

Kierkegaard Studies

Edited on behalf of the

Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre

by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser

Monograph Series
8

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2003

Kierkegaard und Schelling

Freiheit, Angst und Wirklichkeit

Herausgegeben von
Jochem Hennigfeld und Jon Stewart

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York
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“Actuality” in Schelling and Kierkegaard

By MICHELLE KOSCH

Abstract

The paper ties one aspect of the view of actuality that emerges in part of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to (a new reading of) Schelling's critique of the ontological argument. The idea is to try to get clearer on what it means to say that actuality is “transformed into possibility” when it is thought, on what is supposed to go missing from actuality in this process, and on why that (whatever it is) might be a bad thing to lose.

The concept of actuality is clearly intended to play an important role at various junctures in Kierkegaard's authorship, but it is not always clear what that role is intended to be. One such juncture is the discussion under the heading “Actual and Ethical Subjectivity” in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.¹ There, actuality is opposed to thought (and possibility) in passages like the following:

Abstraction deals with possibility and actuality, but its conception of actuality is a false rendition, since the medium is not actuality but possibility. Only by annulling actuality can abstraction grasp it, but to annul it is precisely to change it into possibility. Within abstraction, everything that is said about actuality in the language of abstraction is said within possibility. That is, in the language of actuality all abstraction is related to actuality as a possibility, not to an actuality within abstraction and possibility.²

This triumph of pure thinking (that in it thinking and being are one) is both laughable and lamentable, because in pure thinking there can really be no question at all of the difference. . . . Why is thought-reality confused with actuality? Thought-reality is possibility, and thinking needs only to reject any further questioning about whether it is actual.³

¹ *CUP*, pp. 301-360; *SVI VII*, 257-312. All page numbers are from both the Hongs' English edition *KW* and the first Danish edition *SVI*. Translations are those of the Hongs, altered where noted and excepting *Papirer* citations *Pap.*, which are my translations.

² *CUP*, pp. 314-315; *SVI VII*, 270.

³ *CUP*, p. 328; *SVI VII*, 282-283.

points to the endeavor to *become free to become free*. Nor is this an expression of a radical form of autonomy. On the contrary; it is precisely to loosen the bonds between the concept of autonomy and the concept of freedom. In this respect, we should adhere to the Kierkegaardian critique of the Socratic idea of learning. There is nothing that freedom (as a human exercise) can do or learn by itself. There is no particular kind of self-liberation that in itself expresses the essence of freedom. Accordingly, this was Schelling's mistake. He saw the liberation of reason from itself as expressing the essence of freedom (in the sense of a continuing horizon or resource for our lives). Kierkegaard did not see the liberation of the will from itself as expressing such an essence. The lives of human beings are simply not "free" or one with a continuing freedom. Freedom is rather a dimension within the death of our lives as *human beings* and thus within our becoming disciples of Jesus. As I see it, Schelling was right, however, in his underscoring the reality of freedom to the effect that the potentiality of human existence must always be associated with certain modes of being, each of which, for their part, can be seen as expressions of freedom. For instance, certain practical institutions and intellectual traditions embody various forms of *Sein-können* and *Nicht-Sein-können*, and only relative to this does the possibility of being directed towards *das Seinsollende* emerge. This, I have tried to demonstrate, constitutes the condition for the possibility that human existence is *latently free*. My critical remark to Schelling's view has been that this latency should not be seen as itself having a universal form or continuing character. The conversion of a latent possibility to an actual possibility is not just a *consequence* of freedom or a fixed essence of freedom. In principle, it involves the conversion of freedom as such.

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Abstract

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This triumph of pure thinking (that in it thinking and being are one) is both laughable and lamentable, because in pure thinking there can really be no question at all of the difference.... Why is thought-reality confused with actuality? Thought-reality is possibility, and thinking needs only to reject any further questioning about whether it is actual.³

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² *CUP*, pp. 314-315; *SVI* VII, 270.

³ *CUP*, p. 328; *SVI* VII, 282-283.

What is the concept of actuality at work in this discussion, and in what is its opposition to thinking – and to possibility – supposed to consist? Part of the answer to this question lies, I believe, in an account of Kierkegaard's appropriation of the later Schelling's concept of actuality. This paper will propose a rough sketch of such an account.

Since the concept of actuality plays a role at several junctures in Kierkegaard's authorship, and since it is far from clear that it is the idea rather than merely the term (*Virkelighed*) that is the same across these different instances, I will begin by distinguishing the use of the term "actuality" in this *Postscript* discussion from two further, and apparently quite distinct, uses of that term at work elsewhere (section I). I am not certain what, if any, implications my discussion of the *Postscript* passage will have for understanding these; bracketing them explicitly from the beginning is intended to prevent some confusion and to help to individuate the use of the term with which I am primarily concerned. I will then point out some of the salient characteristics of the usage in the *Postscript* passage (section II). The term is explicated in three quite different ways in the space of a very few pages, and understanding the role the concept is playing will involve saying how these three different elaborations can be elaborations on the same notion – or at least, saying how Kierkegaard could have thought of them as that. Schelling's concept of actuality – and the uses to which he puts it in his criticism of idealism and of the ontological argument – turns out to be the source of some of the peculiarities in Kierkegaard's use of the term. I will briefly introduce that notion, and those criticisms, in section III. Finally, I will show how the three understandings fit together to form an argument for a central portion of Climacus' position – an argument that Schelling himself never made and would not have accepted (section IV).

I.

There are two further uses of the term "actuality" in Kierkegaard's authorship which, though probably equally central and perhaps even related to the use with which I am here concerned, nevertheless do not in any obvious way help to clarify it.⁴

The first is also opposed to something called "possibility," but its characterization (and opposition to possibility) is quite different. This is the sense of "actuality" that is predominant in *The Concept of Irony*,

⁴ There are surely more than two, in fact, but these two are most prominent.

that does some work in *Either / Or II* and that is relabeled in *The Sickness unto Death* as "necessity." This (taking the *Irony* characterization as definitive) is just that part of an agent's situation-of-action which consists of unchangeable givens – the givens of situational or psychological or moral determinateness: the character I have, the duties that are mine, the limits of what is possible for me. Actuality in this sense is what distinguishes *real* possibility from *abstract* (or *pure*) possibility. It distinguishes what I can (and perhaps should) do or become from what a human being in general might be able (and perhaps obliged) to do or become. The problem with thinking about action in terms of abstract or pure possibility (rather than in terms of real possibility) is that to do so is not really to think about action at all: it is to engage in idle fantasizing and thereby to avoid getting down to the business of doing. Actuality in this sense is the controlling element in the "controlled irony" described in the final section of *The Concept of Irony*. It is relabeled as necessity in *The Sickness unto Death* in the following passage: "What the self now lacks is indeed actuality.... However, closer scrutiny reveals that what he actually lacks is necessity."⁵ What is meant by "lacking necessity" is then spelled out clearly enough: what is missing in the person who lacks necessity is the power to submit to his own limitations. In this sense, actuality is what distinguishes real from spurious possibilities: real possibilities (as opposed to pure, abstract possibilities) are things that could (and perhaps should) *be actualized* (by me). The exclusive disjunction between "possibility" as a thought-medium and "actuality" as something entirely distinct that seems to characterize the *Postscript* sense⁶ is completely absent from these discussions.

The second sense of "actuality" from which I would like to distinguish the *Postscript* sense is one that is used to convey something like the difference between a mere plan (or imagining) – to engage in a project (the project of communication, for instance, or that of doubt)

⁵ *SUD*, p. 36; *SVI XI*, 149.

⁶ I call it the "*Postscript*" sense although the term "actuality" used in something like this sense also appears elsewhere in the pseudonymous works – most notably in *Philosophical Fragments*, but also in *The Concept of Anxiety*. Compare this passage on the question "to what extent the recent principle that thought and being are one is adequate": "Only the universal is by virtue of the fact that it is thought and can be thought... and is as we think it. The point about the particular is precisely its negative relation to the universal and its repellent relation to it. But as soon as a person thinks the particular away it is canceled, and as soon as it is thought, it is altered, such that one either does not think it at all, but only imagines that one does, or one thinks it, but only imagines that it is taken up into thought" (*CA*, p. 78; *SVI IV*, 347n – translation altered).

or to live a certain kind of life – and the actual engagement or living itself, where the difference lies in the difficulty of the latter, and where that difficulty arises from the fact that the project in question is carried out (the effort made or the suffering suffered) over *time*. The experience of the difficulty or the sustainedness of the effort cannot be reproduced in the imagination (say, when one is contemplating such a project or such a life), the point seems to be, because in imagination any effort, suffering, etc., is *momentary* (appears in “foreshortened perspective”). Perhaps the best illustration of this use of the term “actuality” is the following passage from *Practice in Christianity*:

It can splendidly depict perfection, has all the magnificent colors to describe it, but, on the other hand, the power of the imagination cannot depict suffering except in a perfected (idealized), that is, in a mitigated, toned down, foreshortened depiction. In one sense the imagination’s image or the image that the imagination depicts or maintains is still nonactuality; with regard to adversities and sufferings, it lacks the actuality of time and of temporality and of earthly life. True perfection is, namely, that this perfection is – not *was* (for that has reference to him, the one who has finished, not to me) – tried day after day in the actual suffering of this actuality. But this latter the imagination cannot depict – indeed, it cannot even be depicted, it can only be – and therefore the image of perfection that the imagination depicts always looks so easy, so persuasive.... If [the imagination] could do that, then with the help of the imagination a person could experience exactly the same as in actuality, could live through it in exactly the same way as if he lived through it in actuality, could learn to know himself as accurately and fundamentally as in the experience of actuality – then there would be no meaning in life.⁷

Actuality in this sense is opposed to *imagination* (*Phantasie*) rather than thought (*Tænkning*).⁸ Though this use of the term does appear in *Postscript*, it appears in a quite different context,⁹ and it is not, or not apparently, identical to the use with which I am here concerned.

⁷ *PC*, pp. 187-188; *SVI XII*, 174-175.

⁸ See also, for example, *Pap. IX A* 382, where the same point is made, and *Pap. IX A* 387, with its distinction between the “media” of imagination and actuality. In the discussion of suffering as dying to immediacy in *Postscript* there is a related remark, though here the opposition is to *speech*: “...just as easy as it is to state that a human being is nothing before God, so is it difficult to express this in existence.... [I]n relation to the ethical all speech involves a little deception, because speech, despite the most subtle and skilled precautionary measures, always still has an appearance of the foreshortened perspective” (*CUP*, p. 463; *SVI VII*, 403).

⁹ In particular, it appears in the second division of the last chapter. Actuality is what puts the pathos in existence, as it were. In addition to the passage cited in the previous footnote, see also, e.g., *CUP*, pp. 449-450; *SVI VII*, 391: “Similarly, it also seems to me that to be known *in time* by God makes life enormously strenuous. Whenever he is present, every half hour is of infinite importance. But to live in that way cannot be endured for sixty years....” It also appears to be connected with the *Irony* sense in the same *Sickness unto Death* discussion (cf. *SUD*, p. 36; *SVI XI*, 149).

II.

In that use, the distinction is between what is and what is thought, rather than between what is and what is not plausibly plannable or between what is merely planned and what is also carried out. One might be tempted to say that in the sense at issue, actuality has a theoretical, in the two other senses a practical meaning. Yet actuality in the *Postscript* sense is also tied up with the ethical – and this is part of its peculiarity. The connection to the ethical shows itself in passages like the following:

All knowledge about actuality is possibility. The only actuality concerning which an existing person has more than knowledge about is his own actuality, that he exists, and this actuality is his absolute interest. The demand of abstraction upon him is that he become disinterested in order to obtain something to know; the requirement of the ethical upon him is to be infinitely interested in existing.

The only actuality there is for a person is his own ethical actuality; concerning all other actuality he has only knowledge about, but genuine knowledge is a translation into possibility.¹⁰

We should probably take “the requirement of the ethical...to be infinitely interested in existing” to mean the demand of the practical perspective to accept responsibility. To be infinitely interested in existing is to be maximally morally engaged. The claim that thinking lacks a grasp of this seems to be equivalent to the claim that the “objective tendency” abstracts from the perspective of agency, deals in explanations, and has no place for freedom and responsibility. One recalls the Judge’s polemic against Hegelian philosophy in *Either / Or*, Part II: to be committed to the possibility of absolute knowledge is to be committed to the absolute necessity of everything that is. The Judge is particularly concerned with claims to have understood the necessity of history, and with their apparent consequence: that there is no “either / or,” no human freedom, and that the ethical standpoint is therefore an illusion. Indeed, we are given something like a summary of just this line from the second letter,¹¹ where the distinction is pressed between the standpoint of the observer and that of the agent. One might also want to invoke the point from the end of the section “Possible and Actual Theses by Lessing”: “So-called pantheistic systems have frequently been cited and attacked by saying that they cancel freedom and the distinction between good and evil. This is perhaps expressed

¹⁰ *CUP*, p. 316; *SVI VII*, 271. “To exist” and “existing” here: “*at existere*”; “*existerende*.”

¹¹ *CUP*, pp. 305-307; *SVI VII*, 261-263.

just as definitely by saying that every such system fantastically volatilizes the concept of existence.”¹²

This point, and the sense of “existence” that goes with it, is the one familiar from *Either / Or*, Part II. The suggestion, then is that one’s own actuality will be something that is disclosed, or perhaps constituted, by *interest*: thinking that it matters what one does, being interested in the state of one’s soul. “For the existing person, existing is for him his highest interest, and his interestedness in existing is his actuality.”¹³ Interest is what is missing when actuality is missing. This seems to be where comments to the effect that we should not want “to *observe* the world and human beings ethically”¹⁴ fit in.

I call this being tied up with the ethical a peculiarity, though, because there are clear indications in this very discussion that, on the one hand, what is intended is a familiar epistemological point and, on the other, that what is intended is a familiar metaphysical point. That is, there are two quite distinct *further* points made in the discussion immediately following this passage that offer themselves as glosses upon it, and that have no obvious connection with either one another or with the ethical gloss just given.

The epistemological gloss follows immediately (in the next paragraph): “The trustworthiness of sense perception is a deception.... The trustworthiness claimed by knowledge about the historical is also a deception insofar as it claims to be the trustworthiness of actuality, since the knower cannot know about a historical actuality until he has dissolved it into a possibility.”¹⁵ This is reminiscent of a discussion of the same theme in *Philosophical Fragments*,¹⁶ where two types of knowledge claims are contrasted: logical, mathematical and certain sorts of metaphysical statements that express timeless, eternal truths; and what are called “historical” statements, i.e., statements to the effect that something has happened or “has come into existence.” “Historical knowledge” in this context apparently includes claims about historical particulars (actual things and events) and excludes historical generalizations (that is, those properly speaking political, sociological or psychological generalizations that might be extracted from the study of history, but whose justification would look nothing like the justification one would

¹² *CUP*, p. 122; *SVI VII*, 100.

¹³ *CUP*, p. 314; *SVI VII*, 270.

¹⁴ *CUP*, p. 320; *SVI VII*, 275.

¹⁵ *CUP*, p. 316; *SVI VII*, 271.

¹⁶ *PF*, pp. 79-86; *SVI IV*, 243-248.

give for claims about the occurrence of particular historical events or the existence of particular items in the past).¹⁷ Historical truths, we are told, are not the objects of immediate sense perception: that something is there, I sense immediately, but the fact that it has come into being is not immediately sensible – this belongs to the past, and can be apprehended only through inference or testimony.¹⁸ Nor are historical claims necessary truths of reason. “[P]recisely by coming into existence, everything that comes into existence demonstrates that it is not necessary.”¹⁹ And so claims of this type are liable to a certain sort of skeptical doubt; this sort of skepticism is a persistent aspect of Climacus’ view. The skepticism that the passage²⁰ suggests is in fact deeper than that outlined in the Interlude in *Fragments* – for in the earlier work, “immediate sensation and cognition cannot deceive,”²¹ whereas in the later work even “the trustworthiness of sense perception is a deception.” One might want to invoke the point from the preceding chapter in *Postscript* (“Subjective Truth, Inwardness; Truth is Subjectivity”²²) to the effect that taking the “empirical” interpretation of being means turning truth into a desideratum.

Why put this point by saying that knowledge is only of possibility, not of actuality? On the most obvious reading, the point is that one can know what the possibilities are – the various historical possibilities consistent with a given report, perhaps, or the various possible explanations for a given set of experiences – but one cannot know with certainty which one of them is actual. The point would then be something like: thought gives us possible states of affairs and relations between them; but what is *actually the case* – this only actuality gives us, and this is what is missing when actuality is missing. Note that although this is expressed in a way that makes reference to “existence,” especially in the discussion in *Fragments* – things that exist or have come into existence, and the coming into existence of things²³ – what is meant is *actual facts* (that something has happened or is the case).

The metaphysical gloss (for want of a better term) follows the epistemological one on the next page: “To conclude existence from think-

¹⁷ The existence of such generalizations is, I think, what explains the fact that “historical” knowledge is sometimes (e.g., at *CUP*, p. 193; *SVI VII*, 161) included in the same list with logical and mathematical knowledge.

¹⁸ *PF*, p. 81; *SVI IV*, 244.

¹⁹ *PF*, p. 74; *SVI IV*, 237.

²⁰ *CUP*, p. 316; *SVI VII*, 271.

²¹ *PF*, p. 82; *SVI IV*, 245.

²² *CUP*, pp. 189-251; *SVI VII*, 157-211.

²³ Here “existence” is “*Tilværelse*,” “to exist” is “*at være til*.”

ing is, then, a contradiction, because thinking does just the opposite and takes existence away from the actual and thinks it by annulling it, by transposing it into possibility."²⁴

This again recalls a discussion in *Fragments*.²⁵ The context there – unsurprisingly, as there are few other contexts in which such a point would come up – is a discussion of demonstrations of God's existence. One does not reason to existence as a conclusion, Climacus there claims, but rather from existence as a premise.²⁶ "Whether one wants to call existence an *accessorium* or the eternal *prius*, it can never be demonstrated."²⁷

This point is also familiar. The ontological argument is faulty, according to this line of criticism, because it relies on an equivocation between two senses of "being" – the sort of being that objects of thought can be said to have (and that figures in the conceivability premise) and the sort of being that independently subsisting entities can be said to have (and that figures in the conclusion). The ontological argument is mentioned explicitly in the *Postscript* discussion as well,²⁸ where a different distinction is made: that between the *hypothetical* being involved in the premise and the actual being involved in the conclusion. Climacus continues:

The confusion is the same as explaining actuality in pure thinking. The section is titled *Actuality*,²⁹ actuality is explained, but it has been forgotten that in pure thinking the whole thing is within the sphere of possibility. If someone has begun a parenthesis, but it has become so long that he himself has forgotten it, it still does not help – as soon as one reads it aloud, it becomes meaningless to have the parenthetical clause change into the principal clause.³⁰

²⁴ *CUP*, p. 317; *SVI VII*, 272. Here, again, "existence" is "*Tilværelse*."

²⁵ This one at *PF*, pp. 39-43; *SVI IV*, 207-210.

²⁶ A formulation Kierkegaard owes to Trendelenburg. Cf., e.g., *Pap. VII*, 2 C 1. For a brief discussion of Kierkegaard's debt to Trendelenburg on this issue, see J. Heywood Thomas "Logic and Existence" in *Journal for the British Society for Phenomenology* 2, no. 3 (1971), p. 6.

²⁷ *PF*, p. 40; *SVI IV*, 207. References to Kant's and Schelling's critiques of the ontological argument, respectively. Kant does not use the term *accessorium*. Still, we know from *Pap. V B 5.3* that Kierkegaard associates the term with Kant's critique of the argument – presumably with Kant's claim that existence is something over and above the totality of conceptual determinations of a thing. Schelling does use the term *prius*. The reference is to a discussion in the Berlin lectures: cf. Paulus' notes to the lectures (reproduced in Schelling *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, ed. by Manfred Frank, Frankfurt am Main 1977; reference is to p. 110) and Kierkegaard's notes of Schelling's lectures at *Notesbog 11 (SKS 19, 303-367) / Pap. III C 27* (vol. XIII), p. 260.

²⁸ At *CUP*, p. 334; *SVI VII*, 288-289.

²⁹ The reference, of course, is to the "Actuality" section of Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik*.

³⁰ *CUP*, pp. 334-335; *SVI VII*, 289.

In fact Kierkegaard seems to assume the two distinctions are identical: the hypothetical (or possible) and that which is "in thought" are equivalent. What is thought is the merely possible, and what is possible is just what is hypothesized or entertained – what is thought.³¹ It seems that the thing about "actuality" that goes missing once it is "taken up into thought" is *existence* – or at least the sort of *independent* subsistence that ordinary objects might be said to have. But note the very different sense of existence here.³²

So we have (in a space of two pages) these three suggested readings of what it is that abstraction knows it lacks and pure thinking (mistakenly) thinks it has³³: the practical perspective, certainty about what is actually the case, and a sort of being. All nominally connect actuality to existence, but in three quite different senses of that term (the second

³¹ For a statement of the view that the possible is thought-dependent in something like this way, see Nicholas Rescher "The Ontology of the Possible" in *The Possible and the Actual*, ed. by Michael Loux, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1979, pp. 166-181. While Rescher's view is that the *merely* possible (possibilities which never have and never will be actualized) is ontologically dependent on thinking, Climacus seems to hold both this view *and* the view that even the actual is transformed, as it were, into the merely possible once it is thought. I am not sure what to make of this part of Climacus' view, which appears in a number of places, e.g. at *CUP*, p. 321; *SVI VII*, 276: "When I think something I want to do but as yet have not done, then what I have thought, however precise it is, however much it may be called *thought-actuality*, is a possibility. Conversely, when I think something that someone else has done, therefore think an actuality, then I take this given actuality out of actuality and transpose it into possibility, inasmuch as a *thought-actuality* is a possibility and in terms of thinking superior to actuality but not in terms of actuality. This also means that ethically there is no direct relation between subject and subject. When I have understood another subject, his actuality is for me a possibility, and this thought-actuality is related to me *qua* possibility just as my own thinking of something I still have not done is related to the doing of it."

³² Cf. *CUP*, p. 330; *SVI VII*, 285: "Existence is always the particular; the abstract does not exist."

³³ There is a distinction to be drawn in the citations given in the opening paragraph between the "thought" involved in the first citation and the thought involved in the second. In the first, it is *abstraction* whose medium is possibility and which can "grasp" actuality only by "annulling" it. In the second, it is *pure thinking* in which "thought-reality is confused with actuality." Actuality, then, is something that escapes both abstraction and pure thinking, both of which are instances of thought, instances that differ not in their relation to actuality, but instead in their conceptions of that relation: abstraction recognizes that actuality eludes it, while pure thinking mistakenly claims to have taken actuality up *into* thought. Abstraction recognizes that it is one term of a relation, while pure thinking is "in mystical suspension," "unaware of the relation that abstraction still continually has to that from which it abstracts" (*CUP*, p. 313; *SVI VII*, 269). "Pure thinking" refers to Hegel, and this "mystical suspension" is the gist of Climacus' critique of Hegelianism in this section.

very artificial). The first of these senses of actuality is Kierkegaard's very own. For the second we are continually referred to ancient skepticism, though we might equally well point to Hume (quite likely via Jacobi – in particular Jacobi's *David Hume on Faith*³⁴). The immediate source of the third is Schelling. I will first say something about that sense, and then return to the problem of how Kierkegaard / Climacus seems to want to fit the three senses together.

III.

Schelling began his second lecture in Berlin by announcing that the "relation of philosophy to actuality" would be his theme,³⁵ and Kierkegaard wrote in his journal:

I am so happy to have heard Schelling's second lecture – indescribably. I have been pining and thinking mournful thoughts long enough. The embryonic child of thought leapt for joy within me as in Elizabeth, when he mentioned the word "actuality" in connection with the relation of philosophy to actuality. I remember almost every word he said after that....³⁶

What is it that he remembered? Schelling began his lecture series that year by summarizing the line he had taken on idealistic philosophy for roughly the preceding fifteen years – a position that Kierkegaard had quite certainly already heard and read about, and which had brought him to hear Schelling to begin with.³⁷ A central part of that line is a

³⁴ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch*, Breslau 1787. Kierkegaard would have read the revised edition published in Jacobi's *Sämmtliche Werke*, Leipzig 1812-25.

³⁵ Schelling *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42* (cf. note 27 above), p. 98. Citations from Schelling's work will be identified as follows: Schelling *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42* refers to Paulus' volume to the lectures Schelling gave in Berlin in 1841/42 as reproduced in the volume indicated in note 27. These are the lectures Kierkegaard heard. *Schellings Werke* vols. 1-13, ed. by Manfred Schröter, Munich: Beck and Oldenbourg 1927-59; vol. 10, refers to lectures given in Berlin in 1842/43 and later years. *Grundlegung der positiven Philosophie* refers to *Grundlegung der positiven Philosophie: Münchener Vorlesung WS 1832/33 und SS 1833*, ed. by Horst Fuhrmans, Torino 1972. These are lectures given in Munich throughout the 1830's.

³⁶ *Pap.* III A 179.

³⁷ He had certainly read Schelling's preface to Victor Cousin's *Fragments Philosophiques* (1834) and the various reactions to that and to Schelling's Munich lectures on the part of I. H. Fichte (cf. his *Ueber die Bedingung eines spekulativen Theismus*, Elberfeld 1835) and the latter's contemporaries – many published in the *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Spekulative Theologie*, Bonn (of which Kierkegaard owned volumes 1-20 [1837-48] and 23-27 [1853-55]).

view of the relation of thought to actuality that sounds very much like the *Postscript* view.

The various idealist systems are accounts, according to this line, of "the relations which things take on in pure thought" rather than an account of "existence, what *actually exists*."³⁸ Idealism (or "negative philosophy") knows nothing of actual things; it knows only possible things.³⁹ "[R]eason, so long as it takes itself as its principle, is capable of *no actual knowledge*...."⁴⁰ To think otherwise is to fail to acknowledge the distinction between the content of what is (what systematic philosophy presents) and the instantiation of that content (the actual world):

I am in complete agreement with the Hegelian definition of philosophy: it is *the science of reason, insofar as this latter becomes aware of itself as all of being*....In philosophy, reason becomes aware of itself as all of being – assuming that by "being" one does not mean *actual being* but means instead that in rational science reason appears as all of being according to its content. *That in philosophy reason becomes aware of its own content as the content of all of being – this is the explanation of pure rational science*. But we must not fail to make this distinction!⁴¹

In fact, Schelling pointed out, idealism was essentially committed to the invalidity of the distinction. Post-Kantian idealism was defined by the claim that being is necessarily such as to conform to thinking, and therefore that in constructing the ramified totality of possible thought contents, it has constructed the ramified totality of the actual world. This epistemological claim rested, Schelling thought, on an ontological thesis. What idealism presupposed, according to this diagnosis, was the sort of ontological priority of thought to being that nullifies the distinction between "all of being as thought-content" and "all of being as actually instantiated." Schelling had come to reject that presupposition, and to hold that in fact there is a philosophically significant gap between the conceptual totality reason can construct and the actuality it purports to describe.⁴²

³⁸ *Schellings Werke* (cf. note 35 above), vol. 10, p. 125.

³⁹ Schelling *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42* (cf. note 27 above), p. 119.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁴² What exactly Schelling's reasons were for this change of mind – together with what exactly the change of mind amounted to – have been the subject of a long debate. Landmarks in this debate have been Horst Fuhrmans *Schellings Letzte Philosophie*, Berlin 1940; Walter Schulz *Die Vollendung des deutschen Idealismus in der Spätphilosophie Schellings*, Pfullingen 1975; and Manfred Frank *Der unendliche Mangel an Sein*, 2. ed., Munich 1992. My concern in this section will be less with Schelling's reasons for holding the view than with the view itself as he presented it in his lectures.

This presupposition was most clearly demonstrated, he thought, by the renewed commitment (after Kant) to the possibility of something like the ontological argument for the existence of God. As a result, his critique of idealism usually included an assessment of (a modal version of) the argument – an assessment we find repeated in *Fragments* and *Postscript*. He criticized the argument on logical grounds, claiming the invalidity of the inference from being within the scope of a modal operator (the possibly necessary being asserted in the premises) to being outside the scope of a modal operator (the actual being asserted in the conclusion). His grounds for this seem to have been a conviction that the former is an instance of the latter rather than the other way around – in other words a version of metaphysical actualism.⁴³ Actuality is ontologically prior to possibility, according to this view; the actual world is the only world there is, and possible worlds are not entities independently subsisting alongside it in logical space, but are instead proper subsets of it – subsets consisting of thought constructs or entities “in thought.”⁴⁴ Schelling’s complaint about the ontological argument seems to be that it requires one to take actual existence to be an instance of existence in possibility – i.e., that it relies on a possibilist ontology.⁴⁵ The commitment to the onto-

⁴³ Cf. Robert Adams “Theories of Actuality” in *Nous* 8 (1974), pp. 211-231. Adams argues that if we take possibility as ontologically primitive, there turns out to be no answer to the question, “In virtue of what is the actual world actual?” that does not entail either that the actual world is necessarily actual (i.e., that no other worlds are even possible) or that actuality is a relative property – a property that all worlds possess in themselves, but none of them possesses absolutely. Where Adams has arguments, however, Schelling seems to possess only intuition.

⁴⁴ Again, the view is similar to the one Rescher presents – cf. note 31 above. There are other versions of actualism, of course. On one view possible worlds are sets of propositions (cf. Adams [see previous note]); on another they are sets of properties (cf. Stalnaker “Possible Worlds” in *Nous* 10 [1976], pp. 65-75); on still another they are states of affairs (cf. Alvin Plantinga *The Nature of Necessity*, Oxford 1974 and “Actualism and Possible Worlds” in *Theoria* 42 [1976], pp. 139-160).

⁴⁵ One way to put this in contemporary terms is to say that Schelling believed an actualist ontology required rejecting the symmetry condition on accessibility relations between the actual and non-actual possible worlds, at least in where existential statements are concerned, and paradigmatically in the context of the ontological argument. Since symmetry is assumed in all modal systems which the argument is valid, this would give Schelling the logical objection to the argument he thinks he has. This is why I think Henrich is correct – to this extent – in his characterization of Schelling’s position. (Cf. Dieter Henrich *Der Ontologische Gottesbeweis*, 2. ed., Tübingen 1967, pp. 219-237.) He is also right to point out that Schelling ultimately cannot accept the consequences of this position.

logical priority of possibility and the commitment to the possibility of an ontological argument go hand in hand, according to Schelling – and both fall out of the idealist commitment to the priority of thought to being.

Actualism does not in fact commit one to the impossibility of an ontological argument.⁴⁶ Schelling, however, apparently thinks it does. I believe it is this view that is the source of many of the difficulties Schelling encounters in making a place for negative philosophy within positive philosophy – in defining a space for necessity, as it were. This is, of course, a central unresolved question about the later Schelling.

It seems to me that Schelling illegitimately oscillates between two views – one of which is that logical truth is simply irrelevant to claims about actuality, the other that logical truth is relevant except in some contexts – paradigmatically, the context of the ontological argument. The first option – that *nothing* about thoughts (not even the necessity of thinking them) entails anything about the actuality of actually existing things – effectively bankrupts the notion of necessity. Some of Schelling’s comments make it seem as if he is willing to do just this – for instance: “We are here beginning to grasp that *the so-called eternal truths* are nothing other than propositions abstracted from the present state of things. There are no *eternal truths* in this sense.”⁴⁷ There is, in other words, no conceptual necessity in nature. Idealism has mistaken empirical knowledge of how the world contingently is for a priori knowledge of how the world necessarily is. At other places, however, Schelling seems to want to limit the scope of his claims, where he insists that negative philosophy does grasp the reality of things, and seems to limit the scope of positive philosophy’s claims to knowledge of God alone.⁴⁸ This suggests the second option.⁴⁹ To take the second option, however, requires making a plausible distinction between the context of the ontological argument and other contexts. Schelling gives us no such distinction, and it is not clear that his view provides

⁴⁶ Cf. Alvin Plantinga *The Nature of Necessity* (see n. 44) and “Kant’s Objection to the Ontological Argument” in *Journal of Philosophy* 63 (1966), pp. 537-546.

⁴⁷ At Schelling *Grundlegung der positiven Philosophie* (cf. note 35 above), p. 90. By the “present” state of things Schelling means the world in its fallen state.

⁴⁸ For instance at Schelling *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42* (cf. note 27 above), pp. 99ff.

⁴⁹ Fuhrmans is correct to point to a change of mind between the Munich and Berlin periods on this score; this difference is an instance of it.

the resources for constructing one.⁵⁰ To draw this line would be to specify negative philosophy's place within positive philosophy.

So, Schelling faces a trilemma: either (1) there is some plausible distinction to be drawn, or (2) we can have at most contingent empirical knowledge of even the "what" of things (and using the term "knowledge" here seems like a stretch), or (3) the point about actuality cannot after all be used against the ontological argument. Schelling seems to waver between options 1 and 2.

IV.

What really bothers both Schelling and Kierkegaard is the idea that some sort of wholesale necessity could be determinative of actuality. The source of the worry, for both, is the suspicion that if we admit that the actual falls into the *grip* of necessity, we shall have to give up freedom and moral responsibility. It looks as though it is this concern that binds the three senses of "actuality" in the *Postscript* discussion together. The structure is roughly the following:

The epistemological point, which amounts to a sort of Humean skepticism, first comes up in the Interlude to *Philosophical Fragments* – where there are also specific references both to natural causation and to freedom. After arguing for the claim that "nothing comes into existence by way of [conceptual – M.K.⁵¹] necessity"⁵² – i.e., arguing that the necessity that might inhere in conceptual relations among properties cannot inhere in the causal relations among historical events⁵³ – and after claiming that if history were necessary (here the sense of "necessary" is unspecified) "then we could no longer speak of the past and the future"⁵⁴ and "freedom itself would be an illusion and coming into existence no less an illusion,"⁵⁵ Climacus makes the

⁵⁰ Kant's view, for instance, does give us a plausible place to draw the line – but it also gives us a non-logical objection to the argument. Cf. Henrich (cf. note 45 above), pp. 139ff.

⁵¹ The context suggests that conceptual necessity is what is meant, and the grounds Climacus cites support only this conclusion anyway.

⁵² *PF*, p. 74; *SVI* IV, 238.

⁵³ For a full reconstruction of the argument at *PF*, pp. 73–75; *SV* I IV, 236–239 see Poul Lübcke "Freedom and Modality" in *Kierkegaard and Freedom*, ed. by James Giles, Hampshire and New York 2000, pp. 93–104.

⁵⁴ *PF*, p. 77; *SVI* IV, 241.

⁵⁵ *PF*, p. 78; *SVI* IV, 241.

following comment: "I cannot immediately sense or know that what I sense or know is an effect.... That it is an effect is something I believe...."⁵⁶ One does not see the relation of cause and effect – and so inferring a causal connection between events requires closing an inductive gap. This is optional; whether and how we do so is in some strong sense up to us. So, at least, goes the view of belief that goes together with Climacus' skepticism: "The organ for the historical must be formed in likeness to this, must have within itself the corresponding something by which in its certitude it continually annuls the incertitude that corresponds to the uncertainty of coming into existence.... This is precisely the nature of belief."⁵⁷ Belief is what steps in to fill the gap; it is the "subjective" certainty that takes the place of an absent "objective" certainty. But note that "subjective" here is to be taken in what most would call a pejorative sense. "[B]elief is not a knowledge but an act of freedom, an expression of will."⁵⁸ Belief does not arise on its own out of reflection on experience; it is a contingent decision on the part of the reflecting subject. "[I]t is assumed that reflection can stop itself objectively, whereas it is just the other way around; reflection cannot be stopped objectively, and when it is stopped subjectively, it does not stop of its own accord, but it is the subject who stops it."⁵⁹

If what we believe about the outside world is in some strong sense up to us, then it would seem that we are subject to ethical demands with respect to what we believe, just as much as to what we do. This move is suggested in the *Postscript*:

In other words, if a beginning cannot be made immediately with the immediate...but this beginning must be achieved through reflection, then the question arises very simply...: How do I bring to a halt the reflection set in motion in order to reach that beginning? Reflection has the notable quality of being infinite. But being infinite must in any case mean that it cannot stop of its own accord.... Perhaps the infinity of reflection is the bad or spurious infinity. In that case, we are indeed almost finished, since the spurious infinity is reputedly something despicable that one must give up, the sooner the better. In that connection, may I not ask a question:...Is not "spurious" an ethical category?⁶⁰

Here is a connection between two of the glosses on "actuality" in the *Postscript* passage. Our ethical actuality (that is: interest) governs the

⁵⁶ *PF*, p. 84; *SVI* IV, 247–248.

⁵⁷ *PF*, p. 81; *SVI* IV, 245.

⁵⁸ *PF*, p. 83; *SVI* IV, 247.

⁵⁹ *CUP*, p. 116; *SVI* VII, 95.

⁶⁰ *CUP*, pp. 112–113; *SVI* VII, 91–92.

question of what we should take to be actually the case. These two senses of “actuality” are conjoined by the possibility of skepticism about natural causation to support the claim that nothing we could know empirically about the objective world could entail that the fundamental character of the agent perspective is an illusion (that we cannot take ourselves to be free).

There are some distinctly undesirable consequences to this view, but Climacus, at least, is willing to accept them. First among these consequences is that we have no knowledge about the medium in which we act. This implication is duly noted: “to make the subjective individual’s ethical actuality the only actuality would seem to be acosmism.”⁶¹ But this implication is simply dismissed as irrelevant. The response: we should not worry about giving up the world if we thereby gain ourselves. “[T]o the individual his own ethical actuality ought to mean, ethically, even more than heaven and earth and everything found therein....”⁶²

What about the metaphysical sense of actuality? It seems to fit in as follows. There are not two but three senses of “necessary” which Kierkegaard is concerned might apply to history (that is, to human actions). The first is conceptual or logical necessity in some straightforward sense; against this Kierkegaard invokes Aristotle and Trendelenburg. The second is causal necessity on a broadly empiricist interpretation – that is, where the claim that everything that happens does so in accordance with causal laws and hence could not be otherwise is taken as an inductive inference from observed empirical regularities. It is against this that Kierkegaard invokes Hume. The third is causal necessity on a broadly Kantian / idealist interpretation. And it is here that Kierkegaard invokes Schelling.

What Kant claimed to have done – and if anything, post-Kantian idealism claimed to have done it better by correcting perceived inadequacies in Kant’s account – was to have made Humean doubt untenable, and thereby to have rescued a sense of necessity applicable in natural science. Does Schelling’s view of actuality constitute grounds for abandoning that claim? That depends upon which horn of the tri-

⁶¹ *CUP*, p. 341; *SVI VII*, 296.

⁶² *CUP*, p. 342; *SVI VII*, 296. This response brings problems of its own. How, for instance, is one then to determine what one’s “real” possibilities (one’s actuality in the sense operative in *The Concept of Irony*) are? The ethical problems arising out of Climacus’ acosmism are the subject of Louis Mackey’s paper “The Loss of the World in Kierkegaard’s Ethics” in *Review of Metaphysics* 15 (1962), pp. 602-620.

lemma one takes. If one takes the second – that we can have at most contingent empirical cognition of actuality – it does. Climacus takes the second. He takes the metaphysical point about actuality to entail the epistemological point. It does not. But we can see why Kierkegaard might have thought it did: he took the idealist critique of Kant to be correct (and concluded that Humean skepticism is the only alternative to full-fledged Hegelianism), and he took Schelling’s critique of idealism to be correct, and thus to defeat the only available line of argument against Hume. The ethical sense of actuality (the first-person agent perspective) can take priority because of the possibility of skepticism (the epistemological gloss), which in turn is made possible by what Kierkegaard sees as a defeat of the project of “pure thinking” effected by the late Schelling.

Schelling himself would never have accepted the sort of triangulation that goes on between these three points. He thinks we do have something properly called empirical *cognition*. But it is unclear that he would have the resources to block this move. Still, the problems this fact raises for Schelling (who still does want to say that thought maps the actual, at least in some limited sense) are not problems for Kierkegaard. For if there was anything Kierkegaard (as Climacus, at least) was not worried about, it was the project of preserving some account of the grip of *thought* on actuality.