

SCHELLING AND KIERKEGAARD IN PERSPECTIVE: INTEGRATING EXISTENCE INTO IDEALISM

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Abstract: Søren Kierkegaard is often considered to be one of the most vocal critics of German idealism. The present paper analyzes the philosophical similarity between Friedrich Schelling's early idealistic work and Kierkegaard's existential writings, endeavoring to display Schelling's epic 1809 publication *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* as a possible forerunner to Kierkegaard. This juxtaposition reveals concrete similarity that supports the thesis that Schelling's work could have been of great inspirational value for Kierkegaard, especially Kierkegaard's core concepts such as *freedom, morality and God*. However, Schelling's early work is primarily appreciated as a *philosophy of nature* (metaphysics), and therefore fundamentally different from Kierkegaard's theistic-psychological writings. The present paper tentatively opposes this distinction, concluding that if Schelling really is a forerunner to Kierkegaard, then we ought to appreciate Kierkegaard's writings as conveying more than a theological message. The conclusion suggests that Kierkegaard's writings should be interpreted in a broader philosophical context, closer to the metaphysical idealism he is often assumed to resist.

Only one who has tasted freedom can feel the longing to make everything analogous to it, to spread it throughout the whole universe.

F. W. J. Schelling, *Freiheitsschrift*¹

1 Introduction

The present essay is an attempt to strengthen the philosophical relationship between German idealism and the early development of existentialism. By

¹References to *Freiheitsschrift* are to *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Matters Connected Therewith* (Schelling 2006).

elucidating the similarities between the early writings of Friedrich Schelling and the foundational premises of Søren Kierkegaard's works, I demonstrate a concrete resemblance between the two philosophers, which reveals a basis for recognizing *the early Schelling* as a decisive inspirational source for the Danish grandfather of existentialism.

This juxtaposition reveals a useful, but often overlooked, interpretative angle to Kierkegaard's writings—tentatively suggesting that Kierkegaard's position is much more closely related to the methodological approach of German idealism (i.e., philosophical systemization) rather than being diametrically divergent as often suggested by most secondary literature and to some extent Kierkegaard himself.² This perspective also repudiates one of the popular (but less dominating) receptions of his work, which holds that Kierkegaard's writings are best understood as theological dogmatism. The task, then, is to deliver a new supportive argument for placing Kierkegaard's writings in a much broader philosophical context—opposed to orthodox Christianity. The paper therefore substantiates the view that Kierkegaard's agenda is a genuinely philosophical venture—that is, above all a metaphysical and ontological project.

Commentators typically appreciate Schelling's work as an attempt to integrate existence into an idealistic (i.e., systematic) framework, emphasizing freedom as a necessity in a divine natural order. Therefore Schelling's viewpoint can be seen as a synthesis of determinism and rationalism. This is often contrasted to Kierkegaard's authorship, where a higher objective natural order, or system, is mostly avoided, well illustrated in Kierkegaard's notorious catchphrase *subjectivity as truth*.³ Thus, the present alignment of the two thinkers will oppose standard convictions, suggesting that the abyss between Kierkegaard's views and Schelling's so-called system of freedom is narrower than what the history of philosophy suggests.

The work of Schelling and Kierkegaard constitutes a peculiar relationship. Both opposed the dominating thought in the early and mid-19th century, namely the late German idealism epitomized by Hegelianism, and both were occupied by the same ambition to re-describe freedom and subjectivity in coherence with a theological foundation. Despite the shared philosophical agenda, the two thinkers are rarely considered to be philosophical allies—probably because of Kierkegaard's overt aversion to Schelling's late work.⁴ However, Schelling was, just like Kierkegaard,

²See the overall message of Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (i.e., subjectivity) and *The Point of View* (i.e. religious authorship).

³See *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* chapter II, the discussion of “Subjective Truth, Inwardness; Truth is Subjectivity” (CUP1 189). Another analogy could be the slightly satirical comments on the possibilities of systems (CUP1 107). References to CUP1 are to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol. 1 (Kierkegaard 1992).

⁴Here I side with Kosch (2006, 5) and Wolsing (2004, 148), pointing out that significant work has been done the last two decades on the resemblance between Schelling and Kierkegaard—nevertheless, often (mostly in English literature) similarity is overlooked.

concerned with a critical appraisal of G.W.F. Hegel's philosophy, and it was perhaps this side of Schelling that convinced Kierkegaard to attend his famous Berlin lectures in 1841–1842 (Olesen 2007, 230).

Most secondary literature agrees that, judging from the statements in Kierkegaard's private journals and papers, there can hardly be any doubt that he was somehow inspired by Schelling's lectures and late philosophy.⁵ At least, as emphasized by Wolsing (2004, 148), Schelling conveniently reminded Kierkegaard that the *actuality* of life (*virkelighed* or *Wirklichkeit*) vanished when it was philosophically conceptualized.⁶ But the direct connection between the two thinkers seems to conclude with this (after all) well-documented event in Berlin 1841–1842. Thus, it is through an elaboration of Schelling's *early writings*, which date decades before their meeting that I search for new argumentative ground for constituting a more positive relation between the two and their respective traditions and impact.

The present essay will expand primarily on Kierkegaard's relation to the early writings of Schelling,⁷ and more precisely his work from 1809, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Matters Connected Therewith* (henceforth, *Freiheitsschrift*).⁸ A small group of scholars have earlier been motivated by the same specific idea, and to my knowledge the connection was initially pointed out by Günter Figal in his 1980 article *Schelling und Kierkegaards Freiheitsbegriff*. Shortly after, a similar position appeared for the English speaking audience in Vincent McCarthy's (1985) article *Schelling and Kierkegaard on Freedom and Fall*. The preeminent examination is Michelle Kosch's recent book *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling and Kierkegaard* (2006).

The central difficulty in the present task is that Kierkegaard never reveals any specific and explicit interest in *Freiheitsschrift* (Olesen 2007, 256),⁹ which in his time was certainly respected as one of the epoch-making works

⁵ It is worth noting that Schelling's lectures in Berlin were an anthology of his previous lectures dating decades back in time. The lectures more or less encapsulated Schelling's *late philosophy* up till 1841 (SKS 19:305–367). References to SKS are to *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (Kierkegaard 1997–) and identify the volume number followed by the page number.

⁶ The concept of *actuality* clearly occupied Kierkegaard from when he was very young, and here we find some of the earliest possible linkages between the two (Stewart 2011, 239).

⁷ It is widely agreed that Schelling's early writings differ from his later writings, due to the constant developments of his philosophical premises and arguments (O'Meara 1977, 284). It is also widely agreed that Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* from 1809 is a final culmination of his *early period* (Kosch 2006, 87).

⁸ Original German title: *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*.

⁹ Here I feel obligated to correct a minor mistake made by McCarthy. He (1985, 92) claims that Kierkegaard refers several times to *Freiheitsschrift* in a "draft introduction to *Repetition*" which is actually a satirical, non-published response to J. L. Heiberg's attack on *Repetition* (*Pap.* IV B 117–119). These references that McCarthy refers to (*Pap.* IV B 117–118) are not explicit references to the actual work *Freiheitsschrift*, but could just as well, or most likely, refer to Karl Rosenkrantz's work *Schelling: Vorlesungen gehalten im Sommer 1842 an der Universität zu Königsberg* (Olesen 2007, 254).

in German idealism (and romanticism) ([Thulstrup 1979](#), 144). But the similarities to Kierkegaard's own writings are striking, which makes it difficult to believe that we are merely dealing with a coincidence ([Kosch 2006](#), 137–138; [Wolsing 2004](#), 157).

We know that Kierkegaard had several of Schelling's works in his personal book collection, including *Freiheitsschrift*.¹⁰ Unfortunately, there is no evidence of when Kierkegaard bought these books ([Olesen 2007](#), 249). Maybe Kierkegaard acquired some of them under his *magister* studies in Copenhagen. Or maybe he bought them much later. Regardless of these unknown details, it is possible to reveal great similarity between Kierkegaard's philosophy and Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*. The forthcoming demonstration of these similarities will terminate with a tentative argument, suggesting that these substantial parallels have strong implications on how one ought to interpret Kierkegaard's work.

2 Historical Perspectives

Schelling's philosophical position transformed quite significantly throughout his tenure (which is often seen as a weakness and source of confusion). From being one of the central figures in the German idealistic movement in the beginning of the 19th century, Schelling later became one of its most vocal critics, due to his opposition to the Hegelian dominance that emerged quite shortly after the publication of some of Schelling's most important writings.¹¹ As mentioned earlier, it was probably this hostility toward Hegelian philosophy that made Kierkegaard travel to Berlin in October 1941 to partake in Schelling's lectures on *philosophy of revelation* (*Philosophie der Offenbarung*).¹² Kierkegaard had recently defended his *magister* dissertation *On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, thus it was a young and encouraged philosopher who travelled south to

¹⁰The *auction catalogue* from the selling of Kierkegaard's personal library confirms that Kierkegaard had five books by Schelling. Among these was the first edition of *Philosophische Schriften* from 1809, which contains a total of five essays, among these *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freyheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände* ([Rohde 1967](#), 52–53).

¹¹Martin Heidegger emphasizes that Schelling never changed his standpoint, though; it was the discursive context that made him change his position: "When Schelling's name is mentioned, people like to point out that this thinker constantly changed his standpoint, and one often designates this as a lack in character. But the truth is that there was seldom a thinker who fought so passionately ever since his earliest periods for his one and unique standpoint" ([Heidegger 1985](#), 6).

¹²We should not, however, undermine the overall importance and reception of Schelling in the Danish Golden Age (and for Danish idealism). Schelling was one of the biggest inspirational sources for Kierkegaard's superiors and mentors (F.C. Sibbern and P. M. Møller), and this was perhaps also a reason why Kierkegaard felt inclined to participate in Schelling's lectures ([Ebbesen and Koch 2003](#), 13–18, 87–91, 249–252).

Berlin, yet without any concrete published material beside his dissertation and a short review.¹³

The stay in Germany overjoyed Kierkegaard to begin with. Experiencing a close encounter with the most famous contemporary philosopher,¹⁴ with whom he shared an immediate scholarly vicinity, was indeed an exceptional event. In a letter to his friend and theologian Emil Boesen, Kierkegaard expressed his enthusiasm of being a part of “an extraordinary audience” (*JP* 5:5542).¹⁵ And Schelling did not disappoint Kierkegaard—after a few lectures his expectations were already fulfilled:

I am so happy to have heard Schelling’s second lecture—indescribably. I have been pinning and thinking mournful thoughts long enough. The embryonic child of thought leapt for joy within me as in Elizabeth,¹⁶ when he mentioned the word ‘actuality’. . . . Now I have put all my hope in Schelling. (*JP* 5:5535)

What Kierkegaard found especially riveting was Schelling’s exposition of Hegel’s philosophy as a refined *Spinozism*, which he accused of leaving no room for (positive) free self-hood.¹⁷ Here we trace the first concrete similarity between the two thinkers, sharing an antagonism toward mechanistic or deterministic philosophy that violates human subjectivity.

It is notable that Kierkegaard’s attendance in Berlin took place just before the publication of his first major works, such as *Either/Or* from 1843 and *The Concept of Anxiety* from 1844. *The Concept of Anxiety* especially bears a close connection to Schelling’s early work *Freiheitsschrift* (McCarthy 1985; Hennigfeld 2003). It is also worth noting that

¹³A short critical review of the H.C. Andersen novel *Only a Fiddler* (1837), presented with the title *From the Papers of One Still Living, Published Against His Will* from 1838.

¹⁴The publicity and fame surrounding Schelling was immense, and definitely unusual for today’s standards. Schelling was asked to take the chair in Berlin (after Hegel) on the personal request of the newly crowned king Friedrich Wilhelm IV. It was indeed a public event when Schelling finally agreed after many months of negotiation. The salary that Schelling received was unheard of—and it remained the highest instructor salary for more than 75 years (Olesen 2007, 234–36n29).

¹⁵References to *JP* are to *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers* (Kierkegaard 1967–1978) and identify the volume number followed by the entry number.

¹⁶See Luke 1:41, “And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”

¹⁷Cf. “He claims to have discovered that there are two philosophies, one negative and one positive. Hegel is neither of these, his is a refined Spinozism. The negative philosophy is given in the philosophy of identity, and he is now about to present the positive and thereby help bring science to its true heights. As you see, there will be promotion for all those with degrees in philosophy. In the future it won’t just be the lawyers who are *doctores juris utriusque* (doctors of both civil and canon law), we magisters are now *magistri philosophiae utriusque* (master of both negative and positive philosophy), now, but not yet, for he has not yet presented the positive philosophy” (*JP* 5:5542).

Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* from 1809 signifies an end of his early philosophical publications. It is not before 1841–1842 that Schelling again starts to publish genuine philosophical works. So, in Kierkegaard's life up to 1841 Schelling had not yet published anything of philosophical significance (Olesen 2007, 232n13). This is one of the clues that Kierkegaard's knowledge and expectations of Schelling dates back to this era around *Freiheitsschrift*.

However, Schelling had partly altered and refined his views throughout the long period after the publication of *Freiheitsschrift*. This might be one of the reasons that Kierkegaard's enthusiasm started to cool off as the Berlin lectures progressed. At least Kierkegaard was expecting something different. In a letter to Emil Boesen (dated February 27, 1842), Kierkegaard said that he was "extremely dissatisfied" (JP 5:5551) with Schelling's performances—he had indeed disappointed Kierkegaard, who, just before leaving Berlin, concluded with a miff that, "Schelling talks endless nonsense both in an extensive and an intensive sense" (JP 5:5552). At that time, Kierkegaard had even stopped taking detailed notes from the lectures, which in the beginning had enthused him.¹⁸

The early lectures of Schelling had promised to deliver a critical assessment that would fortify existence and actuality, and thereby self-hood, from the mechanistic Hegelian system. But in Kierkegaard's eyes, Schelling had not succeeded, and it was a disappointed young philosopher who returned to Copenhagen in the beginning of March 1842 to commence one of the most intense and creative writing-periods in the history of philosophy.¹⁹ In fact, judging from the letters from the last days in Berlin, Kierkegaard seemed more interested in the writing of *Either/Or* (JP 5:5552), which was halfway done a month after his arrival in Copenhagen, and published one year later.²⁰

The encounter and disappointment with the Berlin lectures certainly gives rise to some speculation. Maybe, as mentioned earlier, the disappointment that filled Kierkegaard was actually a result of a substantial knowledge about Schelling's early writings manifested above all in his *Freiheitsschrift*. Kierkegaard had earlier revealed great expectations in regard to Schelling's philosophy. In his journal one year prior to the stay in Berlin, Kierkegaard writes: "The view that Hegel is a parenthesis in Schelling seems to be more and more manifest; we are only waiting for the parenthesis to be closed."

¹⁸Kierkegaard's forty extensive notes on Schelling's lectures are of great historic importance. However, the notes conclude with a note entry without content, dated February 4, 1842 (KJN 3:366). Kierkegaard probably gave up taking notes due to the loss of interest, but maybe also because of the time consuming work; Kierkegaard wrote notes in class, and rewrote them when he returned to his private room (Olesen 2007, 241). References to KJN are to *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* (Kierkegaard 2007–) and identify the volume number followed by the page number.

¹⁹Kierkegaard's negative reaction is quite ironic. Several commentators have pointed out that Schelling's lectures seem to anticipate Kierkegaard's later and famous criticism of the Hegelians (Wolsing 2004, 148; Garff 2005, 210).

²⁰See JP 5:5553.

(JP 2:1589) The comment is definitely sincere, but appears quite odd, since there are no similar references to Schelling in these early journals (Olesen 2007, 230).

Regardless of our interpretations, there seems to be a great anticipation in Kierkegaard's private journals, which make us suspect that Kierkegaard expected a more radical celebration of subjectivity and existence from the Berlin lectures. This is indeed strongly presented in Schelling's early writings. Thus, it is likely that Kierkegaard might have remained fascinated by the early writings of Schelling, and then undermined the actual lectures of Schelling, that is, the later development of his philosophy (which is also inferred by Peter Fenves [2001, 394]).²¹

Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* made a multifaceted and positive contribution to the development of the idealistic movement in 19th century Germany.²² German idealists, and Schelling in particular, were primarily occupied with the Spinoza-inspired idea of creating a complete description of the world; establishing a system of accurate philosophical insight. Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* emerged as a response to two preceding philosophical developments, namely rationalistic idealism (rationalism) and materialistic naturalism (determinism). It would be beyond the capacity of the present essay to give a detailed account of the historical background for Schelling's response.²³ Instead we should just be reminded why rationalism and determinism were problematic for Schelling.

The writings of Immanuel Kant (and Johann Fichte) had established a rationalism, which necessarily terminated in a radical idea of (negative) complete freedom. Thus, also emphasizing the impossibility of building a philosophical system of nature, due to the view of freedom as an absolute resistance of systemization. The Kantian standpoint is therefore seen as a system of subjectivism or rationality, which establishes the dualism (phenomenon/noumenon) that Schelling was opposed to. To understand

²¹One should notice that Kierkegaard later seems to have an eye for the critics of Schelling's late *Philosophy of Revelation*, i.e. Philipp Marheineke's *Zur Kritik der Schellingschen Offenbarungsphilosophie* (Olesen 2007, 252). This, however, does not mean that Kierkegaard discarded Schelling's later writings as a whole. After the Berlin stay Kierkegaard acquired a number of Schelling's works, which also included the Berlin lectures that were published in 1846 (Olesen 2007, 249–252). It is quite evident that, regardless of Kierkegaard's hostility toward Schelling's lectures, he used Schelling's *late philosophy* as a source of critique and inspiration (Brock 2003; Figal 1980), and it is also argued that Kierkegaard borrowed many of Schelling's critical insights into Hegelian philosophy (Kosch 2006, 122).

²²Some commentators see *Freiheitsschrift* as a break with the idealistic movement (McCarthy 1985, 90), and others see it (a more nuanced and—in my point of view—more cogent way of seeing it) as taking idealism in a new direction, however, still adhering the overall idea of “unifying practical reason and theoretical reason in a single system” (Kosch 2006, 88; cf. Wolsing 2004, 149).

²³Heidegger (1985, 1–61) gives a useful detailed account. Schelling's own introduction (9–26) in *Freiheitsschrift* is primarily an explanation of his approach and motivation. The editor's introduction to the SUNY translation of *Freiheitsschrift* is probably the most concise and useful for contemporary readers (Schelling 2006, iv–xxix).

the world in a dualistic view is “closer to flight than to victory,” Schelling emphasizes (*Freiheitsschrift* 11). The danger is that freedom will be understood as a result of our cognitive capacities, and therefore, freedom is only something *thought-of*. However, Kant was very aware of the complexity and consequences of his dualism or transcendental idealism²⁴—that is, he knew there could never be any total understanding of “even a little blade of grass” (Kosch 2006, 41). The metaphysical world is thinkable, but fundamentally unknowable. But still, the complete lectures of Kant seem to establish a possibility (or optimism) of describing the world as a whole—that is, mapping its teleological structures. This approach becomes the essence of German idealism. In other words, German idealist’s task was somehow a continuation of the work carried out by Kant in his third critique, *Critique of Judgement* from 1790, endeavoring to understand the teleological structures of nature (Kosch 2006, 42; Heidegger 1985, 5). Nevertheless, the Kantian system (transcendental idealism) could not overcome the subjective distance to the metaphysical order, and therefore a complete idealistic philosophy of nature was unachievable as a result of the Kant’s transcendental foundation. The problem for Schelling, then, was that Kant’s thinking remained caught up in its own autonomy (Kosch 2006, 42).²⁵

Thus, the German idealists, and Schelling in particular, did not adhere to Kant’s conclusion. The goal was to create a complete system, and system was not understood as a *weak* description of the world (which is the culmination of Kant’s project); a system was, as Heidegger writes, to describe being “in the totality of its truth and the history of truth” (Heidegger 1985, 48). In the light of this ambition, both rationalism and determinism were problematic. Rationalism entailed a resistance to any systemization or mechanistic order, and determinism was considered irreconcilable with any free non-mechanistic actions. Thus, it is between these two theoretical standpoints that Schelling in the early 19th century inserts his philosophy, bridging and merging determinism and rational idealism into a systemized whole—in other words, integrating freedom and existence into a new idealistic metaphysics, placing man as part of the whole system (world), but still as a free creature (Kosch 2006, 67–69).

According to Schelling, freedom is something natural and conjoined—it is in a symbiosis with nature that freedom is revealed. Consequently, freedom is not a radical subjective idea only possible in a dualistic worldview, nor is freedom unachievable due to a mechanistic necessity. Schelling’s early project was to show that everything in nature (not only human subjectivity) has freedom as a conditional part of its being (Wolsing 2004, 150). It might be clarifying to contrast Schelling’s early achievements with another

²⁴Namely, being as mere representation. See also Kosch (2006, 27–29).

²⁵Cf. editor’s introduction to SUNY translation of *Freiheitsschrift* (Schelling 2006, xviii).

development in German idealism, namely Hegel's 1807 publication *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is seen as a forerunner to his philosophical system that was thoroughly elaborated by the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* from 1817 and *Elements of the Philosophy of Rights* in 1821. The conclusion of Hegel's project is a radicalization of an objective higher order, brushing aside the possibility of subjective freedom, and again putting pressure on the idealism proposed by Schelling (Westphal 1996, 102). Historically, the centrality of Schelling's early work was indeed overshadowed by Hegel's opposition. In Copenhagen, the massive popularity of Hegel's philosophical system also prevailed within the intellectual environment before and during Kierkegaard's tenure.²⁶

Thus, it is crucial to have in mind that the philosophical starting-point and agenda for both Schelling and Kierkegaard was quite similar: First of all, trying to establish personal freedom as something foundational, but also trying to rethink the concept of human freedom as such—a task that Hegel fundamentally dismissed (Kosch 2006, 86, 217).

3 Exposition of Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*

In becoming familiar with Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*, one quickly realizes that it endeavors to reshape fundamental philosophical ideas. There is in many ways a groundbreaking and speculative uniqueness in Schelling's style. Even Hegel iconized *Freiheitsschrift* (Heidegger 1985, 13), and it has been crowned as one of the most important works in German idealism and romanticism (Thulstrup 1979, 144). The main topic is human freedom, but one quickly notices that Schelling is not trying to give an account of *free will*—rather, he endeavors to re-define the meaning of freedom, as Heidegger quite mystically describes it: "freedom is here, not the property of man, but the other way around: Man is at best the property of freedom." (Heidegger 1985, 9) Freedom does not emerge as a result or definition of our judgments and willingness; quite the opposite, freedom is the natural center from where being has emerged—and the only way being can emerge. Thus, Schelling's system departs from something that was normally viewed as incoherent with systematization—that is, he starts his philosophical system from the concept of freedom.

Not surprisingly, then, *Freiheitsschrift* begins with an intricate defense of one of the central ideas in the tradition of philosophical systematization—a justification of Spinoza's highly disputed pantheistic world-view:

²⁶Hegel's presence in Danish academic and erudite circles grew robustly during the Danish Golden Age (ca. 1800–1850). The biggest Hegelian personality was probably Hans Lassen Martensen, one of Kierkegaard's teachers. However, prominent names such as F.C. Sibbern and P.M. Møller also used Hegel's thinking, but as opposed to Martensen, Hegelianism was primarily their object of criticism, due to their support of Schelling's thinking (Ebbesen and Koch 2003).

According to an old but in no way forgotten legend, the concept of freedom is in fact said to be completely incompatible with system, and every philosophy making claim to unity and wholeness should end with the denial of freedom. (*Freiheitsschrift* 9)

With this topical opening, Schelling later rejects the view that human individuality can only be either radically free willed or deterministically bound in natural order.

Freiheitsschrift is above all characterized as a philosophy of nature. It is worth noticing, however, that *Freiheitsschrift* was written also as a theodicy, and its main motivation is therefore a defense of a natural theistic background, in the light of the problem of evil—to argue how evil is possible in a world arranged by an entirely good God (*Freiheitsschrift* iv). Thus, for Schelling, the defense of Spinoza's natural order with a parallel defense of human freedom provides a systematic description, which holds that evil is possible exactly because of freedom: "Freedom is the capacity for good and evil" (*Freiheitsschrift* 23). The challenge is to describe the world on the behalf of freedom as some God-creation. Thus, in one turn, Schelling gives a philosophical account of how God's creation can coincide with personal freedom. In addition to this, Schelling's modification of Spinoza also contains a counterargument to another debate that preceded the writings of *Freiheitsschrift*. His colleague and immediate superior Friedrich Jacobi was a fierce critic of any form of natural idealism. In his view, scientific or mechanistic speculations would necessarily end in a form of atheistic fundamentalism, hence also supporting the (renowned) condemnation of Spinozism (*Freiheitsschrift* 18–20, notes 20–21).

It goes without saying that Schelling's agenda was very multifaceted, which explains some of the initial confusion for contemporary readers. Thus, in the forthcoming elaboration, the reader should focus on the most important aspects, namely that Schelling first of all wants to maintain a theistic underlying idea while also demanding to make room for individual freedom as a fundamental condition of natural existence. He does this in the broadest possible sense, aiming to describe the fundamental system of nature (hence, philosophy of nature). Conclusively, *Freiheitsschrift* is a major rethinking of the concept of human freedom together with the metaphysical foundation (Kosch 2006, 86).

For Schelling it is not enough to show *how* human freedom is possible. He must show how freedom is something that is embedded in nature, that the totality of nature has "activity, life and freedom as its ground" (*Freiheitsschrift* 22). It is an attempt to describe one system—one totality that embraces everything—but in doing this, dynamical indeterminism or better, freedom, becomes an essential premise for the entire appearance:

Idealism, if it does not have as its basis a living realism, becomes just as empty and abstract a system as that of Leibniz and Spinoza, or any other dogmatist. The entire new European philosophy since its beginning (with Descartes) has the common defect that nature is not available for it and that it lacks a living ground. Spinoza's realism (*Determinism*) is thereby as abstract as the idealism of Leibniz (*Rationalism*). Idealism is the soul of philosophy; realism is the body; only both together can constitute a living whole. (*Freiheitsschrift* 26; my emphasis)

In this quote we sense the optimism, and also the romanticism, in Schelling's approach. In correcting dualism he also corrects determinism and rationalism, claiming that they must necessarily be two sides of the same token.

To solve this difficulty of combining something that is both determined and free, Schelling takes on the complex task of describing nature as something that is not just mechanistic, but rather *living freely* in accordance to some created outline of possibilities. The world is basically an *unfolding* of an already rationally constituted event, but in the process of unfolding, nature is then living freely. It is a definition of nature as *actively struggling*, and not passively unfolding mechanically. We can say that Schelling wants to show how nature always reveals itself as becoming what it already had the potential to be—but also to demonstrate that nature has a peculiar spirituality, yet concealed within nature (Wolsing 2004, 150–151).

Schelling's philosophy, then, is a lecture on potentiality—that is, understanding nature in its primordial state as a divine foundational creation, yet unfolded. The whole world is already grounded as a creation of ungraspable possibility and potential (non-ratio). Thus, Schelling holds that being (or things) unfolds itself from the potentiality already constituted. That is, all beings are events that emerge from what Schelling calls *the ground* (or *real principle*). However, something can only be, or exist, when the *ground* interacts or collides with a second principle, which Schelling calls *understanding* (or *ideal principle*). Schelling wants to show that nature comes to life as a struggle between these two principles. Further, according to Schelling, God is a part of the *ground*, and by having its ground also in God, everything sets off from a divine potentiality always given in relation to God (*Freiheitsschrift* 27–28).²⁷ The world is not an instant creation of God, but rather a becoming of itself, in relation to God's superiority residing in the *ground* (*Freiheitsschrift* 28).

²⁷Here we also find the porosity of Schelling's philosophy. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to criticize Schelling's theoretical conditions, it might be helpful to point out that Schelling takes it as a premise that *being* is rooted in an absolute ground, sometimes signified as God. In *Freiheitsschrift* one finds no supportive arguments for this premise. See also the editor's notes in *Freiheitsschrift* (147–151), where the editor refers to Schelling's earlier work from 1801 *Presentation of My Philosophy* (Identity Philosophy), which might be the best supporting argument Schelling gives for *ground* and *existence* as the premise of being.

The above explanation of being is at first glance quite speculative and to some extent confusing.²⁸ Thus, it might be helpful to elaborate this further. The argument rests on distinguishing being as a creation by two poles (the real and the ideal principle). Being is therefore a *kind of being*; it is not the description of some essential *thing*—it is rather a description of some wholeness of having life. Thus, any living wholeness is a relation of having two parts in its relation. Schelling wants to emphasize that being is “what emerges from itself, and in emerging reveals itself” (Heidegger 1985, 107). We can say that being is then partly determined or limited via its potential, its ground, but freely outlived in existence, only possible in virtue of a second principle opposing the ground. The ground is somehow awakened via the second principle—and this awakening is what essentially reveals itself in being (Kosch 2006, 98). One should here focus on Schelling’s view of natural being as a struggle between two opposing forces (principles)—one seeking contraction (real) and the other seeking expansion (ideal)—where the collision itself is nature or being, that is, life is the dynamic struggle.²⁹

With this, Schelling indeed reveals a crucial existential observation that parallels the centrality of the much later tradition of existentialism. Nature, or being, is already from the beginning filled with a divine yearning to become what is given in potentiality—nature (or being) has the existential task of becoming itself: “the yearning the eternal One feels to give birth to itself. . . . The yearning wants to give birth to God” (*Freiheitsschrift* 28). Every entity in nature has in itself a divine will to know of itself and to become itself—that is, to freely become what is primordially given as potentiality. There is a general will of necessity, but there is also a particular authentic will of our own. Having freedom as its core, being is neither determined nor pre-destined in its existence, but not completely without any preceding essence (Heidegger 1985, 107).

Schelling’s natural philosophy is indeed a kind of anthropomorphism, with a positive meontological tuning.³⁰ That is, Schelling is drawing an

²⁸Even among scholars one finds confusion and lack of clarity regarding Schelling’s concepts of *being*, *ground*, *God*, *principles* and *existence*. For example, Heidegger (1985), McCarthy (1985), Wolsing (2004), and Kosch (2006) all give slightly different explanations of the connection between the aforementioned concepts. In addition to this, some scholars have commented on Schelling’s own confusion—especially when it comes to the concept of God (Kosch 2006, 98). However, most commentators conclude with similar interpretations—emphasizing that Schelling depicts being as a living wholeness with an inherent struggle between two contradicting principles.

²⁹Schelling often uses seemingly odd analogies such as *darkness* and *light* (i.e., ground and understanding). In darkness everything rests—only via light is *being* revealed—however, never actually revealing either darkness or light, but only the concrete being (*Freiheitsschrift* 30–31).

³⁰Meontology ($\mu\eta\ \sigma\sigma\tau\alpha\lambda\gamma\eta\tau\alpha$): Being is thought from the standpoint of *becoming*, which pushes Schelling to emphasize the viewpoint that a naturalistic meontology necessarily grounds ontology as such (Grant 2006, 171). Meontology here understood as the non-being (that-which-is-not-yet) that has no actuality or particularity, but is still given via its (platonic) possibility (McCarthy 1985, 95, 99) (cf. Plato *Sophist* 237a, 256d, 257d, 258a–d).

outline of nature as having non-particular (non-ratio) potential and possibility as its fundamental essence. In light of this meontological premise, it might be fair to claim that we must brace ourselves for modern scientific obstructions, if we want to investigate Schelling's philosophy—these concerns would certainly also have troubled Kierkegaard (Wolsing 2004, 151–152).³¹ We could deny the totality of Schelling's message, but he seems to have an eye for what later became a central issue for Kierkegaard and other modern existentialists (who did not advocate for any anthropomorphic world-view). What I find most central and important in Schelling's writing is that nature is contextualized: Emerging from, and having its own inescapable ground. For the human being in particular, this becomes a central existential question of being aware of one's own *contextualized* existence, finding oneself already charged with the tension that freedom brings—always in relation to some fundamental authoritative and restrictive call, when willing to become oneself. For both Schelling and Kierkegaard, this context or superiority of a specific (experienced) calling is rooted in the theistic-existential foundation of being responsible before God—God is the superiority who makes existence difficult by making one's life emerge from freedom; one can only be free, and experience freedom, when one experiences the contextualized and restrictive ground of life. Thus, the obvious similarity between *Freiheitsschrift* and early existentialism is to see the human condition as a relational struggle.³²

4 Juxtaposing Schelling and Kierkegaard

With Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* the question is not whether we have either freedom or determinism, but rather whether or not the human being is placed in a relation that calls for decisions. We are naturally struggling in between—that is, between potentiality of becoming or not, a relation to the two principles *ground* and *understanding*. Only as a *constant-becoming-of* is being actualized. The innate structure of the human being is dynamical; a willingness to become the being we have been given in mere potentiality. The awareness of this situation is the profound outcome of having spirit, which differentiates man from the rest of nature.³³ Human self-hood, Schelling holds, is “as such spirit; or man is spirit as a selfish (*selbstisch*),

³¹The anthropomorphism of Spinoza is a problem for Kierkegaard (PF 41n), but viewing being (*vaeren*) in possibility is a central approach in *Philosophical Fragments* (PF 73–76). Compare CA 59n. References to PF are to *Philosophical Fragments* (Kierkegaard 1985); references to CA are to *The Concept of Anxiety* (Kierkegaard 1980).

³²Needless to say, this theistic naturalism is not as radically focused on freedom, as the later development of existentialism, with the slogan *existence precedes essence* (Heidegger 1985, 107). However, we see the clear analogy from Schelling to early existential writings, most obviously with the theistic anchor-point of Kierkegaard's writings (e.g., *The Sickness unto Death*).

³³See *Freiheitsschrift* 32: “Because he emerges from the ground (is creaturely), man has in relation to God a relatively independent principle in himself; but because precisely this

particular being (separated from God)—precisely this connection constitutes personality” (*Freiheitsschrift* 33). Self-hood is then a description of something third that emerges from being aware of its relation—an understanding of one’s composition. Having spirit is a rise above the creaturely and underlying necessity—it is a detachment from the universal wills of nature, and freely holding sway of one’s own particularity, but always in inescapable connectedness with the divine underlying ground. The task of existence, then, is to seek the balance between the principles.

Freedom, then, involves a premise. We have to choose in accordance with some underlying rational ground for our existence. It is not, as rational idealism would claim, that we are without any external determination (complete autonomy)—that is, without any preceding criterion or context, say free from determining premises (*Freiheitsschrift* 48). For Schelling, human freedom is explained only in the context of deciding between possibilities and accepting necessities. Choice is defined only in a context of criterions; if everything were merely possible or necessary—then both criterion and choice would be without meaning. Hence, if there is no genuine choice, there is no freedom. Only when exposed to a situation where one has to choose do we experience freedom in the way Schelling describes it (*Freiheitsschrift* 50). We see here that Schelling has tried to overcome the absolute abstract freedom (rational idealism) with an incorporation of some underlying divine and naturalistic necessities. Values become something that relates to externality, and therefore not one’s autonomy. These ideas may already be very familiar to us via Kierkegaard, in particular with his writings *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), and *The Sickness unto Death* (1849).

In *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard deals with the concept of freedom in a classic and formal philosophical way that contains many possible allusions to Schelling’s early work, but without any explicit references (Olesen 2007, 261). Although commentators have noticed that it is more useful to link *Philosophical Fragments* with Schelling’s later philosophy (Brock 2003), some of the sections are indeed corresponding to Schelling’s message in *Freiheitsschrift*. For example when Kierkegaard writes:

All coming into existence occurs in freedom, not by way of necessity. Nothing coming into existence comes into existence by way of ground, but everything by way of a cause. Every cause ends in a freely acting cause. The intervening causes are misleading in that the coming into existence appears to be necessary; the truth about them

principle—without it ceasing for that reason to be dark in accordance with its ground—is transfigured in light; there arises in him something higher, spirit.”

is that they, as having themselves come into existence, *definitively* points back to a freely acting cause. (PF 75)³⁴

Despite the apparent similarity to Schelling in *Philosophical Fragments*, most commentators have found it much more appealing to focus on Kierkegaard's naturalistic and psychological works about the facets of freedom, which is indisputably Schelling's main interest in *Freiheitsschrift*.

In *The Sickness unto Death*, a work that represents some of Kierkegaard's more fully matured thoughts (and therefore also one of the most well known sides of Kierkegaard's philosophy), the introductory pages put the reader into an almost identical framework as Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*: "Spirit is the self . . . the self is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is the relating to itself" (SUD 13).³⁵ Recall here Schelling's idea of being as living wholeness: Being as having both *ground* and *understanding*. In the same way as Schelling, Kierkegaard holds that being is a relation, and further the human being (self-hood) is first of all a synthesis between body and mind—that is, between necessity and possibility. A being has spirit when its relation relates to itself—such a being is the human being (SUD 13, 35).

The same overall distinction appears in Kierkegaard's earlier work *The Concept of Anxiety*, where he says: "Man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is spirit" (CA 43). Kierkegaard would agree with Schelling here, that human self-hood is something undetermined and undecided, but still arrested in a relational context. Similar to Schelling's definition, Kierkegaard here characterizes the fundamental idea of self-hood as something already bound in freedom (bound for choice). Characterized as a relation that necessitates and upholds freedom—makes freedom inescapable; free-of-choice is an existential impossibility. Schelling emphasizes this when he says: "But precisely this inner necessity is itself freedom; the essence of man is fundamentally his own act; necessity and freedom are in one another as one being [Ein Wesen]" (*Freiheitsschrift* 50). Kierkegaard seems to dwell on the same idea in his work, when he says that "freedom means to be capable"—freedom has the necessity of capability (JP 2:1249).

It is also crucial to notice, that both Schelling and Kierkegaard give this situation a certain ethical connection: Schelling in his theodicy, and Kierkegaard in his existential (Christian) conscientiousness. Here they both turn to familiar existential terms, such as dizziness, yearning, and angst,³⁶ as a central psychological consequence of experiencing and having

³⁴See JP 5:5603 and Pap. IV C 101. Kierkegaard's perspective from this quotation is maybe related to Hegel's logic (PF 301–302). References to *Pap.* are to *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer* (Kierkegaard 1968–1978) and identify the volume number followed by the section number then the page number.

³⁵References to SUD are to *The Sickness unto Death* (Kierkegaard 1983).

³⁶Be aware of the unfortunate mistranslations in the English editions (Schelling 2006, 1936), where *Angst* is translated with "fear" (*Freiheitschrift* 47) and "terror" (Schelling 1936,

freedom (or freedom having being).³⁷ Self-hood is, because of freedom, a set-up of experiencing external responsibility, and this particular realization of responsibility makes man dizzy and anxious (*SUD* 14, 16; *CA* 61). Angst is a fear of the unknowable consequences of one's possible actions, as in the awareness of undetermined capability—angst reveals itself as a psychological proof of freedom.

The discomfort of angst can push man into resistance of his own freedom (and obligations), as when one dedicates oneself to a general will like “the irresistible song of the sirens” (*Freiheitsschrift* 47). We always have the possibility of escaping the very notion of one's innermost particularity, which basically is to be relational. This escape is a downfall, as the ability to fall into the construct of evil, Schelling says. Evil is defined as not taking responsibility to stand before one's own relation, or divine ground (*Freiheitsschrift* 47–48). It is a surrender to one of the two principles, letting go, to release oneself from the struggle of freedom, “to reverse the relation of the principles, to elevate the ground over the cause” (*Freiheitsschrift* 34). Evil is here precisely described as an imbalance between the principles, when people escape the foundation of being as freedom. This imbalance is metaphysical and non-autonomous in kind.

In *The Concept of Anxiety* Kierkegaard sides with Schelling's definition of actual existential experience (e.g. angst) as what reveals itself (psychologically) when we discover our freedom—when we discover the possibility of being capable and bound for choice, “anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility” (*CA* 42). In this sense “The possibility is to be able” (*CA* 49). In the experience of freedom, of the possibility, Kierkegaard sees anxiety as the inescapable by-product (or proof) of being relational: “How does spirit relate itself to itself and to its conditionality? It relates itself as anxiety” (*CA* 44). However, the message in *The Concept of Anxiety* is not about overcoming anxiety (the topic of *The Sickness unto Death*), but rather to show how anxiety manifests itself because of relational freedom (McCarthy 1985, 103). Thus, the centrality is not the imbalance between being and God, as in *Freiheitsschrift*.

This imbalance was for Schelling the essence of the moral decay, the very negation of one's innermost, naturally given connectedness. Pushed by the discomfort of anxiety into a detachment from responsibility, not accepting one's freedom is a negation of the human foundation as such. In the end,

59). The German edition reads “Die Angst des Lebens selbst treibt den Menschen aus dem Centrum, in das er erschaffen worden” (Schelling 1927, 273). This might explain why McCarthy overlooks this analogy, and instead emphasizes that Schelling “never used the term anxiety” (McCarthy 1985, 105).

³⁷However, Schelling only mentions the term angst in one single sentence in *Freiheitsschrift*, and as noticed by Olesen, Kierkegaard's awareness of the term angst seems to stem from elsewhere than the *Freiheitsschrift*, maybe one of Schelling's contemporaries, Karl Rosenkranz (Olesen 2007, 257–258).

and Kierkegaard agrees, it is a negation of one's ground—hence, a sinful negation of God (SUD 79).

Therefore, the ethical notion is, for Schelling and Kierkegaard, naturally related to a form of sin, due to the theistic ground of existence: Good and evil is an external relational value. Maybe Kierkegaard emphasizes more clearly that sin is ultimately a negation of oneself, but Schelling seems to be on the same page. For Schelling, the development of evil is connected to a “false imagination” of not being in front of the eternally loving God (*Freiheitsschrift* 54). Evil is exactly an escape into a self-negation, a negation of one's relationship to God: “Thus is the beginning of sin, that man transgresses from authentic Being into non-Being, from truth into lies, from the light into darkness, in order to become a self-creating ground and with the power of the centrum which he has within himself, to rule over all things” (*Freiheitsschrift* 55). The escape into non-being is a denunciation of the principles, a collapse of freedom and instead a “growth of restlessness and decay. The most fitting comparison here is offered by disease (*Krankheit*) which, as the disorder having arisen in nature through the misuse of freedom, is the true counterpart of evil and sin” (*Freiheitsschrift* 34).

The divine nature grounds the ethical relation; sin is seen as a contradictory existence—a sickness, disease, *Krankheit*—and it fills us with “fear and horror” (*Freiheitsschrift* 55). The awareness of having done evil is the awareness of having escaped into non-being, before one's ground, before God. It is human responsibility to select the good and neglect the evil—this particular actuality is the foundation of freedom: “Freedom is the capacity for good and evil” (*Freiheitsschrift* 23). As mentioned earlier, the good is here signified as the balance between the two principles.

In Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death* we find almost identical definitions of the ethical notion as something theologically signified. Sin is when one neglects one's own existential relation. Analogously to Schelling's emphasis on sin as experienced through psychological feelings of *fear and horror*, “Despair” Kierkegaard says, “is sin” (SUD 77). Despair emerges when one contradicts the fundamental relation to God. Thus, despair is exactly what will lead to evil: “Despair is the sickness unto death” (SUD 13, 17). Kierkegaard wants to tell us that death is the negation of one's relation leading to inauthentic self-hood. It is what anxiety can push us into—the dizziness of freedom can push us into the effortless solution of autonomous self-control and self-determination, escaping the responsibilities, our most actual ground given by God (SUD 79). Freedom is our responsibility, and it demands authentic self-hood (i.e. balance), facing the anxious premise—that is, the struggle of being responsible for one's own decisions, “wills to be itself in accordance with its misery” (SUD 73).

In *The Concept of Anxiety* Kierkegaard explicates the same analogy, but holds back the theistic solution:

Anxiety . . . is entangled freedom, where freedom is not free in itself but entangled, not by necessity, but in itself. If sin has come into the world by necessity, there can be no anxiety. Nor can there be any anxiety if sin came into the world by an act of an abstract *liberum arbitrium*.³⁸ (CA 49)

We see here how freedom is the ground of any moral responsibility and how this freedom reveals itself as anxiety of being in a relation, bound for inescapable decisions. Anxiety is linked to the responsibility of becoming oneself. That is, selfhood is always bound up in a struggle as being contextualized between necessities and possibilities. In other words, selfhood implies anxiety; selfhood implies a struggle between internal and external relations.

5 Closing Comments

The similarities between Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* and Kierkegaard's more explicit ethical and theistic works, in particular *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death*, reveal a concrete plausibility that Kierkegaard could have been inspired directly by the early work of Schelling. Kierkegaard refers to Schelling surprisingly few times—and he never explicitly quotes or mentions Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* in any of his writings ([Olesen 2007](#), 258, 264). Because of these factual conditions, we necessarily have to settle with a tentative and speculative conclusion on these matters.

The most pressing and obvious similarity is how they both form their philosophy as a systemized connection between three terms: God, morality, and freedom. For both thinkers, it is due to their definition of freedom that morality is viable as an issue, and this issue is theistic in kind. However, there is a slight difference between Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* and Kierkegaard's works. Schelling advocates a totalizing anthropomorphic romantic view on nature. The central point is that everything emerges as a struggle between metaphysical principles. It is a clear devotion to the idealistic ambition of creating an all-embracing system. Kierkegaard did not go as far in his writings. For him, an emphasis is placed on the psychological issues that arise in man's existence (i.e., actuality), and he thereby resists a complete metaphysical description. Further, the human relation (as spirit) is merely established or arrested by God—again leaving out any speculative anthropomorphism. God becomes a mere superiority that is abstractly experienced, and something that we can only approach through faith, if living authentically. It is a weaker metaphysical signification than Schelling's—but still an ontological standpoint. They both agree that morality is incorporated from an outside affection of the individual,

³⁸“*Liberum arbitrium*, freedom of indifference or the ability of the will to choose independently of antecedent factors” (CA 236n58).

and therefore also opposed to any absolute rationalism (or autonomy). Freedom is entangled; only because of God do we have true freedom. Thus, from this peculiar entanglement morality becomes real.

Schelling wanted to create a metaphysical structure (philosophy of nature), which had God incorporated in the ground. For Kierkegaard, this becomes an unnecessary speculative move. To him, it is enough that we appreciate the *reality* of feeling a psychological connection with the presence of God. This is a decisive difference between the two philosophers, but it also reveals that Kierkegaard might have wanted to acknowledge the idealism, namely, the metaphysical perspectives on being as having life as its wholeness; hence the human being having both life (understanding and ground) and spirit as its premise. If Kierkegaard was in fact inspired by Schelling's idealistic approach, then we might be willing to agree that his message is essentially an ontological outline. His psychological explication of angst and despair is indeed a creation due to a keen eye for experienced reality (or a realism), as it was for Schelling. Thus, we have now unlocked a query that suggests that Kierkegaard is closer to this form of idealism, which he is often interpreted as resisting. Namely, resisting the possibility of describing any *wholeness* of human existence, say a complete ontology.

In the end, both thinkers wish to establish the human being as a contextualized being, and this particular contextualization, they agree, emerges between rationalism and determinism—it is hard to see how Kierkegaard can avoid calling this a *higher idealism*. We should properly realize that this is the apparent and most interesting analogy we can draw from Schelling's early work to Kierkegaard's existentialistic authorship. The idea of integrating human existence into an idealistic (systemized) framework is what makes Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* (or early philosophy of nature) special and groundbreaking—and in practicing this peculiar idealism, Schelling ended up creating a work that shared many elements with the later writings of Kierkegaard and the early development of existentialism.

When juxtaposing and edifying Kierkegaard's relation to a German idealist and metaphysician, we discover an interpretative angle to Kierkegaard's writings, which has not yet been fully recognized in the secondary literature. Depicting Kierkegaard in this idealistic context will necessarily repudiate Kierkegaard's own interpretation of his work as essentially being theological dogmatic writings (*PV* 6),³⁹ and a resistance of any system (*CUP* 107). Schelling tries to reconcile theism with a philosophy of nature, but in doing this, he emphasize that only nature exists (ontology), opposite to the *ground* of non-being (meontology—μή οντολογία), where the theism resides. It is these aspects of Schelling's philosophy that Kierkegaard seems to acknowledge. That is, Kierkegaard's philosophy seems to partake in the same idealistic ontology. I hope the reader will agree that these philosophical premises necessarily make it difficult to interpret Kierkegaard primarily

³⁹References to *PV* are to *The Point of View* (Kierkegaard 1998).

as a theological thinker, since his priority is placed on *what-is*, namely, the ontology of human nature.

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