

Kierkegaard's search for absolutes.

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Introduction

Kierkegaard was an enormously able 'high-brow' and well-educated man, not only in the field of philosophy but at equally in that of theology. His works reflect crucial aspects of both subjects of

study accompanied by a rare panoramic view he was thinking about the challenges of his age within.

As well as a view of European philosophical thinking, we focus on the analysis of key texts. The texts that occur in his works discuss reality by terms of terminology relevant to the category of truth. Different scholars classify Kierkegaard's work in several ways. In our lecture we have made a selection of so called offensive writings as classified by a Canadian professor McKinnon. The argument stood for the McKinnon's topical sensitivity of selection. Among the existing ones it is this one that suits our purposes the best. McKinnon has divided Kierkegaard's writings as follows: (McKinnon, 1999, pp. 15-18).¹

1) Aesthetic writings. (Either/Or vol. 1,2, Two Ages, The Crisis in the Life on an Actress, Repetition, From the Papers of One Still Living, Stages on Life's Way, The Concept of Irony, Philosophical fragments, The Concept of Anxiety, Fear and Trembling, Prefaces)

2) Religious writings (Two Ethical-Religious Essays, Practice in Christianity, An Upbuilding Discourse, For Self-Examination, The Sickness Unto Death, The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air, The Changelessness of God, Two Discourses at Friday Communion, Three Discourses at the Communion, Christian Discourses, Works of love, Upbuilding Discourses in Diverse Spirits, Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses)

3) Offensive writings. (The Instant, Judge for Yourselves!, Christ's Judgement on Official Christianity, Newspaper Articles 1854-1855, This must be said)

4) Metawritings being on the boundary between aesthetic, religious and offensive ones. ([Concluding Unscientific Postscript](#) to Philosophical Fragments, On my Work as an Author, [The Point of View for my Work as an Author](#), Articles related to the Writings)

Between heart and reason

Trying to understand the European mind then, and especially Kierkegaard, shaped by his philosophical and theological background, we have analysed some representatives who themselves had made attempt to cope with scepticism – René Descartes (1596-1650) and Blaise Pascal (1623-1662). While Descartes decided to follow the way of the reasonable analysis, Pascal moved towards the Hebrew resources. In his sceptic defence he put the human heart first. As shown by our research, both of them remained theocentrically oriented. While using logical evidence yet they rejected rational cause of God's existence. At the same time both of them doubted human capacity to be able to postulate the first principles; ontologically sufficient for philosophy with possibly reliable validity to be built up.

Between philosophy and politics

Regarding the given issue we were comparing existentialist categories in work by J. P. Sartre: „Existentialism is humanism“² as well as the concept of an individual in works by S. Kierkegaard. Despite the fact that both of them come from the same direction, that is to say that their desire is to implement human authentic being into the context of a team, we have found out that in their perception of existentialist categories within their own concepts, the same concepts acquire different content and semantic classification. Our research has shown that comparing Sartre's case and thinking that oscillate between philosophy and politics, Kierkegaard's philosophical as well as ethical consequences seem to be rather consistent.

Between the sacral and profane

Kierkegaard's conceptual mechanism is related to his attitudes towards society and Church representatives. His attitudes were generally known as critical and rigid. We went through Kierkegaard's relationship he had to Danish society then as well as his opinions on educational system reformers Nikolai F. Gruntvig and Bishop Jakob P. Mynster.³ In their understanding of the Church they had different ideas: for Kierkegaard the Church was always a fighting one (Ecclesia militans), while it was a triumphant one for Gruntvig (Ecclesia triumphans). We can see another difference between Kierkegaard and Gruntvig. It is related to their understanding of an individual. While before God, Kierkegaard emphasises an individual, Gruntvig goes for the fellowship. Kierkegaard reproaches Mynster his desire for a kind of ministry and relationship with the Establishment without any conflicts. However works of 'Kierkegaard's heroes', followers of the Truth even at the costs of suffering, are characterised by the conflict. During their own period actual Christians will get in cultural and social conflicts, as they live in paradox – Church is rooted in a different world, however it takes actions in this world. If God's people are more and more culturally blended, they will continually become a pagan fellowship of people. They will miss the 'otherness', so needed for current wounds and pains to be healed and cured effectively. Love to a neighbour and one's goodwill to Christ's sacrifice and suffering are features Kierkegaard was missing in people's lives. While having a persuasively profane existence, they considered themselves to be part of the sacral.

McKinnon – Offensive writings

Judge for Yourself

Yet at the beginning of his foreword and prayer in his 1852 writing Kierkegaard points out the difference between world and God: "Well do I know, and I know only all too well, how true it is that the world wants to be deceived" (Kierkegaard, 1990, p. 91). On the other hand "Father in heaven! You are Spirit, and they who wish to worship you must worship you in spirit and truth – not how in Spirit and truth, if we are not or do not first of all really strive to become sober! Send, then

your Spirit into our hearts.” (Kierkegaard, 1990, p. 95). Kierkegaard views the truth as something outside the world. One is not able to neither search for nor find the truth in the world. In his opinion it is caused by the fact that “our time is precisely one of having made the infinite and the finite, the highest and the lowest, blend in such a way that the condition is an impenetrable ambiguity.” (Kierkegaard, 1990, p.128). He puts accent on the truth to be applied: “either a strenuous life, strenuous in self-denial and renunciation, made strenuous by witnessing in actuality to the truth and against lies (not be declamations amidst seventeen illusions in quiet hours), and then claim to Christian dignity; or the more lenient forms, that a pastor’s life is no more strenuous than anyone else’s, and then a relinquishing of Christian dignity – the two combined are a lie.” (Kierkegaard, 1990, p. 128). Kierkegaard criticises the point that “Christianity became the power in the world” (Kierkegaard, 1990, p. 198) and started to bear testimony to the truth – parsons managed not to change the world, but “the Christianity began to be deformed” (Kierkegaard, 1990, p. 129). Kierkegaard requires Church to separate from and stop being economically supported by the State. It is only without any state support that the Church can grow. Everyone then who avows to the Church will not have any earthly advantages and benefit of having become a Christian, a Church member.⁴

The Instant

On the verge of life in 1855 the broadsheet ‘The Instant’ was published by Kierkegaard. On one side Kierkegaard is characterised by formal Christianity silent attack and criticism, while on the other side he points out and calls man to “suffer for the truth” (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 298). The argument is that one cares of his eternal future – eternal life – only then.⁵ Kierkegaard confronts the world full of deceits, lies and immediacy with eternity. If one wants to suffer because of the truth, his life will not be defeated and “filled with what cannot be recollected eternally” (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 298).⁶ Kierkegaard requires man to love in truth while his suffering is the consequence of. “Only one thing remains, only one thing is to be recollected eternally – to have suffered for the truth” (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 299) and “his name is written in heaven” (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 299).

Around the world the truth walks 'in poverty and abasement, there's no place to lay its head; it has to be thankful if it is given a glass of water. Again Kierkegaard highlights the truth, being embodied in Jesus Christ (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 299). It is not possible for the truth – the suffering truth - to be found at priests called "tradespeople" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 299), but in suffering. Kierkegaard's answer to Bishop is so critical.⁷ Martensen "began to serve up about being truth – witnesses." (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 98).

Conclusion

Being against theological algorithmic that of Hegel, Kierkegaard ingeniously revived Socrates in such a clever way against the framework of his three stages of life, that he was thence able indirectly to encapsulate the epistemology of truth. Within his original dynamics of paradox he used Socrates in two ways: as significant Christian triumphalism criticism and at the same time a serious point against those who claimed that real Christian life is having a gap concerning philosophical looking for the truth. Similarly to his understanding of 'an absolute paradox' he presents metaphysical issues in the context of the phenomenology of the concreteness. The same stands for his paradoxivity of the Socratic thinking. It evokes the concept of truth which – unlike Kant – provides for a coherent relationship between the vertical and horizontal. This suggestion corresponds to another paradoxical expression: "truth is subjective" and "subjectivity is untruth". We were ambitious to show that Kierkegaard's concept of truth is a personal, however a universal one. Therefore it is consistent regarding all the particular aspects of subject's existence; it is in contrast with the formal logical systems of axioms.

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¹ For further classifications see Julian Watkin, Howard V. Hong, Robert L. Perkins, Sylvia Walsh. See: Králik, 2006, pp. 21-23.

² In details: Máhrík, T. a Králik, R. Komparácia kategórii existencializmu v diele J. P. Sartre: „Existencializmus je humanizmus“ vzhľadom na koncept indivídua v diele S. Kierkegaard. In: *Etické reflexie*. Ed. Jurová, Jarmila.

³ Králik, Roman. (2006) *Zápas Søren Kierkegaard*. FF UKF, Nitra 2006. pp. 56-75.

⁴ The idea of the legitimacy of the secularization of our society, even to the point of a separation of church and state, is being hotly debated nowadays. See for example: Valčo, Michal. (2005). „Cirkev a fenomén sekularizácie: Máme z neho mať strach?“ In: *Křestanská revue*, č. 7/2005, p. 197-202. ISSN 0023-4613

⁵ „A righteous person“ as called by Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 298).

⁶ As added later on: „If you have loved the most beautiful girl. Have lived a whole life happily with her, the most loveable wife – it cannot be recollected eternally; it is formed from what is more fragile than the eternal. The greatest achievement in the external world, to have conquered kingdoms and countries, the most interesting and most thrilling enterprises, to have been the idea in them, the greatest discoveries in the world of nature, to have been the discoverer etc. – they cannot be recollected eternally.“ (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 298-299).

⁷ Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-1884), professor of theology. His book *Christian Dogmatics* defined the main line of the 19th century Danish theology and represented a speculative, mysticism related tendency.