

Theses of the doctoral dissertation

HERMENEUTIC APPROACH OF SÖREN KIERKEGAARD'S NOTION OF BELIEF

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The aim of our essay is to introduce and to analyse Søren Kierkegaard's notion of belief from a hermeneutic point of view. The Danish philosopher paid a great deal of attention to the questions of Christian life from the beginning of his activity. He considers himself to be a religious author, although he analyses belief from an external viewpoint in his pseudonymous writings as if he wasn't able to „carry out the movement of belief“. The subjective attitude which is characteristic of his pseudonymous writings can't be regarded as Kierkegaard's personal standpoint. The theological competence of the Danish philosopher is beyond doubt. Kierkegaard as a religious author struggles for an authentic Christianity.

We have set the goal to show this struggle and its dramatic character in the light of his works. There is no doubt over the unity which can be discovered behind the variety that is typical for the periods of Kierkegaard's authorial career. Christianity and Christian belief can be regarded as central elements in this unity.

Due to this fact we have set the objective to explore and evaluate the hermeneutically remarkable points in the Danish philosopher's notion of belief on the basis of the above mentioned unity. While reading Kierkegaard's works, we can face plenty of hermeneutic questions of great importance (such as presence of *dispositions* in human existence, *historicism* of belief, the attempt to *understand and interpret* belief, the importance of the Holy Script in belief, the *language* which is designed to express belief) that present themselves in an open or a latent way. In our essay we are trying to explore and to analyse the connections between these issues. Statements which have been made in our essay are primarily based on Heidegger's ideas, being described in his main work *Being and Time*, but we also pay a great deal of attention to some important connections, being surveyed in Gadamer's work *Truth and method*.

In the first chapter of our essay we are trying to draw a parallel between Heidegger's and Kierkegaard's notions because we are convinced that the early period of Heidegger's philosophy is strongly linked with Kierkegaard's notion of existence. It should also be noted

that the Danish philosopher had a huge impact on intellectual life in Germany as the Diederichs publishing company had published the translation of his works in 12 volumes as of 1909.

Neither Heidegger was untouched by this effect, that's why he dealt with phenomena that had been analysed by Kierkegaard before such as *choice, anxiety, attitude to death* and *sinful existence* in his early work *Being and Time*. Despite of the similarity between their ideas Heidegger considered the Danish philosopher as a religious author, not as a philosopher; starting from this fact he attached a greater importance to Kierkegaard's theological writings than his philosophical essays. Our goals don't allow us to explore this topic fully so we have to concentrate on the introduction of Kierkegaard's notion of *anxiety, death, guilt* and *belief* which can be paralleled with Heidegger's similar ideas.

When studying the analysis of anxiety made by Kierkegaard and Heidegger, we can come to the conclusion that both philosophers draw a distinction between fear and anxiety because the object of anxiety - as opposed to fear - is completely indeterminable. Everyone's life is accompanied by anxiety which reveals the deepness of human existence. The deeper you are the deeper your anxiety - highlights the Danish philosopher, like Heidegger who stressed the importance of the productive effects of anxiety because it shows the presence of entities which remained latent before. We mustn't forget about another similarity between Heidegger and Kierkegaard: both philosophers consider *anxiety* to be an inevitable and fundamental experience of human *freedom* with the help of which one can get closer to transcendence. Latent anxiety that can „awaken" at any time forms the basis of transcendence and freedom and according to Heidegger it's the eternal concomitant of existence; following Kierkegaard's way, we can get to belief through different forms of anxiety which can't be absolutely free from the feelings of anxiety. Considering these, we can say that basically anxiety is deemed as a positive phenomenon by both philosophers so they come to the conclusion: everyone who will exist has the responsibility to face anxiety instead of recoiling from it.

When taking a closer look at the similarities between Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's *concept of death*, we get a view as follows: Both philosophers agree that human life is influenced by the seriousness of death productively so they are averse to the idea of objective death which could be applied to anyone and they highlight the subjective experience of death. They regard death not only as ceasing of life, but the impact of death on life is of authentic importance to them, that's why the acceptance of death results from an *existential decision*

and choice and forms the basis of a right human self-interpretation. We could say that death as an *attitude to ourselves* (Kierkegaard) is the *substantial feature/essence* of life (Heidegger). Reflecting to the differences between Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's concept of death, we have to point out that Heidegger considers death to be an existential phenomenon i.e. he doesn't describe it in Christian sense separating facting life from God; as opposed to the Danish philosopher who distincts the Christian concept of life and death from general human thinking, according to the Christian concept death is only an event of small importance concerning eternal life. Kierkegaard reflects to the importance of death primarily in Christian sense due to which death represents not only the end of life but the estrangement from God, too because the ethical person will be destroyed by it. In Christian sense „dying” means not only the death of the ethical person which became present (being-in) through the sin but it has a positive and productive effect which involves dying regarding/for mundane life as a condition of perfection of belief and the authentic person.

There is another similarity between Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's concept of *sin*. According to the German philosopher the possibility of free choice becomes consummate in the choice of sinful existence, Kierkegaard is of the opinion that choice involves the distinction between good and bad and the assumption of a radical guilt can't be ignored. The essential element of Kierkegaard's concept of sin can be interpreted in the light of Christianity; as opposed to it Heidegger focuses on the existential sense of sinful existence, he detaches the importance of sinful existence from the religious aspects. On the basis of the statements of our essay we can make the following establishments regarding the concept of the two philosophers: Heidegger highlights the historic importance of belief, he describes crucifixion as a historic event which makes Being-in possible to exist. In the interpretation of the Danish philosopher belief isn't only a possibility of existence in which Being-in became a knight in front of the Lord God - as claimed by Heidegger, on the contrary: Christianity is the religion of freedom because human existence perfects itself through belief.

By comparing Heidegger's and Kierkegaard's notions, we will get to a substantial element of Kierkegaard's notion of belief – the explanation of which can be found in the fourth chapter – according to which essence of Christian belief is the *unenforced pursuance* of Jesus; human existence completes itself in this pursuance that can only happen in case of *synchrony* with Jesus. The demand of the unenforced pursuance of Jesus (made by Kierkegaard)

implicitly includes the statement that the way of belief accompanied by struggle, fear and trembling can't be eased with the help of proofs of God's existence. In the light of these facts we have set the goal to compare argumentations aiming to prove the existence of God with Kierkegaard's notion of God. Without aiming at completeness, we are trying to describe how God can be approached and experienced because we would like to parallel the ways of approaching God with Kierkegaard's notion of belief, while analysing the similarities and differences between them. We concentrate on the introduction of the forms of the philosophy of religion that emphasizes the existence of such methods of philosophical argumentation due to which God can be experienced or its existence can be denied: we will describe the above-mentioned argumentations using an approach on the basis of *ontotheology*, *transcendental philosophy* and *hope*. In the next step we will analyse theories, proofs of God's existence and denials in the formerly mentioned context from Kierkegaard's point of view. Although the Danish philosopher considers the religious sphere of existence to be the perfect form of existence, he denies the convincing power of the proofs of God's existence. Kierkegaard is convinced that God is *unknown* for human beings so *absolute diversity* (from God) is characteristic of the human attitude to God and there is no access for human cognition to entities which are absolutely different from us, that's why their existence can't be proved.

In the third chapter of our essay we will try to clear up the existential and the religious base of Kierkegaard's polemy with Hegel. The Danish philosopher fights passionately against the scientific approach of the Word of God which is called by him the *misfortune of Christianity*. The aim of the description of the polemy between Kierkegaard and Hegel is to demonstrate the existential struggle of Kierkegaard's belief and to show the absurdity of belief. The Danish philosopher puts the greatest emphasis on the inner experience of the individual and highlighting the aspect of individuality he derives a lot from Schelling's course which he attended during his stay in Berlin.

In the third chapter we draw a distinction between the ways of *subjective and objective reflexion* while describing the differences between the *positive and negative philosophy* (defined by Schelling) in order to characterise Kierkegaard's notion of truth related to subjectivity and to distinct it from Hegel's concept of the absolute truth. At the same time we attempt to pay tribute to the Hegelian *mediation* by preferring the Hegelian *integration* to Schleiermacher's concept of *reconstruction*. Although Kierkegaard criticises Hegel's system because it ignores freedom due to highlighting the absolute power of mediation, Hegelian mediation has much to offer as far as hermeneutics is concerned. In our essay we also try to

describe its advantages. We can agree with Gadamer when he said: apprehension can't aim at reproducing meanings of the past objectively, but it should mean an integration of meanings into and for contemporary time. In this sense Gadamer considers integration as a duty of hermeneutics and at the same time he rejects Schleiermacher's intention to emphasize the importance of reconstruction and to reconstruct tradition. We are convinced that Gadamer highlights it with good reason that Hegel told a basic truth when defining the essence of historic spirit as *an intellectual mediation towards contemporary life*. We can rightly say that the excellent representant of hermeneutics joins the Hegelian principle of integration, but we have to highlight that he formulates this principle radically, as opposed to Hegel. If we accept the Hegelian principle of historicism, i.e. we admit that historicism and finitude are basic and ineliminable features of human existence, we implicitly disprove the possibility of absolute knowledge. Starting from the above-mentioned, our critique towards Hegel can be more tinged than the critique formulated by Kierkegaard. Regarding our hermeneutic study we can accept the importance of the Hegelian mediation, but we can also agree with Gadamer who says absolute knowledge can't be gained by integration.

In the fourth chapter we try to make a detailed study of relations having been outlined formerly and we analyse the connection between *synchrony* and *historicism*, the existential effect of the Holy Script and the hermeneutic problems of the Kierkegaardian language (*speech* and *silence* within it) issues in the context of Christian belief. The description of the existential importance of Jesus Christ stands in the centre of our study and within this we try to sketch the base of Miguel Unamuno's and Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological notions which are relevant regarding our topic because we think that the declaration of the pursuance of suffering-humiliated Jesus is a strong link to Kierkegaard's notion of belief.

In the fourth chapter we introduce the struggle of the Danish philosopher (who always kept track of the interests of Christianity) against the empty formality of Christianity and we reveal the difference between the *fighting Church* (which is determined by Christian belief) and the *victorious Church* (which got stuck on mere formalities) Kierkegaard calls that Church a victorious Church which considers truth of belief in Christ as a result and thinks time of struggling is over. We can regard only the struggle of the *fighting Church* as an example to be followed if we accept the argumentation of the Danish philosopher, the only way for the Church of Christ to survive and to combat the infidelity of the victorious Church is the struggle, it has to fight for perpetuance at every time. According to the fighting Church

truth of belief in Christ can't be interpreted as a result, on the contrary: the *way* should be stressed and human beings who have to reach their decision on choosing this way in the presence of God while being aware of their responsibility. It's important to say that the interpretation of Christianity as a struggle and fight can be paralleled with Unamuno's notion of belief. Unamuno is convinced that belief is based on doubts the essence of which lies in the intensive fight against intellect. Therefore both Kierkegaard and Unamuno protest with deep grief against the formal Christianity which secularizes the real attitude to God and starting from this, both declare that Christian belief manifest itself in the individual human life that is accompanied by a constant struggle. This requirement of belief calls one's attention to the importance of the way of life devoted to religion instead of preferring Christian dogmas.

We reflect to the meaning of the Word of the Holy Script keeping track of the importance of the religious way of life. Among these issues we highlight the hermeneutic element of Luther's personality because he was the first theologian who stressed the verbliness of the Holy Script as the Word of the Holy Script - like an auditive text - has the power to transform our ego, existence and our notion of God. Later we attempt - taking the importance of the practice of religion into account - to explain why Christian belief is incommunicable and we try to show the legitimacy and the limits of the Kierkegaardian argumentation. Considering these, we deem the philosophical reflexion related to the possible hermeneutic connection between *silence* and *apprehension* as a fundamental question. To study these issues, we should explore those ones of Heidegger's thoughts which can be paralleled with Kierkegaard's notion of the lack of the possibility to mediate belief and the importance of silence regarding belief.

When making a detailed study of the Kierkegaardian notion of belief, we can establish it plays a crucial part in belief that disciple becomes similar to his master which perfects itself in undertaking suffering voluntarily. It's the most important feature of Christian belief for the Danish philosopher and it can be accomplished by *synchrony* with the *humiliated and tortured Christ*. Similarly, Unamuno emphasizes the agonic struggle and suffering which are basic elements of Christian life; the identification with the *agonizing Christ* makes this trial possible. We can rightly claim that in the features of the agonizing Christ who was described by Unamuno we can discover the shape of the humiliated and suffering Christ with his characteristics being defined by Kierkegaard. In compliance with this, Balthasar determines

crucifixion as a condition of Christian existence which can be experienced by suffering. According to this, Christ's suffering is inclusive - says the theologian from Switzerland - , that means: co-suffering (*con-passion*) with the Saviour becomes a condition of Christian belief.

Emphasizing the requirement of *synchrony* with Christ, Kierkegaard considers the elimination of historic interval to be a fundamental condition of Christian belief since we can't learn anything about the paradoxon of belief (whereas eternal truth arose from historic-objective time, i.e. God appeared as Christ) from the history. In our view elimination of historic interval isn't acceptable in terms of Christian belief. In this respect we share Gadamer's opinion according to which this interval can be hermeneutically productive. Historical mind concerning effects needs to be formed for a real apprehension which results in a *merger of horizons* i.e. the horizon of present undergoes a constant change by getting in touch with the past. Essence of apprehension lies in the mediation towards present time, not in the reconstruction of the past. If we refer these ideas to the interpretation of the Holy Script, we can agree with the notion (represented by our essay) due to which no one can be able to eliminate the time interval between the past of the text and the present of the recipient, so we prefer the Kierkegaardian requirement of synchrony to the merger of horizons described by Gadamer.

Evaluating Kierkegaard's notion of belief, we have to admit that the requirements of Christian belief regarding voluntary pursuance of the humiliated Christ (while accepting loneliness and being not understood) can't be fulfilled by every single human being, it can't be an absolute requirement of Christianity. But we can accept (what is stressed by Kierkegaard, too) that everyone has to fight himself and has to be honest if he wants to be a real Christian. Therefore Christianity can't be limited to the passive acceptance of religious dogmas, it can only perfect itself in a way of life devoted to religion. If we accept Kierkegaard's standpoint due to which truth of belief in Christ can't be interpreted as a result, i.e. believers can't be in possession of truth; so we can understand that substance of belief lies in being on the way, everyone has to walk this way on his own, believers have no other choice but to carry out their fight of belief on their own.

