any philosophy which agrees with that of Comte in limiting philosophy to the data and methods of the natural sciences—opposition to the *a priori*, and to speculation by any method peculiar to metaphysics. In this sense Locke and Hume were positivists: Hume, indeed, quite explicitly so in limiting the method of philosophizing to the results of observation, and stopping whenever going further means confused and uncertain speculation about hypothetical causes (*Treat.*, i. § 4). Mill and Spencer are called positivists, though thoroughly opposed to Comte in many respects. George Eliot is a positivist in a somewhat more strictly Comtian sense. Cf. NATURALISM. (J.D.)

Literature: COMTE, Positive Philos.; Positive Polity (synopsized in English by Harriet Martineau and George Henry Lewes); J. S. MILL, Auguste Comte and Positivism; SPENCER, Genesis of Science; Classification of the Sciences; HUXLEY, Scientific Aspects of Positivism; FISKE, Outlines of Cosmic Philos.; E. CAIRD, Social Philos. of Comte; Encyc. Brit., art. on Comte; LAAS, Idealismus und Positivismus (1879–84); H. GRUBER, A. Comte (1889). On Comte's Social Philosophy see BARTH, Geschichtsphilos. als Soziol., i.
(J.D.–K.G.–J.M.B.)

Possession [Lat. *possessio*]. One of the categories of Aristotle (ἔχειν, *haben*). See CATEGORY. (J.M.B.)

Possession (demon, &c.): Ger. *Besessenheit*; Fr. (*délire de*) *possession*; Ital. *possessione, indemoniamento*. The notion that a disease, such as epilepsy, is due to the possession of the patient by an evil spirit. Cf. DEMONOMANIA, and OBSESSION. (J.J.)

Possibility, Impossibility, and **Possible** [Lat. *possibile*, from *posse*, may, can, be able; equivalent to the Gr. δυνατόν]: Ger. *Möglichkeit, Unmöglichkeit, möglich*; Fr. *possibilité, impossibilité, possible*; Ital. *possibilità, impossibilità, possibile*. The term is used to express a variety of meanings which, although distinct in themselves, yet flow readily into one another. These meanings may best be grouped according as they have (1) an ontological objective value, or a logical subjective value; and (2) according as they are used antithetically to actuality or necessity. The antithetical point of view is the most convenient from which to begin.

Possibility may mean that something is (1) not actual, or (2) that, while it possesses actual existence, that existence lacks causal or rational necessity.

(1) As opposed to the actual, the phrase has again a double meaning. (a) Taken objectively, it may mean something as yet undeveloped, since not presenting itself in actually objectified form, but capable of doing so at some future time, when all the conditions of its realization occur: latent, potential being. This implies capacity for realization; and, if this capacity be taken in an active sense, connotes some inherent tendency to actuality, which if not thwarted leads to final completeness of being. This involves the active sense of POTENTIALITY (q. v.), of FORCE (q. v.), &c. It is close to the literal sense of the term (posse, *can* be). This is the dominating sense in Greek philosophy, being connected with Aristotle's teleological theory of development. See NATURE, and POWER (δύναμις and ἐντελέχεια). (b) Taken logically, it denotes that there is some ground for asserting actuality, but not sufficient to justify a positive statement: *may*, as distinct from *can*, be. Thus, possibly it will rain to-morrow. It has to do with degrees of certainty in judging. See PROBABILITY.

(2) As opposed to the necessary, the term has also a double sense. (a) It may mean chance, contingency, as an objective fact. CHANCE (q. v.), again, has a double meaning: (i) something not derivable or explainable causally by reference to antecedent facts. There are those who assert the reality of such chance (see TYCHISM). On this view there are many *possibilities* in store in the future which no amount of knowledge would enable us to foresee or forestall. Indeterministic theories of the will assert possibilities of this sort also. (ii) Chance may mean that which, while necessary causally, is not necessary teleologically: the unplanned, the fatalistic. From this point of view the 'possible' is that which unexpectedly prevents the carrying-out of a purpose or intention. It leads up to the logical sense (b), according to which the possible, as opposed to the necessary, is anything whose existence cannot be derived from reason: that, the existence of which, rationally speaking, might be otherwise. It is opposed to mathematical or metaphysical necessity, where existence cannot be otherwise than as it is. In this sense the objective actual may be only (logically) possible: the present rain-storm is actual, but since it does not follow from a necessity of thought, but only from empirical antecedents, it is not necessary, and hence just a contingent possibility. This distinction goes back also to Aristotle,

being found in his logical writings, as the possible, as potential meaning, is found in his metaphysical. It has played a large part in modern RATIONALISM (q. v.), especially in the philosophy of Leibnitz, being identical with his distinction of 'truths of reason' and 'truths of fact.' In the sphere of mathematics, logic, and metaphysics there is no possibility in the strict sense; all that exists exists of ·necessity. In the physical and practical spheres which deal with the space and time world the notion of possibility has full sway. Everything is possible which does not contradict the laws of reason; that which is inconceivable, which violates the law of reason, is impossible. The impossible is the self-contradictory. Kant's criticism of rational conceivability as a criterion of truth, to the effect that it is only formal, resting upon the principle of identity and contradiction, and when applied to existence must be supplemented by appeal to sense, made Leibnitz's distinctions of hardly more than historic interest.

The problems regarding the possible as a category of philosophy may be summed up as follows: Does it have any objective existence, or is it simply an expression of a certain logical attitude? If the former, is the objective possibility a necessary phase of a process of development, which will unfold itself into actuality; or does it express a particular fact, the reality of chance? If of logical significance only, does it flow from the distinction between *a priori* reason and *a posteriori* experience; or does it express a certain combination of ignorance and assurance in relation to facts, so that *real* possibilities would also be experienced facts? (J.D.)

The nominalistic definition (nominalistic in its real character, though generally admitted by realists, as Scotus, i. dist. 7, qu. unica) that that is possible which is not known not to be true in a real or assumed state of information is, like many nominalistic definitions, extremely helpful up to a certain point, while in the end proving itself quite superficial. It is not that certain things are possible because they are not known not to be true, but that they are not known not to be true because they are, more or less clearly, seen to be possible.

For example, one collection may be said to be greater than another if, and only if, there is no *possible* relation in which every member of the former collection stands to a member of the latter, to which no other member of the former stands in the same relation. Now, the question arises—whether or not it is possible for two collections to be, under this definition, each greater than the other. In advance of an investigation, the *proposition* is possibly true, in the sense that we do not know that it is impossible. But is the *fact* possible? That is, can we in any way suppose such a state of things without involving ourselves in contradiction? It is that positive supposition which will constitute the possibility, not the mere ignorance of whether such a supposition can be made or not. In order to make two such collections possible, we must make some positive assumption in regard to the possibility of collections; while in order to make such a relation between two collections impossible, we have to make a positive assumption of the possibility of a certain description of relation. It is not a question of ignorance, since nothing but pure hypothesis is concerned. The question is whether it is possible in every case to suppose distinct pairs each composed of a member of either collection and such as completely to exhaust one of the collections. If this is always possible, then two collections each greater than the other are impossible. It is evidently desirable to state the logical principles of this general kind of possibility, which does not consist in ignorance, but, as it would seem, in hypothetic indetermination or disjunctive determination.

Nominalists uniformly speak of Aristotle's view of future contingents as really absurd. It may be so; but it is certainly the only doctrine which their principles leave room for. A certain event either will happen or it will not. There is nothing now in existence to constitute the truth of its being about to happen, or of its being about not to happen, unless it be certain circumstances to which only a law or uniformity can lend efficacy. But that law or uniformity, the nominalists say, has no real being; it is only a mental representation. If so, neither the being about to happen nor the being about not to happen has any reality at present; and the most that we can say is that the disjunction is true, but neither of the alternatives. If, however, we admit that the law has a real being, not of the mode of being of an individual, but even more real, then the future necessary consequent of a present state of things is as real and true as that present state of things itself.

By the old logicians, possibility is usually

defined as non-repugnancy to existence. Kant defines it as that which satisfies the formal conditions of experience (*Krit. d. reinen Vernunft*, 1st ed., 218, 234).

The possible proposition, or problematic judgment, as it is called by German logicians, is said by many logicians, especially Sigwart, not to be any proposition at all, because it does not draw a sharp line between truth and falsity. It seems to be necessary to distinguish between a proposition which asserts that under such and such general conditions a certain thing is possible, of which an example is the proposition that of any two collections one is not greater than the other, and a proposition which pretends to be no more than a conjecture. If a conjecture can be absolutely baseless, which may be doubted, a proposition which pretended to be no more than that may be said to be no proposition at all. But it can hardly be maintained that when Poincaré says that there is no physical law whatever which will not be rendered more certain by every new confirmatory experiment, he is depriving those laws of all meaning as propositions.

Logical possibility: that of a hypothesis not involving any self-contradiction.

Mere possibility: that of a state of things which might come to pass, but, in point of fact, never will. In common language, exaggerated to the 'merest possibility.'

Metaphysical possibility ought to mean a possibility of existence, nearly a potentiality; but the phrase does not seem to be used in that sense, but rather in the sense of possibility by supernatural power.

Moral possibility one might expect should be the opposite of moral impossibility, meaning, therefore, something reasonably free from extreme improbability. But, in fact, it seems to be used to mean what is morally permissible.

Physical possibility: (1) that which a knowledge of the laws of nature would not enable a person to be sure was not true; (2) that which might be brought about if psychological and spiritual conditions did not prevent, such as the Pope's pronouncing *ex cathedra* as an article of faith the fallibility of all his own utterances.

Practical possibility: that which lies within the power of a person or combination of persons under external conditions likely to be fulfilled, and questionable chiefly because internal conditions may not be fulfilled.

Proximate possibility. It is very difficult to make out what is meant by this; but the phrase is evidently modelled on *potentia proxima*, which is a state of high preparedness for existence; so that proximate possibility would be a high grade of possibility in a proposition amounting almost to positive assertion.

Real possibility is possibility in the thing, as contradistinguished from mere logical possibility (Scotus, *Opus Oxon.*, I. ii. 7, *Ad secundam probationem maioris*).

Remote possibility: the possibility of a proposition which is far from being positively asserted. Also used in common speech.

Substantive possibility: the admissibility of a pure hypothesis (as illustrated above). (C.S.P.)

Post hoc, ergo propter hoc [Lat.]: see FALLACY.

Postpredicament [Lat. *postpraedicamentum*]: Ger. *Postprädicament*; Fr. *postprédicament*; Ital. *categorie postume*. One of five relations which are considered by Aristotle in the book of *Praedicamenta*, or *Categories*, after he has disposed of the predicaments themselves. They are *opposita* (ἀντικείμενα, in cap. x, xi) of four kinds (see OPPOSITION, in logic), *prius* (πρότερον, in cap. xii) of five kinds (see PRIOR), *simul* (ἅμα, in cap. xiii) of two kinds, *motus* (κίνησις, in cap. xiv) of six kinds, and *habere* (ἔχειν, in cap. xv) of eight kinds (see POSSESSION).

Abelard gave a special meaning to this word (for which see Prantl, *Gesch. d. Logik*, ii. 169), and also added Antepredicament. (C.S.P.)

Post-selection [Lat. *post* + *selectus*, chosen]: foreign equivalents are not in use. Natural selection of a structure, function, habit, or instinct, effected at a period in the life-history of the individual subsequent to the period when the character selected appears or takes place.

Suggested by Minot. A structure appears in an embryo; but, not benefiting the embryo, selection cannot act until a later stage, in which further development has rendered the structure useful. A parasitic wasp lays an egg in a larva, but without benefit to herself; but the benefit by which selection acts appears in the life of the offspring. These illustrations make the term clearer. Most natural selection is post-selection.

Literature: MINOT, Biol. Centralbl., xv. (1895) 584 (trans. in Amer. Natural., 1895); CH. DARWIN, Origin of Species (1859). (C.S.M.)

Postulate [Lat. *postulatum*, begged, used to translate Gr. αἴτημα]: Ger. *Voraussetzung* (the German *Postulat* = *Forderung* is a very different idea from that properly expressed by