

Kierkegaard and modernity: Truth and decision

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Abstract

This article is intended to be an interpretation to the question of truth in Kierkegaardian writings under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus (mainly from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*), and intended to present, in accordance with his insightful considerations of his time, the most essential points of what might be called a Kierkegaardian diatribe addressed to modernity. At the same time, his ideas are confronted with other thinkers in a dialectical way in order to contrast them and to delimit their meaning. The distinguished Dane suggests surreptitiously, but also directly, a vindication of what is human based on a search for Christian truth, decision-making, the passion to exist, intensive spirituality, and the convictions that give meaning to human existence. All this in the face of the characteristics of modernity, such as excessive rationality, reflection, scientific objectivity, abstract subjectivity and, in general, intellectual confusion with respect to the categories proper to the Christian religion

Keywords: truth, decision, freedom, modernity, relationship, subjectivity

Introduction

For a world revolutionised by the massive rise of information and increasingly dependent almost entirely on technological media, thinking has become almost a backward action or the exclusive concern of experts in the subject. So then, in the midst of the vital system that governs the everyday rhythms of being-in-the-world today, the fact of thinking about how to live existence is suggestive of finding solid reasons for which we may energise our existence and, in the highest sense, think about how to be-in-the-world through a truth that serves as a foundation and on which one can build the life project associated with each existent.

It was a preoccupation with truth that spurred Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, the great Danish philosopher, to ask himself about the question of the individual's truth, always in search of a radical choice that would lead him to proceed *qua homo*, overcoming the devouring nature of abstract universal categories, in which the individual is eclipsed and almost completely cancelled out. The truth that compromises the totality of existence is, precisely, what concerned and spurred Kierkegaard (SKJP, 1967, 5100 / SKP, I A 75 / SKS, AA: 12.), to philosophise about *veritatis splendor* distinguishing truth from quantitative, methodical, and verifiable procedures with regard to nature.

Indeed, Kierkegaard sets out to demonstrate the deficiencies of human reason in its eagerness to comprehend the question of truth and, in general, any other issue that has a Christian religious meaning. Thus, through his philosophical conjectures, he concludes that it is only possible to understand truth, which had been a preoccupation of the young Kierkegaard, with all its hermeneutical implications, in an exclusively subjective way. In this way, this article sets out to break down the question of Kierkegaardian truth, in a succinct dialogue with Heidegger, Gadamer, Nietzsche and indirectly with Hegel (as, throughout the text of the *Postscriptum*, Johannes Climacus formulates a continual critique of the Hegelian system, although Hegel's postulates: dialectic, objectivity, idealism, etc. are not cited explicitly. The critical vision with

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which Kierkegaard refers to modernity will then be discussed, with brief references to some of his most significant works in this regard (*The present age*, *The book on Adler*, *Johannes Climacus* or *The Omnibus Dubitandum Est* and *For self-examination*); and, finally, the essential and existential alternative of his thought will be elucidated on: the power of decision-making and, therefore, of freedom.

It is suggestive to recall the imperative need to seriously consider the question of truth. Thus, Heidegger proposed “the way is a way of thinking” (1997, p. 3), as the question incites, interpolates, illuminates, provokes, drives a series of vital attitudes with which one must face the challenge of existence itself. Moreover, it is worth recalling Jesus’s declaration, referred to in the Gospel according to John: ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς (“The truth shall set you free”, Jn 8:32), in which we find a certain concordance with Kierkegaardian thought through two key categories: on the one hand, truth (*Sandhed*), and on the other, freedom, understood as “the infinite possibility of power” (*den uendelige Mulighed af at kunne*) (Binetti, 2006, p. 75). Moreover, Pontius Pilate, in his dialogue with Jesus, did not intuit that truth makes human existence free, and that it is only possible to understand it with a silence (as in the biblical case of Abraham’s silence) which, unlike Aristotle and other speculative thinkers like Hegel, demands the utmost interiority. St. Augustine glimpses the horizon of Truth by means of striking expressions that delineate the sense of truth: “See where He is: He is everywhere where there is the least trace of truth. He is right inside the heart, but the heart has wandered away from Him. Return, sinners, to your own heart and cling to Him who made you. Stand in Him, and you shall stand fast; rest in Him, and you shall find peace” (*Confessions* IV.12.18).

In this way, as we dig deeper into Kierkegaard’s thought and modernity, we can understand that the realm of reason, or at least the enthronement of rationality as the gold standard of truth, experiences failings in the existential analysis that Kierkegaard suggests. Hence, the philosophical alternative drawn by Kierkegaardian thought has an enormous richness for humankind today; in addition to emphasising that, for Kierkegaard, the problem of truth is deeply involved with what he calls the theme of his work: “the problem of becoming a Christian” (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 23).

Kierkegaardian truth

Truth, undoubtedly, has been one of the great goals of philosophical activity, insofar as it emerges as one of the major issues that stimulates philosophical reflection and that, in the tradition of philosophy, has generated points of view that enrich its analysis. It is interesting that Aristotle, in his *Metaphysics*, begins with the following words: “All men are naturally inclined to know” (I.1.980a).

Indeed, there is an existential need to know Truth. Philosophy has been viewed as a path (ὁδός) and instrument (*instrumentum*) to arrive at truth. However, the question that arises as a guiding enquiry of this study hinges on sketching how Kierkegaard understands truth. Since many philosophers have become sidetracked about Truth, through various approaches and conceptual theories, Kierkegaard turns his attention to the issue of the relation, as he takes the view that truth inexorably entails a profound, intimate, and interior relationship.

It is known that, based on Aristotle’s, approaches, truth (ἡ ἀλήθεια) corresponds to concordance in judgement, and subsequently, as determined existence (*Metaphysics*, IX.10.1045b-1052b). Thomas Aquinas understood truth as *aedequatio rei* (S. Th. I, q. 16, a. 1), in which the thought is suited to the thing, insofar as it is known intelligibly by me. In contrast to these approaches, Kierkegaard’s Johannes Climacus states:

Whether truth is defined more empirically as the agreement of thinking with being or more idealistically as the agreement of being with thinking, the point in each case is to pay scrupulous attention to what is understood by being and also to pay attention to whether the knowing human spirit might not be lured out into the indefinite and

fantastically become something such as no existing human being has ever been or can be, a phantom with which the individual busies himself on occasion, yet without ever making it explicit to himself by means of dialectical middle terms how he gets out into this fantastical realm, what meaning it has for him to be there, whether the entire endeavor out there might not dissolve into a tautology within a rash, fantastical venture (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 189).

In this way, Kierkegaard's notion of Truth, under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus, diverges from the classical disquisitions, by associating it with the *concretum*, that is to say, the individual. Furthermore, asking what the meaning is for the individual of the term "being" makes it possible to situate the coordinates of Kierkegaard-Climacus's posture, as it relates truth with being, with a concrete commitment, one that is neither ethereal nor imaginary, nor logical speculations of truth. On the contrary, his stance points to the singular individual who strives, engages, and rediscovers self-being. For this reason, Kierkegaardian truth aims to promote a qualitative leap in the human being: that is, to pass from the knowing subject, who, on the one hand, intuitively deduces, infers, and interprets the phenomena of the world, but who is not aware of their existence as such, to the individual person; on the other hand, in one's ontological task, one must seek the first thing: to be who one is, demanding that the truth transform human existence, committing one not only to one's intellect, but also to all one's acts, through an existential reduplication. In short, truth is not a merely theoretical or intellectual question. Rather, it is a practical and existential matter. Its purpose is to tackle a person's existence by giving it meaning and transmuting it.

This Kierkegaardian truth finds a justification in the notes on the nature of philosophy, according to Heidegger. This is so since, in his paradigmatic metaphysical thought, truth encompasses all its activity. Heidegger expresses this in paragraph 44 of *Being and Time*: "Philosophy itself is defined as the science of the 'truth'. But it is also characterized as 'a science which contemplates entities as entities'-that is, with regard to their Being" (Heidegger, 2001, p. 256). Thus Heidegger, when he refers to the notion of truth, from a philosophical perspective, sets out to think about the being of things, placing thought on the ontological frontier. Now the question of the essence of truth necessarily implies not only the question of truth's mode of being, but also how this mode of being is made concrete in human existence.

Indeed, the problem of truth focuses on the mode of being in which truth manifests itself, so that two questions arise from the problem: first, the question of who perceives or intuitively this manifestation; and, secondly, determining whether the mode of being of truth entails an ontological relation that, as a *conditio sine qua non*, requires an unveiling of the being of the existential subject. Likewise, Heidegger metaphysically conceives the question of truth on the basis of two plausible elements: the first refers to the original meaning of truth, in which *Dasein* as being-discoverer and through its being-in-the-world, unveils the existences - with which *Dasein*, co-exists in the world. However, in the second aspect, *Dasein*, in its derived sense, is a being-discovered in the world (Heidegger, 2001, pp. 262–263). Indeed, truth consists of discovering being and, at the same time, in being discovered by others. Hence Heidegger concludes that *Dasein* is "is its disclosedness essentially, and discloses and uncovers as something disclosed to this extent it is essentially 'true'" (Heidegger, 2001, p. 263).

Kierkegaard – Climacus, for his part, establishes the coordinates of his perspective on truth, differentiating it from the objective path, which is characterised by the abstract dimension of its content: "To objective reflection, truth becomes something objective, an object, and the point is to disregard the subject. To subjective reflection, truth [*Sandhed*] becomes appropriation [*Tilegnelse*], inwardness [*Inderlighed*], subjectivity [*Subjektivitet*], and the point is to immerse oneself, existing, in subjectivity" (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 192). This approach configures one of the major aspects of the critique of modernity, since, by pointing out the deficiencies of the objective, it constructs a reconsideration of the subjective. Indeed, the subjective does not allude

to a relativism, but rather aims to establish that reason is not the sole criterion that makes us human. The single individual is, at the same time, passion, paradox, angst, freedom, possibility, adventure, decision. The knowing subject is reformulated as a concrete existent, within space-time coordinates and a socio-cultural-biographical context, which seeks something intangible to which to cling, support, and surpass itself. In this sense, and in a certain way, Kierkegaard could be considered a forerunner of the sociology of knowledge and culture, a discipline developed by Max Scheler and Karl Mannheim, which basically poses the question of the social origin of our knowledge.

Kierkegaard, in this way, raises the question of relation as an elementary aspect of his disquisitions on truth, moving away from the objective route, properly and emblematically modern, and reformulating the subjective route as the main argument of his thesis. Heidegger also unveils the scenario of the new concept of truth: "What is primarily 'true' – that is, uncovering – is Dasein" (Heidegger, 2001, p. 263), focusing the core of the issue on the concrete individual. Nietzsche has this to say about truth:

The will to truth that still seduces us into taking so many risks, this famous truthfulness that all philosophers so far have talked about with veneration: what questions this will to truth has already laid before us! What strange, terrible, questionable questions! (...) We asked about the *value* of this will. Granted, we will truth: *why not untruth instead?* And uncertainty? Even ignorance? The problem of the value of truth came before us, – or was it we who came before the problem? Which of us is Oedipus? Which one is the Sphinx? (Nietzsche, 2002, p. 5).

In short, whether we are Oedipus or the Sphinx, the anthropological slant on truth will be directed towards the question of the individual, existentially considered; rather than towards the epistemological question, characteristic of modern philosophy. It is a subjectivist spin on truth, which rather than seeking its 'unveiling' (in the classical sense) or its apodictic certainty (in the modern sense), is understood as revelation and existential appropriation of it, making it our own.

Indeed, the singular character of truth, the malignancy in the process of unveiling the truth and, above all, the ambiguity of truth, will be aspects that Kierkegaard will develop. In the *Concluding unscientific postscript to philosophical fragments*, under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, one of the critical elements of his philosophy of truth is argued: the beginning. That is to say, the Hegelian thesis that it always puts the subject in constant becoming, whereby syntheses are obtained via a dialectic on phenomena, forgetting the existent. Precisely, the beginning alludes to the subject of truth, that is, on which the notion of truth as the principle of truth starts, since the subject contains a subjectivity within itself. As Paul L. Holmer points out: "Kierkegaard is surely one of the greatest of dialecticians of all times. Yet, his expression, "truth is subjectivity", seems to be an absolute denial of all dialectical powers and values. In fact, the very expression is offensive. It smacks of romanticism, of relativism, of self-assertion" (Holmer, 2012, p. 109).

For this reason, the cryptic character of Kierkegaardian thought is found both in what he says and in the way he says it, which requires a meticulous hermeneutical understanding to establish the essence of his formulations.

In this sense, Kierkegaard-Climacus defines truth, above all, as subjectivity. Certainly, his approaches are directed to the modern question of knowledge, understanding it as a relationship between a knowing subject and a knowable object; that is, between a subject that can know and an object that allows itself to be known. In this relationship, epistemological *par excellence*, Kierkegaard seeks to vindicate the subject, not as a knowing subject, but as he himself expresses it: "That the knowing spirit is an existing spirit, and that every human being is such a spirit existing for himself" (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 189); and, in another section: "I am indeed a poor

existing” (ibid.). However, the *modus operandi* that Kierkegaard proposes to think of oneself as an existing spirit is through a process of self-questioning. Like Heidegger, Kierkegaard poses a question: “Consequently, it is an existing spirit who asks about truth, presumably because he wants to exist in it, but in any case the questioner is conscious of being an existing individual human being” (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 191). Thus, the question of truth denotes a singular purpose: to seek to engage and exist in truth.

Next, the question has the potential to generate two relations: an objective and a subjective one. As for the objective relation, as an ironic representation of modernity, truth seeks to become something objective, dispensing with the subject, and is represented in the abstract. The objective relation, which makes the subject contingent or irrelevant, and, thus, makes existence indifferent, meagre, is not the solution to the problem of truth. The subjective path, suggested by Johannes Climacus, is the one that provides the highest sense of individuality - decision. Decision, indeed, entails an implication of the existing spirit, as it commits itself in all its possibilities. It emerges from an inner relation.

Clare Carlise underlines an interesting point about the importance of truth and its nexus with doing philosophy: “Kierkegaard is not bringing another new philosophy back from Germany, but calling into question whether doing philosophy is the right way to seek the truth, whether baptism makes people Christian, whether being human is something to take for granted” (Carlise, 2020, p. 31).

Kierkegaard thus proposes what could be called a ‘philosophy of decision’, taking into account that it stages the maximum commitment that the existing spirit has to itself, that is, to its existence: to be itself. At the same time, he reconsiders the meaning of being Christian, differentiating it from Christianity, while proposing a rich anthropology, in which the single individual is an unrealized, unfinished and indeterminate project, which is realised through every vital decision (Pavliková & Tavilla, 2023).

Another salient aspect of Kierkegaard’s approach to truth lies in interiority; for, by contemplating the existing spirit that is diluted by objective reflection and Hegelian speculation, Kierkegaard establishes the inner path as the fertile ground of an essential relationship: that is, to pass from knowing oneself to oneself. Indeed, this “*radical choice*” (Morales, 2023, p. 343) produces the effect of an inner movement in existence that means the individual acquires for oneself a “(...) essential knowing is essentially related to existence” (Kierkegaard, 1992, p.197). In this sense, the interiority that Kierkegaard postulates is similar to the one expressed by Pascal and St. Augustine of Hippo, who, with their respective philosophical postulates and vital discourses, make brilliant points on the theme of truth. This is demonstrable with the permanent critique of Pascal, in his *Penseés* (1670), against modern rationalism, whose leading exponent was Descartes.

Pascal aims his critique against the over-valued achievements of modern reason, emphasising the fragility of the human condition. Hence the metaphor of the “thinking reed” (Pascal, 1910, p. 118) is a suggestive one with great philosophical content: weak, strong, perishable, finite, etc. These insights are the fruit of the interiority of truth. In addition, St. Augustine, when he alludes to the death of his anonymous friend, in his pain and, above all, in his inner loneliness, perceived the human condition (*Confessions* IV, 4.9 and X, 43.68.70). Hence truth, in its very interiority, is a passion and a paradox. These two aspects, which go beyond the modern objective territory, are fundamentally situated in, to quote Climacus: “Therefore, only ethical and ethical-religious knowing is essential knowing. But all ethical and all ethical-religious knowing is essentially a relating to the existing of the knower” (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 198). When Kierkegaard considers interiority, he finds in his essential knowledge of his very existence a reality that is intrinsic to the human condition: passion. Johannes Climacus expresses it thus: “Subjective reflection turns inward toward subjectivity and in this inward deepening will be of the truth, and in such a way that, just as in the preceding,

when objectivity was advanced, subjectivity vanished, here subjectivity as such becomes the final factor and objectivity the vanishing” (Kierkegaard, 1992, p.196)

Consequently, by internalising the existing spirit and diminishing objectivity, what is left is solely the Self in its nature and in its essence. Therefore, the subject can itself comprehend its Self, it can experience angst for not being itself, and it can choose itself. Kierkegaardian truth emphasises the relationship, as Climacus puts it:

When the question about truth is asked objectively, truth is rejected upon objectively as an object to which the knower relates himself. What is rejected upon is not the relation but that what he relates himself to is the truth, the true. If only that to which he relates himself is the truth, the true, then the subject is in the truth. When the question about truth is asked subjectively, the individual's relation is rejected upon subjectively. If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he in this way were to relate himself to untruth (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 199).

The “how” of the relation is the essential point for Kierkegaard as is the mode of truth, since the mode corresponds to the existential singularity of each individual. Nonetheless, for Climacus, the predilection for the relation finds a fundamental grounding in the life of Socrates; for, through the passion of infinity that always characterised him, he chose to question the very interiority of his contemporaries. However, the Kierkegaardian focus on truth seeks to claim the single existence, exhorting the human being to be who he is.

Thus, the way of understanding truth as a relation is not that of reality/being-knowledge/thought (traditional approach), nor that of thinking-contents of consciousness (evidence of self-consciousness or thought contrasted with itself in the modern approach), but the relationship between the concrete person who exists and that (truth) that gives them meaning and sustains their existence. Climacus in *De omnibus dubitandum est* therefore, rejects the initial approach of modern philosophy (Cartesian doubt), which in fact presupposes that from which it starts, which is not doubt, but the existence of the doubting subject. Philosophical modernity with Descartes arose from a confusion between the essential and the non-essential; of a dishonesty with regard to the artificial and instrumental use of a theoretical doubt, and from a misunderstanding between what was a strictly personal matter (Descartes with his circumstances) and its generalisation. Climacus, in short, makes a sharp critique of modern philosophy to the extent that doubt is made a universal and necessary condition of all philosophical legitimacy, when in reality it should only serve to characterise it historically, not essentially. The important point, again, is how the individual relates to the proposition “philosophy begins with doubt”, not just to who enunciates it, but above all in terms of who receives it (Kierkegaard, 2007, pp. 50-70).

That is why modern philosophy is the daughter of the temporal and the orphan of the eternal. Or to put it another way, all serious philosophical reflection, even if it pertains to a particular historical-cultural context, must have a timeless value. Moreover, that would also be the way for it to have ‘authority’; not simply a greater or lesser ephemeral influence. Kierkegaard addresses this very problem of authority in his work *The book on Adler* (unpublished during his lifetime; SKP, VII 2 B, 235-270/SKS, BOA ms.2.1- 2.20). He uses this contemporary personage of the time to highlight the confusion in his day regarding what religious authority means and what obedience entails. Something that is misunderstood because it would be approached rationally, instead of from the point of view of faith. In this regard, he differentiates between the ‘essential author’ and the ‘premise author’. The former has his own conception of life with which he tries to heal his time (this would be the case of Kierkegaard); while the second would be that false, inauthentic writer who tries to satisfy his time by taking advantage of it, like the pastor A. P. Adler (Kierkegaard, 1998, pp. 7-27).

A critique of modern man

Kierkegaard, when examining modern society, does not hesitate to make a strong critique of its bases or foundations (Pavlikova, 2019, pp. 1015–1026), since his rigorous diatribe is directed at several strategic points: the Lutheran Church of his country, the media (Pavlikova, 2021, pp. 223–226), the Hegelian philosophical environment, and Danish society, in general. However, in his consideration of the great modern ideal that promotes the claim of an enlightened society which, according to Kant, should overcome minority by means of a practical reason based on the understanding of each subject, Kierkegaard-Climacus expresses his disagreement because Enlightenment ideals do not aim to consider and formulate the great task: to be a single individual. Consequently, the objective path, as the presence of the Enlightenment ideal, is the first theme of his diatribe: “Ordinary communication between one human being and another is entirely immediate, because people ordinarily exist in immediacy” (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 74). Immediacy, in fact, is part of one of the stages or spheres of existence that Kierkegaard calls the aesthetic stage, since the immediate has to do with the presence of the pleasurable and the sensual (Cañas, 2003, pp. 45–46). However, such immediate existence entails despair as a characteristic disease of modern man. The desperation of trying to affirm ourselves in the ephemeral, of wanting to eternalise the ephemeral, of not being what we really are: a spirit. Modern man and society lack a self-valuation of what it means and implies to be a singular individual for authentic transformation (Ehichioya Obinyan, 2014, pp. 1–2).

Communication in the modern world is characterised by the fluidity of information, together with a plethora of sources or channels, and not by the famous Socratic dialogue, in which the word goes from individual to individual, encouraging the transmission of the *logos*. With regard to dialogue, Gadamer underlines (*Wahrheit und methode*, 1960) the importance of genuine communication, because this type of interaction facilitates, according to his approach: “(...) and to take its stand in the movement of dialogue, in which word and idea first become what they are” (Gadamer, 2004, p. xxxiii). Thus, the formulation of arguments, the reformulation of theses, the construction of questions, and the movement of the word, generate a cultural revolution within modernity (the technological revolution of communication and information). For this reason, the communication suggested by Kierkegaard, whose aim is the emergence of the truth of and in each individual, is a unique mode of communication that must provoke, incite, and stimulate the dialogic relationship of the individual with oneself and, at the same time, with the other. Kierkegaard calls this type of communication indirect communication or communication of power (*Kunnens Meddelelse*) in which, according to the Platonic dialogues, the aim is for each reader to come to discover their own truth on their own, and, in terms of the *Philosophical Fragments*, to “dar a luz su verdad” [“to give birth to his truth”] (Morales, 2023, p. 323). Hence, the use of pseudonyms is seen as a dialectical way of prompting the reader to consider the most essential: to be oneself.

Climacus highlights the importance of indirect communication that links subjectivity with the existence of both the sender and the receiver, distinguishing it from direct communication, whose fundamental purpose is the transmission merely of the content of the message, knowledge or information of the objective.⁵ Climacus states it as follows: “The form of a communication is something different from the expression of a communication. When a thought has gained its proper expression in the word, which is attained through the first reflection, there comes the second reflection, which bears upon the intrinsic relation of the communication to the communicator and renders the existing communicator’s own relation to the idea” (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 76).

Although Kierkegaard did not write or publish a work on “communication” (*Meddelelse*), he did leave among his “papers” (*Papirer*) an unfinished project in which he dealt with both

⁵ On the problem of communication in Kierkegaard, cf. García Martín, J. and Giordano, Diego (eds.) (2011): *Kierkegaard y la comunicación*. Napoli: Orthotes Editrice.

types of communication (SKP, VIII 2 B 86-89/SKS, Papir pp. 369–371:2). Consequently, Kierkegaard advocates a new mode of communication that fosters the essential relation, which challenges the self against the self. This interpellation has two effects: objectivity vanishes and subjectivity shines. Modern Man, subsumed by the pretension of the objective, neglects the most intimate and the most singular element of his own existence, ignoring its singularity or even rejecting his own interiority. Thus, for Kierkegaard, modern Man is a desperate being (he does not want to be what he really is: a singular individual) who lives in a desperate society.

In the religious sphere, Kierkegaard severely and critically, examines Danish Christianity as experienced in his beloved Copenhagen in the mid-19th century and reaches the conclusion that there is no Christianity, for what exists is a bourgeois and well-to-do Christianity; above all, the ecclesiastical hierarchy with whom he had discussions and controversies (first with Bishop Mynster indirectly, and then with Martensen directly at the end of his life). A Christian is not one who is simply part of the church, but one who, having understood the essence of Christianity, realises it existentially: “Actually to communicate such a conviction would require art and self-control: enough self-control to comprehend inwardly that the God-relationship of the individual human being is the main point, that the meddling busyness of a third person is a lack of inwardness and a superfluity of amiable obtuseness” (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 77).

The relation of the single person to God is the purpose of Kierkegaard’s essays, for it is this relation that fosters the relation to oneself, the author-relation, or the reflective relation (this is how he understands man as “Selv” or “Spirit” *The sickness unto death* of Anti-Climacus, 1980, p. 13), and it means an appropriation of the self which, in its essence and through a centripetal movement, understands itself and chooses itself. Moreover, it is authentic Christianity that promotes existence in its highest sense; In fact, it could be argued that no other religion is more so. To be a Christian, baptism is not enough, nor is it enough to retain or know dogmatic truths, for being a Christian includes enthusiasm or passion, life, relationship, and works of love (Kierkegaard, 2006, pp. 21–34). Ultimately, being a Christian inexorably demands seriousness and martyrdom, bearing in mind that one’s salvation is at stake in every decision and in every act.

The alternative: the worldly spirit or the Christian spirit

If there is one thing that characterises Kierkegaard as a writer and thinker, it is his ability to express religious questions or theological problems from an existential point of view. In doing so, he uses both the literary personification of different types of individuals, as well as intellectual categories or concepts in the form of discursive narratives, metaphors, personal stories, or merely simple sermons or biblical or evangelical commentaries. Be that as it may, the point of departure and arrival, the common meeting point of all his work and thought, is always the same: the concrete individual and his existence. However, an existence that is committed, responsible and therefore free or indeterminate. Thus, the existence of the existent itself, of the singular individual (*Den Enkelte*) is the general framework of Kierkegaardian thought.

In Kierkegaardian thought, one can easily identify the importance of the commitment and responsibility of the existent to one’s own existence. Truth, from the Kierkegaardian standpoint, aims to subjectively commit the existent to itself, through a decision. In fact, we are what we decide, and the possibility of being oneself is, through the weight of decision, the qualitative leap that Kierkegaard proposes; although, he claims, in the present time one of the pathological symptoms that the subject suffers from is indecision, that is, not deciding, being frustrated and subsumed in reflection. Specifically, in his work *The present age* (*Nutiden*, 1846), Kierkegaard describes his era as one with characteristics that are the opposite of our own era; today what we find is a lot of “sentiment”, “emotions”, “passions”, but little “reflection”: “The present age is essentially a sensible, reflecting age, devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial, short-lived

enthusiasm and prudentially relaxing in indolence” (Kierkegaard, 1990, p. 68). Reflection is synonymous with inactivity and total passivity (Kierkegaard, 1990, p. 71); for this reason, Kierkegaardian philosophy entails a force that spurs the existent to action.

Heidegger claims that: “Every philosophical -that is, thoughtful- doctrine of man’s essential nature is *in itself alone* a doctrine of the Being of beings” (Heidegger, 1968, p. 79). Precisely, Kierkegaard postulates an essential doctrine of human existence, since he considers the question asked by Being of the entity, that is, to pose it in such a way that this question asks the existing subject about its essence, drawing the alternative of his diatribe, which is decision: “(...), since the issue is the decision and all decision, as shown previously, is rooted in subjectivity” (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 129). With the decision, the modern dilemma is overcome, in which the individual is left in a state of subjective death and, therefore, interiority is eternally eclipsed. Conversely, in the decision there is adventure, risk, pain, bliss and, above all, passion to exist intensively.

The decision, then, includes two phases of the religious stage that Kierkegaardian thought emphasises, namely: Socratic interiority or religiosity A, where the decision consists in choosing oneself. On the other hand, Christianity or religiosity B, in which the singular self attains beatitude through faith; that is, through the exercise of Christianity. In this way, Kierkegaard places the existing subject under the imperative obligation to decide, since the work of evil *par excellence* is the non-decision of the existing subject, since the human being is an incomplete, never-finished action that is continually constructed through the vital commitment to oneself (Binetti et al, 2022; Martin et al., 2019).

Finally, in *For self-examination (Til Selvprøvelse. Samtiden Ambefaleet*, 1850), in part three of that work, Kierkegaard, in relation to the feast of the Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, critiques the *Zeitgeist* or the world in his time as an evil spirit: “Indeed, according to Christianity someone who believes in the spirit of the age, in the spirit of the world, certainly believes in an evil spirit” (Kierkegaard, 1990, p. 75). Like a mist, the *Zeitgeist* (modernity) hardly gets an inch off the ground, preventing it from seeing beyond what is right in front of it. It is the spirit of humankind, of Man, of false Christianity or Christendom (*Christenheden*), but not of the single individual. Real Christianity therefore demands renouncing the worldly spirit, to die for the world (Kierkegaard, 1990, p.77), to give up love of oneself or love of the world. Only then will we live for the Holy Spirit, the only spirit that really gives life, for the Glory of God: “the truth or the world” (Máhrík, 2018, p. 42).

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