

## Kierkegaard, Socrates and Existential Individuality

### *Introduction*

The 19<sup>th</sup> century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard was a profoundly religious thinker. He is also regarded as the father of Existentialism, one of the most important philosophical movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term ‘existentialist’ is applied to those philosophers, like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, who held that the foundation of all philosophical thought is to be found in the actual, existing, Individual. For the existentialist, in opposition to traditional philosophy, it is not a matter of seeking to clarify the general structure of what is – existence in its broadest sense – by appealing to a prior and intelligible order that imbues it with its sense; rather, what is must be understood in its positivity, that is as it appears to the concretely existing Individual. As Sartre puts it in *Being and Nothingness*, the essence of what is lies in its “‘appearing” which is no longer opposed to being but on the contrary is the measure of it’.<sup>1</sup> It might be thought, then, that there is something paradoxical in the fact that Kierkegaard is regarded as both a religious thinker and a proto-existentialist, since religion, in contrast to Existentialism, seems to suppose or demand a negation of actual existence, draining it of its intrinsic significance in favour of a divine world that fills it with meaning. How, then, does the religious aspect of Kierkegaard’s thought not exclude the existential aspect?

In this article I seek to clarify how both the religious and the existential are related in Kierkegaard’s work through an analysis of his interest in the ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates. As the eminent Kierkegaardian George Pattison has noted Kierkegaard ‘sought orientation’ in Socrates, and he did so from his first major work until his last.<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard’s Magister’s dissertation, defended by him in 1841, was entitled *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*.<sup>3</sup> Beyond that there are repeated references to Socrates throughout Kierkegaard’s writings, and weeks before his death, Kierkegaard expressed directly his deep affiliation with Socrates in his pamphlet series, *The Moment*, declaring that: ‘the only analogy I have for what I am doing is Socrates.’<sup>4</sup> Thus Kierkegaard’s work is both framed by the example of Socrates and composed with constant reference to Socrates.\*

But what importance does the father of Western philosophy, Socrates, living during the pagan religiosity of Ancient Greece have for a deeply theological thinker whose concern was the state of Christianity in modernity? In answer to this question I will argue that Socrates is a pivotal figure in Kierkegaard’s work because Kierkegaard held Socrates in the highest regard as the model for a philosopher, a model which he understood to be distinctly lacking in his contemporaries. In Socrates’ treatment of those he conversed with and lived alongside Kierkegaard found the highest instantiation of the relation between human and human. It is Socrates’ concern for the

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\* EDITORIAL NOTE: Kierkegaard draws a distinction between Socrates’ and Plato’s thought. Plato’s thought is characterised by our coming to know an eternal realm of ‘Forms’ – the archetypes of which all our changing experiences are instances. Kierkegaard sees Socrates to be an ‘ironist’, bringing us to a state of doubt in which we are thrown back on to our existential (lived) situation when making decisions. On realising this, we cannot avoid responsibility for our basic understanding of truth by simply referring our thought to absolute standards of objectivity. All discussion of Socrates in this paper will refer to this interpretation of him.

Individual as an actually existing Individual that Kierkegaard identifies as having been lost to contemporary philosophy and culture, and that he seeks to retrieve in his appeal to an existentially grounded form of religious faith.

Nevertheless, despite his deep respect for Socrates, Kierkegaard's admiration is not unqualified. Whilst, for Kierkegaard, the manner in which Socrates practised philosophy embodied the highest recognition of Individuality, Socrates' understanding of his own practice (as it is presented by Plato) undermines this recognition. In the self-understanding of that philosopher who in his philosophising related to his fellow man as no other had before or since, Kierkegaard saw the shadow that presaged the coming eclipse of the significance of the Individual in his own time, and which he sought to rectify through the existential commitment of true religious faith.

### *Socrates and the Delphic Precept 'Know Thyself'*

Socrates' philosophy has long been associated with the principle of self-knowledge. As Kierkegaard observes in *Philosophical Fragments*, writing under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus: 'Socrates did his very best to gain knowledge of human nature and to know himself' and consequently 'has been eulogized for centuries as the person who certainly knew man best'.<sup>5</sup>

This Socratic concern with self-knowledge has long been taken to be a concern found in Greek culture generally. The precept 'know thyself' was inscribed on a plinth at the temple of the Oracle of Delphi. The Oracle was held in great esteem by the Ancient Greeks; not only was it the source of prophetic counsel, but Delphi itself was believed by the Greeks to be situated at the centre of the human world, and consequently the principle of self-knowledge prescribed in the precept was at the heart of human community.

However, Socrates' concern with self-knowledge is not wholly identical with the concern of the Greek culture from which it emerged. The precepts inscribed on the Delphic temple, of which 'know thyself' was one, were addressed to those who came to consult the gods. Taking this into consideration, it has been suggested that the precept 'know thyself' should be understood to be a recommendation or warning to those consulting with the gods: humans must remember their mortality and thus ward off any inclination to presume too much of their strength and oppose the powers of the gods. Thus, in its original context and with its original significance the Delphic precept does not concern the philosophical problem of the relation between the Individual and the truth. Rather, as the French philosopher Michel Foucault argues, in its original sense the precept 'know thyself' had a ritual significance; it stipulated a rule of conduct, warning humans against *hubris*.<sup>6</sup>

It is in the thought of Socrates that the proclamation 'know thyself' first acquires its philosophical significance as the foundation of the relation between the Individual and truth. For Socrates it is only if one first of all pursues the question 'what sort of being am I?' that one can come to know any other truth at all.<sup>7</sup> In effect, what Socrates claims is that all other questions concerning the world and the ways we relate to it remain abstract unless we first know what in truth we are. Thus through the Socratic formulation of a distinctively philosophical project there arises an entirely new notion

of what it is to be a self: the notion of the Individual as a subject for whom there is a necessary relation to the truth.<sup>8</sup>

One of the clearest examples of this is found in Plato's *Apology*. The *Apology* is Plato's record of Socrates' appearance before the court which was to put him to death on charges of corrupting the young of Athens and impious conduct. Socrates is presented as speaking in his own person: firstly, defending himself against the charges brought against him; secondly, on being found guilty, suggesting what he considers a suitable punishment; and finally, having been sentenced to death, making a final address to the court. The *Apology* can, then, be understood as both Socrates' own testament to the way in which he understood himself to conduct philosophy and a prescription to others, through his own example, of how they must live their own lives. This prescription is made explicit as that which encourages others to take care of themselves through self examination when Socrates declares:

I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living.<sup>9</sup>

In effect, then, Socrates' urges his fellow citizens to cease their preoccupation with their own reputations and material wealth and turn their attention to truth, wisdom and the improvement of their souls.

In making this exhortation, Socrates dislocates the notion of virtue from the traditional Athenian emphasis upon good reputation or the possession of wealth.<sup>10</sup> Rather, virtue in life takes on the form of self-knowledge. Thus, with Socrates the activity of philosophy becomes a necessary mode of living for each Individual. Self-knowledge becomes inextricably linked to a way of life which places the Individual in a direct relation to the care of his or her own soul. Socrates' philosophical activity which he defends at his trial thus amounts to an interrelation of knowledge with morality as it is his task to engage others in the examination of the values they hold which inform the way they live. What this shows is that whilst the activity of philosophy in its Socratic form announces a privileging of the acquisition of self-knowledge, it is nonetheless grounded in a broader practice, namely that of the care the Individual should take over themselves and their ethical existence. With Socrates, philosophy is part of the existential being of the Individual as that practice which not only becomes an enterprise concerned with giving an account of the conditions for truth but also how and why the Individual must strive to live in relation to the truth.

### *The Socratic Individual and Its Problematic Nature*

The Socratic enterprise emphasises the importance of the Individual's task of self-examination. Kierkegaard understands this aspect of Socratic philosophy positively, principally because it is directed towards the Individual as an Individual and demands of them an existential labour of self-transformation, a life lived virtuously. Nevertheless, for Kierkegaard Socratic philosophy harbours within itself the potential for the loss of an authentic existential existence on the part of the Individual. In what follows I show how this loss is implicit in Socratic philosophy by discussing Kierkegaard's understanding of the role accorded to ignorance by Socrates.

As Kierkegaard observes in *The Concept of Irony* Socrates' method of philosophising itself amounts to, and is based upon, the presupposition of a confession of ignorance.<sup>11</sup> In the *Apology*, Socrates argued in response to the claim that he was the wisest man in Athens, that if that was so it was not because of the extent of his knowledge, but because unlike other men, who are ignorant of their ignorance, supposing themselves wise when they are not, he knows the limits of his knowledge. However, not only does Socrates himself, particularly in the early Platonic dialogues, express his own ignorance concerning the matters he is enquiring about, he compels others, or seeks to compel them, under his questioning, to admit their own ignorance about such things.

So what does the admission of ignorance yield for the Individual? The significance of Socratic ignorance for Kierkegaard is such that it ensures the freedom of the Individual to embark upon a journey of self discovery once the realisation of their ignorance moves them to explicitly question the opinions they once held and from there on to the love of wisdom. In this way, Climacus, in the *Philosophical Fragments*, understands Socrates to fulfil the role of 'midwife' that he ascribed to himself. Socrates' point in likening himself to a midwife turns on the fact that in Socrates' time real midwives were past child-bearing age – unable to give birth themselves their role was to aid others in doing so. So too Socrates, being intellectually barren in the sense that he is ignorant, cannot give birth to truth himself or inculcate knowledge in those with whom he converses; his role, like that of a midwife, can only be to induce the Individual to give birth to their own truth through his questioning. However, according to Socrates' own claim, reported in the *Apology*, it was the gods who debarred him from 'giving birth'. This distinguishes him from his interlocutors in that, unlike them, he is somehow divinely restrained. This restraint is, then, a mark of Socrates' particular piety, and Socrates' admission of ignorance is a sign of religious duty in his care of his fellow humans' souls. Thus, as Climacus sees it, Socrates acted as a midwife because he understood this to be the highest possible relation of human to human, whilst to give birth or create can only be the relation of god to human.<sup>12</sup> Or in other words, truth's acknowledgement cannot properly be taught, but we can only be helped to come to the acknowledgement of truth for ourselves.

In one respect, then, Kierkegaard, writing under the pseudonym Climacus, understands positively Socrates' use of ignorance. That he does so is confirmed by the analogy between Socrates' philosophical practice, premised on the presupposition of ignorance, and Kierkegaard's own manner of writing. In discussing his role as an author Kierkegaard asserts, 'So long as I considered the strictest silence my religious duty I strove in every way to preserve it.'<sup>13</sup> Kierkegaard aligned himself with Socrates in this way, declaring in *The Moment* that he did not possess the truth of faith and that through his writing he has striven to demonstrate that no other person does either.

Moreover, just as the Socratic presupposition of ignorance has the positive function of provoking Socrates' interlocutors to free reflection, Kierkegaard seeks to similarly move his readers. Distancing himself from his writings by his use of pseudonyms, Kierkegaard sought to ensure that his readers could not – and cannot – suppose them to be a direct and unambiguous communication of the truth of faith, a truth which, as we have seen, Kierkegaard declared himself not to possess anyway. Kierkegaard's use

of pseudonymous authors amounts to the fact that Kierkegaard, as the real author of such works, actually says nothing himself. Thus, Kierkegaard's readers must actively seek to discover such truth for themselves.<sup>14</sup>

This indirect method of communication is claimed by Kierkegaard to be the only way to destroy the illusions Individuals hold.<sup>15</sup> With Socrates, this was the illusion held by the Individual that they knew the truth of the concepts in question. For Kierkegaard, this concerned the illusion that one was a Christian when the true meaning of what it meant to be one was not realised.<sup>16</sup> It is this that constitutes the ironical nature of both Socrates' and Kierkegaard's philosophical methods, in that the nature of irony is understood by Kierkegaard to be that of indirect communication, to leave something unsaid and only 'hint at it elusively'.<sup>17</sup> Now, Kierkegaard finds in Socratic irony the ability to transform the way in which language is used in that it says what it does not mean. This ambiguity of language prepares the Individual to confront their understanding of themselves as something which needs to be uncovered as essentially contradictory and thus alters their self understanding as moral agents.<sup>18</sup> The contextually embedded nature of indirect communication then, along with its refusal to lend itself to ultimate answers, throws us back on to the question of our own authenticity in that communication

So far, what I have argued is that Socrates' method of philosophising – i.e. the use he makes of ignorance – is grounded in an ethical concern for the Individual, informed by Socrates' construal of his religious duty. What I would now like to claim is that by implication this same method also constitutes the understanding of the self in relation to what we might call, following Kierkegaard, 'Socratic Sin'.<sup>19</sup> For Socrates, man only does wrong if he is ignorant of the truth. That is, no man, Socrates argues, does wrong if he is in possession of the truth. Consequently, Kierkegaard observes that wisdom is understood by Socrates necessarily to entail virtuous action, and as a result knowledge becomes aligned with morality. It is because of this equation between ignorance and Sin, that Kierkegaard takes his distance from Socrates.

In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard articulates his criticism of Socrates. He understands Socrates' claim to mean that only the good is chosen if its true nature is wholly known, and conversely, since its source is ignorance alone, evil cannot possess any intrinsic attraction. For Kierkegaard this entails that the Individual, for Socrates, acts, at least in part, unconsciously when engaged in harmful actions. But, as Kierkegaard understands it, the naivety of this assertion is that it disregards the existential occurrence of an Individual acting wrongfully when they are in full possession of the knowledge of what is the right thing to do. In contrast to Socrates, Kierkegaard asserts that there is something in the *psyche* that accounts for evil, and that is the will of the Individual, a defiant will and not a will constituted in the Individual as a knowing subject.<sup>20</sup> On this basis, then, what Kierkegaard finds lacking in Socrates' account of the Individual is their freedom to act sinfully (a postulate that is central to Christian faith). As I will go on to show in the next section of this article with regard to the analysis of Kierkegaard's concept of 'the moment', it is in this way that Kierkegaard reinstates freedom in the Individual's concrete, ethical existence.

However, if Socrates' acknowledged ignorance is the vital means by which he brings the Individuals with whom he converses to an awareness of their own ignorance, and if ignorance must be displaced in order for the Individual to live a life of virtue, how,

for Socrates, is positive knowledge to be reached? An answer to this question is found in the *Philosophical Fragments*, where Climacus begins by posing the question ‘can truth be learnt?’ He goes on to describe the way in which Socrates arrives at the justification of *anamnesis* (recollection) as being that mode by which the Individual accesses the truth. As it is discussed in the Platonic dialogue *Phaedo*, the theory of *anamnesis* accounts for the knowledge we have of abstract concepts, such as equality, or beauty, the good, or justice. What Socrates argues is that although one might be led to such concepts from experiential observation, they are not derived from experience. Rather, they are presupposed by it, and this is why Socrates can claim that when we say we learn something, we are ‘basically only recollecting it, and therefore learning is a recollection’.<sup>21</sup> Socrates explains how this is possible by arguing that the soul, the intelligent element of the human being, is immortal; when we die, unlike the body, the soul does not perish. Rather, it passes from this world to a heavenly realm where such abstract qualities – which Socrates calls ‘the Forms’ – are encountered. According to Socrates, then, as a result of its time in this eternal realm the soul encounters the truth; but on being born or reborn into this world the soul forgets this true knowledge and it must be recalled or remembered, a process facilitated by Socratic interrogation.

What leads Socrates to this theory of *anamnesis* is the following paradox associated with learning: if learning is correctly defined as a form of seeking, then it is argued by Socrates that through logical necessity the Individual can not seek knowledge of something if he already knows it; yet to seek it he must already know what he is seeking for. In order to dissolve this paradox learning must be conceived of as the *anamnesis* of what is always already known by the Individual, but which they cannot immediately recall because they have forgotten it.<sup>22</sup> What Socrates is saying, then, is that there are different modalities of knowing, of which explicit knowledge is but one. In his journals Kierkegaard claims that this account of learning means that each Individual already holds within himself the Divine as it is the absolute truth which the Individual eventually comes to recollect.<sup>23</sup> In this respect, however, there is once more a denial of the existential bearing of the Individual’s relation to truth: the Individual does not require a fundamental change in his being in order to access the truth as it is already there within him; all that is needed is a reflective mode of understanding in which the universality of truth is exposed.

In his criticism of Socrates, Kierkegaard seeks to re-establish the grounds for the Individual whose subjective, personal existence is the only concern. In the next section of this article I will show that in doing so Kierkegaard re-instates the conditions of ‘spirituality’ which he understood contemporary culture to lack, and by so doing also re-establishes ‘philosophy’ as that practice which is *existentially* concerned with how Individual existence can be an existence in relation to truth.

### *‘Going Beyond Socrates’: The Existential Problem for the Individual*

In *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard says, or has Climacus say, in what amounts to a constantly repeated refrain, that he seeks ‘to go beyond Socrates’.<sup>24</sup> This ‘project’ of ‘going beyond Socrates’ is most clearly effected in Climacus’ discussion of the concept of ‘the moment’. Through the concept of the ‘moment’ Climacus raises a philosophically, as well as theologically, significant concern with the Individual; a concern that reinstates the Individual as a concretely existing subject for whom the journey to truth involves a transformation of their being.

The concept of 'the moment' is introduced in *Philosophical Fragments* in contrast to the concept of 'recollection' that in Socratic thought is the way in which the Individual comes to possess the truth. The problem Climacus has with Socratic recollection is that at the point when truth is acquired by the Individual, the moment it actually happens, bears no real significance for the Individual, as they realise they have always known the truth, and in fact have known it eternally as it has always been inscribed in the very nature of their souls. Thus, as Climacus says, 'viewed Socratically, any point of departure in time is *eo ipso* something accidental, a vanishing point, an occasion'.<sup>25</sup> 'The moment', that is, the temporal occurrence of the Individual's relation to the truth, is thus:

Hidden in the eternal, assimilated into it in such a way that I, so to speak, still cannot find it even if I were to look for it, because there is no Here and no There, but only an *ubique et usquam* [everywhere and nowhere].<sup>26</sup>

For Climacus, 'if the situation is to be different',<sup>27</sup> and this means here if one is to 'go beyond Socrates', then the eternal could not have existed for the Individual in any respect or modality. That is, if 'the moment' is to have 'such decisive significance',<sup>28</sup> then before the moment the Individual possessed the truth, the eternal could not have a relation to the Individual.

However, it can not be the case that 'to go beyond Socrates' is the only reason why the eternal must come into relation with the Individual in a radically different way. If this were so, then it would reduce the whole significance of *Philosophical Fragments* to that of merely 'haggling' with concepts so as to say something different from Socrates. Rather, this relation to the eternal must have an existentially, 'decisive significance' for the Individual so as to constitute a transformation of their very being; a condition which, for Kierkegaard, is paramount to spirituality. It is the case, then that 'the moment' presupposes the possibility of the Individual having a relation with the eternal. However, it remains to be seen what, for Kierkegaard, constitutes a relation to the eternal.

George Pattison claims that for Kierkegaard a relation to the eternal is manifested in an Individual's concern for their life as a whole.<sup>29</sup> For Kierkegaard this constitutes proof of the Divine origin of the human since 'what is great about the human being, is that he can occupy himself' with the future and that this relation to the future is a struggle. However, for the Individual this relation is not only with the unknown of the future itself, but with himself. This is because the future does not exist other than as a possibility of a way of being a self.<sup>30</sup> 'The moment', which Climacus posits in the *Philosophical Fragments*, is, then, the moment in which the Individual acquires faith, as it is the transition to faith with which Climacus is trying to understand as a way of life. Thus, it can be asserted that not only does the notion of 'the moment' relate to the 'theoretical' transition from non-Christian to Christian or as Climacus asserts from a state of untruth to truth.<sup>31</sup>

However, the 'moment' must also relate to the more general transition of the Individual from one way of existing to another. This is confirmed in the *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, which Kierkegaard wrote under his own name. There Kierkegaard contradicts Climacus' claim that the eternal could not have a relation to

the Individual if 'the moment' is to have decisive significance. Perhaps it is the case that a relation to the eternal does not necessarily consist in residing in 'the truth'. If this is so, then for Kierkegaard, a relation to the eternal is possible even if it does not find its fulfilment in faith as such. For this reason, it can then be claimed that a relation to the eternal is not necessarily constituted in an acknowledgement of God, i.e. as the Individual in possession of eternal truth. Rather, this relation to the eternal is manifested in the Individual's very being through the way that they comport themselves toward their own lives. Indeed, this concern with the way in which an Individual exists is precisely the concern of philosophy itself as expressed by Socrates urging 'care for oneself'.

The question that then arises is what actually constitutes a 'way of existing' for Kierkegaard? The first thing to note is that Kierkegaard's understanding of what it means to exist is wholly different to that of Descartes and the post-Cartesian philosophers. Whereas for Descartes existence was self-evident, a truth expressed in the famous Cartesian declaration *cogito ergo sum*, 'I think therefore I am', for Kierkegaard existence is something to be striven for by each Individual through the choices, values and actions which are particular to their own life.<sup>32</sup> As Kierkegaard puts it in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: 'an existing Individual human being is not an idea; surely his existence is something other than the thought-existence of the idea?'<sup>33</sup> Thus, for Kierkegaard, the Individual must always endeavour to exist. However, existence can be striven for in different ways. The different ways of existing are found in Kierkegaard's description of the three spheres of existence: the aesthetic, the ethical and that sphere with which Climacus deals – the religious. These three spheres are characterised by the particular Individual's comportment toward their own life.

How then, is the aesthetic Individual characterised as having a relation to their life as a whole? The aesthete does not possess a relation to themselves at all. This is because what is important to them, what typifies their existence, is the enjoyment of the immediate moment and the things which they find within it, or more specifically that they chance upon. This is exemplified in the assertions of the young aesthete A in *Either/Or*: 'The whole secret lies in arbitrariness... One enjoys something entirely accidental, one regards the whole of existence from this standpoint, lets its reality run aground on it.'<sup>34</sup> The aesthete does not struggle with the eternal as their future in a way which attempts to give their life as a whole meaning. Rather, the aesthete struggles with the eternal possibility of boredom and thus must be constantly reinventing the way in which they see reality. For the aesthete, 'the eye with which [he] look[s] at reality must be constantly changing.'<sup>35</sup> The aesthete, then, is always pure possibility. His actual existence is never reflected upon as such.

The existence of the ethical Individual is given in contrast to the whimsical life of the aesthete. The relation of the ethical Individual to the eternal is constituted in their employment of the universal concepts of reason which transcend the particular Individual's own circumstances. Thus, the ethical Individual's concern for his life is constituted by his self-regard as a member of the community. In this way, the ethical Individual subsumes his own self-interest to moral duty. It is this relation to the universality of moral duty which consolidates the ethical Individual's sense of self, and in which in the moment of decisive action the Individual places himself. This is clear in *Either/Or* where Judge Vilhelm makes the decision to take it upon himself to



try and convert the young aesthete to the acceptance of marriage as a possibility for his life. He writes:

[F]or it is indeed my vocation as a husband to fight for marriage. . . And I assure you the affair is so close to my heart that I, who otherwise feel little temptation to write books, could really be tempted if I hope . . . to make a few people better able to bring to fruition the most beautiful task set for a person.<sup>36</sup>

It can, then, be claimed that Socrates' life is the greatest example of such subordination of personal interest, since as I have argued, it is Socrates who lived by the principle that man is of the highest value as each man has 'the good' within himself and the love of man is the ultimate good.

'To go beyond Socrates' is, then, to go beyond ethical existence, and this means into the sphere of religious faith. It might, then, appear to be paradoxical to ask about the philosophical significance of 'going beyond Socrates' as I have sought to do here, since it seems that in leaving behind the ethical, one leaves behind the sphere in which philosophy finds its possibility and in which it realises itself. However, the significance for philosophy of Climacus' 'going beyond Socrates' cannot just be understood negatively; rather, this movement beyond Socrates reveals and realises the importance of the Individual in his or her existential freedom to choose faith. Thus, in order to understand the significance of Kierkegaard as a philosopher and not merely as a religious writer I have argued that it is this understanding of the possibility of existential freedom for the Individual that stood behind the philosophical project and which was present, admittedly ambiguously, in the existence and philosophy of Socrates.

What, then, does it mean 'to go beyond Socrates'? As I have argued, Climacus must posit 'the moment' of faith as the passage from 'untruth to truth' in a unique way if it is to 'go beyond Socrates'. Indeed, he must posit 'truth' in terms of Kierkegaard's conception of 'subjective truth'. That is, there can not be any absolute, objective justification for existing as a Christian. Rather, 'the moment' as that which has 'decisive significance' entails the constant, impassioned and free self choosing of the Individual without the possibility of appealing to any objective justification. Therefore, in 'going beyond Socrates', the Individual does not simply have to recollect that the eternal is within him, as truth itself is not an object of knowledge; rather, it is 'a way of life'. In essence, what I have attempted to argue, then, is that Kierkegaard seeks to reconnect the fracturing between the determination of truth and existential activity involved in the passage to truth by positing truth as something subjective which the Individual must appropriate through the way they comport themselves in their very being. For Kierkegaard, truth is *existentialised*, that is, truth is about the bearing of the Individual towards his or her own existence. Thus the Individual as a concretely existing human and not merely as a 'knowing subject' is reinstated to philosophy and faith. This Individual then must make a leap of faith, a leap which must involve the Individual and their whole being in their capacity for the truth.

Rebecca Elleray  
Lancaster University  
[r.elleray1@lancs.ac.uk](mailto:r.elleray1@lancs.ac.uk)



### *Further Reading*

An excellent introduction to Kierkegaard's work is C. Carlisle, *Kierkegaard: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2006).

G. Pattison provides a more advanced account of Kierkegaard's work in the nevertheless accessible, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, (Bucks: Acumen, 2005)

Kierkegaard's dissertation on Socrates is published as *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).

Another important work by Kierkegaard which concerns Socrates is *Philosophical Fragments* (ed. and trans. Howard V Hong and Edna H Hong. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 1985)

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1989), p. xii.

<sup>2</sup> See George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, (Bucks: Acumen, 2005), p. 172

<sup>3</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989)

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, p.172

<sup>5</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and trans. Howard V Hong and Edna H Hong. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 1985), p. 37

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, intro. A. I. Davidson, trans. G. Burchell, (New York: Picador. 2001), p. 4

<sup>7</sup> In the *Phaedrus* (ed. C. Rowe, Middlesex: Penguin, 2005) Socrates says: 'I investigate not these things [general questions about the nature of the universe, etc], but myself, to know whether I am a monster more complicated and more furious than the serpent Typho or a gentler and simpler creature, to whom a divine and quiet lot is given by nature. (230a)

<sup>8</sup> That Socrates truly inaugurates the discipline of philosophy is testified to by the primacy he accords to the principle of self-knowledge. From Socrates onwards the foundational role of self-knowledge is found throughout the philosophical tradition. For example, Descartes, Kant and Heidegger all orient their distinctive philosophical projects through an initial analysis of the self.

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *The Apology in The Last Days of Socrates*, ed. H. Tarrant, trans. H. Tredennick (Middlesex: Penguin, 2003), 38a

<sup>10</sup> The traditional Athenian equation of virtue with reputation and wealth is the subject of the opening discussion between Cephalus and Socrates in *The Republic*. See *The Republic*, introduced by D. Lee, trans. H. D. P. Lee (Middlesex: Penguin, 2003), 329a – 330a.

<sup>11</sup> Kierkegaard writes: 'Socrates' philosophy was essentially aimed at the knowing subject for the purpose of showing that when all was said and done they knew nothing whatever. Every philosophy that begins with a presupposition naturally ends with the same presupposition, and just as Socrates' philosophy began with the presupposition that he knew nothing, so it ended with the presupposition that human beings know nothing at all.' *The Concept of Irony*, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* p. 11

<sup>13</sup> Søren Kierkegaard. *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, trans. Howard, V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 1998) p. 5

<sup>14</sup> For example, James Giles in *Kierkegaard and Freedom* (London: Palgrave Publishers, 2000) p. 2 asserts that many interpreters of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings present that purpose as being that of stimulating the reader to explore personally the issues under discussion and to apply these to their own life

<sup>15</sup> Søren Kierkegaard. *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, p. 24

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Kierkegaard. *Concept of Irony* p. 86

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266

<sup>19</sup> The expression 'Socratic Sin' is used by Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Irony*.

<sup>20</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1989) pp. 127-128. See also the discussion of hereditary sin in *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. and trans. R. Thomte in collaboration with A. B. Anderson, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980)

<sup>21</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, 76a, cited in Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 70

<sup>22</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* p. 9

<sup>23</sup> Kierkegaard's *Journals* as referenced in H. Sarf, 'Reflections on Kierkegaard's Socrates' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 44, No. 2. (Apr-Jun 1983), p. 263

<sup>24</sup> See, for example. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 111.

<sup>25</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 11

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> G. Pattison. *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, p. 71

<sup>30</sup> From Kierkegaard's *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, referred to in Pattison *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, p. 71

<sup>31</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 15

<sup>32</sup> R. C. Solomon, *Rationalism to Existentialism*, (New York: Harper & Row 1972), p. 85

<sup>33</sup> Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Howard V Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 329

<sup>34</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, trans. A. Hannay, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1992), p. 239

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, p. 386.