o]riginally the word *religio* means that obligation with which a certain concept of holiness or a similar feeling of inviolability is bound. This is clearly stated already in the Latin use of the words: *hoc mihi religio est, hoc mihi religioni duco*”²⁷

Despite all their differences, these etymologies reveal one element remaining constant and that is the importance of writing for religion. This fact is evident in Cicero, where the act of “reading”, at least in our own head, is explicitly mentioned in the definition, but also in Lactantius and Augustine. In fact, we can easily infer that what is actually *binding more strongly* than before is the formulation of a promise to honour the divinity, which is mostly the expression

²⁰ See Hoyt 1912: 126-129.

²¹ «Qui autem omnia quae ad cultum deorum pertinerent diligenter retractarent et tamquam relegerent, sunt dicti religiosi ex relegendo, ut elegantes ex eligendo, diligendo diligentes, ex intelligendo intelligentes; his enim in verbis omnibus inest vis legendi eadem quae in religioso.» Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 2: 28,72.

²² Hoyt 1912: 126-129.

²³ “Credo nomen religionis a vinculo pietatis esse deductum, quod hominem sibi Deus religaverit et pietate constrinxerit . [...] melius ergo (quam Cicero) id nomen Lucretius interpretatus est, qui ait religionum se nodos exsolvere.” *Institutiones Divinae*, 4, 28.

²⁴ “ad unum Deum tendentes, et ei uni religantes animas nostras, unde religio dicta creditur, omni superstitione careamus?” Augustinus, *De Vera Religione liber unus*, 55,111.

²⁵ “Hunc eligentes vel potius religentes (amiseramus enim neglegentes)- hunc ergo religentes, unde et religio dicta perhibetur” Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei contra paganos libri viginti duo* X, 3, 2. In his later *Retractationum libri duo* I, 13, 9 Augustine will reflect on this two etymologies and explain how he went from the first to the second one: “Item alio loco: “Ad unum Deum tendentes”, inquam, “et ei uni *religantes* animas nostras, *unde religio dicta* creditur, omni superstitione careamus”. [...] Nam non me fugit aliam nominis huius originem exposuisse latini sermonis auctores, quod inde sit appellata *religio, quod religitur*” (my emphasis).

²⁶ Fichte 1964: 23.

²⁷ Schelling 1984: 390.

of a commitment to obey and serve god. As Ferraris states, the formulation of a promise is as such a first form of inscription,²⁸ but in fact we can hardly imagine religion in Western societies without a written corpus and this holds not only for the monotheistic one, but also for polytheistic cults, which the existence of mythology amply confirms. Thanks to this traditional etymology we can then conclude that writing is a condition for understanding the sense of religion, and even the possibility of religion itself, which is hence closely linked to documentality.

If we now examine Schelling's PoM we can unexpectedly find strong support for this interpretation: where his interpretation of mythology shows the most originality, i.e. when he speaks of a proper monotheism detaching itself from the previous status of an unconscious monotheism named *monolatry*, due to the rise of polytheism. The question arises in the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* when Schelling reflects on the priority between polytheism and monotheism. Schelling's solution is to acknowledge two kind of monotheism: a *relative monotheism* or *monotheolatri*, characterizing the most ancient life of the mankind on earth, that status, which Rousseau named the state of nature; and a second *absolute monotheism* following the revelation. This distinction allows him to present a developing history of the unique God, and an evolution in which the history of mankind is also involved. There is a progress in the transition from the first unaware monotheism to the second conscious one, and in fact it is the consciousness of humanity itself that evolves: from being absorbed by God, our consciousness eventually becomes aware of him and can recognize him as such, i.e. as the unique God, which is from now an object of our consciousness and not its subject any more.

But the need to acknowledge God as such can be felt only thanks to the solicitation of polytheism, which marks the weakening of the bond linking man to God. Polytheism is then on the one side one of the symptoms of a disease affecting mankind, which leads it to break apart in several populations with different languages and hence different mythologies; but on the other side it is a "solicitation" for the mankind to acknowledge the uniqueness of God as such and so to switch from monotheolatri to *monotheism*. The story of Noah relates that by the time of the arising of mythology only a few people still remained devoted to the one God, and it is for this reason that God sent the flood. Moreover, the oscillation between two names for God by the Jews, that of Elohim, a plural name, and Jehovah, also shows that the Jewish Nation was continually prone to lapse into polytheism. Schelling recalls that the name Jehovah, the one pertaining to the absolute One God, had been used

²⁸ "There is an inscription [...] not only when an individual registration is written somewhere, [...] but also when in a society, which usually involves at least two persons, words are pronounced or rituals are performed, that result in a social object: a promise, a bet, an oath, the affiliation to a secret society etc.", Ferraris 2013: 266.

only from a certain generation of the Jews onwards. Before that they always referred to God with the name Elohim. This leads to conclude that polytheism and hence mythology, arises at the same time with the absolute monotheism expressed in the Mosaic Books, which narrates the guilt of mankind and its punishment by God.

4. *What does really mythology documents?*

From this Schellingian reconstruction we may conclude that the first degree of freedom attained by humankind would be documented by the possibility of recording, i.e. setting the relation between human beings and God. This step of the evolution of the consciousness would be hence documented in the mythological tales of polytheistic populations on the one side and in the books of the Jewish Nation on the other. These documents are all indeed insofar *tautegorical*, as they do retrace the conditions of possibility for the birth of documentality and present them in a document, precisely that document that they are in themselves. The beginning of the mankind coincides with the ability of the human being to acknowledge itself as a human being, thanks to its power to fix the difference between itself and God in a document. This document will then also allow us to bind ourselves again to the divinity, being this multiple or unique. In this way mythology, as the place where consciousness arises and becomes acquainted with itself, attests precisely to the registration and exhibition of this new interest that mankind shows for itself and for its relation to what it is not itself, that is, God and the Nature. To this extent, it is the document of our departure from the first relatively unique God and hence the registration of the original sin consists in setting a distance between us, i.e. mankind, and God. With this distance, we therefore acquire a first degree of freedom.²⁹

However, here we have to make a very important clarification, and therefore return to the result in the second point of this paper. Speaking about Mythology we have until now always referred ourselves to the arising of *consciousness*. But thanks to Hogrebe's reconstruction of the WA's argument

²⁹This idea had been already expressed in the *Freiheitsschrift*, where Schelling stated: "The same unity that is inseverable in God must therefore be severable in man—and this is the possibility of good and evil. [...] [T]here thus emerges in the will of man a separation of selfhood having become animated by spirit [...] that is, a dissolution of the principles which are indissoluble in God. If, to the contrary, the self-will of man remains as central will in the ground [...] and if, instead of the spirit of dissension that wants to separate the particular from the general principle, the spirit of love prevails in it, then the will is in divine form and order. [...] But no sooner than self-will itself moves from the centrum as its place, so does the bond of forces as well; in its stead rules a mere particular will [...] must strive to put together or form its own peculiar life from the forces that have moved apart from one another [...]" Schelling 1997: 226-227.

we must now admit that this actually cannot be the point: It cannot be the emergence of the consciousness supplied by myths. Otherwise we would again be lapsing into an idealistic position, stating that consciousness, being, and the semantic all emerge together at once, i.e. that being eventually depends on consciousness.

If this is not true, then consciousness must exist before meaning, and actually the human being is aware of the world before making sense out of it. The point here is not the question whether we can solve the problem of the relationship between things and representations, and the fact that from a certain moment onwards we are able to disentangle our representation from the things. I just want to stress the fact that if Schelling, and we with him, want to admit that there is consciousness and history, and that sooner or later this history will imply reason, and that myths are part of the documents helping us to reconstruct this history, then myths cannot tell us about the insurgence of consciousness, because consciousness is not the key feature of the human being. They speak of something, which is related to consciousness and based upon it, but it is not our mere ability to acquaint; they rather relate the history of the emergence of our *conscience*, i.e. of the moral direction of consciousness. And insofar they are not really speaking about the insurgence of the meaning, which I understand as the mere capacity to establish references, but more about the “sense”, which is a capability for evaluating “purposes”, that which is only meaningful for us, mankind. In fact, we are speaking here about the emergence of law and culture.

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