

# SCHELLING'S MEONTOLOGY AND THE CONCEPT OF POSSIBILITY IN KIERKEGAARD

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**ABSTRACT:** In Kierkegaard's treatment of the concept of reality, possibility, freedom (the *not-necessity* of the history) both in the *Concept of Anxiety* and in *Philosophical Fragments* is possible to make out Schelling's *meontology*, that is the philosophical discourse concerning the negation of the *actual* being of something, but not its possibility. The article makes first a survey of the latest philosophy of Schelling, the so-called "positive philosophy" and explain its methodological meaning for the development of philosophy of Mythology and philosophy of Revelation. Its shows why Kierkegaard's thought could have been attracted by Schelling's *Spätphilosophie* and its way of treating the concepts of possibility and reality in opposition to Hegel's "negative philosophy", but in the end it shows why Kierkegaard could not accept even Schelling's speculation.

**KEY-WORDS:** empiricism; freedom; Idealism; Kierkegaard; meontology; negative philosophy; positive philosophy; possibility; reality; revelation; Schelling.

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## La meontología de Schelling y el concepto de posibilidad en Kierkegaard

**RESUMEN:** En el tratamiento de Kierkegaard del concepto de realidad, posibilidad, libertad (la *no necesidad* de la historia), tanto en *El concepto de la angustia* como en sus *Migajas filosóficas*, se puede apreciar la *meontología* de Schelling, es decir, el discurso filosófico relativo a la negación del ser *real* de alguna cosa, pero no de su posibilidad. El artículo realiza un primer estudio sobre la última filosofía de Schelling, la llamada "filosofía positiva" y explica su significado metodológico para el desarrollo de la filosofía de la Mitología y la filosofía de la Revelación. Muestra por qué el pensamiento de Kierkegaard podría haberse sentido atraído por la *Spätphilosophie* de Schelling y su manera de tratar los conceptos de posibilidad y realidad en oposición a la "filosofía negativa" de Hegel, pero al finalizar muestra por qué Kierkegaard no pudo aceptar incluso la especulación de Schelling.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** empirismo; libertad; Idealismo; Kierkegaard; meontología; filosofía negativa; filosofía positiva; posibilidad; realidad; revelación; Schelling.

In making a survey of Kierkegaard's relationship to Schelling in particular moving on from *The Concept of Anxiety*, I would like take both this concept (anxiety) and the work dedicated to it as a point of departure – better said an “occasion” – in order to investigate the way in which Kierkegaard drew some philosophical intuitions, ideas and concepts from the latest philosophy of Schelling. This will be done by means of establishing a kind of route along the Schelling “river”: a conceptual river that Kierkegaard seems to have carefully followed and from which he also drank several times.

I will show in special how in Kierkegaard's treatment of the concept of possibility (as well as in the treatment of freedom, thus in the *not-necessity* of the history) both in the *Concept of Anxiety* and in the contemporary *Philosophical Fragments*,<sup>1</sup> for instance, there seems to be possible to make out Schelling's *meontology*. I refer with this concept to the distinction Schelling regained from Plato's *Sophist*<sup>2</sup> between the Greek “subjective” and “objective” negation,  $m^{3/4}$   $\hat{\text{O}}n$  and  $o\hat{\text{U}}k$   $\hat{\text{O}}n$  in order to found Good's freedom in the creation. Let me recall that while the Greek negation  $o\hat{\text{U}}k$  totally denies the reality of something both in *thought* and in *actuality*, the negation  $m^{3/4}$  just denies the *actual* being of something, but not its possibility, thus defining something as “not existing”, but still possible.

The root of Schelling's latest speculation – the “positive philosophy” – has its origin in the attempt of reaching philosophically the so-called “positive”, that is the true, historical, free reality, without falling into the *logical pantheism*. And this was exactly what Kierkegaard was interested in. As it is well known, the whole discussion concerning the possibility of elaborating a philosophical perspective able to come out of the “negative philosophy” (this is the way in which Schelling indicates a merely logical perspective) in order to grasp the reality without giving up to a scientific approach, concerned others besides Schelling and Kierkegaard.

Just before Hegel's death, a great number of voices (even within Hegel's followers) had raised in order to criticize some points of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Philosophical Fragments* came out the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 1844, but it had been probably composed before March and the end of May 1844. *The Concept of Anxiety* came out the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 1844, but it had been written before. On the question of dating see the commentary [K] to *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* [SKS], ed. by Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscenteret, Gads Forlag, Copenhagen 1997ff., vol. 4: *K4: Philosophical Fragments* by Jette Knudsen and Johnny Kondrup, pp.171-196, and on *The Concept of anxiety*, by Søren Bruun, pp. 305-339. They were originally both signed with the name of Kierkegaard himself then the name was replaced with the actual ones. On that, see also Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, Cambridge 2003, pp. 40ff.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Sophist* 237 a ss., 256 d ss., 258 a ss.

System, in particular the interpretation of the first category of Logic, that is the category of Being, and its identity with Nothing, from which the Becoming should have followed. I will not go over the complex and long discussion about this point now,<sup>3</sup> but I will just emphasize some very important theoretical joints in order to understand Kierkegaard's interest for Schelling's so-called *Spätphilosophie*, since Schelling's position has had the peculiarity of presenting also a *pars construens* and not only the elaboration of the *destruens* one.

The most incisive objection to Hegel's first Section of Logic had focused on the identity between Being and Nothing, because this identity would be only a sterile tautology from which Movement and Becoming cannot result, unless Being was already something determinate. It means that in the Hegelian pure and indeterminate Being it is not true that the Nothing is thought, but instead, that simply the Nothing is not a thought. This was precisely what Karl Werder said in 1841,<sup>4</sup> and already Schelling during his second stay in Munich since 1827<sup>5</sup> had actually formulated the same objection. Even Feuerbach in 1839<sup>6</sup> had raised a similar argument, saying with Aristotle that the Nothing cannot be thought, because when it is *thought*, it is already determined, this meaning that it is something existing and no longer "Nothing". The thought can only think something that *is*. Moreover the Thought itself is an existing activity, it is something real.

What Hegel seemed to have forgotten, in a sense, was also the real and subjective definiteness of the *act* of thinking opposite to the abstractness without any contents of the pure Being.

But following this direction, we could also mention in the same period of time the so-called *Spätidealisten* Immanuel Hermann Fichte and Christian Hermann Weisse with their periodical «Zeitschrift für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie», to which Kierkegaard was a

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<sup>3</sup> On this topic I would like to refer to the monograph I have published in 2007 and to the bibliography it contains: *Kierkegaard editore di Schelling: le lezioni berlinesi sulla "Filosofia della Rivelazione", 1841-1842. Tracce della filosofia schellinghiana nell'opera di Søren Kierkegaard*, Mimesis, Milano 2007, pp. 17-39.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Werder, *Logik. Als Commentar und Ergänzung zu Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik. I. Abteilung*, Berlin 1841, pp. 35 ss.

<sup>5</sup> *Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*, in *SW*, I, X, pp. 1-200, in particular pp. 127 ss.

<sup>6</sup> L. Feuerbach, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie*, in «Hallische Jahrbücher für deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst», 1839, nn. 208-216 (30th August to 9th September), coll. 1657-1725, then in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by W. Bolin and F. Jodl, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1959, vol. II, in particular pp. 195-202.

subscriber, and their accusation of formal truth and material falsity<sup>7</sup> of the Hegelian Logic.

In short, all this criticism accused Hegel of having pushed Logic beyond its intrinsic limits, of having passed it off as something that it wasn't, that is, in Schelling's terms, a "positive" philosophy. According to its critics, Hegel's Logic was indeed unable to come to the "positive" unless by introducing it surreptitiously from outside.

This was exactly what Schelling wrote in 1834 in its famous *Preface* to the German translation of Victor Cousin's *Fragments philosophiques*, a text which also Kierkegaard had in his library and that had in the meanwhile become a kind of manifesto against Hegel's Logic:

The logical self-movement of the Concept held only as long as it remained within the limits of a purely logic dimension; [...] The first presupposition of this philosophy that pretended to be free from any presupposition was that the pure logic concept, in itself, has as its quality or its nature to pass in other, to go beyond itself (the subjectivity of the philosopher should be indeed totally neglected) toward its contrary, and then coming back to itself again: something that could be thought of a real and living entity, but that concerning the pure concept neither can be thought nor imagined, but only said. [...] the passage [from the Idea] to the nature is not a dialectical one, but it is something different for which does not exist any category within a purely rational system, and for which neither its inventor is able to find a category within his own system. This attempt [...] is just an episode in the history of philosophy, [...] useful in order to show *that it is impossible to reach the concrete reality through a purely rational way.*<sup>8</sup>

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And we can also find the same argument in the first series of lectures he held in Berlin, especially in Lecture no. 9 (beginning of December 1841), something that we can also read in Kierkegaard's notes:

When the demands of the negative on the positive are not satisfied, it [the negative] itself is transformed into the positive.

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<sup>7</sup> C.H. Weisse, *Gründzuge der Metaphysik*, Hamburg 1835, p. IV.

<sup>8</sup> *Über französische und deutsche Philosophie. Aus dem Französischen von Dr. Hubert Beckers. Nebst einer beurtheilenden Vorrede des Herrn Geheimraths von Schelling*, Stuttgart und Tübingen 1834, p. XIV

Hegel did this; he made the philosophy of identity into positive philosophy, the only philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

Now the task of philosophy had become exactly the recovering of the non-inferable *becoming*, but without renouncing to the scientific discourse, the philosophical discourse. And this was precisely Schelling's concern, as we can read in his inaugural address in Berlin of November, 15<sup>th</sup> 1841, when he quoted the Hegelian Eduard Gans and his objection according to which «a System can be confuted only by another System». Therefore the point of departure of such a project could just be the individuation of the real nature of the Experience, and consequently in the light of this answer, the reconsideration of which relationship between Being and Thought could be the right one. And with "Thought", what is here meant is not the pure Thought without any conditions, only able to give birth to «stillborn products»,<sup>10</sup> but a Thought which is itself a concrete reality connected to a thinking real subject.

This was actually a need that Schelling had already pointed out also in his *Erlangen Vorträge* two decades before, in 1821, when he talked about the nature of Philosophy as a science and when he asked himself how it would be possible to conceive and realize a System that included living beings. One thing is indeed a science like Geometry, but definitely another thing is the Subject of philosophy, which is simply indefinable, because it is in incessant movement, since its essence is freedom. Talking about the subject of Philosophy, Schelling quotes here emphatically the evocative formula of Gospels: «Who will keep it, he will loose it, while who will abandon it, he will regain it».

To this "epistemological" concern, Kierkegaard also dedicates the first lines of his *Introduction to The Concept of Anxiety*, a work where – together with *Philosophical Fragments* – the echoes of Schelling's philosophy are more evident than elsewhere, even if the Danes will follow later another way. Here Kierkegaard tries first of all to calibrate, so to speak, his scientific instruments, right in order to avoid a philosophical launching that goes beyond its limits, running this way the risk to lose the object it wants to grasp:

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<sup>9</sup> Not11:9, in SKS 19, p. 313; Engl. trans. by Vanessa Rumble, *Notebook 11*, in *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, Ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hanay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Vanessa Rumble and Brian Söderquist, published in cooperation with the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, Copenhagen, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2007, vol. 3: *Notebooks 1-15*, p. 311.

<sup>10</sup> Adolf Trendelenburg, *Die logische Frage in Hegel's System*, Leipzig 1843, p. 13.

«By failing to proceed in a scientific manner and by not taking care to see that the individual issues do not outrun one another, as if it were a matter of arriving first at the masquerade, a person occasionally achieves a brilliance and amazes others by giving the impression that he has already comprehended that which is still very remote. At times he makes a vague agreement with things that differ. The gain is always avenged, as is every unlawful acquisition, which cannot be owned legally or scientifically. Thus when an author entitles the last section of the *Logic* "Actuality" he thereby gains the advantage of making it appear that in logic the highest has already been achieved, or if one prefers, the lowest. In the meantime, the loss is obvious, for neither logic nor actuality is served by placing actuality in the *Logic*. Actuality is not served thereby, for contingency, which is an essential part of the actual, cannot be admitted within the realm of logic. [...] In logic, the *negative* is used as the impelling power to bring movement into all things. One must have movement in logic no matter how it is brought about, and no matter by what means. The negative lends a hand, and what the negative cannot accomplish, play on words and platitudes can, just as when the negative itself becomes a play on words. In logic, no movement must come about, for logic *is*, and whatever *is* logical only *is*. This impotence of the logical consists in the transition of logic into becoming, where existence and actuality come forth. So when logic becomes deeply absorbed in the concretion of the categories, that which was from the beginning is ever the same. Every movement, if for the moment one wishes to use this expression, is an immanent movement, which in a profound sense is no movement at all. One can easily convince oneself of this by considering that the concept of movement is itself a *transcendence* that has no place in logic. The negative, then, is immanent in the movement, is something vanishing, is that which is annulled. If everything comes about in this manner, nothing comes about at all, and the negative becomes an illusion. Nevertheless, precisely in order to make something come about in logic, the negative becomes

something more; it becomes that which brings forth the opposition, not a negation but a contraposition.<sup>11</sup>

In this work, Psychology will be Kierkegaard's epistemological instrument in order to make possible a discourse on reality – and in this case the reality is the fact of Sin, that is, actually the fact of freedom itself. Psychology is in a sense the instrument thanks to which Kierkegaard thinks it is possible to talk about the negative. Through psychology the negative will be not grasped in its essence (that would be impossible), but it can be truly analyzed by a “phenomenological” – we would say – point of view. In fact, Kierkegaard analyzes the only possible human understanding of the *negative*, not as an abstract concept, but in its existential reality: the idea of *possibility*, an idea that causes anxiety. We read in *The Concept of Anxiety*:

«[...] no science can explain. Psychology comes closest and explains the last approximation, which is freedom's showing-itself-for-itself in the anxiety of possibility, or in the nothing of possibility, or in the nothing of anxiety».<sup>12</sup>

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«[...] what effect does Nothing have? It begets anxiety. [...] The actuality of the spirit constantly shows itself as a form that tempts its possibility but disappears as soon as it seeks to grasp for it, and it is a nothing that can only bring anxiety. [...] Anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility. [...] The possibility is to be able. In a logical system, it is convenient to say that possibility passes over into actuality. However, in actuality it is not so convenient, and an intermediate term is required. The intermediate term is anxiety, [...]. Anxiety is neither a category of necessity nor a category of freedom; it is entangled freedom, where freedom is not free in itself but entangled, not by necessity, but in itself».<sup>13</sup>

Now, I want first to make clear that I will stop at this first step of Kierkegaard's discourse, in order to make possible a comparison

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<sup>11</sup> *The Concept of Anxiety*, Engl. trans. by Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1997, pp. 9, 12-23; in *SKS* 4, pp. 281-82, 285-86.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76; *SKS* 4, pp. 41-42.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 41-42; *SKS* 4, p. 347.

between Kierkegaard and Schelling on this point. I mean, I will not enter into Kierkegaard's discourse about Dogmatic, that is the bulwark against which Kierkegaard thinks it is necessary to stop, and this is exactly why he refused Schelling's latest Philosophy of Revelation. Among other examples, we can read in this context that emblematic passage in a note of the *Concept of Anxiety* in which Kierkegaard rightly quoting Schelling's lectures in Berlin, says «*how strange everything becomes when metaphysics and dogmatics are distorted by treating dogmatics metaphysically and metaphysics dogmatically*».<sup>14</sup> So, I will stop now at the first stage of Kierkegaard's discourse, in order to show why Kierkegaard could have been so interested into Schelling's latest speculation, and which elements he seems to have used in his own thought.

We were talking about Possibility: possibility is indeed not an absolute nothing, but according to the Platonic distinction ( $m\frac{3}{4} \hat{O}n$ ), it is a relative one, and Kierkegaard will not investigate it through a metaphysical discourse, but through the "phenomenology" of the anxiety, that can be considered the human resonance of the only conceivable Nothing: not the inconsistent pure Nothing, but the relative and unpredictable one, at the root the human freedom. In *Philosophical Fragments*<sup>15</sup> Kierkegaard actually talks about the Becoming as a change that does not concern the essence, but being: it is a change from the *not-existing* to the existing. Still, this *not-being* that the becoming abandons, has to exist, otherwise one could not talk about a change, but about something else. So, *such a being that nevertheless is a non-being is possibility*.<sup>16</sup>

It is precisely thanks to the concept of *not-being as possibility* (that is something real, not the pure nothing) that Schelling could elaborate – escaping from Hegel's panlogism – his "positive philosophy", a philosophy that according to his intent was founded on the historical reality, whose essence is freedom... and indeed – as we read in Kierkegaard's notes of Schelling's lectures at the lecture no. 18: «One can never know what freedom will bring to light».<sup>17</sup> Schelling had also presented during his lectures the distinction between  $m\frac{3}{4} \hat{O}n$  e  $o\ddot{U}k \hat{O}n$ , in particular during the lecture that Kierkegaard in

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 59; SKS 4 pp. 363-364, in the footnote.

<sup>15</sup> Engl. transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1985, p. 73; SKS 4, p. 273.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74; SKS 4, p. 274.

<sup>17</sup> SKS 19, p. 327; Eng. transl., cit., p. 325.



his notes numbers with no. 7, dating from the end of November.<sup>18</sup>

But in order to see how Kierkegaard made use of Schelling's concepts, I believe one should analyze Schelling's foundation of the positive philosophy and understand what exactly it is.

Schelling's positive philosophy was founded on the basis of the so-called "philosophical empiricism," a method that he started to elaborate in Erlangen and then developed later in the *Darstellung des philosophischen Empirismus* in 1836 and in *Ueber den nationelle Gegensatz in der Philosophie* of the same year. Schelling realized that he could have organized his speculation in a system that should have been articulated in five sections:

1. History and critics of the modern philosophy.
2. Exposition of the philosophical empiricism.
3. Theory of the Absolute.
4. Philosophy of Mythology.
5. Philosophy of Revelation.

The turning point in his speculation had been Hegel's decisive development of the Idealism in the direction of the Logic (after the publication of works like the *Science of Logic*, 1812-16, and the *The Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline*, 1817). Thus he felt the necessity to elaborate a science that was, as we said, rational but at the same time positive, real, and historical.

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Schelling stated that there were two different possible ways of considering Empiricism: the traditional one, which according to Kant rejects everything that goes beyond the limits of the sensible experience, and a higher one, that does not necessary negate the supernatural. «There exists, accordingly, an empiricism that, thought supersensible, is still empiricism – a metaphysical and not merely sensual empiricism», we also read in Kierkegaard's notes of Schelling's lecture 17<sup>19</sup>. But which is the nature of the object that the positive philosophy investigates? It is an object supernatural, but still knowable only empirically. We read in the lectures 17 and 18:

«...a freely acting intelligence, for example, does not fall within the world of sense; nevertheless, it can be known only empirically. Likewise, a free intelligence beyond the world will only be knowable through That-sachen [facts]. [...] Positive philosophy is based neither on what is given in experience, nor on what is given exclusively for thought. Its principle is neither in ex-

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 310-11; Eng. transl., cit., pp. 308-309.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326; Eng. transl., cit., p. 324.

perience nor in pure thought. Its principle is absolute transcendence, which comes *zuvor* [before] thought as well as experience.»

Now, Schelling introduces a new element, the *Prius*. What is the nature of this *Prius*? In order to explain that, we have to come back to the first lectures of Schelling's course, when he makes a survey on the meaning of the rational knowledge in the different stages of the thought. He had in fact divided his first course in Berlin in two parts:

1 – Introduction to the Philosophy of Revelation or Foundation of Positive Philosophy.

2 – Philosophy of Revelation.<sup>20</sup>

According to Schelling's survey, Philosophy had historically reached the point when it divided itself in a negative and a positive one. Because everything that is real can be considered from two points of view:

a) QUID SIT – WAS (the essence), that is “thing in its concept”.

b) QUOD SIT – DAß (the real existence, the fact that the thing is).

We can have the concept of something without its real existence, but never the contrary, therefore a real “knowing” is always a “recognizing”, even if in this way we grasp only the QUID SIT of something, not its real existence. The Reason can only recognize the concept of something, not its real existence. Nevertheless, one cannot recognize a concept unless it is embodied in something existing. It means that concept and the existing object are one... but DAß, the *fact* of the existence of an object does not have any influence on the concept we have of that object, because the existence is something accidental that we grasp only with senses.

But sometimes it happens that the relation between reason and experience is missing, because experience is lacking. This is the case of supernatural objects. We can think back, in this case, to Kant's critique to the ontological proof of the existence of God, where it is said that the concept of God does not prove his real existence. Kant actually recognized to the “positive” just the value of an exigency, but he does not accept its scientific value.

But Kant's exclusion of the positive from philosophy, according to Schelling, cleared the way to Idealism, whereas philosophy will not only be Critique, but it becomes Science of the Reason. For the

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<sup>20</sup> But Kierkegaard actually abandoned the course before Schelling started to explain the Philosophy or Revelation, as we know, exactly because he could not accept its foundation.

first time with Fichte and his “transcendental Act” that posits “Ich bin”, we have a science which is completely *a priori*, where the only *prius* is the human Reason. In other words, reason becomes at the same time the subject who knows and the object which is known.

Thus, Reason as the object of itself is: 1) *infinite power of knowing*, whose content *a priori* is 2) the *infinite power of being*, that is the immediate concept of being. A concept that, for its nature, passes into being, since every thought when it is thought becomes being (in thought). When I think something, I give to my thought the reality of a concept. The thought, because it is thought, necessarily passes into being (even if it is only the being of a concept). But this passage is not a *real* movement, it is only a rational one. (See Kierkegaard’s Referat, lecture no. 3<sup>21</sup>). This is actually the necessity that rules the realm of thought, where nothing can be thought without being in this way necessary.

But how in this way one can think something which is totally free of being, but also free of not being? Because, as Schelling states «The authentic freedom means not just being, but also the possible decision of not being» (that is actually God’s decision to create the world and manifesting himself in it) [SW, II, 3, p. 209]. In other words, how can we think something real without making this really necessary by having thought it? How can we grasp the eternal mobility of the Becoming without turning it into stone with that glance of Medusa that Reason possesses? How to preserve that portion of relative not-being that is the infinite power of being (the possibility)? How can the human being grasp and understand in its reality the *Infinite power of being* that is “das Seyende selbst” or the *Prius*? To arrive to the concept of “das Seyende selbst” as *infinite power of being* is the task of negative philosophy: but if we can grasp it as a *concept*, how to grasp the reality of something that because totally free of being and not being (a reality that comes before every possibility) is also outside of thinking? Schelling calls it *unvordenkliche Seyn*, which is something “immemorial”, it means not thinkable. This is actually the *Prius* from which the positive philosophy starts. But if we cannot think it, how will the positive philosophy start? It will start from something that is, and this being is “das Seyende selbst” as power, that is God, who has decided to reveal himself through Creation, which is something empirical, thus something that human being can grasp. We read in lecture no. 22 in Berlin that the absolute *Prius* has not the necessity of moving into being, so if it does it, it does

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<sup>21</sup> SKS 19, pp. 305-307; Engl. transl., cit., pp. 303-305.

just through a free action and we can know it only as something empirical, that is something we can know *a posteriori*.

We can find Schelling's method in lecture no. 18:

«Positive Philosophy is thus not empiricism in the sense that it arises *from* experience; neither is it based on an immediate given, nor does it arise from a given, through [a series of] conclusions. Rather, it *arrives at* experience, and demonstrates its prius a posteriori. Its difference from empiricism is then sufficiently clear, but is it not then identical to negative philosophy? Negative Philosophy takes what exists in experience as the object of possible knowledge; the a posteriori, which it discovered a priori, remains outside itself; if it accords with experience, all the better, but the truth of its constructions rests on an inner immanence. Positive Philosophy arrives and enters into experience. The a posteriori is not elicited from experience; it arises from the absolute prius, and the a posteriori is derived from it by free thought (negative philosophy has necessary thought), as the actual rather than the merely possible. It is not the absolute prius that *soll erwiesen werden* [ought to be proven] but its consequence.»<sup>22</sup>  
[...]

«We will say: the Prius whose concept is this and this can freely produce a particular sequence if it wants. Now, this sequence exists (is a fact of the experience). Thus this fact – the existence of this sequence – shows us that even the Prius itself exist exactly like we had understood it.»<sup>23</sup>

But we have to notice that with the word “experience”, that is the facts, Schelling means the whole experience, the whole history, which is something that is never ended, that is why we talk about *Philo-sophy* and not just about “sofia”. And it is worth in this context to quote Schelling's words in lecture no. 22 when he recalls Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Plato's *Theaetetus* where they said *initium*

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327; Engl. transl., cit., p. 325.

<sup>23</sup> See *SW*, II, 3, p. 129.

*philosophiae est admiratio*,<sup>24</sup> a famous passage that even Kierkegaard also quotes in his *Journal* in these years, when he writes that «It is a positive point of departure for philosophy when Aristotle believes that philosophy begins with wonder and not, as in our times, with doubt. The world will certainly come to learn that it doesn't do to begin with the negative [...]».<sup>25</sup>

It means that the real object of the positive philosophy cannot be the object of a definite and concluded proof, like it was God of the old metaphysics, whose existence was demonstrated through the existence of his creatures. We cannot demonstrate him, because its essence is freedom, and one can never know what freedom will bring forth: the most difficult thing for philosophy is indeed to understand the *possibility*. In a sense we can say with Schelling that the whole philosophy (the positive philosophy) is a never ended proof of the existence of God.

In his *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen*,<sup>26</sup> Schelling said that «The cross for every philosophy is the investigation of the essence of the not-being [that is the possibility]. We always try to grasp it, but in vain». The same wrote Kierkegaard in its *Journal*, when he stated that «Freedom is the cross that philosophy is unable to bear».<sup>27</sup>

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Coming back to our initial problem: we have seen that both Schelling and Kierkegaard emphasize the same difficulty for philosophy, that is the difficulty of a scientific discourse which pretends to include reality in a system, that is something constantly “possible” and never completed. To include something in a system means – as we saw – to transform it, through rational comprehension, in something that is necessary, it means to misrepresent it. Nevertheless, Schelling had even been able to include the not-being in its system, taking it as something existing, but in the way of possibility.

This is the same problematic point that Kierkegaard emphasizes in the *Interlude* of the *Philosophical Fragments*, when he talks about historical comprehension:

«Everything that comes into existence demonstrates that it is not necessary, for the only thing that cannot come into existence is the necessary, because the necessary is. [...] The change of coming into existence

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<sup>24</sup> SKS 19, p. 335; Engl. transl. cit., p. 333.

<sup>25</sup> Not 7:21, in SKS 19, p. 211; Engl. transl. by Bruce H. Kirmmse, in *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, op. cit., p. 207.

<sup>26</sup> SW, I, VII, p. 436.

<sup>27</sup> *Journalen* FF:149 (1838), in SKS 18, p. 103.

is actuality; the transition takes place in freedom. No coming into existence is necessary.»<sup>28</sup> [...]

But if through the understanding we transform something which has become (the past) in something necessary, we lose the object we wanted to grasp: «If what is apprehended is changed in the apprehension, then the apprehension is changed into a misunderstanding »<sup>29</sup>.

In a sense Kierkegaard uses the conceptuality of Schelling, but in order to reach the opposite result. The intent was at the beginning the same, Kierkegaard put all his confidence in Schelling as he states in a famous passage of his notebooks<sup>30</sup>, and therefore also tries to improve Schelling's instruments; however, he cannot follow the old philosopher exactly in that crucial point of his philosophy that is the point of contact between positive and negative philosophy, a point on which Schelling himself got stuck during the long years of elaboration of his System.

As Kierkegaard writes still in the *Philosophical Fragments*, «the difficulty is to grasp factual being (factual experience) and to bring God's ideality into factual being».<sup>31</sup>

The human being can thus think the Being, but he cannot understand it, determine it, because being is something from which he is transcended: nevertheless by thinking it, the human being can attest its presence, even if «*There is no Here and no There, but only an ubique et nusquam* [everywhere and nowhere]».<sup>32</sup>

Schelling explained that the negative philosophy gave to the positive the "true being" as its latest result, the *purus actus*, the *unvordenkliche Seyn*, an absolute being that only if it really exists, it is. And it really exists, because our senses testify that, and they testify exactly what we had conceived. But the point for Kierkegaard is that not

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<sup>28</sup> SKS 4, pp. 274-275; Eng. transl., cit., pp. 72, 75.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279; Engl. trans. cit., pp. 79-80.

<sup>30</sup> *Notesbog* 8:33 (1841), in SKS 19, p. 235; Eng. transl. by Alastair Hannay, in *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, cit., p. 229: «I'm so glad to have heard Schelling's 2<sup>nd</sup> lecture – indescribable. I have been sighing and the thoughts within me have been groaning long enough; when he mentioned the word "actuality" concerning philosophy's relation to the actual, the child of thought leaped for joy within me as in Elizabeth. After that I remember almost every word he said. Perhaps here there can be clarity. This one word, it reminded me of all my philosophical pains and agonies. [...] Now I have put all my hope in Schelling [...]»

<sup>31</sup> SKS 4, p. 247; Eng. transl. cit., p. 42.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221; Engl. transl. cit., p. 13.

only does not the conceptual knowledge of this pure Being (that is the knowledge of its possibility) mean that this Being exists necessarily, but the contrary is also true: *the fact that this Being is* does not necessarily mean that it is the “necessary Being”.<sup>33</sup> In this space, the possibility of a passage is not given, but it is just possible to leap with *fear and trembling* by virtue of faith.

According to Kierkegaard, faith is indeed the only organ thanks to which is it possible to understand historical reality:

« 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 - a double uncertainty: the nothingness of non-being and the annihilated possibility, which is also the annihilation of every other possibility. This is precisely the nature of belief – for continually present as the nullified in the certitude of belief is the incertitude that in every way corresponds to the uncertainty of coming into existence. Thus, belief believes what it does not see». <sup>34</sup>

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The position of the human being within the existence is well described by a famous passage of the *Postscript*, where Kierkegaard says that:

«For the existing person, existing is for him his highest interest, and his interestedness in existing is his actuality. What actuality is cannot be rendered in the language of abstraction. Actuality is an *inter-esse* [between-being] between thinking and being in the hypothetical unity of abstraction. Abstraction deals with possibility and actuality, but its conception of actuality is a false rendition, since the medium is not actuality but possibility.» [*Postscript*, Hongs' p. 314]

Only a reason able to be *praeter se*, an ecstatic Reason, so to speak could arrive to conceive the *unvordenkliche Sein*, that is the *Prius*, able to be or not to be if it wants: that is a Reason, which in a sense is itself divine. According to Schelling, indeed, a theory of Revelation, in order that the Revelation is understandable, presup-

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 245-248; Engl. transl. cit., pp. 40-43.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 280-81; Engl. transl. cit., p. 81.

poses an already existing original relationship between God and human consciousness, that precedes the Revelation itself and that develops itself through the different degrees of Mythology.

This is something that Kierkegaard absolutely refuses, and he to Schelling's position opposes his *subjective existing thinker* in its «abysmal qualitative difference» from God.

And against the speculation he recalled the Socratic ignorance,

«... which guards faith against speculation, keeping watch so that the gulf of qualitative difference between God and man may be maintained as it is in the paradox and faith, so that God and man do not, even more dreadfully than ever in paganism, do not merge in some way, *philosophice, poetice*, etc., into one—in the system.»<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Sickness unto Death*, in SKS 11, p. 211: Engl. transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1980, p. 99.