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From Principial *Theoria* to Anarchic *Praxis* in the Radical Phenomenology of Reiner Schürmann

John W. M. Krummel

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Abstract: Reiner Schürmann, known for his readings of Heidegger and Eckhart, was also known for his philosophy of ontological *anarché*. The transition from metaphysical theory to post-metaphysical practice, for him, meant the transition from *theoria*, which looks at phenomena monomorphically in accordance with principles (*archai*), to a *praxis* that is an-archic and thinks in recognition of polymorphic singularities. Here, I seek to clarify Schürmann's notion of ontological anarchy and the praxis following it. I inquire into its political implications and relation to political anarchism. What is the connection between his "radical phenomenology" of ontological *anarché* and what he called anarchic praxis?

Key words: Reiner Schürmann, ontological anarchy, ontological *anarché*, Martin Heidegger, Meister Eckhart, Zen Buddhism, Anarchism, phenomenology

Reiner Schürmann, probably best known, preceding his untimely death, for his provocative readings of Heidegger, Eckhart, and Plotinus, among others, was also known within limited circles for his original philosophy of ontological *anarché*. That is, being is ultimately without any lasting principle or *arché*. Principles come and go just as living things are born and die. What are we to do with this realization, practically speaking? The transition from metaphysical theory to post-metaphysical practice is one from *theoria*, which refers to a normative principle projected over phenomena, to a *praxis* that corresponds to the presencing of polymorphic singularities. Here, I will look into the practical implications of this move. Can we live or act without assuming a ground or foundation? Schürmann liked to repeat Samuel Beckett's utterance, "No ground, but *say* ground" (e.g., Schürmann 2003.1: 6; see Beckett 1983: 78).¹ We cannot help but say it

¹ R. For the texts by Schürmann to which this article refers by year and entry number, see "Schürmann's Works Cited," in this issue of *Philosophy Today*.

even when there is no ground. We are caught between the fact that there is no ground and the inevitable urge to ground.

1. Language and the Natural Metaphysician in Us

Schürmann states that we call both “this” form passing over our home and “that other” one disappearing in the distance: “cloud” (Schürmann 2003.1: 5). There is what he calls a *differend* between the sense invoked by such nominalization in everyday speech and the concrete singular *this*.² Our idioms add to the latter *chimeras* that exceed experience (Schürmann 2003.1: 28). This accounts for our theticizing tendency—the “natural metaphysician within us” (2003.1: 621; 2021.1: 77). As we forget there is a gap between the chimera and the experience, its verbal origin and singularity become occluded. Once a universal is thus set up, other phenomena can be referred to it, through subsumption, as instances (Schürmann 2003.1: 7). He calls this the normative-nominative tendency of language (Schürmann 2003.1: 11, 13, 14, 17, 37). But the norm is not justified; it is arbitrary and anthropomorphic, a fantasm.

² Schürmann borrows the term “differend” from Jean-François Lyotard, for whom it means an irresolvable conflict between two parties for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both. But Schürmann gives it his own specific meaning: “a radical *differend* ... would be one in which coercion under a principle would be matched by an equal dispersion among singulars... In a radical *differend*, we stand equally exposed to laws unifying the particular and plurifying the singular” (Schürmann 1989.1: 3). Such a differend “neither consolidates nor consoles” (Schürmann 1989.1: 16; 2003.1: 135).

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2. Principles Precarious, Their Epochs and Hegemonic Fantasms

The metaphysics founded upon the nomothetic act ties the many to the one—the “*pros hen*” relation—that contextualizes a meaningful “world.” Schürmann explicates the history of metaphysics as a history of epochs, in each of which there rules an *arché* hegemonizing over the many. In his magnum opus, *Broken Hegemonies*, Schürmann identifies three epochs founded on the principles of the one (*to hen*) for the ancient Greeks, initiated by Parmenides and ending with Plotinus; nature (*natura*) for the medieval Latins, from Augustine and Cicero to Eckhart; and finally, self-consciousness or subjectivity for the moderns, speaking the vernacular, beginning with Luther and Kant and ending with Heidegger. The principle is “observed without question in a given epoch” (Schürmann 1987.1: 29), determining an economy of presence—a field of intelligibility whereby phenomena are present—while concealing its unjustified and thetic origin. As they set up regimes for normalizing what would count as a being and excluding what does not fit, they become hegemonic. The tragic condition of all such constructions is in their denial of singularity that remains exterior to, other than, the principal norm. This “tragic denial” launches metaphysics with its prescriptive, normative structures for thinking and acting. But as the denial cannot be maintained in completion, history proves to be a series of successive *broken* hegemonies.

The *pros hen* structure here has political implications (Schürmann 1981.2: 249, 255n17). To act in public is to join words and things in action. The exchange of the three regions of speech, action, and things are made to render the epochal principle visible (Schürmann 1987.1: 81; 1981.2: 249–51). The principle provides action with sense and direction, making the “commonwealth” conceivable and accessible to metaphysics

(Schürmann 1981.2: 252). The *arché*, however, is an ensemble having its genesis, reign, decline, and ruin (Schürmann 1989.1: 29; 2019.2: 44; 2021.2: 113). Accompanied by its destabilizing undertow, it is essentially precarious (Schürmann 2003.1: 629; 1981.2: 248; 2021.2: 113).

3. The Double Bind

Schürmann traces this inclination to posit and maximize the common to natality (*Gebürtigkeit*) and opposes it to mortality (*Sterblichkeit*), the paradigmatic fact that everything inevitably and eventually comes to an end.³ Mortality uncovers the singularity of being, since in *facing* our coming death, we face the limit to the sovereignty of common referents, their claim to universality and eternity. Being-towards-death thus is the originary experience of singularity (Schürmann 2003.1: 346). Natality on the other hand is our inevitable urge to determine and universalize in commencing our projects. He argues that while in natality the future *totalizes*, in mortality it *solifies* (19). Yet one might add that natality is *also* a *given* preceding our determination, for we did not choose or decide our birth. We *cannot help but* commence, determine, and plan. It *happens* to us despite our will; in Heidegger's terms, we are thrown into the world before being cast out of it. We are *thrown* into our *projections*. But behind what is thus universalized is

³ Schürmann borrows the concept of natality from Hannah Arendt, who in *The Human Condition* defined it as the impulse in active life of beginning and leading, to which the Greek verb *archein* refers: "the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew" (Arendt 1958: 9). And he traces Arendt's distinction between natality and mortality to Martin Heidegger's distinction (in *Being and Time*, §72) between "being-for-the-beginning" (*Sein zum Anfang*) and "being-towards-the-end" (*Sein zum Ende*) or "being-towards-death" (*Sein zum Tode*) (2003.1: 635n33). For Schürmann, the impulse of natality institutes the *arché*, while mortality signifies its inevitable fall.

ing its decontextualizing singularity that threatens to weaken that constellation (43–44). The praxis without *arché* would be in cor-correspondence with that *Ereignis*. The origin happens in neither one's own activity nor merely one's passivity vis-à-vis another, but in the ambiguity of the middle voice, *of-itself*, as the sinographs of the Japanese for "nature," *shizen* (自然), used in Zen, says: "It is the event enunciated in the middle voice, which is to say, one with neither agent nor patient" (Schürmann 2003.1: 38).¹¹ Symbolic praxis as anarchic is a knowing by doing, itinerant and without *telos*. In this, we learn to love our ultimate conditions and live fully, letting living be. Bearing with humility our finitude and contingency, we might then live in communion as "the community of mortals." In this community among ourselves, with other communities, and with the rest of nature and the cosmos, we are called to a deep recognition of finitude and interdependence, relinquishing our archic posits and seriousness, in itinerant and playful anarchic praxis, retaining humor, irony, even in the face of the tragic. Only then can we learn to love ultimates in differend. I believe this would be the anarchic ethos Schürmann intended.

To express this, Schürmann (2003.1: front matter; 2021.1: 69) presents, more than once, the Japanese haiku by Ome Shushiki (1668/69–1725):

Dead my fine/old hopes
And dry my dreaming
But still ...
Iris, blue each/every spring

Hobart and William Smith Colleges

¹¹ Schürmann refers to this etymology of *shizen* in a paper he gave in Kyoto: the first sign (自) means "self," and the second one (然) means "thusness." On this basis, referring to Zen masters like Dōgen, Seigen Ishin, and Butsugen, he explains the Zen sense of "nature" or "natural" to be whatever "is as it is." The insight here is that "nature becomes an event, a *nasci* or a birth from the original emptiness" (Schürmann 1987.2: 154, see also 152, 153).

is also contingent like mortality. Schürmann has his narrator in *Origins* quote a friend: “life is so precarious: a perforation in a condom is enough to begin it, and a misstep on the edge of a sidewalk to end it” (Schürmann 2016.1: 172). Natality is singular just as mortality is universal in its non-discrimination. We need to take Schürmann’s anarchism in a nuanced way. The anarchistic subject’s deconstructive praxis is aimed not at law *as such*, but rather at the law that *totalizes, reified* into a hegemonic principle. Natality will continue to urge thought to posit universals. But we can unlearn the denial of their mortality (Schürmann 2021.1: 72), and we can recognize their contextuality, conditionality, provisionality. Schürmann (2003.1: 631) argues that, in this way, it is still “possible to enlarge one’s way of thinking beyond the fantasied common.”

We unlearn hubris and learn humility by acknowledging our mortality. Schürmann (2003.1: 552) refers to Heidegger’s (2022: 205) insistence that we “‘rational animals’ [*vernünftigen Lebewesen*] must first *become* mortals [*Sterblichen*].” To become what one is—*mortal*—is to realize for oneself the real that we otherwise would deny even as we partake in it. But even our *natality*, in the contingency of our birth between shit and piss, is enough to make us humble. We are flanked on both sides by an abyss. But this also calls for gratefulness for the chance gift that is life. And so, while occupying one’s appropriate/d place, one *knows* oneself as expropriated *from* nature (Schürmann 2003.1: 338). The anarchic economy of being is prepared, not from *a priori* posits, but from that tragic knowledge of life and death (536). There, the *singular* can show itself (631), in the middle voice, despite ourselves. The *phuesthai*, “arising,” happens in the middle voice of a phenomenon that can only be pointed at as “this,” which together with other “thises” come to form a constellation, by entering into a context while retain-

part, I treat his oeuvre as a whole, such as by looking for clues for an ethics or praxis in his earlier works of the 1970s.

an abyss. Schürmann cites Heidegger, for whom the Not is “more originary ...” and the No is “of an essence deeper than the Yes” (Schürmann 2003.1: 617; see Heidegger 1989: 178, 247), for it both precedes and succeeds it. The public function of philosophy for centuries has been to conceal this by promoting the normative *koinon*, “capable of consoling the soul and consolidating the city” (Schürmann 2003.1: 9). Yet fantasms are mortal; they not only arise but are put to death to make way for the next one. Schürmann associates this *differend* between the institution of the normative common and the dispersive force of plural singulars—the conflict between linguistic impulse and mortal knowledge—with the conditions of birth and death, or rather primordially natality and mortality, ontologically appropriation and expropriation (see, e.g., Schürmann 2003.1: 24, 132). He designates this as our double bind. The bind is the originary but non-binary tension between centripetal and centrifugal, or legislative and transgressive, forces. Thus bound, we’re inserted into an order and then wrenched out of it (Schürmann 2003.1: 201).

Whether it is the logic of *hen*, henology, the logic of *natura*, cosmology, or the transcendental logic of autonomous consciousness, Schürmann views each as contingent upon its presencing event accompanied by its destabilizing undertow, undermining its normative referent; this is its tragic *logos* of presencing/absencing (Schürmann 2003.1: 535, 629). This is what we know firsthand even if poorly: our birth and death—tragic knowledge of the double bind. The one, nature, and consciousness were from the beginning thus affected by an internal erosion (Schürmann 2003.1: 17). An abyss perpetually destabilizes the world of meaning that in turn is stabilized only fantasmically. Reality as such is agonal, and our *pathos* is to be held in its archic-anarchic double bind, between the illusory base and the baseless real (Schürmann 2003.1: 533, 546).

4. Ontological *Anarché*: The Anarchy of Being

In *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, Schürmann ironically called this state of affairs the “principle of anarchy.” The ultimates themselves that institute and destitute epochs are an-archic. The event—on the one hand phenomenalizing under a context and on the other hand withdrawing the context to singularize—is anarchic, since it is indeterminable: ontological *anarché*. Schürmann interprets Heidegger to suggest that originary being, greater than the Yes, is the Not, nothing (Schürmann 2003.1: 605; Heidegger 1989: 246). As the No is larger than the Yes, the anarchic possible is higher than the archic actual (Schürmann 2003.1: 610). Hence being is anarchy and nothing—I have called this an/ontological anarchy.⁴ This discovery “frustrates the very desire for an unshakable ground of theory and action” (Schürmann 1987.1: 155). Schürmann paints an ontological picture of phenomenal interconnectedness lacking all *archai*, without a central focus, core, or authority; a relational net of events in the coming-about and passingaway of phenomenal constellations as they happen to occur (Schürmann 1987.1: 245–50). He calls this “Protean presencing” and “Protean anarchy” after Proteus, the form-changing god, in its proliferation of the origin or, in Nietzschean terms, “the irreducible multiplicity of forces in flux”; and he borrows Deleuze’s term to characterize it as “rhizomatic” (Schürmann 1987.1: 56, 321n44; 2020.3: 33; 2021.1: 67). Within that flux, on the basis of chance, the epochal economy may or may not be (Schürmann 2021.2: 109). An anarcho-contingency envelopes our pretensions to order.

⁴ See Krummel (2022: 128–29; 2015: 247n14). I have used the neologism of anontology or an/ontology in many of my works on Kyoto School philosophy.

Eckhart’s mysticism is the loss of origin,⁹ and he equates this to his own concept of anarchy, “the absence of a beginning, of an origin in the sense of a first cause ... as negating the complement of *arche*, namely *telos*. I claim that the logic of releasement as it is lived in *zazen* and by Eckhart leads to the destruction of origin and goal not only in the understanding of the world but even in human action” (Schürmann 1978.4: 283).

Yet it seems impossible, as Schürmann concedes, to eliminate the fantasm so as to leave *nothing*. He quotes Nietzsche (1984: 351): “There, that cloud! There, that mountain! What in them is ‘real’? Merely eliminate from them the fantasm of any human *addition*, you sober ones! If only you could!” Everyday speech is deceiving. But take away what can be spoken in nouns and not much will be left. For singularity is always but a co-condition (Schürmann 2003.1: 324). Human experience is torn between “the push toward unity under some representation” and “the pull toward dispersion among singulars” (Schürmann 1989.1: 15). Language, despite its fantasies, allows us to communicate and understand one another. “Thus to the extent that, to live, it is necessary to speak and act, to understand and think ... we will never extricate ourselves from legislative maximizings” (Schürmann 2003.1: 345). To pledge allegiance to nothing but the singular “would reduce language to zero” and signify our death (18). Natality makes life livable.¹⁰ But natality

⁹ *Zazen* is the Japanese term for “sitting meditation,” the principal practice of Zen Buddhism.

¹⁰ This is a significant development on Schürmann’s part, noticeable in *Broken Hegemonies*, from his earlier works. Although I chose not to focus on the development of Schürmann’s thinking from his earlier to later works, I still think this difference is noticeable, for example, between his earlier Heidegger book, which focuses more on anarchy, and his later posthumous book, where the emphasis is more on the double bind of ultimates, and which moreover includes this urge of natality along with the singularizing force of mortality. This development seems to make his understanding of ontological anarchy more nuanced. At least for the purpose of this essay, for the most

attentive to the origin's ambiguity. We understand the meaning of symbols through acting rather than observing, objectifying, or theorizing; their significance is extracted from singulars rather than universals, as they symbolically open up the experience of being in one's itinerary. In the absence of univocal posits, the praxis is "irreducibly polymorphous," a "polymorphous doing," cor-responding to the field of "polymorphous presencing," giving birth to "the Dionysian child" (Schürmann 1978.2: 199, 206; 1987.1: 279).

As examples, Schürmann points to the German mystical practice of Meister Eckhart, medieval alchemy, and Zen Buddhist practice, which Schürmann himself experienced as a student in France.⁸ The soul's singularization that lets go of the universal in Eckhartian de-attachment leading to a formless state is analogous to the alchemical return of the metal to a liquid state of indistinction. From out of that primal indistinction, the metal receives its form of pure gold in alchemy, and the soul receives the Word to be ennobled as the Son of God (Schürmann 2003.1: 281). What emerges in the dissolution of normative consciousness is the anarchic self, existing anarchically, without principles (533, 534). In analogous fashion, Schürmann summarizes the Zen path to lead from the active ego to the "self" who lets beings be. For both Zen and Eckhart, letting-go or letting-be is the encompassing *ethos*, required for life in tune with the right measure (Schürmann 1987.2: 159). When we let-go of representations of a supreme standard, the measure gives itself, naturally, of itself—an event in the middle voice (159–60). For, "in our language, verbs in the middle voice always lead their speaker out of simple nominative lawmaking" (Schürmann 2003.1: 631). Schürmann writes, "the synthetic concept I wish to develop as standing at the core both of the experience in *zazen* and of

⁸ On Schürmann's relationship to Zen, see Krummel (2022).

5. The Final Epoch: Global Technology and the End of Metaphysics

No age before ours—in its global spread of capitalism, technology, and scientific rationality—has "known planetary violence." Schürmann (2003.1: 25) adds that "no age then is better positioned to unlearn fantasmic maximization" and "to learn and bear ... the tragic condition." He refers to Heidegger's insight that this age is dominated by the reductive posture of "enframing" (*Gestell*), in which everything, including our humanity, is reduced to object-ness, subjected and objectified as mere resources in a "standing reserve" (*Bestand*) (Heidegger 2000: 17–21). Technology as such is the last form of epochal principle (Schürmann 1988.2: 144). Its violence of subsumption under the same has become global (Schürmann 2021.1: 61), flattening the diversity of lifeworlds. It takes recourse to "gas, nuclear fission, ... raw market forces" (Schürmann 1988.2: 144); its monstrosity is exemplified by Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Chernobyl and Fukushima. But its pursuit of unshakeable grounds is also leading to its exhaustion with the emptying out not only of modern subjectivity, but of all preceding ontological principles, the exhaustion of normative epochs in general (Schürmann 2003.1: 556). Schürmann calls this the "peremption" (*dessaisie*) of principles, signifying a divestment from hegemonic order as such and a recovery from the tragic denial of its double bind (see, e.g., Schürmann 2003.1: 546).⁵ What comes to pass is the *peremption* depriving us of any possible ultimate fantasmic recourse: "the loss of every hegemony" and hegemonic thinking as such (Schürmann 2003.1: 514, 623) in facing the anarcho-contingency. The tragic

⁵ The term *dessaisie* has been translated as "diremption" in the published translation of *Broken Hegemonies* and in most commentaries, but I will follow the more recent translation of Guercio, Moore, Rauch, and Schneider of the term as "peremption." They argue that "diremption" has the connotation of *bifurcation*, which is not in the

knowledge we are permitted, with the destabilization of every law, is the knowledge of legislative peremption, “the break between the archic terrain and the conflictual anarchic condition” (555). One consequence, in Schürmann’s view, is that the traditional derivation of praxis from theory, action from principles, no longer works. Action must now be without *arché*, and thinking is rendered an-archic (Schürmann 2019.2: 42). This calls us to assume a different attitude toward contingency, opening the possibility of a new post-hegemonic, anarchic, anti-thetic discipline in thought that would refuse to betray the deictic phenomena as they manifest even while complying with regional norms (Schürmann 2003.1: 348; 2021.1: 80). This can also mean the resurgence of a plurivocal world, escaping the global imposition of univocal modernity. In this, technology is Janus-faced: “there where danger grows, so also is what saves” (Heidegger quoting Hölderlin) (Heidegger 1954: 36; Schürmann 2003.1: 555; 2019.2: 39).

6. The Question of Ethics: What Is to Be Done? Anarchic Praxis

Schürmann (2003.1: 22, 528), however, asks: Can we live with this recognition of the tragic condition? And how? What to do when we no longer have a consoling and consolidating fantasm? And “how should we think and act in a world without firsts, without principles, in an-archy?”; “*How is one to live, under the sign of Proteus?*” (514). He answers that “a radical phenomenologist can only respond: dislodge all vestiges of a teleocratic economy from their hideouts—in common sense as much as in ideology—thereby liberate things from the ‘ordinary concept’ which ‘captures’ them under ultimate representations” (Schürmann 1987.1: 280). And: “Combat all remnants of authoritative Firsts” (Schürmann 2019.2: 52), “artificially endowed with ultimacy” (Schürmann

“collective functioning and organization” under a thetic norm or principle, he suggests abandoning this title (Schürmann 1979.1: 122). Letting-go of that seriousness, actions assimilated to an “anarchic economy” turn into “a groundless play without why” (Schürmann 1987.1: 242–43, see also 273)—a play of singulars with singulars. Arendt (1971: 123–24) noticed how for Aristotle, play qua *praxis* possesses no end apart from its own activity—as in flute-playing, not flute-making. Arendt’s project in *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* was to broaden Kant’s faculty of judgment of singulars to the political domain. Schürmann (1989.1: 4, 5) asserts this would be “entirely a philosophy of the singular” that reflects upon “the phenomena head-on.” As foundationalism and teleology are no longer possible, the political domain becomes confined to situating singulars, not founding particulars: “The site of politics is ‘the political,’ ... the public conjunction of things, actions, and speech” (Schürmann 1987.1: 40).

8. The Anarchistic Ethos: How to Live

To ground such a politics, Schürmann (1997.1: 33) proposes life as an “itinerantwandering,” letting that which is be and the one who is on the path go on the way. In his 1970s works, he calls this *symbolic praxis*. The praxis is predicated upon the “symbolic difference,” in which the path and the wandering are experienced as the origin of being in difference from the entities manifest through it. It is symbolic because symbols, varied and inexhaustible in meaning—objects, rites, feast, dance, song, labor, works, dwelling, and so on—awaken one’s existence to go on the way, each generating its own course (Schürmann 1997.2: 39–40, 44, 46, 62, 63; 1997.1: 34). Thereupon things happen in spontaneous participation—e.g., the circular slam pit in a 1980s hardcore concert—undermining attempts to impose a univocal order of meaning. It enjoins a non-archic response

without “why?,” described as faithfulness to the constitutive openness of the political event and its radically contingent possibilities, rather than imposing an order founded upon one’s archic vision. Schürmann quotes Michel Foucault: “The political, ethical, social, and philosophical problem of our days ... is to liberate *ourselves* from the State and the type of individualization linked to it” (Foucault 1982: 216), a “polymorphous fight against social totalities” (Schürmann 2019.2: 26–27). As the locus of such resistance, Schürmann appropriates Foucault’s notion in terms of an “anarchistic subject” who “constitutes itself in micro-interventions aimed at resurgent patterns of subjection and objectification” (30, see also 28).

Schürmann (1989.1: 4) shared Hannah Arendt’s fascination with those “‘rare moments of freedom’ in history, the moments of interregnum when one order of rules is about to vanish and a new one has not yet entirely come to place ... literally times of anarchy, of absence of governance,” junctures of history in which people act in concert to found new institutions of liberty. He adds that these are moments of direct democracy: the town meetings in the American Revolution, the people’s societies and Paris Commune in the French Revolution, the workers’ and soldiers’ councils or soviets in the Russian Revolution, the German *Räte* at the end of the First World War, revived for a moment in Budapest in 1956, and the May 1968 student rebellion (Schürmann 1989.1: 4; 2022.1: 123). Might we add attempts made during the Fall of the Berlin Wall or the Occupy Wall Street movement, the experiments in Rojava or of the Zapatistas in Chiapas?

“If cognition was all that was necessary in the political sphere ... politics would be reduced to management, sheer administration” (Schürmann 1989.1: 5). Schürmann (1978.2: 221) proposes instead “an alternative type of political thinking” that “refuses to restrict itself to the pragmatics of public administration as well as to the romantic escapes from it.” But if we are to reserve the term “political philosophy” for theories of

1988.2: 140). Also: “Call all archic remnants by their name, which is ‘hubris,’ and through discursive intervention rob them of their fictitious constancy” (Schürmann 2021.1: 69). He refers to Heidegger’s statement that we can, at most, prepare a “place of questioning” (Schürmann 2003.1: 558; Heidegger 1989: 85), an *other* dwelling, an *other* eco-nomy, an age of manifold presencing, entering a multiplicity of localities, anarchic *topoi* of presence.

French, making it sound too Hegelian, which would not be to Schürmann’s taste (see Schürmann 2019.2: 164–65n54; 2021.1: 90n70). *Dessais* itself has the sense of withdrawal or relinquishment, “in legal theory ... the annulment of a previously valid law” (Schürmann 2021.1: 80).

Schürmann argues that if there is an urgent task for thinking in this state, it is to *better know the tragic condition and to learn to love it* (Schürmann 2003.1: 345). “What we ought to do” is to “love the flux and thank its economic confluences” (Schürmann 1987.1: 81). This “other thinking” (1987.1: 229; 2021.1: 66)—*other* than metaphysics—is predicated upon a *praxis*, an anarchic praxis, focusing on singulars and their event of mutual manifestation. He refers to Kant’s “expanded way of thinking” (*die erweiterte Denkungsart*) in the third *Critique*, consisting in a judgment that takes singulars into account “beyond the fantasied common” (Schürmann 2003.1: 631, 680n15). This practical unlearning of norm-positing *hubris* is what Heidegger called *Gelassenheit*, which for Schürmann restores the tragic truth as the disparate other of univocal law (620). On this basis, Schürmann proclaims, “ethics and morals, then, no longer belong to philosophy” (621).

Drucilla Cornell reminisces how at the beginning of a two-year long seminar on whether “the ethical is a philosophical question?,” Schürmann’s response was No; but that he

changed his mind towards the end (Cornell and Moore 2024).⁶ A Schürmannian ethics would have to allow one “to think of things not according to their unchangeable essence, but in their singularity” (Schürmann 1987.1: 213). Schürmann refers to Heidegger’s invocation (in *Der Satz vom Grund*) of “life without why,” borrowed from Eckhart via Angelus Silesius, that “in the most hidden ground of his being, man truly is only if in his way he is like the rose without why.” As “the imperative of ‘without why’ dispossesses the aprioric imagination” (Schürmann 2003.1: 327), freed from the *pros hen*, it implies an *ethos* that relates to being non-metaphysically—a free engagement, “following pliant being with compliant acting” (Schürmann 1987.1: 202), open to the plurivocal expressions of being, in compliance with every moving constellation of presencing. Schürmann (2022.1: 101–02, 106) argues that an anarchic economy is “one in which thinking and acting espouse the fluctuations in the modalities of presencing,” where “the only standard for everything doable is the event of mutual appropriation among entities” in their contingent presencing and “interdependence unattached to principles.” What suffices in Schürmann’s view is *Einsicht*, that is, insight, circumspection into the concrete singular (Schürmann 2003.1: 621).

⁶ Derrida was also a participant. Cornell says Schürmann came to see the argument for ethics from the perspective of anarchy, even suggesting a possible relationship of anarchy with Levinas’s infinity (Cornell and Moore 2024). This is relevant, as Levinas (1981: 99–102) also spoke of alterity and singularity in terms of anarchy, and Miguel Abensour (2011: 123–24) at the end of his analysis of Schürmann’s principle of anarchy turns instead to Levinas’s concept of anarchy. Schürmann’s anarchy indeed may hold ethical significance in resonance with Levinas’ understanding of alterity in terms of infinity.

7. Ontological Anarchy and Political Anarchism: The Question of Politics

Does ontological anarchy entail political anarchism? For Schürmann (2019.2: 138), the impossibility to institute a totalizing nomos “frees the public sphere from univocally binding phantasms.” Catherine Malabou (2021) argues that ontological anarchy as such would seem to imply political anarchism but also questions Schürmann’s apparent self-distancing from political anarchism when he differentiates his concept from the political philosophies of Proudhon and Bakunin. In Schürmann’s (1987.1: 6) view, they remained metaphysical in deriving action from a theoretical referent, replacing authority with reason as the principle. A number of commentators, on the other hand, have attempted to develop Schürmann’s thought variously in an explicitly political direction.⁷

Any kind of political appropriation of Schürmannian anarchy would have to underscore the significance of a sense of humility vis-à-vis that which exceeds our knowledge and power, and of playfulness in refusing submission to the busyness and seriousness of modern techno-capital. This would entail what Saul Newman (2004), referring to Schürmann’s notion of action

⁷ For lack of space, I am unable to discuss these authors in detail, but we can mention Miguel Abensour (2002; 2011; Blumenfeld et al. 2021), who compares Schürmann’s “anarchy” with Claude Lefort’s “savage democracy” and Levinas’ “anarchy”; Frank Schalow (1997), who develops Schürmann’s “anarchy” in terms of a habitat for reciprocity and dwelling; Christopher Long (2018), in his reading of Schürmann’s politics in terms of a (sym)poetics or nuptial union of mortal natality and natal mortality; Alberto Moreiras (2017), in his notion of an “infrapolitics” that attempts to think the concrete; and Payman Vehabzadeh (2005; 2012; 2020), in his theories of the activism of play and of locative and multiversal thinking. In addition, we might also mention Gianni Vattimo (2011), Giorgio Agamben (e.g., Rauch 2021), Simon Critchley (Blumenfeld et al. 2021), Catherine Malabou (Acid Horizon 2021), and Saul Newman (2004; Rousselle 2013), who have all confronted Schürmann’s thought in one way or another.