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Markus Gabriel: *Der Mensch im Mythos. Untersuchungen über Ontotheologie, Anthropologie und Selbstbewußtseinsgeschichte in Schellings Philosophie der Mythologie*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005, X, 503 S., ISBN 978-3110190366.

With *Der Mensch im Mythos* we encounter a work of refreshing originality and reassuring depth, from a thinker whose ideas will no doubt be with us for years to come. The leading voice of a new generation of scholars, Gabriel finds in Schelling's philosophy resources to recast the terms of current debate on the relationship of ontology and epistemology, consciousness and personality, and our relationship to nature – a reframing that places a rehabilitated ontotheology before epistemology, qualifies the autonomy of the subject, and takes seriously the historical development of self-consciousness. Based on his dissertation, the focus of Gabriel's efforts is Schelling's *Spätphilosophie*, which encompasses the final 30 years of this thinker's lengthy career, and has as its content the last iteration of Schelling's attempt to "disclose and reveal that which never allows itself to be captured in the concept" (SSW, XI, p. 186), namely "the meaning of the fact of the world" (Schelling, 1972, p. 272). Like all of his iterations, his *Spätphilosophie* was the integrated whole encompassing the tensive interplay of opposing standpoints, be it of the Real and Ideal, or in this case, positive philosophy and negative philosophy, and philosophy of mythology and philosophy of revelation. How to understand the relationship between these has always been a challenge for the reader of Schelling, and Gabriel proposes an elegant, if stark, interpretive strategy that focuses only on one pair of this opposition, the *Foundation of Philosophy of Mythology and Negative Philosophy*, found in the eleventh volume of the *Sämtliche Werke*.

What emerges from this focused interpretation is a dense and complex work, the essence of which finds expression in the title of an introductory section introducing the three principles that organize this book: „Man in Myth, or Ontotheology, Anthropology, History of Self-Consciousness“ (p. 28). Gabriel convincingly communicates Schelling's contention that myth, like religion itself, is a historical fact whose pervasive appearance must be accounted for philosophically, on its own terms (§ 11: *Mythologie als Tautegorie*), without being reduced to a mere allegorical significance or, worse, a primitive form of science. Leveraging Kant against Hegel, e-pistämh has limits which must be delineated and respected if practical, positive interests are to be realized. Man in myth is embedded in an historical process, be it of ideas, politics, or consciousness, whose beginnings and purpose he can never know through any theoretical science or transcendental source. According to Schelling history and experience offer the only credible sources for developing a philosophically meaningful response to the question of why is there something, rather than nothing?

Schelling held that philosophy is the one science whose object only emerges in the process of engaging in that science (SWW XIII, p. 147). Accordingly, in the collected works Schelling begins his final system with the extensive *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie*, a monumental survey of myth. This is followed by the *Philosophische Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie oder Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*, which employs the first philosophies of Plato and Aristotle to develop a framework for understanding man in myth through –using Gabriel's terms – ontotheology, anthropology, and history of self-consciousness. Gabriel presents these three initiatives (*Ansätze*) via Schelling's *Urform* of reasoning that in trinitarian fashion posits all principles as organically related, each essential to the whole, and thus none more originary than the other. Citing Schelling's claim that his life's work has always aimed at this system, Gabriel argues that an accurate understanding of this final phase of his philosophy will in turn provide the key to understanding all periods of his work (p. 27). Gabriel frames his understanding not with principles or the "fundamental thought" of Schelling, but with the "overview of the whole" (p. 53) supplied by an ontotheology, understood not in the Kantian sense, as being limited to the ontological proof of god, but rather in accordance with Heidegger's and Werner Beierwalteres' understanding. According to this way of thinking, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* provides the paradigmatic articulation of the "intimate connection of theology and ontology" that supplies Schelling's system resources to account for the beginning and *telos* of metaphysics (p. 196, n. 52). The centrality of theology and ontology to Schelling's task emerges when Gabriel characterizes his historical treatment of myth as actually being a "construction of the history of philosophical theology" designed "to introduce the idea of a teleology of freedom [that] leads to a free or philosophical religion," the concept of which – and this is determinative for the course of Gabriel's argument – "can only be made clear in the course of this work" (p. 76, n. 57). Continuing to move from the outside in, Gabriel supplies his own definition of the religious form of consciousness, as that for which „the world in its entirety appears as an event at the center of which stands that consciousness for which alone there is a world in its entirety“ (p. 54). Religious consciousness so defined makes humanity dependent on the world as a whole, as well as setting man as the center and goal of creation. He thereby challenges efforts to provide a comprehensive description of the

world that do not also account for the fact of this religious consciousness and its emergence. It is in this sense that, following Schelling, Gabriel declares this original form of consciousness *theonomous*.

As Schelling's overview of philosophy demonstrates, however, while this original form of consciousness is *theonomous*, the "emancipatory teleology of freedom" (p. 71) behind historical development leads to a metaphysical consciousness that "necessarily tends towards autonomy" (p. 55). Yet throughout this historical development, consciousness itself retains its essential relation to a totality from which it derives meaning, be it the Platonic idea of the παντελῶς ὄν (p. 65), or its Kantian analogue, the *Inbegriff* of the Transcendental Ideal. As always already there, this idea of totality is what "makes possible the conceivability of all that exists" (p. 79), providing the frame within which we pursue knowledge of the particulars of experience. As the basis of ἐπιστήμη, this ἀνυπόθετος ἄρκά (Plato, 1972, p. 510b 7) can never itself be known through such a demonstrative science (Aristotle, 1964, p. 100b 5 ff.). Consequently, Schelling must pursue this *fundamentum inconcussum* from a Platonic standpoint with "the concept of a noetic and thus infallible intellectual intuitive thinking" that seeks as its object "the unconditioned principle in Schelling's reading of Plato: the ὄντως ὄν" (p. 65; *SSW*, XI, p. 273). Never given, either through senses or as result of thinking, this being (*das Seiende*) is "the necessary content of reason" (p. 75) and, as such, demonstrates the identity of both as well as thinking's dependence on this totality of being. It is this dependency of thinking on being that defines what Gabriel calls *ontonomous* consciousness, a term that moderates the religious tones of Schelling's *theonomous* consciousness while still correcting the *cogito*'s claim to absolute status. Gabriel sees in Schelling's inversion of ontology over epistemology a "renaissance of the ontology of consciousness" (p. 468), drawing attention to yet another aspect of Schelling's turn to the ancients and their understanding of how knowing integrates us with the world. Holding that "the beginning of thinking is not yet thinking" (*SSW* XIII, p. 162), Schelling posits an ontological basis of thinking and knowing that overcomes the pitfalls of dualism. It does so by understanding the self-reflexive structure of consciousness as but the most complex manifestation of the larger organization of nature, whose own self-organizing dynamic we participate in and articulate in our knowing nature. Accordingly, our knowledge of the world is for Schelling a "knowing with (*Mitwissenschaft*)" or "*conscientia*" (*SWW*, IX, p. 221). Curiously, Gabriel avoids addressing this fundamental point in Schelling on its own terms, preferring to employ Hogrebe's clever but unsatisfactory account of this "autoepistemic structure" (p. 101) of our world system. Gabriel even quotes Hegel at length on this topic (*Enz.* § 564), leaving explicit mention of Schelling's "*conscientia*," as well as Plato and Aristotle's accounts, for brief mention in footnotes. Perhaps most regrettably, Gabriel never mentions the concept of man as "co-poet (*Mitdichter*)" of history (*SWW*, III, p. 603), whose "play of freedom" becomes in a very important sense the condition without which even God "himself *would not be*" (*SWW*, III, p. 603). This reciprocal dynamic not only drives the development of history in Schelling's *Transcendental System of 1800*, but it also supplies the ground and *telos* of the theogonic process presented in the *Spätphilosophie*, making it central to Gabriel's analysis the history of self-consciousness and its "teleology of freedom" (Chapter 3). As Gabriel recognizes, for Schelling, as for Plato and Aristotle, it is not simply the ontological fact "that the structure of the whole of being must be isomorphic with the structure of the knowledge of the whole of being" (p. 119), but more importantly, the theological purpose behind this fact. For Schelling holds that our world organizes and evolves in this way due to god's desire for a self-knowledge that can only be realized in and through the free consciousness of man. Ontology may have precedence over epistemology, but in this teleological sense knowing completes being.

Following the teleology of freedom, the goal of negative philosophy is, thus, to set the necessary content of pure thinking free of its own reflection so that it may direct its gaze beyond itself to existence and set itself to creating the positive meaning of "the fact of the world." Reason must traverse the course of pure thinking from start to finish, beginning with "the original content of being," delimiting the necessary "structure of the whole of being" (p. 144) that makes possible this process of self-knowledge, and finally ending in the necessary concept of being itself (*das Seiende Sein*), which as "the inverted concept" reveals itself at this point as the other of discursivity, namely existence (*SWW*, XIII, p. 162). The necessity of this process can only be accounted for after it is completed; the beginning and ground of thinking this process, as *natura naturans* – in process – lies beyond the reach of reason, as it did as well for Kant, in "in the abyss of freedom" (p. 178). Yet even as Gabriel ends his account of the dialectic of the potencies in freedom (§ 8), per his interpretive framework, he misses the opportunity to connect his otherwise illuminating rendering of the *Potenzenlehre* with its ethical dimension, its organic dynamic of simultaneous reciprocity, and the motivating desire of its "hunger for being" that pushes it beyond pure reason (*SSW*, XI, p. 294). Following Schelling's rather provocative insistence that "the highest speculative concepts" must always be "simultaneously the most profound ethical concepts" (*SSW*, XIII, p. 67), the trinitarian dynamic of the potencies must provide the logic for both the negative *and* positive philosophy. It can only do this if its dynamic is more a living will than a logical machine whose motor is the law of contradiction. Consistent with the *Urform* of the *Formschrift* in 1794, Schelling's triad of potencies are determined by the category Kant employed to parse (1)

organic life, (2) system as the articulation of the Transcendental Ideal, and most importantly, (3) freedom; this of course is the dynamic category of *Wechselwirkung* and *Gemeinschaft*, the disjunctive logic of which delivers the totality of the whole that renders intelligible the self-differentiation of its constituent *membra disjuncta*. As Schelling makes clear in his account of negative philosophy, the three potencies function “as in an organic whole reciprocally determining and being determined by each other” (SSW, XI, p. 311). Only in this way did Schelling believe he could construct an ontology capable of situating its strata of necessary development within the living and more comprehensive framework of a freely determining will, thereby uniting negative and positive philosophy.

Gabriel’s insightful rendering of Schelling’s rehabilitation of Aristotle’s ontological understanding of the law of contradiction demonstrates the inadequacies of Kant’s purely analytic definition, focusing as it does on the Achilles heel of all dualistic philosophies, the problem of time. In Schelling’s hands Kant’s logical “*zugleich*” is complemented by an Aristotelian ἄμω that refers to “existing things” as well (p. 169). Gabriel, however, uses this reading to develop a novel understanding of the “Aristotelian ontology of the law of contradiction” that delivers the “highest condition of identity” (p. 170), the basis for “thinking movement” (p. 172), as well as the “the law of *all* being” (p. 174). Following his own presentation of how contradiction accounts for time and the dialectical process of the potencies, Gabriel is left with only two tenses, past and present (p. 173), whereas Schelling’s “organisms of time” (SSW, VII, p. 310) always deliver the third and most important tense of the Absolute, namely the future. This is most clearly seen in Schelling’s derivation of categories from the three tenses in his *Transcendental System of 1800*. Whereas Kant holds that the third member of each class “always arises from the combination of the second category with the first” (*KrV*, B 110), Schelling maintains that the first two categories “are possible only mutually through one another, that is, they are possible only in a third, which is reciprocity” (SSW, III, p. 520). Past, present, and future – or Subject, Object and Copula – are each essential to the interaction of all.

The dialectic of the potencies culminates in pure activity (ἐνέργεια ὄν), a relational field that, as the ground of determination and thinking, is *unvordenkliches Sein* (p. 206). Gabriel here breaks from the lectures on the philosophy of mythology in order to address the inversion of principles that occurs at the end of the negative philosophy, which begins the positive philosophy. “Schelling’s inversion of the ontological proof of god” (§ 9), with its realignment of existence and essence, brings full circle this chapter’s argument for the ontonomous nature of thought’s relation to being, thereby opening the door to “the possibility of an ontonomous self,” and thus a new anthropology of man as the *telos* of nature (p. 225). Gabriel follows Schelling in constructing an ontonomous anthropology based on Aristotle’s distinction in *De Anima* between the soul and spirit, construing the former as ontonomous and the later is autonomous. As “the first entelechy of the natural organic body” (Aristotle, 1956, pp. 412b 5 f.), the soul is a “natural product” (p. 226) dictated by the necessity of self-preservation. As the “living function unity of the organism” (p. 227), the soul enjoys, epistemologically speaking, a “non-propositional” relation to its world that Gabriel connects with Sartre’s idea of the “prereflexive Cogito” (p. 228). Spirit is autonomous, “free towards being” to reflect upon itself and pursue its *telos* of self-understanding (p. 227). Like the soul, it is “not discursive, but rather intuitive,” striving for a self-knowledge that would also be a knowledge of the “the whole of all determinations (to the οὐσίω of Idea of being)” (p. 369). As such – as agent and content – Spirit seeks an integration of form and content in a process that sets Absolute Spirit as its ultimate *telos*. With this, Gabriel extends the identity of being and thinking to the identity of nature and man, raising the provocative point that “the question of being is, as a human question, ultimately the question of man about himself” (p. 232).

The new anthropology Gabriel proposes in the second chapter builds on his concept of ontonomous consciousness, unfolding its full definition to demonstrate its dependence on an even more originary theonomous consciousness. Once again, the shared structure is that of the “original relation of consciousness” to the unthinkable ground of thinking “in which the self is nonetheless reflected” (p. 235). Through the *Historical-Critical Introduction* Schelling demonstrates that myth is a natural, distinct, and valid way of being and thus a form of life and truth that cannot be reduced to rational discourse of *logos*. The historical record shows that this original dependence of consciousness was theonomous, and what Gabriel seeks to show is how this fact is to be grasped philosophically. Pursuing Schelling’s tautological treatment of myth and religious consciousness, Gabriel argues that “the representations of mythic consciousness” present an “ontologically binding divine content” (p. 282), which is “not a hypothesis about what there is (i.e., a god), but rather an experience of something real” (p. 266). This “ontological relation of consciousness to its gods” is not free (p. 370) and thus not known, but rather simply experienced as one experiences a mood. God, according to Schelling, is not created, nor communicated, but is rather “the preceding ground” of all consciousness (SSW, XII, p. 121). If we grant that consciousness is originally a god-positing consciousness, what consequences follow “for the reconstruction of the history of ideas,” and particularly, which “modifications of idealism follow” (p. 236)? The entire current of modern thought is presented by Gabriel as having distorted myth through its own unreflective attachment to the myth of “a meaningless world of facts” which, as an unacknowledged myth, constitutes the “blind spot of modern consciousness” (p. 253). This blindness extends to our

very notion of self, in that “physicalism and its covert promise of saving” the world from all enchantment seeks the “the elimination of personal presence,” which is in itself a strategy of personality to repress itself (p. 253). Gabriel’s treatment of the historical import of myth and negative philosophy presents Schelling as not only continuing Kant’s project of critiquing and setting limits to reason (p. 238), but also as following his *practical interest* to establish a new foundation for reason, grounded not in finite subjectivity but rather ontonomous consciousness. Retiring the “worldless cogito” of Descartes and Kant permits an “alternative form” of rationality (p. 242) to be developed, one that offers an alternative to physicalism’s “elimination of the personal” (p. 253) by cultivating the further “self-discovery of humanity” (p. 254). This establishes “a new form of ontotheology” (p. 238), whose grounding is not effected by reason, but by the dialectical “transformation of being into self” (p. 238), the process of which is the history of self-consciousness.

In his final chapter, “*The Philosophy of Mythology as History of Self Consciousness*,” Gabriel applies his reconstruction of Schelling’s “history of philosophical theology” to demonstrate that its “teleology of freedom” can be shown to lead to a new form of “free or philosophical religion” (p. 76, n. 57). The transformative moment occurs in Ancient Greece when Hesiod and Homer begin anthropomorphizing the gods, a process whereby the being of divinity assumes human form and personality. In this way Schelling turns the much decried anthropomorphism of the Greek gods into a virtue. He argues that only by encountering gods as human can consciousness liberate itself from the mythic self-mediation of the divine and, thereby, clear the way for the free revelation of the divine, a process which announces itself in the *logos* of the pre-Socratic philosophers. “Philosophy’s proper standpoint of self-knowledge is thus only fully achieved after the gods have become human” (p. 470). Consciousness comes to this self-reflexive discovery by realizing that it is the carrier of mythic representations. And in this discovery *logos* and myth finally delineate themselves, allowing man to move from the constricted thought of mythic consciousness to the free thinking of revealed consciousness. The development and differentiation of consciousness as it progressively liberates itself from constraints, be they mythic, religious, epistemological, or political, can, if truly historical, be seen as an ongoing process. Schelling himself argued that this process of history was at work in his time, pushing thinking beyond what he considered to be “the final crisis” of German Idealism (*SSW*, II/3, p. 32), namely the ongoing overreach of pure reason into the positive arena of existence and creation. With Hegel no doubt in mind, Schelling held that realizing the impossibility of a strictly immanent grounding of a mythic system of completed reason would allow philosophy to become self-conscious of the need to engage in the infinite task of making its transcendent ground immanent (*SSW*, XIII, p. 281). For Schelling this task is undertaken in the freedom of thought of the yet-to-be-philosophical religion.

The scope of *Man in Myth* is impossible to capture in a brief review, and I will have considered myself fortunate to have provided a very rough sketch of Gabriel’s project. Gabriel’s failure to integrate the positive philosophy and the philosophy of revelation into his framework, and his exclusive reliance on the negative philosophy and philosophy of mythology weakens the claim to do justice the entirety of Schelling’s *Spätphilosophie* – particularly in light of Schelling’s own description of the negative philosophy as serving merely a “propaedeutic, (didactic) purpose” within the positive philosophy (*SSW*, XIII, p. 248; cf. *SSW*, XIII, p. 152). Similarly, his elevation of anthropology with the claim that “the only object of philosophy is man” (p. 387) misses the mark both of Schelling’s thought and the context of the passage cited. In this passage Schelling immediately goes on to argue that man, while the “end” of creation, is not “the ultimate purpose (*Endzweck*),” since “our self-consciousness is not at all the consciousness of that nature that permeates everything: it is just *our* consciousness” (*SSW*, XIII, p. 5 f.). Gabriel situates Schelling, who himself believed that he was following Kant’s architectonic more faithfully than its creator, solidly in the tradition of German Idealism. One of the chief strengths of this work is the extent to which Schelling’s historical enterprise is modeled by Gabriel’s own robust account of the historical roots of the ideas he discusses. One could profit by reading many of the sections in this book on their own, for example, Gabriel’s treatment of the first philosophies of Plato and Aristotle (§ 4), or the texts of Hesiod and Homer (§ 17). It is encouraging to know that not only the classical languages and a historical understanding of philosophy is still with us, but that there are new voices to be heard that are willing to go beyond the scholastic game of commentary and engage in speculative philosophy.

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