

Tragedy, History, and the Form of Philosophy in *Either/Or*

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Kierkegaard's essay "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama," makes two basic claims of far-reaching consequences for the theory of the tragedy and for philosophy more generally. The first is the claim that the essence of tragedy in all its historical manifestations consists in the representation of an irreducible contradiction between two qualitatively distinct principles: substantial determinants and individual agency. The second is Kierkegaard's contention that, within this essence, the difference between the genre's ancient and its modern forms rests on the different relations to that contradiction, on whether it is accepted as an objective fact or as a reflexive possibility. In the present article I elucidate Kierkegaard's argument in terms of these two claims and point to some of their larger implications. With respect to the first, I show that it introduces a significant challenge to the conception of historical time on which our category of modernity depends. As concerns the second, I argue that it constitutes an engagement with what Kant calls as the modality of judgments (whether an object is possible, actual, or necessary), which Kierkegaard here attacks in the version given to it by the young F.W.J. Schelling. Kierkegaard's rejection of Schelling's argument on this point goes to the heart of the idealist project and ultimately questions what the form of philosophy should be.

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Kierkegaard's essay on the tragic in the first volume of *Either/Or*, "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama," is possibly among the most frequently discussed and misunderstood of his works. The misunderstandings largely derive from the tendency in the scholarly literature to view the text in light of Hegel's more famous theory of tragedy, something likely due to the fact that Kierkegaard, too, draws on Sophocles' *Antigone* for his analysis. This approach, however, has obscured the originality of Kierkegaard's contribution, which centers on two basic claims of far-reaching consequences for the theory of the genre and for philosophy more generally. The first is the claim that the essence of tragedy in all its historical manifestations

consists in the representation of an irreducible contradiction between two qualitatively distinct principles: substantial determinants and individual agency. The second is Kierkegaard's contention that, within this essence, the difference between the genre's ancient and its modern forms rests on the different relations to that contradiction, on whether it is accepted as an objective fact or as a reflexive possibility. In the present article I will elucidate Kierkegaard's argument in terms of these two claims and point to some of their larger implications. With respect to the first, I show that it introduces a significant challenge to the conception of historical time on which our category of modernity depends. As concerns the second, I argue that it constitutes an engagement with what Kant calls as the modality of judgments (whether an object is possible, actual, or necessary), which Kierkegaard here attacks in the version given to it by the young F.W.J. Schelling. Kierkegaard's rejection of Schelling's argument on this point goes to the heart of the idealist project and ultimately questions what the form of philosophy should be.

I. Essence

As is indicated by the title of his essay, "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama," Kierkegaard's explicit project in this text is to examine the relation between ancient and modern tragedy, and to show, as he puts it, "how the characteristic feature of the tragic in ancient drama is incorporated in the tragic in modern drama" ("hvorledes det for det antike Tragiske Eiendommelige lader sig optage indenfor det moderne Tragiske"; *Either/Or I* 140 / *Enten-Eller I* 140).¹ The essay, which is addressed by a pseudonymous author "A" to a society of like-minded companions referred to as the "Symparanekromenoi" (the fellowship of buried lives or living dead; 137 / 137), is divided into two almost perfectly equal halves, separated only by a long exhortation to the audience. The first half of the essay provides a theoretical analysis of tragedy in its ancient and modern forms, while the second offers a retelling of the story of Antigone as an example of what modern tragedy should look like. In both halves, the analysis is centered on three categories—action, guilt, and mood—the order of which is merely inverted in the second half.

Kierkegaard begins his discussion in the essay's first half by arguing that the action in ancient tragedy is determined not only by the individual character's agency but

also by the “substantial determinants” in which he or she rests: “in the state, the family, in fate” (“i Stat, Familie, i Skjæbne”; 143 / 143). What this means is that the plot of ancient tragedy is not merely a product of an individual’s autonomous decisions, but also of the conditions imposed upon that individual by forces that exceed it, and over which it has no control. As Kierkegaard puts it, the action of ancient tragedy is not just “action” but “event,” where the Danish word for “event,” “*Begivenhed*,” makes clear that it is something *given* to the character rather than produced by it (ibid.; my italics). The hero of tragedy is thus caught between events of which he or she is the direct source (those actions that we will), and events that are imposed from outside, as historical, social, or metaphysical restrictions on what we can do. No amount of willing, for example, can change the fundamental limitations based on us by our biology (such as our finitude), or by the fact that we are born into one family rather than another (for example, the guilt our ancestors incurred and for which we are made to pay). The events of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* can be taken as paradigmatic in this respect, since they can be read as the outcome both of the hero’s individual decisions and of the fate that predetermined them.

In contrast to this, Kierkegaard argues, substantial determinants have disappeared in modern tragedy, since the conception of individuality in modernity stipulates that each person is fully autonomous and free. In modern tragedy, that is, “What concerns us is a certain specific element of [the hero’s] life *as his own deed*” (“Det, der beskæftiger os, er et vist bestemt Moment af hans Liv som hans egen Gjerning”; ibid., my italics), which is to say that it is possible to fully explain the motivation for occurrences merely by reference to the hero’s particular character (144 / 143). From a modern perspective, not only are there no limits to what we can will but everything that happens, does so only because a specific individual has caused it, leaving any supra-individual agent out of the equation.

This distinction between ancient and modern tragedy repeats itself in Kierkegaard’s discussion of the guilt operative in each. In ancient tragedy, Kierkegaard explains, guilt vacillates between the individual and the substantial determinants: the responsibility for the tragic events we witness can be ascribed *both* to the hero *and* to the forces of state, family or fate over which he or she can exercise no control (144 /

143-4). (Oedipus, again, is a clear instance.) In modern tragedy, on the contrary, the absence of substantial determinants means that the individual is fully responsible for the misfortunes that occur (*ibid.*). Unlike the ancients, when we moderns want to determine the guilt of a transgression we do not take into consideration anything except the individual itself, and any reference to attenuating circumstances of family, state or fate leave us completely cold. As Kierkegaard puts it: “if a criminal before the judge wants to excuse himself by saying that his mother had a propensity for stealing, especially during the time she was pregnant with him, the judge obtains the health officer’s opinion of his mental condition and decides that he is dealing with a thief and not with the thief’s mother” (“Naar derfor en Forbryder vil undskylde sig for Dommeren med, at hans Moder have Hang til at stjæle og især i den Tid, da hun gik frugtsommelig med ham, saa indhenter Dommeren Sundheds-Collegiets Betænkning om hans mentale Tilstand og mener, at han har med Tyven at gjøre og ikke med Tyvens Moder”; 145-6 / 145).

The final category of mood replicates this pattern. Corresponding to the two principles of individual and substantial determinants, the central emotions of tragedy identified by Kierkegaard are sorrow and pain. The former is the effect of the individual’s guiltlessness, his or her subjection to substantial determinants, while pain is the response to an individual’s guilt. True tragic sorrow, Kierkegaard points out, accordingly always contains an element of pain, since the individual’s innocence is always accompanied by responsibility for what happens. Inversely, true tragic pain must contain an element of sorrow, since in tragedy proper all individual agency is counteracted by its subordination to forces it cannot control (151 / 150). Given the constitution of its action and guilt, however, modern tragedy departs from this balance and instead tends exclusively towards pain. Ancient tragedy, on the other hand, retains both emotions, although sorrow is predominant (147-8 / 147-8).

A number of important points can be derived from Kierkegaard’s discussion so far. First, it should be emphasized that, to Kierkegaard, the primacy of the principle of individuality in modern tragedy is “misguided” (“misforstaaede”) and a “misunderstanding” (“Misforstaaelse”; 144 / 144), since it constitutes a move away from tragedy proper. In modern tragedy, as he writes:

We want to know nothing about the hero's past; we load his whole life upon his shoulders as his own deed, make him accountable for everything, but in so doing we also transform his esthetic guilt into ethical guilt. In this way, the tragic hero becomes bad, evil actually becomes the tragic subject, but evil has no esthetic interest, and sin is not an esthetic element. (144)

Man vil ikke vide Noget af Heltens Fortid at sige, man vælter hele hans Liv paa hans Skuldre som hans egen Gjerning, gjør ham tilregnelig for Alt, men derved forvandler man ogsaa hans æsthetiske Skyld til en ethisk. Den tragiske Helt bliver saaledes slet, det Onde bliver egentlig den tragiske Gjenstand, men det Onde har ingen æsthetisk Interesse og Synd er ikke et æsthetisk Element. (144)

The problem, for Kierkegaard, is that in making the individual fully responsible for his or her actions, modernity loses the "ambiguous guiltlessness" ("tvetydige Uskyldighed"; *ibid.*) and "esthetic ambiguity" ("æsthetiske Tvetydighed"; 148 / 147) that is the essence of tragedy and which is the result of the fact that we cannot determine whether actions, guilt, and sorrow are governed by substantial determinants or by individual agency. Instead, modern drama moves towards the comic and the ethical, which ultimately lead to despair by placing all responsibility on the individual and demanding a self-sufficiency that we cannot actually provide. As Kierkegaard puts it:

One would think that the generation in which I have the honor of living must be a kingdom of gods. But this is by no means so: the vigor, the courage, that wants to be the creator of its own good fortune in this way, indeed, its own creator, is an illusion, and when the age loses the tragic, it gains despair. In the tragic there is implicit a sadness and a healing that one indeed must not disdain, and when someone wishes to gain himself in the superhuman way our age tries to do it, he loses himself and becomes comic. Every individual, however original he is, is still a child of God, of his age, of his nation, of his family, of his friends, and only in them does he have his truth. If he wants to be the absolute in all this, his relativity, then he becomes ludicrous. (145)

Man skulde nu troe, at det maatte være et Kongerige af Guder, den Slægt, hvori ogsaa jeg har den Ære at leve. Imidlertid er det ingeniunde saa, den

Krafftfuldhed, det Mod, der saaledes vil være sin egen Lykkes Skaber, ja sin egen Skaber, er en Illusion, og idet Tiden taber det Tragiske, vinder den Fortvivlelsen. Der ligger en Veemod og en Lægedom i det Tragiske, som man i Sandhed ikke skal forsmaa, og idet man paa den overnaturlige Maade, som vor Tid forsøger det, vil vinde sig selv, taber man sig selv, og man bliver comisk. Ethvert Individ, hvor oprindeligt det er, er dog Guds, sin Tids, sit Folks, sin Families, sine Venners Barn, først heri har det sin Sandhed, vil det i hele denne sin Relativitet være det Absolute, saa bliver det latterligt. (144)

The project of modern tragedy, as that of modernity more generally, is doomed to failure since it contradicts the truth of our condition, according to which we are always subject to substantial determinants of some kind. By imputing all events to the specific agent, the dream of god-like autonomy not only introduces evil and despair, but also becomes comic when it turns out that this in fact cannot be done.

The only alternatives to the despair generated by the ethical are the tragic and the religious, which here reveal themselves as structural analogues. In both cases, the individual's responsibility is attenuated by placing it in the context of conditions that he or she cannot control: the substantial determinants of ancient tragedy and the religious notion of original sin (146 / 145). The ambiguous guiltlessness and aesthetic ambiguity of ancient tragedy protects us from despair by placing part of the responsibility for our crimes in circumstances that exceed us, in the same way that the notion of original sin in the religious forgives us for our faults by acknowledging that we could not have prevented them no matter how much we try. The difference between the tragic and the religious is simply that the former is operative only *prior* to the emergence of the ethical, that is, *before* we conceive of the individual as a fully autonomous and responsible agent, whereas the consolation of the religious steps in only *after* such a determination of the subject has occurred. In the tragic we remain uncertain of the individual's guilt because the notion of individuality as solely responsible is not yet fully operative, whereas the notion of original sin maintains our relative innocence even after that concept of the individual has been asserted. As Kierkegaard sums up: "And what, after all, is human life, the human race, when these two things are taken away? Either the

sadness of the tragic or the profound sorrow and profound joy of religion” (“Og hvad er dog, naar man tager disse to Ting bort, Menneskelivet, hvad er Menneskeslægten? Enten det Tragiskes Veemod, eller Religionens dybe Sorg og dybe Glæde”; 146 / 146). Without them, we only have comic despair.

The second point to note about Kierkegaard’s discussion so far is that this conception of the essence of tragedy runs counter to the standard view of the genre during the period.² What Kierkegaard joins into a single dialectical relation is in fact traditionally kept strictly separate, as the features of sharply distinct historical periods: the drama of the ancient Greeks, in which only abstract social, moral or religious principles are at work, and the drama of the moderns, where the conflict is between particular individuals, in all their contingent specificity. To name only some of the more famous examples in this line of thought, the distinction occurs already in Herder’s 1773 essay on Shakespeare, where he argues that “the drama of Sophocles and Shakespeare . . . are two things that in a certain sense barely have their name in common” (“Sophokles Drama und Shakespeares Drama . . . zwei Dinge [sind], die im gewissen Betracht kaum den Namen gemein haben”; 105³) because they derive from fundamentally distinct cultures, the Nordic and the Greek. The point is developed a year later by Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, who distinguishes between the Greek (and French) drama concerned with fate and the ideal and the English (Nordic) drama of characters and actuality (650, 653). In 1795, Friedrich Schlegel radicalizes the same opposition still further in his seminal essay “Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie.” Modern literature, we read there, is “anarchic” (219), subject to “chance” rather than principles and rules (221), and seeks to represent only the particular, characteristic and interesting (228). The culmination of these features is found in the moderns’ predilection for “philosophical tragedy,” which stands in direct opposition to the “aesthetic tragedy” of the ancient Greeks that, like all classical art, aims at beauty, universality and objectivity (246; cf. 277, 283, 396). The same characterization recurs in the influential *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* by Friedrich’s brother August Wilhelm Schlegel, first published in 1809-1811. As the older Schlegel explains there, Greek art proceeds “with scientific rigor from the most universal concept . . . so that the individual was by far the last thing to which it declined” (“mit gleichsam wissenschaftlicher Strenge von dem

allgemeinsten Begriffe . . . so daß das Individuelle durchaus das letzte war, wozu sie herabsank"); whereas we moderns do it "exactly the other way around" ("gerade umgekehrt"; 1: 54). Greek tragedy represents the "idea," "fate," or "myth," and lacks the immediacy and color of everyday life (1: 61, 62, 66), while the moderns provide the experience of reality, although as chaos rather than *nomos*, fragments and particulars that cannot be exhausted by conceptual determination (2: 111-2, 130). The tradition reaches its apex with Goethe, who in his 1813 essay "Shakespeare und kein Ende!" returns to this division. Greek art, Goethe concurs, is governed by necessity, "sollen," while the moderns instead operate with freedom and willing ("wollen"; 291). The world of ancient tragedy thus belongs to "reason," "Vernunft," "like the law of morals and government, or that of nature, like the laws of becoming, growth, and passing way, of life and death" ("wie das Sitten- und Stadtgesetz, oder der Natur, wie die Gesetze des Werdens, Wachsens und Vergehens, des Lebens und Todes"). But the world of modern drama is free and "favors the individual" ("begünstigt den Einzelnen"; *ibid.*) rather than universal laws. Most famously, perhaps, the same view stands at the heart of Hegel's influential discussion of the genre in his *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*, where, again, the heroes of antiquity are said to embody substantive principles of state, morality or religion, and therefore act with absolute necessity, while those of modernity are caught in subjectivity and chance (536).

The pervasiveness of this distinction between ancient and modern tragedy is not merely a consequence of theoretical pedantry. Quite to the contrary, its importance derives from the fact that the *Goethezeit* itself inherits it from the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* that dominated the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—in Germany all the way up to the polemics between Johann Christoph Gottsched and Jakob Bodmer.⁴ The solution to the *Querelle*, it is usually acknowledged, came with the general acceptance of the view that the whole project of determining the relative superiority of the ancients or the moderns was based on the mistaken assumption that different historical periods can be evaluated according to the same standard of measurement or set of rules. Instead, as became increasingly clear towards the close of the seventeenth century, different cultures and periods operate according to distinct rules and criteria and therefore must be judged on their own terms.

As scholars such as Hans Robert Jauss and Reinhart Koselleck have long argued, it is this perception of the qualitative difference of historical periods that gives birth to our notion of modernity, which means that the division of the genre of tragedy into two distinct varieties, each with their own structural properties, in fact articulates one of the most basic binaries of our period.⁵ On the same account, however, by insisting that tragedy should not be understood as governed *either* by substantial principles *or* by individual agency, but rather by the dialectical relation of the two, Kierkegaard is not merely departing from the standard view of the genre during the *Goethezeit* but also putting into play the foundations for our notion of history itself.⁶

Finally, the argument so far also makes it possible to revise two of the most persistent views about his essay in the scholarly literature. The first is the claim that Kierkegaard follows Hegel in equating the tragedy of the ancients simply with substantial principles. In his influential book *Antigones*, for example, George Steiner describes Kierkegaard's argument as a distinction between, on the one hand, tragedy that is fully "action-centered" (the ancients), and, on the other, tragedy that is fully "psychological" (the moderns). As Steiner explains: "All this, of course, is pure Hegel" (55).⁷ In an earlier contribution, Walter Rehm similarly points to Hegel's *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik* as the most important source for Kierkegaard's discussion and also equates his notion of ancient tragedy with pure substantiality, in opposition to the reflection of the moderns (279, 284-5, 290). Jon Stewart, in his important study *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, is more emphatic still, stating that "Kierkegaard took to heart Hegel's analysis of the distinction between ancient and modern tragedy and applied Hegel's characterization of the modern notion of tragedy to the story of Antigone" (218). Isak Winkel Holm likewise claims that ancient tragedy for Kierkegaard is centered on the conflict between the substantive principles of family and state, which he also points out, is merely a repetition of Hegel's famous interpretation (154).⁸ Insofar as Kierkegaard holds that the essence of tragedy consists in the simultaneity of both substantial determinants and individual agency, it is clear that these assertions must be mistaken. Rather than a repetition of Hegel's view, Kierkegaard dramatically breaks with it by joining into one what Hegel keeps separate as attributes of distinct historical moments.

The second scholarly view in need of revision in fact recognizes Kierkegaard's insistence on a duality of principles in tragedy but not its importance. Clyde Holler, for example, in his contribution to the *International Kierkegaard Commentary to Either/Or*, initially notes the duality at work in Kierkegaard's conception of ancient tragedy. But, somewhat oddly, he attributes the same structure to Hegel before it disappears from his discussion (131-2). Also Daniel Greenspan, in his book *The Passion of Infinity*, at one point identifies the indeterminacy that Kierkegaard discusses in his notion of the tragic in antiquity (144-6), but then asserts that Kierkegaard did not believe the ancients in fact had tragedy in a proper sense, which Greenspan instead takes him to think will only find its true actualization in Christianity (149-50). A similar position is held by Karsten Friis Johansen, who likewise momentarily points out the duality of substantial determinants and individual agency in Kierkegaard's conception of the Greeks (116-7) but, like Greenspan, asserts that this means the ancient's did not have tragedy after all and that it has not yet been found (118-9). As I have shown, however, according to Kierkegaard, the simultaneity of opposed principles is neither irrelevant nor a mistake or deficiency of ancient tragedy but rather the proof of its adherence to the essence of the genre.⁹

II. Difference

The fact that, on Kierkegaard's view, modern tragedy as we have it betrays the essence of the genre by reducing it to just one of its constitutive terms (that of individual freedom), should not be taken to mean that Kierkegaard believes that tragedy is dead. Quite to the contrary, the second part of the essay provides a prescriptive account in which Kierkegaard specifies what modern tragedy should look like. Central to this part of the argument is Kierkegaard's assertion that what must distinguish ancient from modern tragedy is not, as the standard view assumes, the contradiction present within each—the ambiguous relation between substantial determinants and individual agency that constitutes the essence of the tragic in all its manifestations—but rather the relationship *to* that contradiction.

As mentioned earlier, Kierkegaard claims with respect to ancient tragedy that its mood is a combination of sorrow and pain, although with a predominance of the former. The reason for this predominance is not that there is more substantial determination to the plot than there is individual agency, but rather that the events of ancient tragedy are

related to in objective terms, as given and unchangeable facts, rather than subjectively, through reflection. As Kierkegaard puts it, in ancient tragedy “A moment of [individual] guilt always remains, but this moment is not actually reflected subjectively; this is why the sorrow in Greek tragedy is so profound” (“Et Moment af Skyld bliver der altid tilbage, men dette Moment er egentlig ikke subjectiv reflekteret; derfor er Sorgen i den græske Tragedie saa dyb”). And again, shortly thereafter: “Thus the moment of [individual] guilt that remains [in ancient tragedy] is not subjectively reflected, and this makes the sorrow profound” (“Det Moment altsaa af Skyld, der bliver tilbage, er ikke subjectivt reflekteret, og dette gjør Sorgen dyb”; 149-50, trans. modified / 149). According to Kierkegaard, the transition from one way of relating to tragic contradiction to the other is marked (albeit still imperfectly) in Sophocles’ tragedy *Philoctetes*, where reflection is introduced for the first time in the form of the hero’s doubt and question: “Why is this happening to me; can it not be otherwise?” (“hvorfør vederfares dette mig, kan det ikke være anderledes”; 151 / 150). Here the ambiguous relation between individual guilt and substantial determinants is no longer merely accepted as a fact, but rather questioned, taken as something that the hero seeks to determine precisely, even if that effort must inevitably fail given that we cannot clearly distinguish the respective contributions of each principle. Where for the ancients proper the simultaneity of freedom and objective coercion is a brute fact of life, the moderns seek (or should seek) to unearth the conditions that can account for its possibility.

The stakes of this difference between ancients and moderns can best be elucidated through the third kind of relation to tragic contradiction that Kierkegaard invokes, namely that of the religious. In a crucial passage of his essay, Kierkegaard writes:

The real reason people have always had scruples about calling the life of Christ a tragedy is that they felt that esthetic categories do not exhaust the matter. That the life of Christ is something more than can be exhausted in esthetic categories is apparent also in another way – namely, that these neutralize themselves in this phenomenon and are rendered inconsequential. Tragic action always contains an element of suffering, and tragic suffering an element of action; the esthetic lies in their relativity. The identity of an

absolute action and an absolute suffering is beyond the powers of the esthetic and belongs to the metaphysical. In the life of Christ there is this identity, for his suffering is absolute, since it is absolutely free action, and his action is absolute suffering, since it is absolute obedience. (150)

Det er egentlig Grunden til, at man altid har undseet sig for at kalde Christi Liv en Tragedie, fordi man følte, at æsthetiske Bestemmelser ikke udtømme Sagen. Ogsaa paa en anden Maade viser det sig, at Christi Liv er Mere, end hvad der lader sig udtømme i æsthetiske Bestemmelser; derved, at disse neutralisere sig paa dette Phænomen og stilles i Indifferens. Den tragiske Handling har altid et Moment af Liden i sig, og den tragiske Liden et Moment af Handling, det Æsthetiske ligger i Relativiteten. Identiteten af en absolut Handlen og en absolut Liden er over det Æsthetiskes Kræfter og tilhører det Metaphysiske. I Christi Liv er denne Identitet, thi hans Liden er absolut, da den er absolut fri Handlen, og hans Handlen er absolut Liden, da den er absolut Lydighed. (149)

Christ does not to qualify as tragic even though his condition involves a contradiction between passivity and agency, between a suffering that he cannot control and has not chosen and being an agent of salvation through his own will (cf. also 142-3 /142). The reasons Kierkegaard gives for why Christ is not tragic in spite of this—or, strictly speaking, why he is “more” than tragic—are twofold. On the one hand, the notion of an identity of opposites runs counter to the ambiguity within the aesthetic. On the other, the claim that the principles thus joined are absolute contradicts the relativity of individual agency and passivity that Kierkegaard associates with tragedy. In the above passage, these claims appear to mean quite simply that, to Kierkegaard, the nature of either of the principles at stake in tragedy cannot be determined unequivocally (absolutely) because in tragedy either one always contains an element of its opposite. This links up with the argument traced earlier, namely that the aesthetic in Kierkegaard’s essay is understood to precede the conception of the individual as fully autonomous, while the religious follows it. And in more general terms, the point resonates with Kant’s claim in the second moment of the “Analytik des Schönen,” in the *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, that aesthetic judgments do not determine their object (211-9). If this is so, then aesthetics

cannot operate with concepts that are fully specified, since that would constitute a determinate cognition, the way that Christ's innocence must be absolutely certain and not leave anything ambiguous or up to further specification.

But the issues involved in this passage in fact run much deeper, even though the translation tends to obscure this point. In the Danish original, Kierkegaard's term for "inconsequential" is "Indifferens," which together with terms like "identity" and "absolute" make it clear that he is alluding to the philosophy of the young Friedrich Schelling, for whom these are central concepts.¹⁰ In rejecting the claim that Christ is tragic, Kierkegaard is accordingly not only making a claim about the representational nature of art, but also rejecting the more fundamental claim that art provides us with access to the metaphysical ground of all experience, as Schelling argues most influentially in his *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, from 1800. It is not, significantly, that Kierkegaard here denies in itself the possibility of such a metaphysical ground in which all opposites are reconciled, but only the claim that it is available to us in any way other than that of the religious.¹¹ Indeed, lined up with the two other, aesthetic forms of relating to the contradiction of objective necessity and individual freedom that the essay offers us, it is clear that the religious is constitutive since it provides a complement that turns all three into a sequence. For the moderns, the clash between individual agency and supra-individual necessity is indeterminate and merely *possible*; for the ancients, its occurrence is a fact, which makes it *actual*; and in the religious it is *necessary* since the opposing terms are recognized to be identical.

To understand the importance of the presence of the possible, actual, and necessary in Kierkegaard's distinction between different kinds of relation to the tragic it is necessary to note that they invoke not only Schelling but also the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, where Kant lists these three categories under the title of modality (A80 / B106¹²). A full examination of Kierkegaard's argument must therefore go back to that context. For the purposes here, it is sufficient simply to recall that the categories of modality to Kant differ from all other categories in that they do not contribute anything to the content of a judgment. Instead, the determination of an object's modal status depends on the relation that it has to each of our cognitive faculties: understanding (which determines possibility), judgment (which is responsible for asserting actuality),

and reason (which places the particular cognition in relation to a whole that makes it necessary).¹³

In his *Vom Ich als Princip der Philosophie*, from 1795, Schelling, for his part, draws on Kant to describe the relation of the modal categories in terms of a dialectic of temporal determinations (117-9; cf. Kant, *Kritik der reinen A144-5 / B184*). Possibility is the thesis in the process, which consists in the assertion of an object's agreement with the conditions of time as such, "Zeit überhaupt." Here we identify only the conditions under which anything at all can become an object of time, which means the characteristics shared by all temporal determinations. Actuality provides the antithesis to this condition insofar as it consists in the assertion of individual moments, a "bestimmte Zeit," in terms of the unique specifications that define each moment's difference from all others. Necessity, finally, is the synthesis of the first two categories, the determination of an object in relation to all time, "alle Zeit." This final category consists in the expression of the *content* of actuality in the *form* of possibility, which here include the characteristics of universality and unity. What we find in necessity, accordingly, is the sum of all particular moments organized in a system of universal laws, which means that the judgment that any one moment is necessary consists in the assertion of its participation in, or contribution to, such a totality.

Since we never have all moments of experience available to us, there are only two kinds of objects that for Schelling exhibit the category of necessity in this way: organisms of nature and works of art, both of which have the same structure. What we do when we judge that we are dealing with an organism is place a present moment (a "bestimmte Zeit") in relation to the idea of *all* the moments ("alle Zeit") that constitute the organism as a whole. In such situations we present the non-I confronting us (the distinct, particular moment inexplicable on its own) in terms of the conditions of the I (the rational criteria of identity and universality proper to possibility) by determining it as a part that derives its meaning from the harmonious whole to which it contributes (the synthesis of necessity).

The crucial difference between Kant and Schelling, of course, is that the former takes the necessity of organic structures to be only a regulative principle, a consequence merely of the structures of our cognition, which does not guarantee in any

way that such ideas of reason in fact are real. To Schelling, in contrast, the organic structures that we find in nature and art give expression within the realm of temporality to the identity of the absolute that underlies it. That is, in Schelling's view, there must be an absolute identity between freedom and necessity that precedes and makes possible finite experience,¹⁴ and what judgments of necessity do is simply recreate that metaphysical ground within the empirical world. As he puts it at one point: "Organisms in general are therefore nothing but the reduced and so to speak contracted image of the universe" ("Die Organisation im allgemeinen ist also nichts anderes als das verkleinerte und gleichsam zusammengezogenen Bild des Universums"; *System* 161).¹⁵

Why does Kierkegaard reject this view? The answer seems to lie with the different notion of freedom that Kierkegaard draws on in his deployment of the modal categories. In Schelling, freedom and possibility consist in rational self-determination, so that knowledge resides in the imposition of the principles of the agent's reason on the irrational world of the non-I. The possibility of a synthesis between them derives from the assertion that the irrational opposing us ultimately is governed by the same rational structure as ourselves, which is what the I gradually uncovers through the process of *streben* that conquers that which opposes reason in the realms of thought or action. In Kierkegaard's account of tragedy, however, it is possible to say that this relation has been radicalized and inverted by making the notion of the irrational fully independent and giving it epistemic priority. Precisely because Kierkegaard is combining the characteristics of ancient and modern tragedy, the notion of individual freedom that he deploys is the one proper to the latter, which is defined in terms of chance and particularity inherently at odds with necessity and universality. Rather than tying individual freedom to reason and moral self-determination, that is, the agent in Kierkegaard is free to choose evil *as well as* good, and therefore is no longer bound by normative constraints but rather to a principle applicable only to him- or herself.¹⁶ Indeed, in "The Tragic in Ancient Drama," it seems that individual agency is always agency against the objective moral order, since in the modern world where the individual reigns supreme the hero is always presented as being evil. This also means that objectivity and universality cannot be attributes of subjectivity, which is why Kierkegaard instead ascribes these to supra-individual categories to which the subject is

ultimately irreducible (the categories of family, fate, the state), and which now oppose us as something other.

In Schelling it is the guarantee that reason underlies particularity, or that particularity can be expressed in rational terms, which secures the ultimate reconciliation of opposites. But in Kierkegaard individuality has become fully severed from rational constraints so that there is no inherent relation between the two. From within human experience, accordingly, there cannot be any transition from one pole of the contradiction to the other, since the two are now wholly at odds. That is, the relation between the conditions of experience as we know them—in which contradiction must be real—and the absolute—in which contradiction does not exist—is no longer merely quantitative or relative, as it is for the young Schelling, but rather absolute and qualitative, a gap that can never be overcome by merely human means. As Kierkegaard puts it in his later *The Sickness unto Death*: “As sinner, man is separated from God by the most chasmal qualitative abyss” (“Som Synder er Mennesket adskilt fra Gud ved Qualitetens meest svælgende Dyb”; *Sickness* 122 / *Sygdommen* 233).

This re-conception of the tragic conflict in Kierkegaard as one between qualitatively rather than quantitatively distinct terms serves to explain why he rejects the idea of a non-religious access to their reconciliation in the category of necessity: we simply do not have a modality of knowledge able to show how objective necessity and individual freedom are compatible. But it also makes it possible to determine more precisely the difference between the two modes of relation to that contradiction that *do* fall within the realm of human experience, namely that between ancient and modern tragedy. As established above, Kierkegaard’s claim is that the ancients relate to the contradiction between freedom and necessity in the modality of actuality, while the moderns do so in that of possibility. On the basis of the preceding discussion, this claim has to be understood specifically in the sense that the ancients relate the contradiction to the faculty or principles that constitute objectivity, so that they determine the relation in terms of those attributes of universality and identity shared by the conflicting terms. Individual freedom in a tragic situation viewed by the ancients would in that case be assessed in terms of that which allows it to participate in an order of events common to more than one subject (although the fact *that* individual freedom agrees with such an

objective order in a given instance would itself remain contingent). The moderns, in turn, must be taken to view the same contradiction in the opposite direction, in terms of the qualities of individual freedom and difference held in common by the conflicting sides. In the modern relation to tragedy, that is, the objective constraints in a tragic situation are viewed in relation to those of its attributes or principles that make it partake of the condition of freedom, which is to say that what modern tragedy does is assert the non-objective dimension of objectivity. Or, more strictly, in ancient tragedy the relation between freedom and necessity in a given situation is assessed in terms of the criteria that account for the fact that the situation could be what it is, while in modern tragedy it is assessed in terms of the criteria that account for the fact that the situation in which they meet could have been different.

In Kant and Schelling, then, possibility is agreement with the conditions common to all actual experience (the categories). But in Kierkegaard freedom and subjectivity are not tied to rationality, and possibility is therefore instead linked to the condition of change and differentiation. Put differently, where possibility in Kant and Schelling is possibility of objectivity and identity, in Kierkegaard it is possibility of subjectivity and change. To relate to the relation between freedom and substantial determinants in a tragic situation in terms of its possibility, as occurs in modern tragedy, is accordingly not to identify its conditions of objectivity, but rather the conditions of difference it might contain. This is a perception of the given close to what Kierkegaard later would call historical faith, or faith *sensu laxiori*, in which we can only grasp the historical meaning of events if we view them in relation to all the things they could have been but were denied by their actualization in a specific way (see *Philosophical* 72-86 / *Philosophiske* 272-82).¹⁷ That is not to say that objectivity is not operative for Kierkegaard, since he insists that we cannot have a reduction of either pole in the tragic contradiction to its opposite. But it is to say that actuality can always be questioned in its objectivity insofar as it necessarily carries a transcendental ground of difference at its foundation. If substantial determinants *do* coerce us, it is not clear how far their power stretches since they could have been different, which means that it is not clear why they are the way they are or whom or what we should hold responsible for that fact. And that also means, finally, that tragedy for Kierkegaard is not the *organon* for absolute necessity and

certainty it is for Schelling. To the contrary, in Kierkegaard, tragedy in its modern form is governed by the category of doubt and consists in the representation of the ground of freedom and contingency that underlies the world. Tragedy is not the condition for us to come to consciousness of the absolute, but of its radical absence.¹⁸

This is the situation of the modern Antigone that Kierkegaard describes in the second part of “The Tragic in Ancient Drama.” As mentioned, Kierkegaard’s discussion in this half of the essay repeats the same three categories of the first—action, guilt, and mood—albeit in the inverse order. With respect to mood, Kierkegaard’s version of Sophocles’ play follows the requirements of ancient tragedy by combining pain and sorrow. But now we are told that the specifically modern element lies in the fact that the relation to these two emotions takes the form of “anxiety” (“Angst”), which is a mode of reflection and therefore proper to modernity and its privileging of subjectivity (*Either/Or I* 154 / *Enten-Eller I* 153). The ancient Antigone, according to Kierkegaard, “is not at all preoccupied with her father’s unfortunate fate” (“beskæftiger . . . sig slet ikke med Faderens ulykkelige Skjæbne”), which is a properly Greek attitude since, “[t]o them, life relationships, like the horizon under which they live, are given once and for all. Even though this is dark and full of clouds, it is also unchangeable” (“Livsforholdene ere dem eengang givne ligesom den Horizont, under hvilken de leve. Er denne end dunkel og skyfuld, saa er den tillige uforanderlig”; 155-6, trans. modified / 154). The modern Antigone, on the other hand, constantly assimilates and internalizes the ambiguity of the tragic situation by questioning it.

The same condition determines the modern version’s construction of guilt. In both Kierkegaard and Sophocles’ version, Antigone knows of Oedipus’ crime, and neither of them can determine the extent to which it is an outcome of his individual agency or fate. What Kierkegaard adds to his version is that Antigone does not know whether Oedipus was conscious of his situation and whether, therefore, he might not deliberately have carried out his destiny. The modern Antigone is therefore explicitly confronted with the impossibility of determining the extent to which the circumstances were the outcome of her father’s agency or merely the consequence of forces that exceed him. As Kierkegaard puts it:

[W]hile [Oedipus] was living, [Antigone] could not confide her sorrow to him, for she indeed did not know whether he knew it, and consequently there was the possibility of immersing him in a similar pain. And yet, if he had not known it, the guilt would be less. The movement here is continually relative. If Antigone had not definitely known the factual context, she would have been trivial, she would then have had nothing but a suspicion to struggle with, and that is too little to engage us tragically. But she knows everything; yet within this knowledge there is still an ignorance that can always keep the sorrow in motion, always transform it into pain. (161)

Men medens Faderen levede, har hun ikke kunnet betroe ham sin Sorg; thi hun vidste jo ikke, om han var vidende derom, og altsaa var der en Mulighed for at nedstyrte ham i en lignende Smerte. Og dog, dersom han ikke har været vidende derom, var Skylden mindre. Bevægelsen er her bestandig relativ. Dersom Antigone ikke med Bestemthed vidste det factiske Sammenhæng, saa blev hun ubetydelig, hun vilde da ikke have andet end en Ahnelse at kæmpe med, og det er for lidt til tragisk at beskæftige os. Men hun veed Alt; men indenfor denne Viden er der dog en Uvidenhed, der altid kan holde Sorgen i Bevægelsen, altid forvandle den til Smerte. (159)

To both ancient and modern versions, the “factual context” is the same: the patricide, the incest, even the oracle. What differs is only that Kierkegaard’s Antigone cannot accept that factual context as a mute given, because she cannot be sure whether her father knew all of it and therefore whether he served as the intentional agent of his fate.

The final category of action is conditioned by a similar dilemma. The modern Antigone is caught between duty to her father—which counts as a substantial determination of the individual as a member of a larger group—and her love for Haemon—which is a subjective condition applicable only to herself and generated by her particular preferences and inclinations. These two relations place opposing demands on her, since she would have to keep her father’s secret out of filial piety but must reveal it if she is to marry Haemon in good conscience. Unable to determine what the situation is and therefore where her obligations lie, Kierkegaard’s Antigone is left silent and immobile, and meets her death unable to commit to either side: “[A]ction

becomes impossible for the tragic individual” (“Handling bliver umulig for det tragiske Individ”; 164 / 162).

Antigone’s immobility is perhaps the clearest image that we have of the difference at stake between Kierkegaard’s theory of tragedy and Schelling’s early philosophy of *streben*. As intimated before, *streben* in Schelling arises from the fact that, within experience, the I is confronted by representations that it seems not to control, in the basic sense that we encounter attributes not explicable in terms of the principles operative in our understanding. Once we find explanations for such phenomena, however, the domain of the I is expanded, since we are now able to account for a larger part of experience in terms of rules compatible with our own agency. This process of knowledge, which culminates in the category of necessity exhibited by organic forms and discussed above, depends on what Schelling calls a pre-established harmony between the I and world, which guarantees the possibility of translating the terms of one into those of the other (*Vom Ich* 130-1). In the absence of such harmony, however, the possibility of recognizing reason in the irrational must disappear, and the consequence becomes not progress but paralysis.

This contrast is drawn explicitly by Kierkegaard’s text in what is perhaps its most remarkable moment, A’s exhortation to his audience. At the mid-point of the essay, in the transition from the descriptive to the prescriptive discussion of tragedy, A delivers the following monstrous sentence:¹⁹

Since it is at variance with the aims of our association [the *Symparekromenoi*] to provide coherent works or larger unities, since it is not our intention to labor on a Tower of Babel that God in his righteousness can descend and destroy, since we, in our consciousness that such confusion justly occurred, acknowledge as characteristic of all human endeavor in its truth that it is fragmentary, that it is precisely this which distinguishes it from nature’s infinite coherence, that an individual’s wealth consists specifically in his capacity for fragmentary prodigality and what is the producing individual’s enjoyment is the receiving individual’s also, not the laborious and careful accomplishment or the tedious interpretation of this accomplishment but the production and the pleasure of the glinting

transiency, which for the producer holds much more than the consummated accomplishment, since it is a glimpse of the idea and holds a bonus for the recipient, since its fulguration stimulates his own productivity – since all this, I say, is at variance with our association's inclination, indeed, since the periodic sentence just read must almost be regarded as a serious attack on the ejaculatory style in which the idea breaks forth without achieving a breakthrough, to which officiality is attached in our society – therefore, after having pointed out that my conduct cannot be called mutinous, inasmuch as the bond that holds this periodic sentence together is so loose that the parenthetical clauses therein strut about aphoristically and willfully enough, I shall merely call to mind that my style has made an attempt to appear to be what it is not: revolutionary. (151-2)

Da det strider mod vor Forenings Bestræbelse at levere sammenhængende Arbejder eller større Heelheder, da vor Tendens ikke er at arbeide paa et babylonisk Taarn, som Gud i sin Retfærdighed kan stige ned og ødelægge, da vi i Bevidsthed af, at hiin Forvirring skete med Rette, anerkjende det som det Eiendommelige for al menneskelig Stræben i sin Sandhed, at den er fragmentarisk, at det netop er det, hvorved den adskiller sig fra Naturens uendelige Sammenhæng; at en Individualitets Rigdom netop bestaar i dens Kraft i fragmentarisk Ødeslhed, og at det, der er det producerende Individ's Nydelse, ogsaa er det reciperende Individ's, ikke den besværlige og nøiagtige Udførelse, eller den langvarige Opfattelse af denne Udførelse, men Frembringelsen og Nydelsen af den glimtende Flygtighed, der for den Frembringende indeholder et Mere end hvad den gennemførte Udførelse har, da den er Ideens Apparens, for den Reciperende indeholder et Mere, da dens Fulguration vækker hans egen Productivitet – da Alt dette, siger jeg, strider mod vor Forenings Tendens, ja, da næsten den forelæste Periode maa ansees for et betænkeligt Attentat paa den Interjections-Stil, hvori Ideen bryder ud, uden at komme til Gjennembrud, der i vort Samfund er tillagt Officialitet, saa vil jeg, efter at have gjort opmærksom paa, at min Adfærd dog ikke kan kaldes oprørsk, da det Baand, der sammenholder denne

Periode, er saa løst, at de indeholdte Mellemsætninger stritte aphoristisk og egenraadigt nok frem, blot erindre om, at min Stil har gjort et Forsøg paa, tilsyneladende at være, hvad den ikke er – revolutionair. (150-1)

Two points of importance for the preceding discussion can be derived from this passage, both of which are again obscured by the translation. The first is A's claim, towards the opening of the sentence, that the central tenet of the fellowship of buried lives to which he belongs is that "all human endeavor in its truth...is fragmentary" (151 / 150). In the original, the word for "endeavor" is "Stræben," the Danish cognate for Schelling's *streben*, and A's claim is that such fragmentary striving is to be preferred because it stands in a closer relation than does "consummate accomplishment" to what he calls "the idea" (152 / 152). At first sight, this would seem to resonate with Schelling's claim that striving serves to reveal the absolute, but towards the end of the essay the nature of the "idea" in question for A becomes apparent when he goes on to equate the fellowship of living dead to his essay's heroine, the modern Antigone:

My dear [Symparanekromenoi], have I not managed to capture your interest for such a maiden, or shall I resort to a *captatio benevolentiae*? She, too, does not belong to the world in which she lives; although healthy and flourishing, her real life is nevertheless hidden. She, too, although alive, is in another sense dead; her life is quiet and concealed. (157)

Skulde det ikke være lykkedes mig, kjære [Symparanekromenoi], at vinde Eders Interesse for en saadan Pige, eller skal jeg tye til en *captatio benevolentiae*? Ogsaa hun tilhører ikke den Verden, hvori hun lever, om end blomstrende og sund er dog hendes egentlige Liv et forborgent, ogsaa hun er, skjøndt levende, i en anden Forstand afdød, stille er dette Liv og skjult . . . (155)

The reasons for this identification with the modern Antigone should be clear in light of the preceding discussion: if there is no access to the absolute, then there can be no recuperation of its structure within the realm of finitude and thus no striving in Schelling's sense. The only thing that can be laid bare is the absence of a unifying ground, which also means that any pretence to the contrary is only a way of hiding the paralysis that is the truth of our condition. In truth, our activity never gets us anywhere,

which is also to say that the condition of *streben*, striving, is nothing but a *sterben*, dying: the paralysis of the living dead.

The second point that can be taken from A's long exhortation to the audience centers on the claim towards the end of the sentence that, contrary to appearances, his style has not been revolutionary or mutinous. The English translation limits the scope of A's claim to "the periodic sentence just read" and "this periodic sentence," but in the Danish original, A in both cases simply uses the noun "Periode," without the specification of "sentence." Granted, "Periode" can refer to sentences or parts thereof, but, as in English, it also has the more general meaning of a determined sequence of time (*Ordbog*, def. 2) and could, therefore, indicate that A has in mind everything of the essay that precedes his statement. In either case, it is clear that a revolutionary style is one that fails to adhere to the society's embrace of the "fragmentary" nature of human striving and instead exhibits "laborious and careful accomplishment" or "consummated accomplishment." A's assurance, accordingly, is that although it might appear as though he has been writing in a coherent and systematic manner, the bond that holds the parts of his argument together "is so loose that the parenthetical clauses therein strut about aphoristically and willfully enough." The systematic analysis of the categories of mood, action, and guilt that dominates the essay up until this point, and which A picks up again immediately after his exhortation, is in this way challenged by A himself and said to be anything but as coherent as we might have thought, and in the end not really meant.²⁰

By drawing attention to the presence of two different argumentative strategies at the mid-point of his text, in a sentence of such monstrous construction that the reader must inevitably reread and reflect, A suddenly reveals that "The Tragic in Ancient Drama" is operating with all the elements ascribed to modern tragedy. First, we have the contradiction between, on the one hand, the rational, systematic exposition of the topic in its necessary moments and, on the other, the contingent and playful interventions of its author. Second, we are explicitly made aware of this contradiction in terms that cannot be easily be pinned down and the status of which is anything but certain. The form of Kierkegaard's essay in this way approximates the form of modern tragedy itself, and in this sense can be read as a further challenge to Schelling's early project. According to the latter, philosophy must be governed by the requirement that it

begin from an absolutely certain principle and derive all other moments from it in a coherent and systematic way (*System* 15-6; *Über die Möglichkeit* 16).²¹ Philosophy in that form must mirror the absolute itself, and its completion constitutes the full exhibition of that metaphysical ground, the speculative counterpart to the aesthetic work of art (*System* 18-9). In Kierkegaard, however, as we have seen, the absolute is radically other, which means that not only tragedy but philosophy too must take a different shape. Philosophy here cannot consist in systematic deductions, in the exhibition of the way that the contingencies of life in fact follow a necessary law. Rather, it occurs in the tension between systematicity and fragmentation, necessity and chance, and in the reflection on that gap.

¹ This essay is the most exhaustive and detailed discussion of tragedy and the tragic in Kierkegaard's corpus, but it does not represent the full scope of his thinking on the topic. As I have argued elsewhere ("Tragedy"), Kierkegaard in fact provides three different understandings of the tragic, one for each of the stages of existence he repeatedly returns to in his authorship: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. "The Tragic in Ancient Drama" articulates most fully the theory of tragedy proper to the aesthetic, while the tragedy of the ethical is presented most extensively in *Fear and Trembling*, and that of the religious in *Stages on Life's Way*.

² Steiner (54) and Rehm (278-9) have also noted that Kierkegaard's argument draws on a longer tradition surrounding the difference between the ancients and the moderns, but they do not indicate that his contribution changes the terms of that debate in any way. For an overview of the distinction between ancients and moderns during the *Goethezeit*, see Szondi, *Antike*.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this article are my own.

⁴ On the reception of the *Querelle* in Germany, see Pago.

⁵ Jauss points to Saint-Évremond's 1692 essay "De la tragédie ancienne et moderne" as the earliest and most consistent formulation of the qualitative difference between moderns and ancients that settles the *Querelle* and gives birth to a new conception of history (34-5, 62-3). In that essay, Saint-Évremond significantly defines ancient drama in terms of its reliance on divine forces, while the moderns ought to opt for the unique human as their proper theme (cf. esp. 175-6).

⁶ That Kierkegaard's essay on the tragic contains a critique of the notion of modernity at large is likewise suggested from another perspective by Gonzáles (109).

⁷ Steiner does proceed to argue for a difference between Hegel and Kierkegaard and finds it in what appears to be the claim that Kierkegaard wants to unify the aesthetic and the ethical (and perhaps also the religious) in a Hegelian sublation (55-6).

⁸ Holm goes on to specify a difference to Hegel in the claim that filial piety for Kierkegaard is no longer articulated in terms of moral obligations but rather in terms of the sins that bind children to their fathers (154-5). But this difference does not appear to change the fact that both filial piety and loyalty to the state are substantive principles. That Kierkegaard's conception of ancient (and modern) drama is taken from

Hegel is also asserted by Harries (54-5). In a related manner, Luzzatto reads Kierkegaard's version of *Antigone* essentially as an extension of Sophocles' play, although he does not draw on Hegel for his understanding of the latter.

⁹ Gonzáles is one of the few commentators to rightfully emphasize the centrality to Kierkegaard's argument of the simultaneity of qualitatively opposed principles (119).

¹⁰ Kierkegaard's relation to Schelling is a vast area of research, although most of the focus has been on the influence of Schelling's late philosophy on Kierkegaard's thought (not least because Kierkegaard in 1841-1842 attended Schelling's lectures in Berlin). For a detailed reconstruction and bibliography on this topic, see Olsen.

¹¹ What such a religious relation to the absolute looks like for Kierkegaard and what consequences it might have for aesthetics is the topic of my book *Marginal Modernity*.

¹² All references to the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* follow the convention of listing page numbers in the first edition (A) followed by those in the second after the slash (B).

¹³ Kant writes: "Die Kategorien der Modalität haben das Besondere an sich: daß sie den Begriff, dem sie als Prädikate beigefüget werden, als Bestimmung des Objekts nicht im mindesten vermehren, sondern nur das Verhältnis zum Erkenntnisvermögen ausdrücken. Wenn der Begriff eines Dinges schon ganz vollständig ist, so kann ich doch noch von diesem Gegenstande fragen, ob er bloß möglich, oder auch wirklich, oder, wenn er das letztere ist, ob er gar auch notwendig sei? Hierdurch werden keine Bestimmungen mehr im Objekte selbst gedacht, sondern es fragt sich nur, wie es sich (samt allen seinen Bestimmungen) zum Verstande und dessen empirischen Gebrauche, zur empirischen Urteilskraft, und zur Vernunft (in ihrer Anwendung auf Erfahrung) verhalte?" (A219 / B266).

¹⁴ On this point, see also Geißler (73, 77). For a more extensive discussion of the relation of the unconditioned to empirical self-consciousness in Schelling, see Frank (48-60). Sandkaulen-Bock in particular has pointed out that the transition from the former to the latter that Schelling wants to provide in his early works is anything but unproblematic (44-5, *et passim*).

¹⁵ While both organisms and works of art can serve this function due to their exhibition of necessity, Schelling in the *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* ultimately grants primacy to the latter. The reason for this is that art not only represents the identity of thought and being, the artist's conscious and unconscious activity, but also exhibits it as located within the artist's consciousness, which is to say the I itself, rather than leaving the source of that identity in nature, the non-I that opposes us as other (281-2). In his posthumously published *Philosophie der Kunst*, from 1802-1803, Schelling provides an extensive discussion of specifically tragedy as the artistic form that represents the absolute most directly (518ff.), although this privileging of the genre goes back already to his *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus*, from 1795. For a discussion of the relationship of Kierkegaard's essay on the tragic to Schelling's more particular arguments about this genre, see Chapter 8 of my book *The Fate of Suffering: Form, Philosophy, History in Modern Tragedy*, currently in preparation.

¹⁶ Michel Kosch has convincingly argued that a shift in the notion of freedom along these lines in fact marks the watershed dividing Kierkegaard's thought from that of the early Schelling and idealism more generally. While I find Kosch's overall argument compelling, I disagree with her claim that the aesthetic mode of existence in Kierkegaard, to which the essay on the tragic in *Either/Or* belongs, should be understood as endorsing the position of the early Schelling. Kosch's argument for this claim primarily rests on the account of the aesthetic given by the representative of the opposing ethical view in *Either/Or*, Judge William, which cannot, on my reading, be taken at face value. Indeed, Kosch's most important

textual evidence comes from the Judge's paraphrase of a passage from Schelling's *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* to characterize the aesthetic mode of life (Kosch 148; *Either/Or* 2 137 / *Enten-Eller* 2 135). But that passage is explicitly said by the Judge *not* to describe the aesthetic as it is represented by the aesthete himself, but rather the aesthetic as it is realized within the ethical; that is, it designates the Judge's own life-view rather than that of A. The aesthetic, on the contrary, as I argue here, is explicitly rejecting the position endorsed in Schelling's *System*, and in my view does so for philosophical reasons that Kierkegaard himself thinks are valid and which he uses in his defense of the religious. With respect to the latter point, see my *Marginal* 49-51.

¹⁷ For a discussion of historical faith and its distinction from religious faith proper, see my *Marginal Modernity* 46-53.

¹⁸ Szondi is thus correct in his perceptive assertion that Kierkegaard does away with the moment of reconciliation in his theory of tragedy (*Versuch* 39). For the same reason, I would disagree with Gonzáles' claim in relation to "The Tragic in Ancient Drama" that Kierkegaard does not provide "un pensamiento de la separación absoluta del hombre con respecto a su origen divino" (107).

¹⁹ Manheimer (105-6) and Harries (58-9) are to my knowledge the only commentators on the essay that note the importance of this sentence.

²⁰ That Kierkegaard's argument in "The Tragic in Ancient Drama" can be read as playful has also been pointed out by Gonzáles (110-1).

²¹ For an extensive analysis of the requirement of systematicity in German idealism in general, see Franks. The origins of this requirement are also discussed by Förster (166-8).

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