

## THE „BOOK OF THE JUDGE”. ON THE IMPORTANCE OF KIERKEGAARD’S *JOURNALS AND PAPERS*

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### ABSTRACT

**Aim.** Our main purpose is to explain the connection between the work and the intimate existence of Søren Kierkegaard, and how freedom operates in both of them.

**Concept.** The article makes visible new writing ways that open from within Kierkegaard's work. Analytical reading of Kierkegaard's *Journals* and the comparative interpretation of the rest of Kierkegaard's work in terms of communicative styles and explains the genesis and location and type of communication of the *Journals* within the framework of the Kierkegaardian Corpus.



**Results.** Kierkegaard's philosophy is present and indicates the extremely personal place in which the author possessed its work.

**Conclusions.** We conclude the unavoidable importance of the Journals for the interpretation of Kierkegaard's work. The reason why the *Journals* are for Kierkegaard's „The Book of the Judge“ lies in the direct, personal and intimate communication of its writing. Existence as free and self-conscious action constitutes the core of the article. On it rests the personal development of the individual and the incommensurable value of his life and work.

**Keywords:** Kierkegaard, existence, indirect communication, christianity, Kierkegaard's discourse

## INTRODUCTION: THE COMPLEXITY OF KIERKEGAARD'S WRITINGS

Becoming initiated into Søren Kierkegaard's work is no simple task. In our opinion, its complexity consists in discovering a philosophical thought, usually expressed in a literary way, exasperated in hyperbolic positions and personalized in the streets of Copenhagen. This thought is equally adapted to a declaration of principles sustained with the utmost speculative rigour, to an aesthetic or edifying and highly polished writing style, and to a fragment of his personal *Journal*, abounding in subjective impressions and intimate experiences. Our author is capable of stating the same existential category with an autobiographical fragment, an edifying admonition or an ironic recourse signed by Johannes, displaying in all these modes the same conceptual process, which advances according to the dialectical rhythm of human existence.

Nevertheless, we believe that, under this morphological multiplicity, Kierkegaard maintains the unity of content of his philosophical thought. In our opinion, throughout Kierkegaard's work we find important convergences and analogies which allow us to state the analogical unity of his speculation, the inner coherence of his ideas and the logical derivation from his principles. In this sense, research on his thought should be ordained to the task of discovering the simplicity within complexity and the unity within multiplicity.

In short, we believe that the difficulty of becoming initiated into Kierkegaard's work lies mainly in the rigorous argumentative consistency of a systematic thought which claims to be antagonistic to the system - specifically the Hegelian system - and which has used every snare of seduction to restrain men, because - according to him - „whoever is 'incapable' of seducing men would not even be able to save them“ (Cappelørn et al., 2007, IX A 383). Attracted by this *seductio*, and perhaps even moved by our salvation, we have yielded to Kierkegaard's written word.

Kierkegaard used different ways of communication. Yet we can agree that „the goal of communication and the means to reach the goal might be different in his various works but his general main goal is the same“ (Žalec, 2018,

p. 49). He „tried to help the reader to existentially grasp their/our condition and the way out, the ‘solution’, or the ‘redemption’, to put it theologically” (Žalec, 2018, p. 49). Máhrík (2018) explains:

Used different pseudonyms under which he was able to bring different perspectives into the discourse on the particular subject in view and thus to provide an effective space to embrace human existence as a unity of temporal and the eternal in a very complex way. (p. 40)

### THE INDIRECT COMMUNICATION OF THE *JOURNAL*

The complexity of Kierkegaard’s work is expressed through two real and effective ways of communication: direct and indirect communication. Both ways are irreducible to a mere stylistic difference and are essentially related to an existential thought, ordained to the free certainty of inwardness. Direct communication is for Kierkegaard the „communication of knowledge” (Kierkegaard, 1967, VIII<sup>2</sup> B 89), whether common or scientific knowledge. Because for him human existence is existence within the space allowed by limitations, „neither an aesthetic nor an ethical view can make a definitive evidence of certain declaration, for no view can be considered to be surely objective” (Máhrík, 2015, p. 51). We are dealing in this case with an impersonal communication, tending to inform objectively about a represented reality, without engaging moral action, whereas indirect communication takes place at the sphere of existence, and that is the reason why it is a „communication of power” (Kierkegaard, 1967, VIII<sup>2</sup> B 89), tending towards the fulfilment of the self through inwardness. Beyond the communication styles – aesthetic-literary, edifying or philosophical-argumentative – Kierkegaard’s own type of communication is the indirect one, because it defines the deepest nature of his thought, the idea of power, as foundation, content and aim of a subjectivity which is incommunicable from a metaphysical point of view and thus obliquely transmissible. The work, whose author identifies with „a potency of spirit” (Kierkegaard, 1967, XI<sup>3</sup> B 168) wholly asserts the same and only spiritual force, capable of overcoming imaginary or conceptual mediation to reveal – indirectly–the reader’s subjective power.

Indirect communication is the „instinctive” determination (Kierkegaard, 1967, X<sup>3</sup> A 413) of Kierkegaard’s writings, consistent with the author’s inner development. „It was – **the Danish existentialist confesses – my natural disposition**” (Kierkegaard, 1967, X<sup>2</sup> A 195), insofar as writing had a majeutic effect on the writer, disclosing the power of his inwardness. Kierkegaard explains that, as a consequence of his personal development, his „indirect communication is inferior to the direct one, because the former depends on the fact that, from the beginning, I was not clear to myself” (Kierkegaard, 1967, X<sup>3</sup> A 628). The initial obscurity confessed by the author must be understood in relation to his religious aspiration, as to which „I was not

able to say whether I was a Christian or not, whereas I have always maintained that to become a Christian was my task in life" (Kierkegaard, 1967, X<sup>5</sup> A 60).

We may well compare the case of Socratic doctrine, whose conclusion became manifest in the person of the ancient learned man, with Kierkegaard's work. Its author claims not to be able to „give an integral explanation to my work as a writer, I mean in the strictly intimate and personal sense in which I possess it" (Kierkegaard, 1967, XIII 554). Kierkegaard's discourse could not show in a direct way that inner place where „thought is essentially an act of presence" (Kierkegaard, 1967, IX A 189) and was restricted to induce the self-presence of all those Seducers and Taciturn, Climacus and Anti-Climacus, every Quidam and each Individual, capable of listening to the truth about themselves.

In fact, Kierkegaard's works have been entirely produced through indirect communication, supported by the personal relation to the idea and „poetically" translated (Kierkegaard, 1967, X<sup>1</sup> A 162). This particularly applies to the *Journal* in a very special way. In it Kierkegaard himself becomes both the subject and the object of a verbal action, the artist and the work of an ideal to which his own life has been devoted. The essential indirect character of his message achieves in the *Journal* the privilege of his own intimacy, mediated and articulated in language. Besides, in telling his experience, our author tries to show us the linguistic essence of every human experience.

Every experience reflected in the *Journal* meets the requirements that indirect communication demands of subjectivity, such as situation, double reflection, reduplication, delusion and majeutic action. The inner pathos, the circumstances and events of Kierkegaard's life express in it their verbal character, as „pure essences", as „absolute realities" launched into the turbine of an infinite movement, carried to the utmost depth, a depth of 70.000 braces. The intimate experience told in the *Journal* expresses an eternal value, capable of elevating the most trivial event to the infinite. The author opened his life to the impact of an absolute power. He confesses himself incapable of the immediately immediate and spiritually forced to measure everything with the infinite dialectics of a transcendent aim, the only one capable of consolidating personal life, of defeating optical illusions, and of disclosing that inner dwelling which shelters the absolute. For this reason - in his view - only „he who relates to the idea and lives in a primitive way is truly alive. The rest is just optical illusion. In death delusion will completely vanish, as in a finished comedy" (Kierkegaard, 1967, XI<sup>1</sup> A 121). Kierkegaard's existence thus assumed the ideal and primitive sense of a being revealed through his own reflection in the process of a linguistically articulated majeutic action.

## THE „BOOK OF THE JUDGE”

In the *Journal and Papers*, Kierkegaard asserts that: „If after my death my *Journal* happened to be published, it could be entitled: ‘Book of the Judge’” (Kierkegaard, 1967, X<sup>1</sup> A 239). This statement induces us to inquire into the reason why Kierkegaard is judged by his *Journal*.

In the first place, we believe that the *Journal* judges Kierkegaard because in it the author speaks in the first person without pseudonyms or stages, and refers to himself without mediators or spokesmen. The *Journal* discloses the different voices of the discourse and the multiple characters of his performance in order to expose the real human being, in the unity of his existence. The raw fabric of Kierkegaard’s soul is revealed in the autobiographical texts of the *Journal*, full of pain and consolation, of melancholy and bliss, of contradiction and serenity. The providential mission he assigned to his life, that „thorn in the flesh” (Kierkegaard, 1967, VIII<sup>1</sup> A 156) and in the spirit that dignified him, his surrender into the hands of the Father, his trust in the world beyond the world and his deep love for the ordinary human being, reveal the self-understanding reached by the author. Finally, the pseudonymous production, the edifying meditation and the philosophical reflection, whose purpose is not self-explained, have the last word in the *Journal*.

In the second place, the *Journal* judges the most heartrending events in its author’s life. I am here referring to his relationship to his father and to that secret guilt destined to family destruction; to his breakup with Regina Olsen, whom Kierkegaard abandoned on account of the melancholy which invaded him, because he was incapable of corresponding to her love on a human basis, and because he had been committed to God a long time ago; to the success of the *Corsair*, a paradigm of his struggle against literary degradation and the process of massification. Lastly, the *Journal* judges his confrontation with the official Church of Denmark, set off in the series of 21 articles published in *Faedrelandet* between the end of 1854 and the beginning of 1855, to which we must add the 10 fascicules of *The Instant*. Kierkegaard criticized the Church for deifying the established order. „The established order, however, abolished man’s sincere and genuine relationship with God and became a measure of value and faith” (Pavlíková & Žalec, 2019, p. 1021).

Thirdly, working on the *Journal* allows us to trace the genesis of Kierkegaard’s thought, following the emergence, evolution, eventual extinction or deepening of an idea. It is also possible to reconstruct it within the personal and historical-cultural context of its appearance, with its visible influences, interlocutors or rivals, and to relate it to his deepest experiences. We might even say that on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 1834 our author inaugurated his *Journal* with a series of texts devoted to two central concerns in his thought: the problem of predestination and the concept of irony, two subjects which prove his Christian commitment from a very early age as well as his vast knowledge of classical and modern thought and, finally, his fundamen-

tal concern with human freedom. The problem of freedom, threatened by Lutheran predestination and latent in the phenomenon of irony – especially Socratic irony – is embodied in the Danish existentialist philosopher's own life through the acutest suffering and silent despair, occasionally relieved by the dramatic outlets of the *Journal* and theoretically reflected in *The concept of anxiety* as the original possibility of power. Later, when around 1848 Kierkegaard achieves a more lucid comprehension of his providential destiny, the subject of freedom gradually intertwines with the reality of divine grace and the need to imitate Christ, ideas which Anti-Climacus has wished to express with the authority of an exceptional Christian. But, precisely since that moment, the sufferings of Kierkegaard's soul become intensified, prompted by a conception of Christianity which denies life and the world, and promoted to the hierarchy of martyrdom. The last fragment of the *Journal*, which was suddenly interrupted on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1855, ends with the idea of spiritual death regarding every worldly sign and with total abandonment into God's hands. Kierkegaard's freedom thus willed to show, in the last battle against the official Church, the absolute worth of divine surrender.

Finally, the *Journal* judges the universal character of Kierkegaard's message because it is not merely an autobiographical review or a vague exclamation of subjective passions. On the contrary, it intends to trace the itinerary of human conscience in the search of the Absolute, and in it Kierkegaard, in discovering himself, tries to discover that universal and concrete Singular Individual that every man is. The *Journal*, like an absolutely personal prism, projects the ultimate sense of human existence in a universal way. What has been lived and understood by the author becomes the inexhaustible source of that legacy which he has bequeathed on to the thought of all times and, beyond time, on to the eternal heart of every man in his singular existence (Batka, 2022).

### THE *JOURNAL* AS COMPLEMENTARY TO THE REST OF KIERKEGAARD'S DISCOURSE

The *Journal* judges Kierkegaard's work because the central themes and deep concerns which inspire the rest of his writings have their source in it. In comparison to the partial character of Kierkegaard's texts the *Journal* has the privilege of an all-inclusive content and, in confrontation with the infinite displacement of each existential position, it states the differentiated unity of the subjective spirit. We might say that the *Journal* reveals Kierkegaard's soul as no other writing does.

Nevertheless, the *Journal* does not excuse us from reading his whole work, whose sentence it pronounces. In fact, in no way undermining a positive appreciation of it, it is our opinion that it often incurs a somewhat fragmentary character and abbreviation in concept treatment, together with a cer-



tain lack of continuity as to compilation and content, usually compensated by the thematic consistency and the argumentative coherence of the rest of Kierkegaard's writings, which, although partial, are capable of completing the definition of the matter in question. Instead of systematic reasoning within a closed system „his approach is rather kaleidoscopic, where he penetrates into understanding the nature of phenomena in different directions and from different positions" (Máhrík et al., 2020, p. 44). On the other hand, the extremely personal quality of the *Journal* leads to polemic exasperation, to effusiveness or imprecision of an intimate tonality which might cause the most sensible conclusions of his thought to falter. Thus, the masterly pedagogy of the Kierkegaardian work and its impeccable overall attainment are complemented by the insuperable depth of the philosopher who, through his own existence, described the universal human being.

Lastly, it is our belief that a philosopher of Kierkegaard's stature can be understood in every aspect of his thought as well as in the totality of it, in the whole as well as in any its parts, because each part repeats the principles displaying the whole. For this reason, the various pieces of Kierkegaard's production are not only harmoniously composed, but the same spirit is alive in the *Journal* as in the rest of his work, tautened in the struggle of a dialectic becoming, and ordained to the retrieval of his authentic image.

### CONCLUSION: WHICH IS THE JUDGMENT OF THE *JOURNAL AND PAPERS*?

In the *Journal*, Kierkegaard's philosophy is present and indicates the extremely personal place in which the author possessed its work; it is the precise point in which the most personal experience acquires a universal dimension and is given to us as a compensation for the ordinary human being that we all are. When he lays open his *Journal* for us to read, Kierkegaard entrusts us with his own history to engage the word of our own personal history. In this way he proposes to us the paradox of a reality both temporal and eternal, past and present. For Kierkegaard, even when „to play with the concept of absolute paradox does not mean to create a philosophical concept, but to deal with the reality that surpasses our perceptive capacities" (Máhrík, 2017, p. 123). And also paradoxically, his first person is today our own, and that pure experience whose verbal character gave a meaning to his existence upon the ultimate limit of the ineffable, has become our own narrative.

The legacy of the *Journal* – much more than the pseudonymous works or the edifying discourses – discloses the deep humility of someone who did not wish to be a master or a model, but merely everybody's equal, a life companion, capable of opening his judgment to our history and his history to our verdict, knowing that the verdict reveals the judge. Kierkegaard wants to speak to us about his own experience. He has made his confession, making us active participants in a life whose fundamental sense questions us perma-

nently. This essentially dialogical character of Kierkegaard's work expresses, in the last resort, the fundamentally relational character of the human spirit, open to God and to others. According to Kierkegaard, God „created man as a relation“ (Žalec, 2017, p. 79)

As is always the case with indirect communication, the *Journal* has been left unfinished, waiting for singular decision. Each one of us is called upon to complete with his own history what the author has left open. Kierkegaard's *Journal*, as the rest of his thought, does not look back to the past but faces a future full of possibilities and new perspectives. And, in the same way in which every existent progresses unchecked *ad se ipsum* (Kierkegaard, 1967, II A 340), the *Journal* is pursued in our own history, and perhaps our personal journal will be its judgment.

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