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INTERPRETATIONS OF COMMUNICATION AS DIALOGUE EXISTENCE IN SØREN KIERKEGAARD'S PHILOSOPHY

The article discusses interpretations of communication as dialogue existence in Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy. The beginning of the article is dedicated to the origins and trends of communicative philosophy. The links between communicative and existential philosophies are also presented. The second part of the article focuses on philosophical texts of Kierkegaard. On the basis of three (aesthetic, ethical and religious) phases in the life suggested by this thinker, the aim is set to reveal the peculiarities and prerequisites of dialogue existence and to highlight the necessity of the dialogue with God, its importance to human existence as well as his/her ability to create a love dialogue with the surrounding people.

Keywords: Kierkegaard, existence, philosophy of communication, dialogue existence, God.

Introduction

With the rapid expansion of new means of mass communication in the age of technological progress and globalisation, the term communication has become one of the most popular concepts. Communication is a complex and multidimensional concept with numerous forms and definitions: “even scientists, writers and philosophers use the term in a variety of ways” [1. P. 7]. It can be stated that in the 20th century philosophical research on communication emerged as a reflection, which was targeted at critical consideration of increasingly evolving mass culture, means of mass communication and their influence on human existence and interpersonal relations. Modern technologies have been gradually contributing to enhancement of an interactive dialogue, which encourages alienation and deepens the crisis of human spiritual life. The main focus in philosophy of Martin Heidegger, a well-known German existentialist, was laid on modern technologies. He consistently underlined their negative impact on human existence [2, 3]. In their philosophical texts Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber and Juozas Girnius claimed that an individual is born to establish a direct and live dialogue with another person, which makes up his/her natural need and necessity. It shows that dialogue is fundamental and a most meaningful aspect of human existence. The latter existentialists emphasised the importance of openness, immediacy and love in interpersonal communication.

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Название статьи: Коммуникации как интерпретации диалогического существования в философии Серена Кьеркегора

Аннотация: Рассматривается коммуникация как интерпретация диалогического существования в философии Серена Кьеркегора. В начале дается краткий обзор истоков и направлений философии коммуникации и раскрываются связи между философией коммуникации и экзистенциальной философией. Вторая часть статьи посвящена анализу философских текстов Кьеркегора и на основе учения мыслителя о трех этапах жизни – эстетическом, этическом и религиозном, раскрываются особенности и предпосылки диалогического существования. Далее подчеркивается необходимость и важность диалога с Богом для человеческого существования и его способности создавать диалог любви с близкими.

Ключевые слова: Кьеркегор, философия коммуникации, существование, Бог, диалогическое существование.

Considered to be the father of existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard was one of the first to refer to the dialogue between the human being and God as to the foundation for human existence and all the relations. Hamid Mowlana [4] astutely observes that philosophy and religion open up new horizons in research on communication as “philosophy is the universal discipline capable of reflecting various sides, angles and aspects of diverse phenomena, processes as well as actions” [5. P. 6]

Kierkegaard's religious philosophy deprives the communicative process of logical and theoretical limitations and with the help of faith raises human communication to a higher spiritual-transcendent level. The insights of this Danish thinker gave impetus for forming the theory of existential communication, which sees communication as a feature of human existence. Therefore, this article aims to disclose interpretations of communication as dialogue existence in Kierkegaard's philosophy. The article starts with a brief overview of origins of and trends in the formation of communication philosophy. The second part of the article focuses on Kierkegaard's philosophy: on the basis of three life phases suggested by this thinker, attempts are made to identify peculiarities and prerequisites of dialogue existence, to highlight the necessity of the dialogue with God and its significance to human existence. The question is formulated: what new dimensions of human life and human relations are revealed by the perspective of religious communication as dialogue existence.

Communication and philosophy

Communication and its peculiarities have been extensively investigated from the different perspectives of the humanities, social and technological sciences. In the contexts of aforesaid research various conceptions and trends of communication emerge: social communication, political communication, art communication, medical communication, and many others. It can be claimed that “communication is at the ‘crossroads’ of many disciplines” [6].

In the middle of the 20th century, there forms a trend in the philosophy of communication, the object of which consists of communication and its various forms. The boundaries of communication philosophy are very broad and they can be interpreted differently. This philosophical trend has connections with such spheres of philosophy as ontology, phenomenology, epistemology, hermeneutics, language philosophy, social and political philosophy, and other spheres. In posing the question about the necessity and role of the philosophy of communication in the contemporary world, it can be noted that the “philosophy of communication is a particularly salient area of inquiry today, given the increased understanding of the fundamental role communication plays in almost all aspects of life, and increasingly, of science, and the social changes brought about by an increasingly globalised ‘communication society’ ” [7]

While analysing the sources of the philosophy of communication, the publication *Philosophy of Communication* [8] indicates that philosophy and communication have belonged together since the beginning. Sharing this attitude, Calvin O. Schrag [9. P. 335] points out that the “philosophical inquiry about human communication existed long before ‘philosophy of communication’ became a specialized discipline.” The prevailing attitude is that ties between philosophy and communication go back to ancient Greece, antiquity, and the first philosophers [9–11]. Sources of the philosophy of communication can be ascribed to such prominent

ancient philosophers as Socrates, Plato and his works *Phaedrus*, *Gorgias*, *Seventh Letter*; Aristotle and his famous *Rhetoric*. These books are regarded as the first classical works devoted to the problems of communication [11]. Here, the ancient philosophers pose and analyse problems directly or indirectly related to communication (dialogue, writing, discussion, rhetoric etc.) as well as draw attention to how certain forms of communication develop the person's skills and critical thinking. According to Algis Mickūnas [12. P. 311–325], we are able to argue and have a dialogue with Plato today while reading his texts because linguistic media open up such possibilities of communication for us.

The overview of the historical development of the philosophy of communication and its field of investigations also refers to such thinkers as St Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, Edmund Husserl, John Dewey, Heidegger, Buber, Jaspers, Georg Gadamer, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and many others [9, 13–17]. All this evidences that the scope of studies of communication philosophy is very broad and requires discussion and separate research.

In his research studies Kirtiklis [18, 19] refers to two interrelated conceptions of the philosophy of communication. The first includes the philosophy of communication oriented to the analysis of the fundamentals of specialized theories of communication. The second embraces the philosophy of communication which aims at examining the meaning of communication in human existence. The latter trend in communication philosophy is associated with the phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophical tradition. Moreover, it is closely connected with existential philosophy where communication is regarded as one of the basic phenomena in human existence. Richard Lanigan claims that most existential philosophers perceive communication as a central force. This process of incorporating communication into the basic explanation of existence has taken four main forms: "1) Existence as indirect communication; 2) Existence as direct communication; 3) Existence as authentic or inauthentic communication, and 4) Existence as primordial or genetic communication" [20. P. 35]. These ties between existence and communication were first reflected in the philosophical texts of Kierkegaard and his followers Jaspers, Buber, Heidegger, and other existentialists.

It may be safely assumed that the origins of existential communication lie in Kierkegaard's religious worldview, where an authentic life of a person is understood as a continued dialogue with God. Thus, it can be stated that existential philosophy, which is directed to dialogue communication, seeks to respond to internal spiritual needs, to help a person to establish an immediate dialogue with another individual, to understand and learn the self and own existence.

Communication as an existential dialogue

There is no doubt that Kierkegaard, who is a forerunner of existential philosophy and the author of the concept *existence*, is one of the first thinkers, who disclosed the links between existence and communication. It can be stated that Kierkegaard's existentialism mainly focused on the communicative aspects of human subsistence. Although Kierkegaard did not use the concept of communication directly, specific forms of communicative expression, such as belief, encounter, dialogue, relation and friendship, can be found in his philosophical works. Later these forms of communication were significantly reflected in the philosophical works of Jaspers, Buber, Girnius and other existentialists.

In fact, it should be acknowledged that “to speak about the conception of communication in Kierkegaard’s philosophy is a huge challenge” [21. P. 123]. This is a very broad topic and it can be approached from a number of perspectives. The communicative aspects of Kierkegaard’s philosophy are analysed by a big number of different authors [21–27]. The aforesaid authors disclose the significance of Kierkegaard’s philosophical thoughts and their importance to various theories of communication. Referring to Kierkegaard’s texts, Brian Prosser and Andrew Ward [28] discuss the influence of the internet on interpersonal relations. They argue “that from Kierkegaard’s perspective, technologically mediated communications run a serious risk of attenuating interpersonal connectivity” [28. P. 167]. True communication, according to Kierkegaard, is interpersonal and never impersonal.

The problem of authenticity of human subsistence and personal development is one of the main issues in Kierkegaard’s philosophy. Kierkegaard points out that human subsistence is not something taken for granted but the aim and objective for an individual himself or herself. What does this mean? An individual is called for building up own personality and authentic existence. The importance of faith, which is expressed as a dialogue with God, arises from this. According to Kierkegaard, an individual is not capable of creating and implementing own subsistence – he/she needs a relation with God and only through this Absolute relation implementation of human subsistence and a possibility of establishing a love dialogue with another individual become possible.

In his book *The Sickness unto Death* [29] Kierkegaard points out that synthesis and relation determine an individual as subsistence. This shows that a human is a communicating being in a constant relation with the self, who is also in a constant relation with another person and God. Later these attitudes were adopted by his follower Jaspers, who is among the first to have formulated the concept of existential communication. “Jaspers perceives people as relative beings, as homo communicativus whose authentic existence and identity result from existential communication” [30. P. 132]

The analysis of Kierkegaard’s philosophical texts reveals that his theory of communication as that of dialogue existence is closely linked to his spheres or stages of existence (*the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious*). The Danish philosopher elaborated on the aforesaid stages in his famous book *Either-Or* [31]. The stages disclose different dimensions of the human subsistence or steps in the individual’s life path. The question arises how communication reveals itself in these stages? Ian McPherson [32. P. 157] states that “communication across ways of being seems relatively straightforward”. Generally specific way of life, specific thinking, worldview, values and relation with reality are characteristic of an individual in each of the stages. Moreover, it can be seen that each of these life stages refers to a different level of interpersonal relations and dialogue. Namely this aspect requires a broader analysis.

Thus, looking at these three stages of life from the perspective of human relations and dialogue, it can be stated that people’s interpersonal relations are grounded on different motives and are of different maturity level. The *aesthetic* stage is the lowest one and is attributed to the elements of sensual life. The aesthetes are people pursuing only pleasures and joy. They follow their instincts and carnal pleasures. For this reason they are not able to maintain long-term relations because another individual is seen only as a means for satisfying own desires. An aesthete

sees the beauty as the most essential source of pleasure, which only provides the established relations with the instant moment. Thus, it can be concluded that a dialogue with another individual does not occur because the subsistence is directed only to the self and to own egoistic needs. These principles are revealed in Kierkegaard's work *The Seducer's Diary* [33]. Since an individual is not capable of establishing an authentic dialogue with another person in this stage, he/she loses "the self", lives in the world of illusions, constantly feels disappointment, emptiness and vacuity because, according to Kierkegaard, the fullness of human subsistence discloses only through the authentic deep love relation.

The second stage is referred to as the *ethical* one. It is a higher level of existence and communication, where duty and logic prevail. An individual seeks for stable relations and a rational dialogue with another. Thus, communication in this stage of life is of substantial character, i.e. it is based on logical thinking and rules. People create an interpersonal dialogue pursuing specific results or goals. However, viewing from Kierkegaard's existential perspective, dialogue communication, which is grounded only on common standards and external communication ethics, remains superficial and restricted and is not capable of an authentic unification of people. On the contrary, people get alienated from each other because the relations that rest only on benefit and external duty, become artificial and schematised.

Kierkegaard points out that without Christian faith, interpersonal relations do not have a real link and foundation. The *religious or faith* stage is the most perfect phase of dialogue because it is based on God's love. The personal choice of an individual to believe acquires utmost importance here. In his *Works of Love* [34] Kierkegaard states that saying "you" to God we enter a dimension of religious life. Faith, according to Kierkegaard, is a live conversation, a love dialogue with God. This dialogue is grounded on a free choice of an individual. A human, as a creature of God, is called to be with his/her Creator. The dialogue between God and an individual occurs not using only words but also involving the heart, the soul and the whole human essence. Thus, this dialogue engages an individual as a whole and all his/her life as well. Therefore, the dialogue arising from this faith can be referred to as an existential dialogue.

This means that Kierkegaard assumes that only religious faith enables prerequisites for existential dialogue. Seeking to encourage an individual to make a step towards faith, Kierkegaard employs Abraham's story in his book *Fear and Trembling* [35]. This story reveals an impressive dialogue between God and a person. Called by God, Abraham answers "Here I am". Only faith enables you to hear God's voice and to answer Him. The Danish philosopher points out that an individual seeks to open himself or herself to this personal dialogue with God. The implementation of this aspiration is one of the most important goals of human subsistence and its final realisation.

One more aspect is related to the principle of equality that *existential dialogue* is grounded on. In his work *Philosophical Fragments* [36], the Danish philosopher presents an analogy of God, who acquires a human shape and that of a servant while seeking the equality and unity with a human. This shows that not only a person but also God presents and dedicates Himself to a human through the relation. This principle of existential communication, which was later elaborated on by Jaspers while presenting the concept of existential communication, is important because "no man can consider himself or herself superior to other people. A person

has to respect another person as a personality, to consider his/her freedom and truth, regardless of gender, social status and cultural differences" [30. P. 133]. Such an internal state of heart derives from the love of God and shows that a person is open to hear another person, to accept and love him/her.

Thus, according to Kierkegaard, human subsistence evolves and unfolds only through the everlasting relation with God. No existential dialogue is possible without faith, without belief in a person, his/her relations with other people remain limited, short-time, only physical and of inferior character. Therefore, the stage of faith can rightly be called *the stage of love dialogue*. The Danish philosopher criticises the aesthetic and ethical paradigms of love. Graham Smith [37] notices that the concept of friendship is of utmost importance to Kierkegaard. In the aesthetic stage friendship is grounded only on short-term "romantic love" or "erotic love", in the ethical phase "ethical friendship" is formed. In both ways people do not acknowledge themselves as spiritual beings and fail to see God's Face in other people. People are closed to existential dialogue, i.e. to spiritual friendship, which derives from God and unites human souls. The true relationship can be achieved only through God and His love. In his *Works of Love* the Danish philosopher states that the wisdom of the world thinks that love is the sense of community between *a person* and *a person*. But Christianity teaches that love is the sense of community between *a person* – *God* – *a person*. Thus, God has to be inside because it is only thanks to him a true relationship is possible [38]. In fact, this tripartite structure defines the essence of Kierkegaard's communication as existential dialogue. God is the foundation of existential dialogue, which contributes to establishment of just, unselfish and equal love dialogue with another person. This Kierkegaard's assumption was expanded in Buber's work *I and Thou*, where the latter pointed out that the relationship with God is supreme because it unites and embraces all the other relations (the ones with another person, with nature, with the world). Thus, communication in Kierkegaard's philosophy can be perceived only from the perspective of Christian communication.

Conclusions

Interpretations of communication as dialogue existence in Kierkegaard's philosophy are closely related to three life stages, i.e. with the aesthetic, ethical, and religious ones. These stages disclose different forms of human subsistence, the evolution of which is closely connected with the abilities of an individual to establish an authentic dialogue. In the aesthetic and ethical stages of his / her life, a human remains alone and his / her existence is not of a dialogue nature. In the first case an individual-aesthete "does not communicate" with an equal partner, his / her existence is directed only to the self, to own carnal and egoistic needs, whereas "ethical friendship" rests only on a substantial dialogue, which is created considering external stereotypes and ethical rules. In either case, an individual is not free and does not have any spiritual relation and an authentic love dialogue with another person because he / she has not made a step forward towards the faith and God. Only the religious stage, which is the supreme life phase, can be referred to as a stage of existential love dialogue. Thus, in the context of Kierkegaard's philosophy, the conception of religious communication as dialogue communication arises. Kierkegaard grounded the individual's authentic existence on the love dialogue, which derives from the faith seeing it as an opportunity for the supreme Absolute

relationship with God. This dialogue is not just short-term moments of life but a constant being in the face of God. Therefore, in the context of Kierkegaard's existential philosophy the religious dialogue acquires a subjective ontological dimension and is perceived as one of the underlying features of authentic human existence and foundation of interpersonal communication with another individual. In other words, dialogue-based life is full of God's love and is an authentic way of human subsistence, which contributes to improvement of an individual as well as enables him / her to experience the fullness of life.

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Keywords: Kierkegaard; existence, philosophy of communication; dialogue existence, God.

The article focuses on a multi-perspective discussion on interpretations of communication as dialogue existence in Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy. The beginning of the article contains a short overview of origins and trends of communication philosophy and reveals the links between communication philosophy and existential philosophy. On the basis of three life phases suggested by Kierkegaard, the links between dialogue communication and existence are disclosed. The article also shows that dialogue communication is of different level in the aesthetic, ethical, and religious stages of life, and is grounded on different motives. From the comparative aspect, in the aesthetic stage of life there is no dialogue among people because an individual is self-centred and searches for pleasures. The ethical stage reveals only possibilities for a limited substantial and rational dialogue. Only the religious phase, which is considered to be the supreme one, opens the path to the love dialogue with another individual. This stage rests on the faith as an immediate dialogue between the human and God. A conclusion is made that authentic human existence is of a dialogue character because an individual is naturally called to be in the relationship with God and it is only through this religious dialogue that the real identity of an individual, his/her purport of life and ability to create a love dialogue with another individual can unfold.