

“INDIRECT COMMUNICATION” IN KIERKEGAARD’S AESTHETICS

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Abstract. The purpose of this essay is to explore the method of communication used by Kierkegaard in his works, Danish philosopher himself called this method of writing indirect discourse. Most of Kierkegaard’s books were written pseudonymously, each pseudonym operates from a different philosophical platform. The problem of pseudonymity refers reader to the problem of language: reflection, ideality as distinct from immediacy. This is, in turn, a cross-reference to existence, which has been defined by Kierkegaard as a synthesis of ideality and immediacy.

Nothing so much pervaded by seduction...as a secret.
S.Kierkegaard. *Diary of a Seducer*

One of the most manifest features of Kierkegaard’s works is the placing of his literary paternity under the sign of duality. On one side, there is an autonomous production, mainly religiously edifying, while on other side there is a pseudonymous one (polynomial, to be more specific), placed under the sign of an existential impasse, which entails the exigencies of religion.

In Kierkegaard’s case, a pseudonym is not mere a name destined to conceal his identity, it is the act of birth of an author who thinks independently of the one who has conceived it. Having considered the over twenty pseudonyms used in his work, Kierkegaard seems to be an "author of authors". This aspect, has been commented by Louis Mackey as follows:

A Kierkegaardian pseudonym is a persona, an imaginary person created by the author for artistic purposes, not a *nom de plume*, a fiction name used to protect his personal identity from the threats and embarrassments of publicity. When Kierkegaard signed his books with impossible names like Johannes de Silentio (John of Silence) and Virgilius Hafniensis (Watchman of Copenhagen), no one in the gossipy little world of Danish letters had any doubts about their origin. Nor did he mean they should; his purpose was not mystification but distance. By refusing to answer for his writings he detached them from his personality so as let their form protect the freedom that was their theme. (1971: 92)

Kierkegaard's literary work and his original style are unique. He planned to publish his works under several pseudonyms and, at the same time, he published and signed his religious writings. His thought coherently developed throughout his work, due to its inherent logic: his cross-references from volume to volume are extremely exact, providing their place and importance as parts of an entire whole.

It is obvious that Kierkegaard constructs himself by means of his books, which represent a stage on which his histrionic spirit plays freely. Besides the intricate dialogue between masks, his writings complete each other, configuring a symphonic harmony in conformity with his counterpoint dialectic.

Kierkegaard defines his method as "indirect communication". As in Plato's dialogues, in Kierkegaard's books the reader identifies several voices that support different philosophical perspectives. That is why the reader cannot know where the author is placed.

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which was to mark the end of his authorship, Kierkegaard writes:

Thus in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, since it is impossible to have that to a doubly reflected communication... My role is the joint role of being the secretary and, quite ironically, the dialectically reduplicated author of the author or the author... (1992: 625)

Each pseudonym identifies the work thematically and places it in a dialectical scheme. Victor Eremita is the editor of *Either/ Or* and also he is the author of *A Word of Thanks to Professor Heiberg* as well. The victorious hermit represents the starting point of Kierkegaard's apparent parting from his authorship and even more, from himself.

Johannes Climacus (name of a Greek monk) is the author of *Philosophical Fragments* and its companion piece, *The Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, as well as of the posthumous *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*. This character rejects the method of rational philosophers (like Descartes or Hegel). Instead, he proposes the subjective approach to knowledge.

Johannes Climacus is divided into two parts. Part one is entitled "Johannes Climacus Begin To Philosophize With The Aid Of Traditional Ideas". The narrative begins with Johannes pondering over the three principles of philosophy which he has

learned: philosophy begins with doubt, in order to philosophize one must have doubts, modern philosophy begins with doubt.

First, Kierkegaard is concerned with the presupposition of doubt in philosophy and he considers whether it was "by accident that modern philosophy began with doubt":

Thus, the individual philosopher must become conscious of himself and in this consciousness of himself also become conscious of his significance as a moment in modern philosophy... (1965: 140)

A particularly difficult chapter is the only chapter in Part Two entitled "What is it to Doubt?" and it debates the important problem of the nature of consciousness. He asks himself what the nature of consciousness would be if it had doubt outside itself.

Immediacy is precisely indeterminateness. In immediacy, there is no relation... Immediately, therefore, everything is true, but this truth is untrue the very next moment, for immediacy everything is untrue. If consciousness can remain in immediacy, then the question of truth is cancelled. Immediacy is reality, language is ideality, Consciousness is contradiction. (1965: 168)

Kierkegaard considers that the real nature of consciousness is contradiction. Therefore, doubt is a positive stance for the negative. The work ends with Johannes considering the Greek skeptics to be far more consistent than modern philosophers.

Johannes de Silentio (author of *Fear and Trembling*) and Constantin Constantius (author of *Repetition*) are both poets that correspond to the ethical stage of the philosopher and express unusual love for Regine Olsen.

Finally, Anti-Climacus is the author of *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity* (considered by Kierkegaard the "most perfect and true work") and he reflects the perfect Christian perspective. In an entry of his journal Kierkegaard observes, "I would place myself higher than Johannes Climacus, lower than Anti-Climacus" (1980: 52).

All of his pseudonyms cover the formation of author within their specific stage. This "indirect communication" is addressed to his contemporaries whom he considered wanderers in the field of reflection, while the anonymous writings are addressed to those who have already experienced religious illumination.

In *Two Ages*, Kierkegaard distinguishes two ways of referring to the world:

The present age is essentially a sensible, reflecting age, devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial, short-lived enthusiasm and prudentially relaxing in indolence...Where as a passionate age accelerates, raises up and overthrows, elevates and debases, a reflective apathetic age does the opposite, it stifles and impedes, it levels...The present age is essentially a sensible age, devoid of passion and therefore it has multiplied the principle of contradiction... (1978: 68)

Kierkegaard deemed his times to be an age of reflection, yet he did not postulate the primacy of reason over subjective experience. In his opinion, reflection is self-referential without any temptation to the absolute. Based on Hegel’s philosophical system, Kierkegaard’s age transgresses contradictions that disappear in a synthetic unity. The lack of contradiction annuls any logic and prevents access to the superior level of religious experiences.

At the centre of Kierkegaard’s analysis, one can notice the attitude of the aesthete who chooses to remain a simple spectator, refusing to engage in the dramatic play of life. For example, the character from *Either/Or* is an individualistic hedonist who experiences the metamorphoses of sensorial-artistic pleasures. This immediacy does not signify the immediate nature of the exterior impression, as in Hegel’s case, it implies the necessary dependence of the aesthete on the reality of existence at the objective material level.

The aesthete pretends that he can ignore reality, excluding himself from it through an attitude of non-involvement, governed by fantasy. Yet, he is not aware of the fact that this presumed liberty of infinitisation is but a negative one, which transfers reality in the field of imaginative possibility.

Immediacy includes the sphere of the vital, of affectivity, and implies the absence of the spirit, since the spirit signifies mediation, split personality, relating to its own self as synthesis. The aesthete only reaches an "exterior infinity", exactly because he lacks interiority and flees from his real, concrete, finite self. His existence is punctiform, it implies the mere juxtaposition of some isolated moments, in a summative, non-synthetic way.

The dialectic of pseudonyms expresses the movement within the aesthetic, transforming itself into a dialectic of possibilities. As it does not have a positive relation with time, as the ethical and religious levels do, aesthetic life, feeding itself on the sensible and the immediate, consumes itself in the tension of possibilities, which may sometimes open to the ethical and the religious.

One cannot comprehend the theory of the two ages, ignoring the essentially personal characteristic of Kierkegaard's work. Hermman Diem (1957:20) asserts that the historical individual vanishes in his work. A continuous transfer takes place from the experience to the conceptual experiment, from theory, wanderings through the labyrinth of false identities, to his own experience.

Thus, the dialectic of the positivity and negativity, placed at the level of the work reflects in the successive alternative of hiding and revealing.

Paul Ricoeur (1984: 75) affirms that nobody else could succeed in transforming his biography into a personal myth. One can notice the relationships between concrete elements and facts on the one hand and his theoretical assumptions, on the other. However, it is still difficult to indicate the author. Kierkegaard's existence is beyond time, in between the ages, he strives to step from the past to the future without touching the present (one entry in his journal records the impression that his soul is tormented), torn up between the past and the future.

Schrey (1971: 125), one of Kierkegaard's commentators, suggests that Kierkegaard's interior evasion correspond with the writer's disapproval of his own times, which he saw locked up by sterile immediacy. His life seemingly surpasses all the three stages yet, Kierkegaard does not belong to any of them.

Paul Ricoeur (1984: 93) draws the conclusion that no one can analyze Kierkegaard on his own theoretical terms, as he was neither a seducer, nor an ethical individual. As regards his personal religious precepts, they were so severe that nobody could ever follow them.

Moreover, a few entries in Kierkegaard's journal for the year 1847 mention a terrible secret, which could explain the author's incapacity of attaching himself to a firm and constant attitude towards his own projects:

And therefore not only will just my writings some day, but my very life, the whole intriguing secret of the machinery be studied and studied. (1967-78, 3: 82)

However, there is an exception, a fragment of *Either/ Or* (1987 4: 124), which could open another perspective on Kierkegaard's life and work. The third section of Part One is "The Tragic Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama", subtitled "A Venture in Fragmentary Endeavor". Below this title, Kierkegaard writes, "Delivered before the Sumparanekromenoi". This Greek word, coined by Kierkegaard, means literally "together alongside those who have died", or more aptly, the "fellowship of the dead". As Walter Rehm (1977: 29) has shown, each element in this format has its antecedent in Romantic letters and postures.

Kierkegaard considered that in antique tragedy, the individual agent, however free, was embedded in the substantive categories of state, family, and destiny. Self-conscious, reflexive subjectivity is characteristic of modernism. In ancient tragedy, the hero is subjected to his fatal destiny, in modern drama he stands and falls entirely by his own acts. The translation from the aesthetic to the ethical, which lies at the heart of *Either/Or* and of Kierkegaard’s sense of personal development, relates to the quality of tragic guilt:

The true tragic sorrow consequently requires an element of guilt, the true tragic pain an element of innocence, the true tragic pain sorrow requires an element of transparency, the true tragic pain an element of obscurity. This, I believe, best indicates the dialectic wherein the categories of sorrow and pain come in contact with each other, as well as the dialectic which lies in the concept of tragic guilt. (1987 4: 143)

It is through Antigone that the categories of sorrow and of pain shall be united. This version of Antigone encodes precise references to Kierkegaard’s intimate existence. The Antigone scenario literally transcribes this supreme crisis in the life and thought of Kierkegaard: the relation with his father and the tragic break with Regine Olsen.

The role of Antigone knits fundamental strands in his personal existence and discourse. This character is one of the inmost guises of his being. In one sense, Kierkegaard’s relation to Antigone is one of possessive irony, in another the author plays dialectically on the ambiguity of identification with the Greek heroine:

It is the Hegelian Antigone which lies behind the tormented silhouette in *Either/Or*...Contrasting, in certain respects antithetical, as they are, the Antigone readings and transformation proposed by Hegel and by Kierkegaard remain inseparable. (Steiner, 1984: 65-66)

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