

COMMUNICATION AND MEANING: FROM INTER-SUBJECTIVITY TO INTER-EXISTENTIALITY IN KIERKEGAARD

Abstract

Important to communication of an experience is the requisite of ‘an- other’ mind without which there would not be a recipient of what is communicated. However, Kierkegaard views that communication of experience, particularly religious experience cannot be understood if broadcasted to a crowd but has to be appropriated by a single individual because the description of an experience is for ‘an-other’ whereas meaning of an experience is ‘in-self.’ In this sense, language becomes the tool to respond to social values and actions of other people. Following Kierkegaard’s methodology of ‘double reflection’ in communication, leads to at least two outcomes: firstly, empathy with fellow humanity and secondly it identifies the limits of expression of experience itself. However, the meaning of experience is unique to an individual, for example death, even though is seen as a universal phenomenon yet each individual has a unique awareness of his or her own death. Here, only the self relates to itself and embraces the possibilities of new meanings hitherto unexpressed due to the limitation of linguistic communication. The meaning ‘in-self’ attributes is better demonstrated in choices than in communication to another. Kierkegaard proposes that this is a double movement, in which the ‘in-self’ becomes the ‘an-other’ for oneself and the ‘an-other’ becomes condition for the subjectivity of ‘in-self.’

I. Introduction

One’s experience is neither true nor false. It is just there. It is only when an effort is made to communicate or describe it that they are categorized as true or false. The same applies to thoughts, feelings, emotions and self-

awareness. None of these exist independent of human mind and yet they seem to alter and falter when expressed. The mystic expresses it through the medium of silence or disinterested communication. An analytical objective thinker chooses what is best expressed by Wittgenstein, 'That whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent.' An existentialist, however, mines the mind to communicate what seems to be elusive and embraces the risk of sounding folly. For this at least an existentialist deserves to be lauded as courageous, chief among whom is Kierkegaard.

Important to communication of an experience is the requisite of 'an-other' mind without which there would not be a recipient of what is communicated. My first premise however, is that experience is singular not universal and therefore communication of an experience goes beyond straight-jacketed prescribed formats. Kierkegaard views that communication of experience particularly religious experience cannot be understood if broadcasted to a crowd but has to be appropriated by a single individual. Kierkegaard's philosophy favors an inter-subjectivity in which 'an-other' is a single individual.

The second premise, I would suggest is that the meaning of an experience is discovered in relation to self. It is my contention that a description of an experience need not necessarily communicate the meaning of an experience by the experiencer. Description of an experience is for 'an-other' whereas meaning of an experience is 'in-self.' Kierkegaard is of the view that meaning of an experience is discovered in relation of self to a divine agency or God.

Based on the above two premises is the third premise that the 'in-self' and 'an-other' validate each other's existentiality and yet we are individually at the center of our perceptions and experiences.

Kierkegaard masterfully used pseudonym, paradox, irony, humor to dialectically express human pathos or more specifically, provided an entry into his private self. A reader of Kierkegaard's works comes out with varied interpretations, suggestions and opinions which seems to be his actual

intention. What makes his work complex are not the linguistic expressions, for one rarely hears of difficulty in reading Kierkegaard's works as reading Heidegger's but the tireless effort of expressions which at the same time seems to communicate what he intends yet subtly opens another world of thoughts in the reader. In Kierkegaard, one could find both communication of experience in relation to others and of the meaningfulness of experience in relation to self which the rest of the paper would draw upon.

a. Hypothetical illustration of the premises

According to George Berkeley things have being only insofar as they're perceived. Thus, this tree, that bird, this computer, that pen... all these literally owe their existence to being perceived by one of my five senses. In fact, according to Berkeley what validates the existence of anything is immediate reference by one or more senses without which the thing would have no existence. However, this does not mean that things have their being one moment and no-being another as they enter and exit our perceptions, but things exist apart from our perception because of an Infinite Perceiver, namely God² i.e., when sensible things are not being perceived by human beings they must be perceived by a cosmic spirit.

Berkeley's empirical argument could be a helpful lens in situating the communication of experience and meaning of experience to Kierkegaard's philosophy. The self in this case would take the position of cosmic spirit

² Berkeley's approach makes it possible for God to exist within the parameters of empirical philosophy which was eloquently presented in a limerick by Ronald Knox, 'God in the Quad,' which goes as:

There was a young man who said "God

Must find it exceedingly odd

To think that the tree

Should continue to be

When there's no one about in the quad."

Reply:

"Dear Sir: Your astonishment's odd;

I am always about in the quad.

And that's why the tree

Will continue to be

Since observed by, Yours faithfully, God."

before whom an experience stands as it is. The communication of an experience is what an individual enters and exits. This entry and exit are not from within but from without i.e., the individual uses the communication framework of others or 'an-other' in the society to enter and exit with its questions, doubts, analysis and parameters. This would be akin to the 'universal' in Kierkegaard. However, the meaning of an experience is from within or 'in-self' i.e., the self enters and exits with its own framework which need not follow the logic, reason or framework of an-other, which is best put by Pascal, "The heart itself has its own reason that the reason itself cannot understand." This I suggest, Kierkegaard calls as 'individual.' And the highest task of an individual is not found in seeking to synthesize the 'individual' to the 'universal' but to live in tension of both like the opposite magnetic poles- someone who belongs to 'universal' yet develops the 'individual self' in resistance from being turned into a crowd.

Communication of experience to 'an-other'

Leon Festinger's decades of research proposes that we as persons, strive towards consistency.ⁱ Festinger proposes that individuals strive for consistency of their cognition (i.e. 'any knowledge, opinion, or belief about environment, about oneself, or about one's behaviour'ⁱⁱ) to subsequent behaviour. But when the individual is made aware of inconsistency between cognition and behaviour or action different from attitude, it leads to dichotomy of observation to reality, resulting in psychological discomfort. Thus, each individual, though being at the centre of their own experience and its perception, is situated within the non-individualist environs. Within this context, to overcome psychological discomfort, the individual has a felt need to affirm that self is in truth. This the individual does by trying to relate it with others using the medium of language. In this sense, language becomes more a medium to be social and relational than a medium to explain oneself. For an individual, while on one hand an experience forms part of subjective engagement with the world, it need not on the other hand be necessarily a proposition requiring articulation. This is amply shown in anthropological

study that commitment to a religious truth is not constrained by epistemology, nor a systematic and coherent understanding is a necessary condition to be a religious practitioner.ⁱⁱⁱ However the description of an experience to ‘an-other’ is an attempt to elude being perceived as inconsistent by the other. It is an effort to negotiate dissonance arising due to truth claims versus behaviour and action of the individual. Here, language becomes the tool to respond to social values and actions of other people. In this sense, communication of the experience in culture specific ways and concepts is the effort of the self to relate to the society.

To the question, how does an individual communicate an experience to others to avoid psychological discomfort or dissonance? The answer is by communicating according to the parameters of others. In communication of an experience, the individual uses the communication framework of ‘an-other’ for otherwise it would only be senseless utterances. It is like someone using the pitcher to draw water from a deep well. The pitcher is the communication framework which enters the self and draws water. The pitcher cannot draw all the water from the well but only as much as it can contain. Moreover, the water drawn takes the shape of the pitcher. Similarly, the individual enters oneself with the pitcher of inquiries, misgivings, scepticism, limitations, approvals etc., and draws from experience of the self. Needless to say, the communication is not exhaustive but in bits and pieces. Kierkegaard terms such communication as ‘Socratic maieutic method.’ Socrates’ view of himself as midwife is to help students go through the discovery process for themselves so that they might ‘give birth’ to their own wisdom by answering questions posed to them. In other words, the wisdom people acquire in their interactions with Socrates is ultimately of their own making. Socrates only assists with the acquisition or ‘delivery’ process.^{iv}

However, seeking to communicate to ‘an-other’ is not simple question-answer format. Kierkegaard identifies that it leads to ‘double reflection’ i.e., when the thought has got its right expression in the word, which is achieved in the first reflection, there is the second reflection, which has to do with the

relation between the communication and the communicator and is an expression of the existent communicator's own relation to the idea.^v The 'first reflection' introduces words with a 'thought-content', i.e. words with a semantic sense, through which an individual can speak and communicate about the entities in the world. Contemporary Indian poet Rahman Rahi, captures this idea in his poem "Aye meri sahjaath zabaan"^{vi}

*Aye meri sahjaath zabaan, yakinan Tum ho meri nazar
Tum ho mere dil ki dhadkan,
Mere vicharon ke indradhanush ka rangeen chidkaav ho tum, Meri ruh ki
veena ke hash-vihchal swar ho Tum³*

Speech consolidates experience as a worldly reality, "an experience makes its appearance only when it is being said"^{vii} which for Arendt entails the presence of others. For the thinker, this corresponds to moving "in a space which is public, open to all sides", i.e. inhabited by others, who either speak their own mind or are confronted with others speaking their mind.^{viii} In modern terminology, we might say that the 'first reflection' has to do with language as a syntactic semantic unity of words (signs) and thought- contents (semantic senses). This unity makes it possible for language to refer to and express something about the entities in the world, so that individual at the pragmatic level, by relating himself/herself to the signs, will be able to understand and use the signs in his/her communication with an-other. On this basis, we have the 'second reflection', which adds a new dimension to the pragmatic level of language. The second reflection, 'has to do with the relation between the communication and the communicator, and is an expression of the existent communicator's own relation to the idea'. The first reflection includes an understanding of the meaning of the words, and

³ Draft English Translation:
*O my innate speech {language} expression
Of course! You are my sight
You are my heartbeat
You are the sprinkling of the rainbow colors of my thought
You are the joy filled sound of the Veena of my soul*

the second concerns one's own interest in what is being said.

The arguments above lead to at least two outcomes: firstly, communication to an-other enables individual to empathize with fellow humanity and secondly it identifies the limits of expression of experience itself.

II. Indirect communication of experience to 'an-other' enables empathy

This empathy is not through positive philosophical approach but via negative method. Instead of making continuous shallow relative assertions, Kierkegaard's approach is to express oneself through irony i.e., to not only express one's experience but also to know of the absurdity of the same expression. Such a way of expression assumes that the individual is in state of constant development and not yet in the whole truth of it. In this process the individual goes into a state of Aporia or being at a loss. Aporia in classical rhetoric is deconstruction of itself by developing arguments on both sides of an issue. The individual questions or doubts his or her own conceptions. As author, this process enables the detachment of the self, a strategy which Kierkegaard practiced by use of pseudonyms "...by which he intended to maintain an openness to plurality of possibilities to becoming an individual self..."^{xix}

By refusing to present positive thesis or affirmation about a given issue or given experience it opens to inward and subjective knowledge. The positive statements which are agreed and controlled universally or by the 'crowd' could be scientific or even religious. But it is not able to empathise with others. However constant learning through double reflection reveals further possibilities, making empathy possible with each 'an-other.' Quoting his teacher, Kierkegaard says, "If God held all truth in his right hand and continual striving in his left, he would choose the latter."^x It is in the process of constant development that one begins to have closer contact with inward life. The individual will no longer then be held by societal norms or by right piece of information or its lack thereof.

To Kierkegaard, official description according to traditions and customs

cannot describe one's inwardness. It is non-attachment to specific philosophies, theories or definitions which makes it possible to discover reality from a personal and responsible point of view. This however, is not to negate 'objective knowledge' practiced in science which Kierkegaard considered outward to an individual i.e., a knowledge that can be shared and used collectively. But an individual experience is unique, which cannot be explained through pre-established theories. Perhaps this explains the concern of psychoanalysts like Freud who were interested in discovering the relation of language to communication of experience. Therefore, Kierkegaard suggests 'indirect communication' as a method to communicate. This maieutic method is not as much about establishing a positive conclusion as much as accepting the hard task of negation. In Kierkegaard's words, "Out of love of humankind, out of despair over my awkward predicament of having achieved nothing and being unable to make anything easier than it had already been made, out of genuine interest in those who make everything easy, I comprehend that this was my task: to make difficulties everywhere."^{xi}

Indirect communication sets the individual as well as 'an-other' free in a more radical way to agree or disagree. A clear example of it is Kierkegaard's work '*Either/Or*.' This work contains what amounts to a debate between two fictional characters over the merits of their respective life-views. An important feature of the book is that it does not provide us with a conclusion to the debate. It does not end with one character acknowledging the superiority of the other character's life-view. Nor does the fictional editor step in, to render an impartial verdict. Such communication makes it possible to empathise with the conclusion 'an-other' makes, for the conclusion is not based on the authority of the societal norms but the self is solely responsible for its conclusions. This perhaps is how Sartre proposed that although there are no a priori values, the agent's choice creates values in the same way as the artist does in the aesthetic realm.^{xii} The values thus created by a proper exercise of my freedom have a universal dimension, in that any other human being could make sense of them were he to be placed in my situation. There is therefore a universality that is expressed in particular forms in each

authentic project.^{xiii} And yet at the same time “...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).^{xiv} The gap between the individual and ‘an-other’ is not filled or occupied with the need to prove rightness of one over the other but the gap is maintained by the individual’s welcoming of ‘an-other.’ This readiness to give something of me enablesempathy as the highest expression of proximity between the individual and ‘an-other.’ In this way indirect communication of experience to ‘an-other’ emancipates a reader from stereotype reading and interpretation.

II. Communication of experience to ‘an-other’ uncovers boundaries of expression

Kant insisted that revealed religious truths must be subordinated to principles accessible to universal human reason, i.e., I must first know that something is my duty before I accept it as a divine command.^{xv} Thisbeing said, the communication to ‘an-other’ is not necessarily to identitywith ‘in-self’ but to consider one’s experience as continuous with all other or universal human experience and understanding i.e., without compartmentalizing one as religious experience and other as non- religious experience. Thus, communication to ‘an-other’ becomes single- minded communication without being classified as essential or accidental; or enter into classification of ‘what belongs to it’ essentially from ‘what does not.’ It by-passes the distinction between man-talk and God-talk. However, Kierkegaard strenuously opposes Kant’s efforts to characterize faith, and in particular Christian faith, as continuous with rational (albeit practical) thinking, arguing that in its highest expressions,the religious constitutes a sphere utterly independent of the demands of ethical universality.

Likewise, Kierkegaard’s existential thinking is complete antithesis of Hegel’s rational absolutism. For Kierkegaard, the starting point may be said to be the individual existence as it is concretely experienced by manfrom moment to moment. For Kierkegaard, there is no such thing ideally as

‘objective certainty’. For example, God exists: the truth of the statement cannot be objectively established with absolute certainty nor denied. Therefore he says, “The paradoxical character of truth is its objective uncertainty; this uncertainty is an expression for the passionate inwardness and this passion is precisely the truth.”^{xvi} This runs counter to Hegel’s notion of a ‘dialectic’, which synthesizes the ideas on the opposite poles through evolution to arrive at the final truth i.e., a thesis yields an antithesis, which then yields, along with the thesis, a synthesis or unity, which in turn becomes a new thesis. Kierkegaard thought such a task ridiculous because the philosopher lives within the system he/she is seemingly evaluating from the outside.^{xvii} Kierkegaard’s work *Either/Or*, is intended as an alternative to Hegelian project. Instead of an ascending series of logical arguments proceeding from one premise to the other into a unified system, Kierkegaard is content to posit polar opposites with an encouragement to appreciate the tension that resides between them. It is only then that an individual can appropriate passionate and subjective approach to truth. He writes, “...one must not think ill of the paradox, for the paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without the paradox is like the lover without passion; a mediocre fellow.”^{xviii}

The paradox necessitates knowledge only through faith for by definition paradox is beyond our knowledge through cognition. Instead of cognitive activity, Kierkegaard insists passion must accompany the leap of faith for the self was always self in relation to God. Self is not in isolation positing itself as sum total but the self before God. Cognitive knowledge pertains to questions of impersonal or objective truth and to the correspondence relation between thought and reality, but never to the personal relation between a thinker and his thought content. To be concerned about that relation is to enter into the province of subjectivity, of interest. Such is the object of religious knowing, called God, the Dharma, the Tao, tathata (thusness), or nirvana, which is not a conventional object in a subject-object relationship, but the original source, the nature, or quality of all conventional objects as they really are. As a consequence, subjective truth cannot be limited to a

conception of truth as a relationship between words or between ideas and things, even though words, ideas, and mental images may evoke the quality of truth whereby self-consciousness responds appropriately to what-is. Subjective truth entails the continuing development of a valid relationship between self-consciousness and one's most extended and most profound environment or reality. While the pragmatic idea of 'truth' emerges out of the basic human experience of valuation (both as assessment and appreciation) as a necessity for human survival and well-being, the subjective truth is the valuation achieved by self-consciousness as it becomes a particular organizing centre of self-awareness, meaning, feeling, and action—an individual participating in, and responding to, reality.^{xix} The question then becomes— is it possible to communicate a divine experience which is always evolving but never arriving to a conclusion? For what one expresses would always be incomplete. This returns us to the phenomenological insight that “Experience, we might say, is at the nodal point of the intersection between public language and private subjectivity, between expressible commonalities and the ineffability of the individual interior.”^{xx} Thus to experience something means to be exposed to a limit, which is to be endured and at some point dealt with, if one wishes to get a glimpse of the sort of depth or transcendence, which full-fledged experience holds in store for us human beings. In experience, humans do not transcend their own finitude, but only temporarily the limits and the peril, which they are exposed to.^{xxi} In this sense, the inability to communicate is then itself a universal phenomenon, which on one hand makes room for a ‘leap of faith,’ and on the other hand, it leads to scepticism. In this sense, scepticism is the hazard one needs to be prepared for while communicating. Thus, the issue of scepticism is a proverbial ‘other side of the coin.’

III. Meaning of experience ‘in-self’

According to Kierkegaard, “our experience of reality does not make sense, we all realize this, and it's making us miserable.”^{xxii} This is despair, a ‘sickness unto death.’ It arises out of self-contradiction. Despair essentially characterizes the impossibility that is felt between finiteness and infinity,

between a self which is seeking freedom, yet has to accept the given.^{xxiii} This contradiction between inevitability and possibility is most sharply revealed in death. He argues that 'death takes place in life, which can only be an individual experience, but also an experience of eternity.'^{xxiv} From an existential point of view, death is not universal, but instead each individual has a unique awareness of his or her own death because death is a moment when one does not interact with an-other. Nor can one learn it by past experience but is paradoxically always with us as a possibility. Thus, Kierkegaard points out that death is not rational and objective but a subjective experience. It leads to awareness of limits of thinking and arguments about the meaning of life, the identity of self, the existence of God.

The usual response to this is to either turn away from such fundamental problems or fall into a deterministic and fatalistic perspective. In contrast, Kierkegaard emphasizes the concept of 'Single individual,' asserting each person's need for passionate determination to assume our own unique existence and to realize our own unique possibilities

different from everyone else. The search for meaning of an experience is not for 'an-other' but for 'in-self.' Such seeking leads not only to an individual awakening but an encounter with God. He gives the example of Abraham who faces ethical self-contradiction in the movement towards sacrifice of his son, Isaac. Abraham is in a state involving infinite resignation- unable to live or die because for Abraham, it would be better to die than to kill his son who he gained only in his old age. However, his faith and obedience to God does not allow him to take his own life. He is aware that the religious expression to sacrifice Isaac amounts to murder in the ethical expression. But man's response to God was to be one of absolute trust which meant there may be particular situations that may be overcome by a higher command given by God. Kierkegaard suggested that "teleological suspension of the ethical" was a necessary result of heeding to the absolute obedience to God, which is unique to the true 'Knight of Faith.' Because in the contradiction between religious and ethical consists dread, which can make a man sleepless. It was precisely through the dread that the 'Knight of Faith' knew

he had acted according to faith and not on aesthetic level.^{xxv}

Abraham's near sacrifice of his son, Isaac, suggests the importance of existential awakening and will so fierce that it reaches the extreme of death. Kierkegaard views death as an opportunity to open up a world to paradox that cannot be resolved through reason or Hegel's dialectic which synthesizes this and that. In contrast, for Kierkegaard to stand before God was to stand before the absurd, that which cannot be fully comprehended but it still makes meaning 'in-self.' God needed to be experienced rather than simply perceived. Therefore, Kierkegaard views that if an individual is capable of grasping God objectively, then he/she does not believe, for faith is contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty.^{xxvi} Whereas communication of an experience requires 'an-other,' meaning of an experience is in 'in-self.' The communication 'in-self' is thinking without attempting to contain them entirely within concepts.

III. a. Meaning of experience 'in-self' embraces search for new meaning

The psychological response to contradictory experience of ourselves, the world around us and our relations to this world leads to existential anxiety. The greater the contradiction, even greater the anxiety. Sacrificing Isaac ran against not only the fundamental proposition of parenthood but also universal ethics. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard retells the story from different viewpoint trying to relate to the proposition of sacrificing Isaac. In the first version, Abraham convinces Isaac that he is carrying his own will and not God's. In the second version, Abraham sacrifices a ram instead of Isaac. In the third version, Abraham seeks God's forgiveness for having the thought of sacrificing Isaac in the first place. In the fourth version, Isaac questions his own faith due to Abraham's refusal to do what God commanded. Kierkegaard tries to unravel Abraham's existential anxiety caused due to the inconsistency of an act he is called to perform versus the ethical commitment. In the final analysis, Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac illustrates that a finite individual can only have pure and complete individual

relation with an infinite God through faith which goes beyond all universal, societal, ethical systems. In Kierkegaard's view, such a process was possible for Abraham because he went beyond fitting one's meaning to prescribed formats to search for new meaning 'in-self.'

For Kierkegaard, the concepts, ideas, propositions, truths, narratives or worldviews to which we are most committed constitute our sense of selfhood. This he describes as "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."^{xxvii}

The self is mediating activity which resides within the opposites. Contrary to Hegel's proposal for the synthesis of the opposites, Kierkegaard proposes that self operates in and through the tensions created by the opposites. Abraham could make sense of the command to sacrifice Isaac in various ways such as- something which he deserved or did not; or acknowledge anomaly and revise his expectations; or look for an alternative interpretation; or consider it absurd which requires faith to act upon. The last analysis, i.e. to embrace faith in God, which necessarily involves embracing the absurd, Kierkegaard claims was the only way to make life worthwhile. The greater the feeling of the absurd, the higher would be the reflection upon the disjointed experiences. This aspect of the self- relating to oneself and through this relation relating to others, forces an individual to explore intersubjectivity by being open to new meanings. On the other hand, the lack of direct and serious experiences or reflection on life, death and human

relations makes light of others and their own lives.^{xxviii}

III. b. Meaning of experience ‘in-self’ gets demonstrated in individual choice

Kierkegaard proposes three stages of existence in which an individual chooses to exist or makes decision on the way to becoming a true self- the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Each of these stages represents competing views of life and as such potentially conflicts with one another. The ‘aesthetic stage’ is the stage of experimentation. The aesthete is only concerned with personal enjoyment which provides no solid framework for making consistent choices. Eventually the pleasure of the aesthete wears thin and one becomes aware of and responsible for good and evil, at which point then one must make ethical choices because those choices evoke a higher set of principles. In *Either/Or* Kierkegaard uses marriage as an example of ethical life choice. By consistently acting for the good of one’s spouse, one learns that there are enjoyments beyond excitement. Still ethical life does little for spiritual development or self- exploration since ethical requires an individual to follow a set of socially accepted norms. Kierkegaard’s notion on human existence is that, it is in the religious sphere or in spiritual development, the individual can give full meaning to their existence when one advances the pursuit of good into the pursuit of God, the absolute truth. This is only possible if one excludes oneself from the crowd and examine oneself. Kierkegaard lays emphasis on the individual and particular as opposed to the communal and universal. The first movement is to choose oneself in order to become the one ‘am’ really is. He admits that usually the person adapts oneself to the social and psychological environment, while forgetting the self. From here on, Kierkegaard proposes there are two possible scenarios- either the person acquires the aura of a genius who failed to fulfil his/her dreams and is thus dissatisfied and not able to bear him/herself; or he/she wants to be himself/herself and yet at the same time feels his/her goal to be unattainable.^{xxix} The person comprehends the distance between self, acting in a real life, to self as his/her true I, thus he/she becomes his/her 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.^{xxx}

Kierkegaard is not a nihilist nor does he aim for the life of a monastic recluse but to find a solution to the existential crisis of despair, he proposes embracing the absurd- to become the 'single individual' who is passionate. Writing under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard asserts that 'truth is subjective' i.e., it is not something one possesses, but rather something that one lives. This is in contrast to the objective thinker, who believes in objective truths that apply equally to everyone. He affirms that while objective truths do exist, but they are in the realm of science, however when it comes to the inner world of humans, he rejects the ideas of objective truth. "When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focused upon the relationship, however, but upon the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of his relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true."^{xxxi}

Truth must be searched and engaged by each individual. In the event of failure to grasp the truth, by the very act of engaging with the truth, one has created relationship with that truth. For an objective thinker, truth exists outside as a separate, indifferent thing that applies equally to everyone whereas subjective truth requires inner reflection and is part of the subjective thinker because existence itself is a subjective experience. For a subjective thinker, meaning of truth experience in-self is not an abstract speculation whereby the individual remains unaffected but is visible in individual choice. Further, subjective existence means individuals are in state of 'becoming.' Thus, the subjective thinker explores the unknown and seeks to understand the reality. This opens the possibility of choice and decision.

However, in Hegelian system, Kierkegaard critiques that the individual's decision matters very little, because for them, truth is not affected by anyone's choice or decision. Reflecting on Kierkegaard's thinking about the inevitable effect of choice due to subjective truth in the context of religious experience, Jeffery Bloechl writes, that one does not grasp religious life solely by understanding it in the context of its engagement with the world, or by interpreting it in the sheer fact of its being-there. It is also to be read in the acts and gestures that appear in a manner that contest the limits of their appearing.^{xxxii} We can recognize a proper religious way of life without necessarily grasping, let alone, giving ourselves up to its fundamental commitments. The virtue of faith is visible in its embodiment and its bearing, even if the commitment that secures it is grounded before and outside light.^{xxxiii}

Since Kierkegaard views human existence as subjective, there is no grouping as humanity, but each one exists as individual humans. For him, the 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. The 'we' relational model for Kierkegaard does not depend on some inherent quality of togetherness or some essence but rather on the individual's active position towards each other. This distinction is put forward in his analysis on the unhappy consciousness in the *Sickness Unto Death*.^{xxxiv} This means a person should be able to break away from the network of social and psychological relations and become the 'Single One,' i.e., 'we' relation requires the initial distinction between 'I and other.' Togetherness for him takes a form of inter-existentiality, since each and every self must turn towards oneself before reaching out to others.^{xxxv} The realization of justice and freedom within community requires each individual's existential determination and action which does not seek self-righteous life but practice of passionate responsibility and love or else the group is powerless to act for good.

IV. From Inter-subjectivity to Inter-existentiality in Kierkegaard

The individual is unique and no two persons occupy the same space-time continuum. Therefore, they can never have the same set of experiences within the continuum. This kind of individualism is foundational to human existence. However, the intersection of the experiences of various individuals, historically shaped the parameters and limits by which to express the experience itself. From childhood, parameters of each environment is ingrained as spectacles through which one forms concepts of evidence, justification and epistemology. One of the dangers such a system produces is the failure to recognise singularity of individuals. Such de-recognition of single individual has the propensity to depreciate single individual to the realm of unessential in favour of collective experience or communitarian ethics.

However, for Kierkegaard, “The Individual is the category of spirit, of the spiritual awakening; a thing as opposite to as well could be thought of.”^{xxxvi} This conception of the individual is the ethical one related to the paradoxical notion of religiosity. What one finds in Kierkegaard is a juxtaposition of the solution albeit in relation to self-awareness. A philosophy with an amalgamation of empiricism and subjectivism. Kierkegaard stresses upon the aspect of relation, of the self-relating to oneself and through this relation relating to others.

Kierkegaard does not view society as a collective of individuals called a crowd but separate individuals in a common space. But turning the crowd into the ‘Single Ones’ is not without its own downside, for the ‘Single Ones’ barely touch each other in a significant way. Yet at the same time alleviating the Single one, makes it possible for an individual to express without the fear of either being accepted or rejected. The tolerance of the individuality of self and individuality of others is maintained. In such a framework, i.e., 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 individual, but rather it opens up the possibility of true communication between equal partners.

In communities influenced by race-based policies, caste or gender curated social fabric, and communal electorates, the divide between outsider and insider is well-defined. The outsider is a visible threat to any proposition of those inside the community. When a community is not able to find ways to integrate anomalous experience for example population growth of the other or economic development or educational betterment or growing number of adherents subscribing to a particular ideology including those considered inside the community etc., it may affirm an unrelated explanation or meaning. This unrelated meaning framework could be such as- engaging in more discrimination; or rallying focus towards a symbolism; or become more protective of status quo; or more defensive; or even secretly wishing harm hoping others deserve it etc. The unrelated explanation or meaning may be desirable to the community rather than reflect on its disjointed experiences, because that may dispel the arousal that arose as a result of the original anomaly.^{xxxvii} This avoids one from being responsible for one's choices. Because being responsible for one's choice ties up an individual to interpersonal relation and role obligations but avoiding the responsibility of one's choice provides easy escape from any existential angst. Thus, an unrelated explanation even if it only serves a short-term goal is favoured, for it safeguards the community from vulnerability caused by anomalous experience. Similarly, those participating in a highly individualistic culture are not better still. Those unfettered by interpersonal relations and its entailed obligation may become even more defensive to any anomalous experience because they have no advantage of protective system as provided by community.

Kierkegaard's perspective affirms that an individual is situated within the parameters of collective dimensions of social, relational and intersubjective perspective. However, despite our relational and situational embeddedness, we are still individually at the centre of our perception. In the given situation, language can become a building tool to respond to social values and actions of other people when the communicator relates to the intentionality of what is being said. This active participation in the communication throws open

doors to many possibilities. Such communication makes it possible not only to uncover boundaries of communication but also enables one to empathise with 'an-other.' Kierkegaard's scheme of thinking, undermines theories that allow people to predict and control environment. Contrary to systems that facilitate a feeling of belongingness or that which provides a sense of information that one encounters, Kierkegaard motivates one to review one's expectation. For when one cultivates Socratic humility seeking to be a learner, then one's association of threats and vulnerabilities to anomalous experience is weakened. While the participants are still uncertain of what they would encounter, they are open to map anomalous experiences within its confines. Thus, the question of the quality of relation to others, far from being the case as other individuals playing a secondary role, the relation is recognition of the others as unique and yet equal. Thus, relationship with the other is more about helping develop the other to become the self it is supposed to be rather than becoming a crowd which forgets its individuality.

Kierkegaard's problem with Hegel's system is the loss of individuality in order to become part of the universal. As such, this means annulling of one's desire and ambition and be motivated by the general interest of all. This leads to alleviating of reason above faith because reason is supposed to be accessible to all above faith whereas faith is individualistic. The universal rationalizes the single individual's place in human society where ethical is that which benefits society as a whole. However, there is no way of explaining religious stage where the only thing that matters is single individual's relationship to God. Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes illustrates this in discussion of the Biblical story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, for which Abraham is acknowledged as father of faith. According to the ethical, Abraham's undertaking amounted to murder. However, for Abraham it was suspension of the ethical obligation to fulfil his higher duty to God. Abraham acted as single individual isolated from the universal and as such his actions cannot be explained. Johannes suggests Abraham's faith is incomprehensible which is why he did not disclose his undertaking to anyone. That which can be disclosed is associated with

universal and falls under ethical. Any rational explanation of Abraham is unable to take us beyond ethical. Johannes concludes that such faith requires passion and passion is not something which we can learn. We have to experience it ourselves or else we do not understand it at all.

In *Either/Or* Kierkegaard writes, “The person who has chosen and found himself ethically has himself as specified in all his concretion. He has himself, then, as an individual who has these abilities, these 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.”^{xxxviii} Kierkegaard proposes the first movement which is isolation and the second act is a counter movement which is taking up responsibility for oneself and for others. This is the ground for continuity. The individual who does not apprehend oneself as a concrete personality in continuity first, wouldn’t feel 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.”^{xxxix} This is a double movement on two levels. On one level, the double movement means communication with ‘in-self’ that presupposes revocation of one’s given identity and only then the movement towards the authenticity of the self. On another level, the double movement means separation of the individual and only after that relation with ‘an-other.’^{x1} During the double movement the ‘in-self’ becomes the ‘an-other’ for oneself and the ‘an-other’ becomes condition for the subjectivity of ‘in-self.’

Conclusion

Kierkegaard’s vision presupposes the sovereignty of the subject. Each of us have been shaped by our own thoughts, emotions and experiences—navigating our ‘awareness of reality.’ “My experience of life within the floating time structure of past, present and future cannot be experienced by anyone else.” Yet, we are “a member of a species, a social being”

functioning within society according to the “rules and patterns of the society.”^{xli} Our sense of becoming and social belonging is thus a mixture of social enforcement and personal freedom by which our seemingly free actions become acts of reproducing and perpetuating a particular culture.^{xlii} Just as the individual intersects at its many levels with the collective, so also the ‘in-self’ interacts with ‘an-other’, for neither of the categories exist entirely outside of the other nor can act wholly autonomously without the other. However, an individual is still at the centre of their own perception and experiences, for the individual is a thinking being even if the individual’s orientation is informed by the engagement with other individuals or the collective. The danger against which Kierkegaard raises a flag is the sickness of the age which according to him is the phenomenon of levelling that results in the ‘*pret-a-porter*’ or ready to use, like the ready-made garments sold in finished condition in the standardized sizes, as distinct from made to measure or bespoke clothing tailored to a particular person’s frame.

In other words, the sickness of the age is an individual becoming a crowd instead of becoming the Single One. Kierkegaard’s struggle with Hegel’s system was its assumption that an individual would fit into the system without significant changes. Such a system may be able to produce cultured or mannered crowd or like a militarized complex. However, it is at the cost of the loss of individuality. And loss of individuality leads to the forgetfulness of existence. At times, even individuals alter themselves to look alike as if one can be duplicated into someone else rather than embracing the hard task of becoming the Single One. Rejecting the Romantic ideology of a society based on abstract ideology and the belief that environment determines the genius, Kierkegaard lays emphasis on becoming the Single Individual. The development of ‘in- self’ and the intersection of ‘in-self’ to ‘an-other’ is key to such a development. A closer examination of the process reveals that both need the other, for they validate the inter-existentiality of each other.

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