

INTERSUBJECTIVITY OR INTEREXISTENTIALITY? KIERKEGAARD'S CONCEPTION OF EXISTENTIAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

To speak about conception of communication in Kierkegaard's authorship seems a bit challenging task since, strictly speaking, the problem has been tackled exclusively only in his unpublished lectures on the dialectics of ethical and ethical-religious communication and in a few journal entries. Sill, in my opinion, the theme of communication runs through Kierkegaard's works though quite often in unconventional setting; to be more precise, communication is being viewed as sharing of information where the crucial role is assigned to the process itself (communication of ability vs. communication of knowledge); at the same time „since the communication is oriented toward existence is pathos-filled in inward deepening.”² Thus Kierkegaard introduces the concept of existence-communication that by no means explanatory, but rather it is paradoxical in its nature. “Christianity's being an existence-communication that makes existing paradoxical, which is why it remains the paradox as long as there is existing and only eternity has the explanation.”³ The aim of the present paper is to disclose the specific character of Kierkegaard's conception of communication that requires, first of all, the act of isolation, then turning towards oneself and only after that – reaching for others, thus performing the double movement of communication. The article consists of five subsequent parts: The Single One; the Other; Distance and Proximity; The Neighbor; and Double Movement of Communication.

Keywords: communication, individual, neighbor, double movement of communication.

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² S. Kierkegaard: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992, 559.

³ *Ibid.*, 562.

The Single One

I would like to start the discussion on the Kierkegaard's conception of communication with the famous passage from his *The Sickness unto Death*:

“A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self. In the relation between two, the relation is the third as a negative unity, and the two relate to the relation and in the relation to the relation; thus under the qualification of the psychical the relation between the psychical and the physical is a relation. If, however, the relation relates itself to itself, this relation is the positive third, and this is the self.”⁴

In this quotation I would like to stress the aspect of relation, of the self-relating to oneself and through this relation relating to others (the absolute precondition is first to establish this relation to oneself or “othering”). This brings into question of the quality of relation to others as, it seems, and in this case the other is playing only the secondary or supporting role. Is it so? I believe that not since the category of the Single One is decisive in understanding Kierkegaard's conception of such relation – precisely because I as an individual am potentially able to get hold of myself, my relation to others is on the deeper level; at the same time others as individuals are turning towards me in the same way through first their self-recognition and then through recognition of me. If nothing else, this can create the common ground for mutual understanding of not understanding each other in full depth. Still the question is – how can we be together in our inescapable singularity?

Martin Buber approaches this matter, constantly referring to Kierkegaard's notion of the single one in his essay *The question to the single one (Die Frage an den Einzelnen)*.⁵ The title of the essay is quite telling as it emphasizes not the notion of the singularity, but rather problems that can arise together with that as for him the true existence is possible only in the dialogical *I – Thou* relation, whereas in Kierkegaard he sees the praise of solitariness, or, in short the *I – I* relation. He writes:

“All individualism, whether it is styled aesthetic, ethical or religious, has a cheap and ready pleasure in man provided he is ‘developing’. In other words, ‘ethical’ and ‘religious’ individualism are only inflections of the ‘aes-

⁴ S. Kierkegaard: *The Sickness unto Death*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980, 13.

⁵ M. Buber: *The Question to the Single One*, in: *Between Man and Man*, London and Glasgow: Collins Clear-Type Press 1964, 60–108.

thetic' (which is as little genuine *aesthesis* as those are genuine *ethos* and genuine *religio*).⁶

What can we see here? First, the single one means not the specific subject or a man, but rather – a person finding himself. Secondly, although Kierkegaard's category is exclusively religious (according to Buber) his religiousness at some point turns merely into the shadow play.

"He cannot mean that to become a Single One is the presupposition of a condition of the soul, called religiosity. It is not a matter of a condition of the soul but a matter of existence in that strict sense in which – precisely by fulfilling the personal life – it steps in its essence over the boundary of the person. Then being, familiar being, becomes unfamiliar and no longer signifies my being, but my participation in the Present Being."⁷

Communication of truth for the Single One is quite an endeavor since to be the Single One is to communicate the truth. But what is this truth? It is the truth of the Single One existing; thus the main determinant of the Single One consists of him communicating his own existence as the ultimate truth. By communication he enters a special relation with himself.

"This relation is an exclusive one, and this means, according to Kierkegaard, that is the excluding relation, excluding all others; more precisely, that it is the relation which in virtue of its unique, essential life expels all other relations into the realm of unessential."⁸

How is then the individual's relation with others, the public possible? According to Kierkegaard – by turning the crowd into the Single Ones; still the Single Ones remain singles barely touching each other in a significant way (one of examples Buber mentions is Kierkegaard's renunciation of marriage, refusal to engage in the body politics). But perhaps the decisive factor is that principal recognition of the singularity of others can create some level of tolerance bar and save them from the realm of unessential. Nevertheless, for Buber it is not enough, of course, he favors the concept of the Single One, but for him:

"The Single One is the man for whom the reality of relation with God as an exclusive relation includes and encompasses the possibility of relation with all otherness, and for whom the whole body politic, the reservoir of otherness, offers just enough otherness for him to pass his life with it."⁹

As we see Buber takes quite a critical stance, interpreting Kierkegaard's position as a kind of isolation, self-encapsulation that precludes all ties with others, in other words – any possibility of intersubjectivity. Whereas, in my opinion, in Kierkegaard, there is a potential for *We* relationships, therefore, we need to clarify his own conception of the

⁶ Ibid., 64.

⁷ Buber, op. cit., 62–63.

⁸ Ibid., 71.

⁹ Ibid., 88.

individual and his other – the crowd. The theme has been thoroughly explicated in his “Literary review”¹⁰ and in the two notes on individual (in a companion piece to “My work as an author”).¹¹ The category of the Single One (the Individual) for Kierkegaard is the highest stage of individualization, the so-called second immediacy (coming after the first aesthetic immediacy and reflection). Besides that this category serves as the diagnostic tool to detect sicknesses of the age of modernity. Moreover, according to him, the age itself is sick, the symptoms being manifest in all spheres of human existence – technology, science, social relations, politics, philosophy and religious life. In his opinion, the worst of the worst is the phenomenon of leveling brought about the modern condition that results in the drowning in the *pre-o-portier* (ready for use) intellectualism. In the *Literary Review* he characterizes the present age as some kind of negative sociality based on abstract principles and loss of individuality that leads to the forgetfulness of existence.

“The dialectics of the present age points to the impartiality, and it is most consistent if mistaken implementation is levelling, as the negative unity of the negative mutuality of the individuals.”¹²

The negativity of relation is related to the generalizing view that requires anonymity as the person’s name and position is of no importance for the society in general.

“The abstraction of levelling, this spontaneous combustion of the human race produced by the friction arising when the individual, singling out inwardly in religiousness, fails to materialize, will be ‘constant’, as they say of a trade-wind; this abstraction consumes everything, but by means of it every individual, each for himself, may again be educated religiously, helped in highest sense in the *examen rigorosum* of levelling to gain the essentiality of religious in himself.”¹³

But what about the role of the individual? “In its immediate and beautiful formation, the individuality principle in the guise of the man of excellence, the man of rank, is a preliminary form of the generation, and it has the subordinate individuals form themselves in groups around the representative.”¹⁴ How then is communication between individuals possible?

In *Two notes on the individual*, in the first note he dwells on the relationship between the individual and the public (here he calls it in a depreciatory manner “the crowd”); particularly accentuating the phenomenon of the collective responsibility that in reality turns out to be the lack of individual responsibility. The defining characteristic of the

¹⁰ S. Kierkegaard: *A Literary Review*, London: Penguin Books 2001.

¹¹ S. Kierkegaard: ‘The Individual’: Two Notes Concerning my Work as an Author, in: *The Point of View for my Work as an Author*, New York: Harper and Brothers 1962, 107–138.

¹² Kierkegaard, *A Literary Review*, op. cit., 75.

¹³ Ibid., 78.

¹⁴ Ibid., 79.

Individual in Kierkegaard, in my opinion, is as follows: “The Individual is the category of spirit, of the spiritual awakening; a thing as opposite to as well could be thought of.”¹⁵ This conception of the individual is the ethical one related to the paradoxical notion of religiosity.

“But this category cannot be delivered in a lecture; it is a specific ability, an art, an ethical task, and it is an art the practice of which might in his time have cost the practitioner his life.”¹⁶

And if we perceive it as an ethical ideal to strive for, as movement towards the authenticity of the self, then individualization doesn't mean the radical seclusion of each and every individual, but rather it opens up the possibility of true communication between equal partners.

The Other

In the article devoted to Søren Kierkegaard's conception and representation of existence *Existence and Ethics*¹⁷ Emmanuel Levinas takes quite a critical stance saying that his understanding of subjectivity could be viewed “...as something separate but located on this side of objective Being rather than beyond that.”¹⁸ What does this revelation mean? According to Levinas, Kierkegaard could be still placed within the tradition of rationality that starts with Socrates, and in this sense Kierkegaardian conception of subjectivity in no way resists the Hegelian system and its totalizing force. For Levinas, the gap between the Self and the Other though unbridgeable (as determined by the absolute transcendence of the Other) could be made meaningful by the initial welcoming of the Other and conversation. At the same time Kierkegaard insists upon the major significance of distancing and of silence as the basis of existential communication per se, therefore he speaks about special measures to be taken to this necessary alienation of the Self from the Other (and of the Self from itself accordingly). In other words, what is meaningless for Levinas becomes meaningful for Kierkegaard and vice versa. This could be illustrated by Levinas's remark:

“And then, with Kierkegaard, it becomes possible for something to manifest itself in such a way as to leave us wondering whether the manifestation really took place. Someone starts to speak, but no – nothing has been said. Truth is played out in two phases: the essential truth is given expression, but at the same time nothing has been said. This is the new philosophical situation: a result which is not a result, and permanent distress. First revelation, then nothing.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Individual*, op. cit., 132.

¹⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Individual*, op. cit., 135.

¹⁷ E. Levinas: *Existence and Ethics*, in: *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1998, 26–38.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

The other point of criticism by Levinas is Kierkegaard's subjectivity's tension over itself that ends up in the philosophy of egoism.

"This kind of existence, whose inwardness exceed exteriority and cannot be contained by it, thus participate in the violence of the modern world, with its cult of Passion and Fury. It brings irresponsibility in its wake and ferment of disintegration."²⁰

For Kierkegaard, in contrary, the very moment the subject chooses himself, turns to itself, it becomes able to take up a full responsibility for this choice, and only after that a movement towards the Other is being made possible. Here we should remember the fore mentioned Kierkegaard's description of the Self as relation. The relation of the Self to the own self is the one that brings in the otherness within the Self itself.

One of the most distinctive features of Kierkegaard's theory of existential communication is its anti-hermeneutical character. In what sense? Kierkegaard's vision of dialogue presupposes a distance, avoidance of identification with the opponent and by all means avoidance of empathy. It means, first of all, the sovereignty of the subject. Levinas in his critique of Kierkegaard calls this position the egoism precluding any true communication, as the subject in this case occupies a privileged position comparing to the Other.²¹ Kierkegaard would agree with Levinas that distance is the matter of prime importance for him, but their understanding of the very nature of the distance and the reasons for this particular distancing differ drastically. None of them speak of the closure of the gap. For Levinas the radical distance is retained in the questioning gaze – the Other is never being reduced to the Same.

"The transcendence with which the metaphysician designates it is distinctive in that the distance it expresses, unlike all distances, enters into the *way of existing* of the exterior being. Its formal characteristic, to be the other, makes up its content. Thus the metaphysician and the other cannot be *totalized*. The metaphysician is absolutely separate."²²

The metaphysician and the Other does not form a simple correlation that could be reversed under circumstances, and this radical break means simply that it is impossible to place oneself outside this correlation. If this wouldn't be so then the Same and the Other could be included in one and the same gaze, and the absolute distance would be closed; and, this, in turn, would mean the act of violence to be performed regarding the sovereignty of the Other (this is one of the ac-

²⁰ Levinas, op. cit., 30.

²¹ Another example of Kierkegaard's treatment of the problem of distance is his utilization of the principle of irony (radical verbal irony in the Socratic sense and irony as a mode of existence that lies between the aesthetic and ethical stages of existence) as irony always requires turning someone into another, not disclosing the heart of the matter, keeping something to himself/herself etc.

²² E. Levinas: *Totality and Infinity*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 1994, 36.

cusations Levinas brings forth against Kierkegaard's wholly egoistic conception of the Self), whereas for Levinas himself "the Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign: his face in which epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our *nature* and developed by our existence. Speech proceeds from absolute difference."²³ For Kierkegaard the source of disharmony is internal, it doesn't grow out of the transcendental dichotomy *the Self/the Other*, therefore, the existential communication is, first of all, a quest for the self-identity as the ideal aim. Thus *praxis* for Kierkegaard is an internally directed activity, and it is possible only if the act of special, interrupted dialogue is being performed. Somebody, and in this case Kierkegaard, stages a situation, that makes it impossible reader's identification with a text, or one or another opinion proposed there – keeping a part of information to himself he creates a distance between himself and a reader. Of course, this kind of relation is asymmetrical as one of the partners of dialogue has an advantage – only he knows the prospective scenarios of further development (this could be called the arranged dialogue), as well as the fact that this conversation will end in uncertainty and perplexity rather than in knowing and certainty. Moreover, Kierkegaard believes that a situation of existential shock is necessary for the emancipation of a reader from stale stereotypes of reading and interpretation in order to pay attention to personal attitude towards a text or a certain position encoded there and to changes within the Self that have come in the course of this interrupted dialogue. It is interesting to note that Levinas also speaks of *a traumatism of astonishment*²⁴ that is related to discourse as experience of something absolutely alien.

"The relationship of language implies transcendence, radical separation, the strangeness of interlocutors, and the revelation of the other to me."²⁵

But at the same time the gap is being filled up with my welcoming of the other, my absolute readiness to give something of me, thus, for Levinas the absolute (inevitable) distance in the face-to-face relationship turns out to be the highest expression of proximity as a category of depth. In Kierkegaard, on the contrary, the distance between the Self and the Other is to be maintained by all means, and, paradoxically, this presupposes also the concurrent self othering (viewing oneself as the Other).

Distance and Proximity

This, in turn, leads us to the question of the hermeneutical significance of the distancing itself. French philosopher Paul Ricoeur speaks of the text as medium through which we understand ourselves giving birth

²³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op. cit., 194.

²⁴ Ibid., 73.

²⁵ Ibid.

to the subjectivity of the reader. The text in its written as opposed to the discourse (the world of everyday language), or dialogue implies distance by its very nature.

“But in contrast to dialogue, this vis-à-vis is not given in the situation of discourse; it is, if I may say so, created or instituted by the work itself. A work opens up its readers and thus creates its own subjective vis-à-vis.”²⁶

In other words, it is a problem of appropriation of the text and application to the current situation of the reader. Ricoeur admits that appropriation is essentially and dialectically linked with distanciation, that is, appropriation doesn't close the gap but rather is a counterpart of it.

“Thanks to distanciation by writing, appropriation no longer has any trace of affective affinity with the intention of the author. Appropriation is quite the contrary of contemporaneity and congeniality: it is understanding at and through distance.”²⁷

The distanciation, in turn, makes it possible self-understanding of the reader. “...(T)o understand is *to understand oneself in front of the text*. It is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite capacity for understanding, but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self, which would be the proposed existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the world proposed.”²⁸ Thus the hermeneutical significance of the distance consists precisely in prompting the birth of the self during the process of reading. In other words, this kind of self-understanding generally does not take into account the extra-textual realms of existence, or at least those not embodied in a discursive form.

“Thus we must place at the very heart of self-understanding that dialectic of objectification and understanding which we first perceived at the level of the text, its structures, its sense, and its reference. At all these levels of analysis, distanciation is the condition of understanding.”²⁹

Though both authors (Ricoeur and Kierkegaard) pays attention to distance as a hermeneutical tool, their approaches differ in the very essence, that is, if the Ricoerian approach is rooted in the discursive structures themselves, then the Kierkegaardian one – brings the distance in the field of existential contradiction and tensions involving a number of quasi-theoretical distinctions, for instance, silence as a mode of existence, reading as the process of self-interpretation in existence, hence the reading ceases to be just a textual affair it has to be view within the broader (ethical, religious, cultural, social) framework. In other words, the weight here is put upon the acting person (the word ‘action’ taken in the widest sense possible).

²⁶ P. Ricoeur: The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation, in: *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics*, vol. II, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press 1991, 87.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 88.

²⁹ Ibid.

He writes: "... since thought does not understand itself, does not love itself until it is caught up in the other's being, and for such harmonious beings it becomes not only unimportant but also impossible to determine what belongs to each one, because the one always owns nothing but owns everything in the other."³⁰ Namely, the self-knowing starts precisely the moment we become the co-owners of other person's knowledge about us (the intention of identification), as a result the border between me and the other disappears and I end up in recognition of my inner poverty and of the fact that I can be a source of other person's self-knowing as well. In contrary to this, Kierkegaard's existential maeutics presupposes the Self's turning to itself first (the waking up of the subjectivity) and only after that – turning towards the other. Kierkegaard's maeutics presupposes that the barrier that divides me from the other remains untouched – none of us discloses everything, we keep our secrets, and we use each other as a catalyst of self-knowing. And the key words here are – each other, that is, I voluntarily agree to be used by the other. The Kierkegaardian maeutics is directed towards the knowing subject but if the Socratic dialogue is an attempt to let the thought manifest itself in all objectivity, then the Kierkegaardian one facilitates the rise of subjectivity. The Socratic way winds up in ignorance of the world and the self within this world, the Kierkegaardian – in ignorance of the self and the world within this self. He strives to create a situation where the self-questioning would be possible. Thus Kierkegaard ascribes the existential status to the dialogue. Further on in the dissertation he analyzes differences between interrogating (*spørge*) and questioning (*udspørge*). He claims that true maeutical relation exists only in the latter occasion.

"...(T)he subject is an account to be settled between the one asking and the one answering, and the thought development fulfills itself in this rocking gait (*alterno pede*), in this limping to both sides."³¹

This kind of dialogue is ironic by its very nature – the irony doesn't offer any solutions and conclusive remarks – everything becomes inconclusive postscript to the self-questioning.

The Neighbor

When reading S. Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* in the context of being with other, we have to admit that the concept of neighbor is rather ambiguous. If, on one hand, the concept of neighbor presupposes closing the distance between I and non-I, the erosion of the dividing line, on the other hand, it involves self's introspection, i. e. marking the difference, i.e. viewing oneself and the other (the "othering" of the self). But at the same time he talks about the cancellation of the difference. In the very introduction Kierkegaard sets the stage for further investigation –

³⁰ S. Kierkegaard: *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1989, 30.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

he admits that the *Works of love* are not edifying discourses, but rather Christian reflections; since edifying discourses, in his opinion, are intended for those whose spiritual development is in the process, whereas reflections are to be read by those who are Christians but they are under the spell of stereotypes as yet. Therefore, Kierkegaard employs *You shall* rhetoric starting with traditional ethical sense of the commandment (e. g. You shall love your neighbor), but ends up with the individualized conception of it. It has to be noted that the author puts emphasis on the individual/particular as opposed to the communal/universal. This means that a person should be able to break away from the network of spiritual, social and psychological relations (such engagements that are characterized by giving preference to certain qualities of a person, be they physical, intellectual, etc.) and become the Single One, the Individual. Only after that it is possible to form the “we” relation. However, the “we” relation model for Kierkegaard is the specific one – it doesn’t depend on some inherent quality of togetherness, but rather on the individuals’ active position towards each other but this, in turn, requires the initial distinction I/other distinction. This distinction is being put forward in his analysis of the unhappy consciousness in the *Sickness unto Death*. The turning of the one to oneself is important, although in this the person may seem egoistic and self-centered, but it is the absolute precondition of being together with others. But is there something to be found at all? Kierkegaard asks. Maybe such I has gone to the desert, to the monastery or to the insane. Or is it just hiding under the cloak of everyday manifestations? That kind of I is sufficiently strong not to let anyone nearby. That kind of person can be a loving husband, a father, a lover, and yes – a Christian. Kierkegaard admits that this person only rarely makes visits to his true I. Is it possible to lead such kind of existing for a long time? Probably yes, but only in some occasions. Usually the person accommodates himself to the social and psychological environment, while forgetting the self, or eventually breaks up. From this point on, according to Kierkegaard, there are two possible scenarios of development – either he acquires the aura of a genius who failed to fulfill his dreams, hence always dissatisfied and resentful, or – he wants to be himself and at the same time feels his goal to be unattainable; at the same time he attends his daily chores with a flair of nonchalance though his attitude to the world has already changed. He comprehends well the distance between himself acting in a real life and himself as his true I, thus he becomes his own other. This highest form of despair Kierkegaard calls the daemonic one and its roots are to be found in the internal split and eternal distancing from others and from oneself. But then – what about the concept of *neighbor* in the *Works of Love* as it apparently presupposes at least some sense of closeness (as opposed to distancing)? It seems that Kierkegaard’s conception of neighbor is *ambiguous* as it includes the dimension of distance as well opposing pairs of metaphors such as blindness/seeing, interestedness/disinterestedness, and intoxication/clarity of mind, symmetry/asymmetry, and intention/result. The stress falls upon the fact that relation with other is possible

when the asymmetry of this relation (independence of others' opinion) is established beforehand. The most telling example of this statement is the discourse *The Work of Love is Remembering One Dead*. Let's dwell on this for a moment. Talking to the living one may lead us to the faulty observations as our opponent may be hiding something, not showing.

“But when one relates himself to one who is dead, in this relationship there is only one, for one dead is nothing actual. No one, absolutely no one, can make himself *nobody* as one dead can, for he is *nobody*; consequently there can be no talk here about irregularities in observation; here the living becomes revealed; here he must show himself exactly as he is, because one who is dead – yes, he is a clever fellow – has withdrawn himself completely; he has not the slightest influence, either disturbing or helping, on the living person who relates himself to him. One who is dead is not an actual object; he is only the occasion which continually reveals what resides in the one living who relates himself to him or which helps to make clear how it is with one living who does not relate himself to him.”³²

The only known fact is that who is dead is unchanged, and if any change takes place in the process of conversation it is change within the living one.

“The work of love remembering one who is dead is thus a work of the most disinterested, the freest, the most faithful love.”³³

Kierkegaard is concerned with destruction of stereotypes, therefore he analyses different Christian ethical maxims offering at times quite unexpected interpretations. For instance, reflection *Mercifulness, a Work of Love, Even if It Can Give Nothing and Is Capable of Doing Nothing* he describes four problem situations with a common leitmotif – intention, but not result is of the most importance. Thus, one has a Christian duty to help one's neighbor, to associate oneself with him, but at the same time the highest level of ethical responsibility is responsibility for oneself, namely, in creation of an existential situation where the human being can start the process of self-knowing. First he refers to the parable about the merciful Samaritan who on his way from Jericho to Jerusalem finds the helpless man and tries to help him. Even if his actions wouldn't lead to saving the man's life, it is a good intention what counts. The second story regards the old woman who gets robbed of her last money on her way to the temple. Nevertheless, she continues her way and put two non-existent coins in the donation box. And Kierkegaard asks – wouldn't Christ value higher her who gave up her last savings rather than the wealthy person who contributes a lot of money? *Mercifulness has nothing to give*. The refrain of two following parables is *Mercifulness is able to do nothing*. Kierkegaard goes about like this. Let's suppose there are two travelers from Jericho to Jerusalem this time.

³² S. Kierkegaard: *Works of Love*, London: Collins 1962, 319.

³³ *Ibid.*, 328.

They both get beaten, while the first man goes on moaning, the second one is able to comfort him and find water to quench his thirst.

“Mercy is evident most definitely when the poor one gives the two pennies which are his whole possession, when the helpless one is able to do nothing and yet is merciful.”³⁴

And now the final story. Some poor woman had a daughter who couldn't really unburden her mother and relieve her from the life-hardness, the only thing she is able to do is to pity; so in the eyes of the world she is a loser, since pitying is not enough to be merciful. Whereas Kierkegaard believes that the feeling for her mother is that what counts.

“Is it mercifulness when one who can do everything does everything for the wretched? No. Is it mercifulness when one who can do just about nothing does this nothing for the wretched? No. Mercifulness is *how* this everything and this nothing are done.”³⁵

Again and again he stresses the aspect of intentions rather than actual deeds. But what does it mean to love one's neighbor for real? This, in turn, entails answering the question about Kierkegaard's meaning of the concept (if we may say so) of neighbor and love for that neighbor. The first answer seems obvious – the neighbor is the one who resides nearby, is the closest to us. But then Kierkegaard asks:

“But is he also nearer to you than you are to yourself? No, that he is not, but he is just as near or ought to be just as near to you as you are to yourself. The concept of *neighbor* really means a duplicating of one's self. *Neighbor* is what philosophers would call the *other*, that by which the selfishness in self-love is to be tested. As far thought is concerned the *neighbor* or *other* need not even exist.”³⁶

In close reading it means that one's neighbor is love oneself and without this love the love for neighbor would be impossible. It would be impossible also without distinction between I and non-I. Thus identification of the lover with the loved one, the relation of empathy, in Kierkegaard's opinion, cancels the very possibility of love.

“The command of love to one's *neighbor* therefore speaks in one at the same phrase, *as yourself*, about this neighbor love and about love to oneself.”³⁷

Thus again we return to the problem of distance and distancing as prerequisite of any ethical relationship, as it involves first the relation of one to oneself and then – to another (a double movement of communication). In this sense *Works of Love* can be regarded as one of the main ethical writings in Kierkegaard. J. Ferreira develops this position in

³⁴ S. Kierkegaard: *Works of Love*, London: Collins 1962, 300.

³⁵ Ibid., 303.

³⁶ Ibid., 37.

³⁷ Ibid., 40.

her article “Moral Blindness and Moral Vision in Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love*”. She speaks of love’s asymmetrical (independency on being loved back by someone) and paradoxical (morally blinding) nature of love; the moral blindness presupposes at least some aspect of distancing.³⁸ Latvian philosopher Jānis Vējš, in his turn, concludes that this text manifests the specific point of view for feelings through the man’s self-apprehension of his existential situation.³⁹ This accounts for Kierkegaard’s emphasis on paradoxical character of morals and his quest to destroy pre-existing moral stereotypes.

“...(N)ighbor is definitely the middle-term of self-renunciation which steps in between self-love’s Land I and also comes between erotic love’s and friendship’s I and the other-I.”⁴⁰

Love for one’s neighbor casts out all preferential love based on certain and qualities. But at the same time we have to distinguish between erotic love/friendship and spiritual (Christian love). If the first form represents intoxication in the other-I, the second form stands for sobriety. “At the peak of love and friendship the two really become one self, one I,”⁴¹ the selfish self. Spiritual love, on contrary, takes away all natural determinants and selfishness. Therefore love for my neighbor cannot make me one with the neighbor in a united self. Love to one’s neighbor is love between two individual beings, each eternally qualified as spirit. Love to one’s neighbor is spiritual love, but two spirits are never able to become a single self in a selfish way.⁴² This stance, to my mind, is captured the best by the means of interplay of two categories closeness/distance – closeness is possible only with establishing certain distance or, in Kierkegaard’s words “one sees his neighbor only with closed eyes...”⁴³ This leads us to the next question: How can we define the beloved in the terms of I-relation? In erotic relationship one loves the other as his other-I “but the beloved whom he loves as *himself* is not his neighbor; the beloved is his other-I. Whether we talk of the first-I or the other-I, we do not come a step closer to one’s neighbor, for one’s neighbor is the first *Thou*.”⁴⁴ The first-I’s love for the other-I is, after all, the self-love and in the strictest sense the self-deification.

“In love and friendship preference is the middle term; in love to one’s neighbor God is the middle term.”⁴⁵

³⁸ J. Ferreira: Moral Blindness and Moral Vision in Kierkegaard’s *Work of Love*, in: *Kierkegaard Revisited*, Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter 1997, 206–222.

³⁹ J. Vējš: Poēta un kristieša pretnostatījums Kirkegora sacerējumā *Mīlestības darbi*, in: *Darbdienas filozofija: ieskats analītiskajā domāšanā*, 2005, 333.

⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, op. cit., 66–67.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 68–69.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

In this sense the neighbor can be qualified as man's equal before God that stands for equality of humanity. This context of proximity/distance, separation/unification should be taken into account when thinking about problems of existential/existence communication.

Double Movement of Communication

The concept of the double movement of communication is the decisive one in understanding Kierkegaard's theory of existential communication. On one level the double movement means communication on the level of the individual (communication with oneself as one's first thou), that presupposes first of all the self-estrangement or the revocation of one's identity and only then – the movement towards the authenticity of the self. On the other level the double movement means first of all the separation of the individual and only after that – relations with other people. It is important to note that in both cases the intermediary and the principal guarantor of humanity for Kierkegaard is God. Still Kierkegaard's prime interest lies in the subjectivity, in the subjective world-view, therefore it may occur that on the social level his vision of communication is one-sided and egoistic and the questions posed by the individual subject can be like these: In what way other selves affect conditions of my own existence? How other people affect my worldview? And, finally – how would my transformed self (after the double movement) perceive others? But in Kierkegaard's case it is not so simple since during the double movement the self becomes the other for oneself and the other selves becomes conditions for my subjectivity. Moreover, the position of the self is not the exclusive one because the similar questions can be posed by other individuals as well. And the questions mentioned above can now be rephrased in the following way. How I as a person affect existential condition of other human beings? What changes I evoke in others? And, finally, what would be the attitude of others to the transformed me now? According to Kierkegaard the first movement (the isolation) means that the self is something already given but yet not comprehended. Thus, all expressions like to choose oneself, to obtain oneself, to capture oneself can be interpreted as becoming the concrete individual, the one we really are.

The self accomplishes the initial separation, that is, admits oneself as being different – different from oneself and different from others thus excluding oneself from his concrete historical existence whereas the countermovement is returning to the concreteness and historicity, and the web of social relations. Now it is time for Kierkegaard to ask the question about the authenticity/inauthenticity of human relations. He believes that inauthentic relations between human beings stem from their inauthentic self-realization, namely, from their inability to view themselves as individuals and hence inability to take on the ethical responsibility. Therefore, the act of self-realization is the absolute precondition for any significant human relation. The explication of the problem of double communication is to be found in *Either – Or*, more precisely,

in the second letter written by Judge William called “Equilibrium between the aesthetic and the ethical”. Judge William states:

“The person who has chosen and found himself ethically has himself as specifies in all his concretion. He has himself, then, as an individual who has these abilities, those passions, these inclinations, these habits subject to these external influences, and who is influenced thus in one direction and thus in another... The self which is the aim is not just a personal self, but a social, civic self.”⁴⁶

Thus, if the first movement of communication is the act of isolation, the second act (counter movement) is taking up responsibility for oneself and for others, these are grounds for continuity, and unless the individual has not apprehended himself as a concrete personality in continuity first, he wouldn't feel the continuity with others later on.

“The personal life as such was an isolation and therefore incomplete, but by his coming back to his personal being through the civic life the personal life is manifested in a higher form. Personal being proves to be the absolute that has its teleology in itself.”⁴⁷

Now it is time to return to the questions posed in the beginning of the present article: *How can we be together? What is the form of the possible togetherness, according to Kierkegaard?* After analysis of such basic concepts as the individual, the other, the distanciation, the neighbor and, finally, the double movement of communication we may conclude that togetherness for Kierkegaard takes a form of inter-existentiality, since each and every self must turn towards oneself, must establish oneself prior to reaching out to others, there is always something left behind that cannot be communicated fully. Still, by apprehending his or her actuality on the ethical level, the individual becomes involved in a social life albeit sometimes in a little limited manner.

⁴⁶ S. Kierkegaard: *Either/Or*, London: Penguin Books, 1992, 553.

⁴⁷ Ibid.