Phenomenology of Religious Experience IV: Religious Experience and Description

Maria Gołębiewska*

The Phenomenal Aspects of Irony according to Søren Kierkegaard

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0129>

received May 16, 2020; accepted August 05, 2020

Abstract: The aim of the text is to characterise some phenomenal aspects of irony (particularly, of the ironic speech acts), which may be found in the Kierkegaardian reflection concerning diverse ironic attitudes of individuals, mainly of Christians. The constant assumptions in Søren Kierkegaard's various output – in pseudonymous works, those signed with his own name, in “edifying discourses” and other religious texts – include the teleological conception of the sense of human being and existence. According to the philosopher, this sense is determined by the individually chosen and subjectively accepted goal of existence, related to the indicated three stages of life. This is the goal of a person who lives their mortal existence between joke and despair, at an ironic and sceptical distance from rash judgements and generalisations, and at the same time in fear of mundane threats and in fear of God. With the ambiguity of the category of existence, researchers combine an ironic attitude which, according to Kierkegaard, would characterise our way of existence together with its cognition and which would be connected with the conception of subjective truth as based on paradox. Kierkegaard wrote about ironic engagement and at the same time distance, about a positive ironic attitude towards the world of the here and now – a mundane immanent reality. According to Kierkegaard, the ironic attitude is closely related to dialectics, which he understood in a specific way – the structures of repetition and doubling are dialectic, and this dialectics may be found, among other things, in communication and in irony as a specific relation between thought and language. One must highlight that Kierkegaard considered two general types of irony: verbal (logical, rhetorical and poetic) and situational (existential), ultimately pointing out their religious aspects. The final part of the article describes different interconnections between the logical plus rhetorical aspects of irony and the issue of religious engagement of individuals (Christians) – their ironic entanglement in the relations between faith and knowledge, faith and doubt, mundane immanent world and transcendent universe.

Keywords: irony, existence, phenomenon, repetition, immanence, transcendence

1 Introduction

The aim of the article is to characterise some phenomenal aspects of irony (particularly, of the ironic speech acts), which may be found in the Kierkegaardian reflection concerning diverse ironic attitudes of individuals, mainly of Christians. In other words, the investigative aim is to present a contribution of Søren Kierkegaard into studies concerning the subject matter of irony, primarily an irony characterised and able to be characterised in the religious texts, considerations, declarations. This contribution pertains to some possible ways of joining and intertwining different kinds of irony which would be more or less typical of the attitudes and intentions of Christians. According to Kierkegaard, this topic cannot be conceived without considering diverse philosophical matters which would be interconnected with the question of irony: dialectics, repetition, redoubling and reduplication, and humour. I gradually explain these notions in the text, and they

* **Corresponding author: Maria Gołębiewska**, Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Warsaw, Poland, e-mail: mgolebiewska@ifispan.edu.pl

constitute a certain arrangement, a set in the centre of which we may find the notion of irony. I gradually define these concepts, one after another, mostly referring to the voluminous study *Kierkegaard's Concepts*.¹

The constant assumptions in Kierkegaard's various output – in pseudonymous works, those signed with his own name, in “edifying discourses” and other religious texts – include the teleological conception of the sense of human being and existence. According to the philosopher, this sense is determined by the individually chosen and subjectively accepted goal of existence, related to the indicated three stages of life. This is the goal of a person who lives their mortal existence between joke and despair, at an ironic and sceptical distance from rash judgements and generalisations, and at the same time in fear of mundane threats and in fear of God. With the ambiguity of the category of existence, researchers combine an ironic attitude which, according to Kierkegaard, would characterise our way of existence together with its cognition and which would be connected with the conception of subjective truth as based on paradox. Kierkegaard wrote about ironic engagement and at the same time distance, about a positive ironic attitude towards the world of the here and now – a mundane immanent reality.

According to Kierkegaard, the ironic attitude is closely related to dialectics, which he understood in a specific way – the structures of repetition and doubling are dialectic, and this dialectics may be found, among other things, in communication and in irony as a specific relation between thought and language. The existence of the individual in Kierkegaard's conception, also framed in an ironic way, equalled the awareness of one's own subjectivity and existence, trying to grasp their ironic, dialectic approach. One must highlight that Kierkegaard considered two general types of irony: verbal and situational, finally pointing out their religious aspects.

An additional investigative contribution of the Dane deals with the semantic processes and phenomenalisation which happens due to irony. His analyses were implicitly rooted in the theses of Locke and Kant concerning the processes of inward, mental phenomenalisation, and this stance was explicitly against Hegel's position on phenomenalisation comprehended as a certain historical manifestation of the absolute Spirit and the Spirit of universal *Geschichte*. The theses of *The Concept of Irony* were inspired by Hegelian thought; however, Kierkegaard implicitly presented there his polemics against Hegel's concept of dialectics, explicitly developing them in later works. One should point out that in *The Concept of Irony* Kierkegaard explicitly wrote about “phenomenon” and “phenomenal” processes referring to Hegel's conception of “historical-actual phenomenon” in the context of which he considered Socrates' philosophical stance and activities.² At the same time, he distinctively defined the subjective, inward, mental phenomena in the context of cognitive processes. One may say that Kierkegaard followed Hegel's theory of phenomenon grasped as a historical “manifestation,” although first and foremost, he proposed his own view on the theory of phenomenon. For he developed the problems of inward, mental phenomenalisation (as “mental appearance”), well-known from the works of Locke and Hume – and Kant as well, who referred to the phenomenalist³ stance of the British philosophers in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁴

2 The concept of irony

Researchers indicate that the English noun “irony” derives from the Ancient Greek term “*eirōneía*,” used in Ancient Greek comedy, considered i.a. by Aristotle, and after known by means of the Latin word “*ironia*.”

¹ Cf. Emmanuel, McDonald, Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Concepts (Kierkegaard's Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, volume 15, tomes I to VI)*, 2014 (2016).

² Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 9: “Before I proceed to an exposition of the concept of irony, it is necessary to make sure that I have a reliable and authentic view of Socrates' historical-actual, phenomenological existence with respect to the question of its possible relation to the transformed view that was his fate through enthusiastic or envious contemporaries. This becomes inescapably necessary, because the concept of irony makes its entry into the world through Socrates.”

³ Cf. Stokes, “Uniting the Perspectival Subject: Two Approaches,” 23–44.

⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 225 (*Division one. Transcendental analytic*).

The Ancient Greek meaning of this term: “dissimulation, ignorance purposely affected,” as well as different types of irony (verbal, dramatic, situational, religious) may be found in their later and present use.⁵ Nassim Bravo Jordán characterises the scope of Kierkegaard’s application of the Danish term “*Ironi*”:

From the Greek *εἰρωνεία*, “dissimulation.” According to its lexical meaning in Danish, it is the expression of something that the speaker does not mean or that is the opposite of what he means. Sometimes it can refer, especially in the aesthetics of the Romantics, to the freedom or arbitrariness of fantasy over its object, or, in a philosophical sense, to the state of mind that puts the finite in contrast with the infinite, thus stripping the former of all its value. Finally, it also makes reference to the method used by Socrates. The word “irony” appears most frequently in *The Concept of Irony*, followed by the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to ‘Philosophical Fragments’* and *Either-Or*. Kierkegaard discusses in depth the concept in his doctoral dissertation of 1841, *The Concept of Irony*, while in the *Postscript*, published in 1846 under the pseudonym “Johannes Climacus,” Kierkegaard compares irony with the concept of “humour.” It should also be noted that throughout the investigation in *The Concept of Irony* the terms “irony” and “ironist” are identified with “romanticism” and “romanticist.” Kierkegaard distinguishes two types of irony: irony as a *rhetorical device*, and irony as a *life-view or existential position*.⁶

As we know, Søren Kierkegaard considered the issue of irony in detail in his early work on *The Concept of Irony*. Many of the themes of this work, including the issue of defining the subject of cognition and self-knowledge of the subject, would be addressed in Kierkegaard’s subsequent publications. This early work is distinguished by references to Georg W. F. Hegel’s theses, which are not yet directly polemical.⁷

Kierkegaard distinguishes between “pure” irony, considered as an object of thought, and irony as a “position.”⁸ According to Kierkegaard, pure irony is close to romantic irony, an irony enclosed in subjectivity, given only to the subject-ironist and only considered in its conduct.⁹ In turn, irony as a “position” is irony comprehended as a certain position taken in action. This version of irony would be closer to Socratic irony and the ironic attitude in general, i.e. the attitude consistently adopted and presented externally (“position,” Socratic attitude as irony¹⁰). This division corresponds to the division into theoretical, contemplative irony and practical irony, i.e. consecutive, performative, “dramatic.”¹¹ Kierkegaard describes irony as a certain operation of “dividing into parts” the object of cognition, perception, logical judgement and the object of a subjective and private opinion.¹² Why does Kierkegaard value this differentiated approach to the object of cognition, which is given through irony? Kierkegaard conceives the immanent universe of the mundane, as a certain whole submitted to the actions and will of humanity – their imperfect condition, incomplete knowledge, wrong choices that lead the individual to errors in existence, often compared to trial and examination. Our cognition and self-cognition are incomplete and misleading because we always refer to our own subjective truth and individual rationales by virtue of the individual character of existence, as well as the separate essence of each of us.

In *Silhouettes* from Volume I of *Either-Or*, Kierkegaard juxtaposes the cognition of truth as a luminous obviousness, the fullness of knowledge (Platonic concept of truth) with our cognition of truth related to everyday life. He compares this incomplete knowledge of the truth to the translucent light in a black paper cut-out, where only the outlines of the object world can be seen, and the light is weak, dimmed by the

5 Cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1419b (book III, part 18): “As to jests. These are supposed to be of some service in controversy. Gorgias said that you should kill your opponents’ earnestness with jesting and their jesting with earnestness; in which he was right. jests have been classified in the ‘Poetics.’ Some are becoming to a gentleman, others are not; see that you choose such as become you. Irony better befits a gentleman than buffoonery; the ironical man jokes to amuse himself, the buffoon to amuse other people.”

6 Bravo Jordán, “Irony,” 30 (emphases in the original).

7 Cf. Perkins, *Hegel and Kierkegaard: Two Critics of Romantic Irony*, *passim*.

8 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 253; cf. Frazier, “Kierkegaard on the Problems of Pure Irony,” 417–47.

9 Cf. Söderquist, *The Isolated Self. Irony as Truth and Untruth in Søren Kierkegaard’s ‘On the Concept of Irony’*, 139–72 (chapter Kierkegaard’s Critique of Romanticism: The Closed Self).

10 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 36–8.

11 *Ibid.*, 254–5.

12 Jankélévitch, *L’Ironie*, 22.

mediation of “a sheet of paper”¹³ – a shutter or a veil. It should be remembered that such an understanding of knowledge and truth appears later on in Martin Heidegger’s conception, which includes the truth – “unconcealedness” or “disclosedness” (*aletheia*)¹⁴ as appearing in a clearing (*Lichtung*). I should add that I do not refer to a reinterpretation of Kierkegaard’s thought accomplished in the context of the Heideggerian “phenomenology of existence” (e.g. proposed by Karl Jaspers¹⁵). A comparison of Kierkegaard’s concept of mental, inward phenomenisation and Heidegger’s multidimensional concept of phenomenon¹⁶ (characterised in *Sein und Zeit*, for example) should be the subject matter of a separate article.

What knowledge would be closest to the incomplete luminosity and fragmentary character of the world being studied, its objects and the “shutter” itself? It would be ironic knowledge, combining elements of knowledge and ignorance (Socrates and the ignorance, which he assumed). This knowledge, together with the assumed ignorance, does not apply to the world as a whole, as captured in general judgements and propositions, but to fragments of the world, given in individual experience, in detailed judgements and subjective opinions, for which Kierkegaard – in the case of an attitude, an ironic “position” – reserves the value of privacy. In this way, he juxtaposes the privacy of irony, enclosed in an autonomous subjectivity, distant in regards to the world, with what is public and what is institutionalised. In this way, despite the references to Georg W. F. Hegel and the affirmation of his theses, Kierkegaard *de facto* acts against Hegel, who sees historical development as the development of certain institutions. Kierkegaard shows how, thanks to irony, an individual gains distance and negates reality – what is related to being and even existence in general, consistently referring to the phenomenal – to representations and mental content.¹⁷ He also shows how the individual encloses itself in the circle of its own private subjectivity and escapes the general order of the course of events (*Geschichte*) and history (*Historie*) as knowledge that generalises the course of events.

It should be noted that the understanding of the phenomenon in the work *The Concept of Irony* was inspired by Immanuel Kant’s theses, but also by Hegelian deliberations in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, where Hegel contrasted the phenomenality of the subject and their mental representations – the substantiality of being and objective things.¹⁸ In his early work, Kierkegaard starts with many of Hegel’s assumptions and theses: (1) from his conception of the order of the course of events, which is determining, (2) by distinguishing between a being and a phenomenon, (3) till distinguishing between the substance of a thing-being and the phenomenality of the subject,¹⁹ who is given as a phenomenon to itself.

One can say that according to Kierkegaard, irony is a fragmentary reference to a certain fragment of reality, starting and stopping at what is phenomenal – the mental representation of this fragment of the world. It should be added that Kierkegaard clearly distinguishes between romantic irony and Socratic irony. Romantic irony is associated with the subject’s consistent aesthetic attitude towards itself and the world, while Socratic irony is ethically characterised as being associated with the elenctic method – questioning the (colloquial) knowledge and beliefs of the interlocutor. Vladimir Jankélévitch indicates “ironic consciousness,” specific to romantic irony, and proposes his own distinction between Socratic and romantic irony, which he refers to Kierkegaard’s considerations of irony. The establishment of an object by “ironic consciousness” is at the same time “distance, continuance and coexistence”²⁰ of the subject in relation to the object of such an attitude, which Kierkegaard repeatedly calls “position” (irony as Socrates’ “position”). And thanks to irony “our consciousness assimilates a kind of synoptic perspective” – a view of the object from a distance.²¹

¹³ Kierkegaard, *Either-Or*, part I, 173 (text *Silhouettes. Psychological Diversion [Shadowgraphs]*).

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 263–6.

¹⁵ Cf. Jaspers, *Philosophy of Existence*, *passim*.

¹⁶ Cf. Hanson, *Introduction*, in: *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist. An Experiment* (especially part *Kierkegaard the Phenomenologist: One Possibility*, XII–XV).

¹⁷ Cf. Rush, *Irony and Idealism. Rereading Schlegel, Hegel and Kierkegaard*, 212–75 (chapter *Irony Redivivus, or Kierkegaard*).

¹⁸ Cf. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, e.g. p. 180 (thesis 310).

¹⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 247.

²⁰ Jankélévitch, *L'Ironie*, 24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

It should be recalled that what is elenctic has its references in the Ancient Greek word *elenchus*, which defines an inquiry that was supposed to be certain of the rationale declared by the interlocutor. The elenctic method therefore requires the two participants in the dialogue to take a clear stance, as well as to reveal an ironic stance and make it the object of conversation. Whereas the ironic attitude, typical of Kierkegaard's times, is an attitude of irony hidden in subjectivity, not revealed by the subject of ironic thought, who considers everyday life to be a kind of theatre, a scene that, as the spectator–observer, they do not want to enter. Ultimately, such contemplative and theoretical irony must be complemented in the practice of dialogue, in ironic expression and knowledge of the subject of irony about itself. In turn, “mastered irony”²² would be the irony associated with the artist's acceptance of the performing discipline, with the formal and content-based mastery of expression (poet, “poetic irony”²³). The romantic category of irony has its roots in Socrates' ironic attitude, which is still a point of reference for the ironic – artistic and aesthetic expression introduced in works of art by successive generations of artists. Kierkegaard finds mastered irony and its “ironic moment” in the works of William Shakespeare,²⁴ in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's operas (libretti, notably those written by Lorenzo Da Ponte), but above all in Johann Wolfgang Goethe's poetry.

“Mastered irony” as the mastery of expression and the conscious use of different means of expression, concerns the subjective expression of oneself, the expression of one's own existence and existence in general. This is what distinguishes irony as an artistic and consistently aesthetic attitude from irony as a private attitude, closed in subjectivity, which is only the subject's communication with itself. Private irony suspends the judgement of existence, the ironist refrains from giving judgement on existence and this would be a typical attitude of a sceptic. However, in case of irony – as Kierkegaard repeatedly stressed – the object of cognition should be approached differently. Scepticism and sceptical restraint in judging (the Dane defines it with the help of the Ancient Greek word *epoche*, i.e. “suspension of judgment,” “withholding of assent”) is associated with insufficient proximity to the object of cognition, while irony requires a consistent attitude of distancing the subject from the object of cognition, statement and description. Researchers (i.a. Karol Toeplitz) emphasise that Kierkegaard used the term *epoche* in the sense of “withdrawing,” “refraining.”

In his reflections on the aesthetic aspects of irony, Kierkegaard points to its different variations and accompanied emotions, including boredom. It is boredom that gives a sense of continuity in time, while irony gives a sense of the moment, its differentiation from other moments. Irony may be described as being focused on a moment of the present – on distinguishing and emphasising it, and the ironist would be an existential and cognitive subject, just focused on the present.²⁵ Kierkegaard juxtaposes the attitude of an ironist with that of a prophet, who is in turn focused on the future, while the historian is interested in the past. Kierkegaard, like Novalis, asks: is irony more comical or more tragic?²⁶ Irony is “false modesty, false naivety and false carelessness,”²⁷ it is a “simulation *per contrarium*.”²⁸ As Jankélévitch points out, echoing Aristotle, to be ironic is to “speak evasively.”²⁹ According to Jankélévitch, irony could be called “pseudology” because words deliberately and intentionally contradict thoughts.³⁰ The ironist does not make an in-depth reflection, but rather touches upon “pathos of infinitely light and somehow elusive tangibility.”³¹ Kierkegaard juxtaposes and compares irony with simulation,³² with some pretence, which would not be

²² Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 328; cf. Frazier, “Kierkegaard on Mastered Irony,” 465–79; cf. McCarthy, “The Ethics of Irony in Kierkegaard,” 61–2.

²³ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 324–5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 324.

²⁵ Cf. Stewart, *Søren Kierkegaard: Subjectivity, Irony, and the Crisis of Modernity*, 87–110 (chapter *Kierkegaard and Romantic Subjectivism*).

²⁶ Jankélévitch, *L'Ironie*, 130.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, s. 81; “modest irony” – Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1419b (book III, part 19).

³⁰ Cf. Jankélévitch, *L'Ironie*, 42.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

³² Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 255.

without ironic mediation. According to Dane, an actor in a theatre both expresses and simulates. The philosopher probably referred his comments mainly to comedy and opera theatre, which he was interested in, where rules and formal discipline strictly defined actors' creations.

3 The dialectics of irony

As mentioned, Søren Kierkegaard considered irony in reference to dialectics comprehended as a structure of dialogic communication and as a structure of repetition and doubling³³ (repetition understood as the act of doing or saying something again, but also as rules of repeating – of a motion or exercise that is repeated and usually counted; duplication comprehended as the act or process of making an exact copy of something, of doing the same thing that another person has already done; redoubling in the sense of increasing twofold, making something much more than before). As is well-known, Kierkegaard approached dialectics³⁴ in his multifaceted polemics with Hegel's philosophy. According to the Dane, dialectics is an investigative method of apprehension and description of various kinds of relationships. First and foremost, it is the method of characterising subjective references to the world and one's own experiences (cognitive processes, ethical choices and religious doubt, among others): for example, a dialectics of freedom and necessity, of the individual and the general, of the concrete and the absolute. Kierkegaard indicated several kinds of dialectics, which he considered in various contexts: ontological (dialectics of being and thought), epistemological (dialectics of the really existing thing in the "historical-actual" reality and the phenomenon, phenomenon versus idea, or phenomenon versus essence), anthropological (dialectical relationships between human beings and God), aesthetical (dialectics of sensual impressions and inward inquiry), ethical (dialectics of a subjective choice, decision, or intention and the real objective results of an action) and religious and theological (dialectics of faith and despair, the result of which is the inconclusive paradox of faith). The dialectical structure of irony pertains to all these contexts and all the phenomena – hardly perceptible, appearing and disappearing, perishable in their semantic content.³⁵

One should add that Kierkegaardian dialectics concerns alterations historically passed in time, as with Hegelian dialectics, but the Dane considered alterations and changes happening in the inwardness of the *subiectum*, in one's own – one may say – micro-history, while not in the macro-history of the universe (in the general or universal history). It is important that Kierkegaard returned, especially in *The Concept of Irony*, to the Ancient Greek concepts of dialectics, mostly of Plato, and via Plato to Socrates, and to Aristotle. This point of view enables the Kierkegaardian theses upon dialectics defined in the structural, synchronic order (out of time) rather than in the historical, diachronic order. The Platonic and Aristotelian concept of dialectics, defined as a logical order of reasoning and argumentation, presupposes the irremovable opposition between the affirmative and negative judgements (propositions) with three logical principles: of identity, of contradictory opposition, and of the absence of a third mediated judgement. As is known, Hegelian dialectics introduces this third mediated and mediating judgement, mostly due to the *Aufhebung* rule, as well as to the concept of a synthesis (a congruence of thesis and antithesis). According to Kierkegaard, such a synthesis would be a cognitive, ontological, ethical, and religious challenge and a subjective task, since this kind of synthetic process, considered to be historical, passing in time, could happen only in the inwardness of the subject, who is still forced to coordinate various rationales, to keep them in an equilibrium. That is why the inward character of dialectics, apprehended historically (diachronically) and logically (structurally), would be a certain solution, requiring an acceptance or even affirmation

33 Kemp, "Repetition," 225–30. Kaftanski, "Redoubling/Reduplication," 205–12.

34 Cavallazzi Sánchez, "Dialectic," 165–9.

35 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 25: "Finally, with respect to irony, there is not one trace of it in Xenophon's Socrates. Instead, sophistry makes its appearance. But sophistry is precisely the everlasting duel of knowledge with the phenomenon in the service of egotism, which can never terminate the duel in a decisive victory because the phenomenon rises up again as quickly as it falls."

of the consistent attitude of the equilibrium of different rationales and arguments, including the rationales of faith and doubt, faith and despair, and humour and despair (in the religious stage), but also the dialectical equilibrium of irony in the ethical stage.

One may ask to what extent irony would be an alleged structure of repetition, and to what extent irony would also be a “doubling” structure. According to Kierkegaard, irony is a kind of repetition, as in the case of Job, discussed in the second part of the treatise *Repetition*.³⁶ However, the repetition cannot concern – repeat – the laws of nature, it remains within the scope of human activities (practice and theory) and the specifically human universe; it is carried out in cultural-creative activities; thus, it concerns not the laws of nature, but the laws established by humans in an immanent, mundane world. Thus, the repetition concerns phenomena, i.e. representations appearing in the mind, as well as cultural representations. Irony, on the other hand, according to Kierkegaard, may concern nature and its laws – both as a way of cognition (theoretically), and as a way of expression (practically). That is why this irony gives the feeling – albeit illusory – of composure and cognitive control.

One has to ask: does irony as a way of thinking and expressing characteristic of the aesthetic stage, ahead of the ethical and religious stage, provide access to Transcendence? Can one make Transcendence an object of irony? As Kierkegaard believes, irony against the Law, given twice in the Bible, is not authorised by anything, but it merely is an expression of Job’s helplessness – an ironic expression against the Law, given twice, in repetition. Job is left with nothing but to repeat in his individual and specific existence – the principles of the Law despite his ironic distance to them. As we know, Kierkegaard lists and compares the Job’s irony and Abraham’s humour.³⁷ In *The Concept of Irony* he also counterpoises humour and irony,³⁸ indicating the directness and scepticism of humour and ironic mediation which entangles the subject in a dual relationship to the object of irony. Irony is a certain cognitive engagement concerning the object in its phenomenal appearance in subjectivity, but at the same time, it is a distancing of oneself from this appearance. The cognitive relation to the phenomenon, achieved through irony, is ambiguous in dialectical engagement and distance. In addition, the phenomenon also has as its point of reference that which is transcendent – after Georg W. F. Hegel, super-sensual, spiritual, i.e. also transcendent towards materiality of things. Ultimately, irony remains a certain cognitive relation to the subject itself, and therefore, in an ironic relation to Transcendence, we refer not to it, but to ourselves and to our own relationship with Transcendence. In this way we also ironically relate to our own existence, making it an object of reflection, which makes it possible to pass from “existence” (*Tilvaerelse*) to “true existence” (*Existents*), conscious of existence and open to Transcendence. Transcendence therefore appears in the act of ironic reflection on existence, as an object of self-reflexive irony, thanks to which the subject-ironist recognises the complex, dialectic, positive–negative character of its own existence entangled in the transcendent order.

As Kierkegaard notes, at that time existence was approached in a two-fold manner: abstract and speculative. “All knowledge about actuality is possibility. The only actuality concerning which an existing person has more than knowledge about is his own actuality, that he exists, and this actuality is his absolute interest.”³⁹ According to the colloquial thinking, one may do his best to forget that he is “existing,” and “an abstract thinker,” i.e. well-knowing the Hegelian theses, “exists, but his existing is rather like a satire on him. To demonstrate his existence on the grounds that he is thinking is a strange contradiction, because to the degree that he thinks abstractly he abstracts to the same degree precisely from his existing.”⁴⁰ Additionally, one may assume a position completely different from the first – he can turn all his attention on this circumstance that he is an “existing being” and, in result, he forgets what it is to be a “human being.” According to Kierkegaard, the latter attitude is, in turn, typical for the contemporary “speculative” philosophy (therefore, i.a. for Hegel): “speculative thought repeatedly wants to arrive at actuality and gives

³⁶ Cf. Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 197–8, 204–13.

³⁷ Cf. Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard’s Thought*, 72–103 (chapter *The Comic and the Existence-Spheres*).

³⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 322, 329.

³⁹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 316 (chapter III *Actual Subjectivity, Ethical Subjectivity; the Subjective Thinker*).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

assurances that what is thought is the actual, that thinking is not only able to think but also to provide actuality, which is just the opposite; and at the same time what it means to exist is more and more forgotten.”⁴¹

It is possible to indicate the elements of existence, grasped by Kierkegaard dialectically, as mutually complementary, and exclusionary at the same time. The aforementioned would include, i.a.:

- (1) choice and freedom, and necessity (polemics against dialectics and Hegel’s historical determinism),
- (2) time and moment, and eternity (chronological and logical order),
- (3) immanence of temporal reality of a thing (the flux of time), and the Transcendence of ideas (eternity),
- (4) individuality and particularity, and repetition and duplication,
- (5) directness of the aesthetic, and the indirectness of the ethical and the religious,
- (6) directness of humour and indirectness of irony within the scope of communication and in the relation of subjectivity to oneself and others, as well as,
- (7) temporariness and conventionality of signs and meanings (models) within the scope of social communication, and the perpetual “idea” (original), evoked in this communication, often partially manifesting in the form of an “ideal” (artistic, moral, personal).

One must add that Kierkegaard is supplementing his conception of dialectics with the notion of the pathetic. He develops on the conception of two attitudes – dialectic and pathetic, which is combined with his concept of two types of religiousness, presented in *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift*. Kierkegaard wrote:

There are three existence-spheres: the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. To these there is a respectively corresponding *confinium* [border territory]: irony is the *confinium* between the aesthetic and the ethical; humour is the *confinium* between the ethical and the religious. Let us take irony. As soon as an observer discovers an ironist, he will be attentive, because it is possible that the ironist is an ethicist. [...] The irony emerges by continually joining the particulars of the finite with the ethical infinite requirement and allowing the contradiction to come into existence.⁴²

Irony is the cultivation of the spirit and therefore follows next after immediacy; then comes the ethicist, then the humorist, then the religious person.⁴³

However, Kierkegaard develops his conception of irony, proposing in *Repetition* an irony that goes beyond aesthetic irony, “mastered” irony⁴⁴ and also ethical – Socratic irony. For he proposes irony as an element of the attitude characteristic of the religious stage of existence, in which existence becomes a “true existence” engaged not only ethically but also religiously. One must highlight the changes and transformations of Kierkegaardian concepts such as dialectics, irony and humour characterised by his works under the pseudonyms (i.a. Johannes Climacus and Anti-Climacus). We should emphasise the helpful character of the irony in the case of ethical choices and decisions, and its inadequacy on the religious stage. For we cannot confuse humour with an ironical denial, with the incompatibility of thought and a verbally declared opinion that is typical of irony. As is known, Kierkegaard wrote about a certain internal, subjective dialectics of ethical and religious choices. Such a dialectics appeared in his works concerning irony as well as humour. However, in the case of his considerations upon death, despair would be a subjective dialectic attitude – of the subject of the religious lived-experience who finds any helpful character neither of irony nor of humour. The despair is not balanced by the humour of the subject accepting the paradoxical character of existence and faith. The *subiectum* would find a dialectical equilibrium thanks to another mediation: a free and simultaneously necessary acceptance of the paradox, an acceptance which would be – I should add – paradoxically rational in relation to the lived-experiences of faith, and leading the subject beyond despair.

⁴¹ Ibid., 319.

⁴² Ibid., 501–2 (paragraph *The Essential Expression of Existential Pathos*).

⁴³ Ibid., 504.

⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 328.

Irony confirms the elusiveness of Transcendence, its paradoxical nature. This irony takes on an ontological character, because by making the existence of the subject itself – an object, it also turns to existence: to the imperfection of existence and essence of human being, to whom the question of existence is given.⁴⁵ In an act of ironic distance towards itself and its own existence, the subject may obtain a dialectic at once positive and negative, attitude towards its knowledge, avoiding solipsism, starting from the subjectivity of its existence towards the objectivity of a transcendent existence. Irony in Kierkegaard's conception is a special case of communication with Others, in whom a transcendent, divine condition of communication is revealed. As we know, it is necessary because Kierkegaard assumes autonomy and separateness of every human subject.

4 Subject of irony

The Hegelian distinction between being and phenomenon, between an objective thing and a subjective phenomenon is the basis of Søren Kierkegaard's conception of subjective truth, which already appeared in his early work on irony. According to Kierkegaard, the distinction between a being (existing thing) and a phenomenon is very important in describing the cognitive qualities of irony and the specific ironic knowledge of the subject about itself. Irony in relation to the object of cognition – the being – consists in its consequent presentation as a phenomenon given subjectively, as a certain mental content, submitted to cognitive (in this case ironic) procedures of understanding and interpretation. Irony, i.e., a cognitive attitude towards the object of cognition, according to Kierkegaard, appoints a certain boundary in the operation of a phenomenon.

In an ironic act, both contemplative (theoretical, private) and executive, consecutive (practical and “dramatic,” made public), we are dealing with the cognitive distance of the subject to the object – to their essence, their alleged substantial characteristics and their existence. For irony as a cognitive act operates not on things, not on being, but on the phenomenon. By consistently referring to what is phenomenal, what appears in the mind of the cognitive subject and what has a subjective value, irony allows for a suspension of judgement on the existence of things and even being in general. “In irony, the subject is continually retreating, talking every phenomenon out of its reality in order to save itself – that is, in order to preserve itself in negative independence of everything.”⁴⁶ Such irony gives the cognitive and acting subject – a sense of freedom, also in relation to its own existence. However, the ironic attitude towards oneself does not lead the subject, as in the case of other ironic references, to a suspension of the judgement of essence, of the substantiality of the object, but serves to confirm the subjectivity itself. In his early work *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard assumes that things and their substantial character are different from what is subjective, which appears to the subject itself as a phenomenon (phenomenon versus substance and essence⁴⁷). Such an assumption, most likely echoing Georg W. F. Hegel and *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, leads to conclusions concerning the recognition, thanks to irony – which operates consistently on phenomena – of the subject itself in its phenomenality.

It should be stressed that the suspension of the judgements concerning the existence and essence of the object, as well as the essentiality of the subject (thought contents) is not at the same time a suspension of the judgement of subjective existence. The conviction and judgement concerning the subject's own existence remains cognitively available and would be a condition for a subjective ironic attitude. “If we consider irony as it turns against all existence, here again it maintains the contradiction between essence and phenomenon, between the internal and the external. It might seem now that as the absolute negativity

⁴⁵ Ibid., 32–7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 257.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 247.

it would be identical with doubt.”⁴⁸ The ironic cognitive attitude related to the suspension of judgements seems to repeat the Cartesian procedure of methodical doubt in which the last point of support remains the formula, “I think, therefore I am.” It is not, however, a repetition or a reference to the Augustinian formula, “I doubt, therefore I am.” The ironic judgement only declares what is contained in colloquial opinions, convictions and intersubjective findings about a given object, and it is against this that the blade of irony is directed. It may be said that irony is closely connected with ignorance and marks the borderline within subjectivity between knowledge and ignorance, including that of the subject about itself. And thus, the Socratic formula, “I know that I know nothing,” is expressed in the irony of Kierkegaard’s time. Irony requires the suspension of a judgement about the essence and existence of a given object of cognition in favour of its phenomenal character, since the object of irony always appears as a certain mental phenomenon in subjectivity. One can say that an ironic attitude would be a disinterested one in Immanuel Kant’s sense, “devoid of interest”⁴⁹ – the subject would not be interested in the existence of a given object due to focusing on the phenomenon and confirming its phenomenal character.

Kierkegaard also considered irony as a simulation, pretending to be a subject to oneself. It may be said that according to Kierkegaard, the subject is always given to itself “as,” i.e. in a certain dialectical relationship compared to a pattern, another person or role. Other subjects are also recognised and considered in a comparative context “as,” where the point of reference is primarily social roles (in the aesthetic stage), but these should be personal role-model patterns (Socrates in the ethical stage, Christ in the religious stage).

It should be stressed that irony and an ironic attitude make it possible to meet the existence of the subject in its phenomenality and the object of cognition in its phenomenality, not in the full existence of being. The phenomenon is not considered as that thanks to which existence is revealed in full, but only – one can say after Martin Heidegger – in *aletheia* (“unconcealedness,” “unclosedness”). In Kierkegaard’s early works, the phenomenon would be epistemologically (after Kant) characterised in its positivity due to cognitive accessibility, while existence would be characterised in its negativity due to the lack of cognitive access to existence. Thus, a phenomenon is a positivity in its appearance, while existence is considered to be inaccessible. On the other hand, in the ontological order, the phenomenon is merely a complement to existence, and this existence is an absolute positivity in its supposed fullness. In his later works, in *Philosophical Fragments*⁵⁰ and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to ‘Philosophical Fragments,’* Kierkegaard would write that this fullness of being – the Transcendence of full true existence – is *de facto* not given to us cognitively.

In his work *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard writes not so much about nothingness as the negativity of existence, as about “nothing” that appears as the result of cognitive actions – speculation, doubt and irony; and irony must be distinguished from both speculation and doubt.⁵¹ Kierkegaard indicates three types of “nothing,” i.e. types of cognitive negativity established on the basis of the positivity of the existence of being and the positivity of the phenomenon that appears in and for existence. Kierkegaard repeatedly stresses:

In irony, however, since everything is shown to be vanity, the subject becomes free. The more vain everything becomes, all the lighter, emptier, and volatilized the subject becomes. And while everything is in the process of becoming vanity, the ironic subject does not become vain in his own eyes but rescues his own vanity. For irony, everything becomes nothing, but nothing can be taken in several ways. The speculative nothing is the vanishing at every moment with regard to the concretion, since it is itself the craving of the concrete, its *nisus formativus* [formative impulse]; the mystic nothing is a nothing with regard to the representation, a nothing that nevertheless is just as full of content as the silence of the night is full of sounds for someone who has ears to hear. Finally, the ironic nothing is the dead silence,⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid., 257.

⁴⁹ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 100.

⁵⁰ Kierkegaard writes: “And then, too, to bring out the orthodox forms in the imaginary construction ‘so that our age, which only mediates etc., is scarcely able to recognize them’ and believes it is something new – that is irony.” *Philosophical Fragments*, 220; cf. Evans, “The Role of Irony in Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments*,” 63–79.

⁵¹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 256–7.

⁵² Ibid., 258.

that emptiness as a point of reference for the ironic subject, a cognitive emptiness assumed and considered by the existing and cognitive subject. Kierkegaard contrasts irony with speculation as understood by Hegel, that is, the order of logic and argumentation. The speculative method assumes fullness and seeks to capture it, while the ironic method assumes emptiness.⁵³

It should be recalled that later in his texts about the three stages of an individual's life, Kierkegaard characterised the aesthetic stage as a certain emptying, emptiness of mental content.⁵⁴ Such an emptiness, typical of the aesthetic stage, would be precisely the emptiness obtained through an ironic attitude, through the liberation of subjectivity from the object, from engaging in the object in favour of distance and regaining a certain autonomy. Phenomena, unlike an objective thing, being, existence in itself or in its transcendent fullness, are inseparable from the cognitive subject. Therefore, an effort is needed to re-establish the distance, or even to draw a certain boundary between the subject and the object of cognition. One should ask again about the status of subjectivity which, thanks to irony, not only achieves distance to the object of cognition, but also loses mental content, achieves emptiness of consciousness. Kierkegaard writes about emptiness, emptying the subject's self of mental content – “everything to be vanity” and the “ironic subject” looks for a point of reference precisely in emptiness.⁵⁵ “[A]lthough the ironist is aware that the whole thing underneath is empty and void of substance.”⁵⁶ One may say that then the subject, having an awareness of its own existence as a starting point, does not so much remove this content from its consciousness, but rather achieves a distance to it – a distance from itself, from its consciousness. The subject then becomes, to some extent, an act itself, an action, but this act does not have any content, even reflexive, not even a volitional intention.

Kierkegaard, later characterising the aesthetic stage, indicated its initial sub-stage as leading to this emptiness of consciousness. This emptiness makes it possible to play with meanings and senses coming from the world, towards which an individual can remain at a distance of disengagement. However, this emptiness of consciousness would give the subject the opportunity to turn reflexively to itself in a reflective aesthetic sub-stage in order to discover the emptiness of mental content. The meanings and senses given to subjectivity should be chosen by virtue of both free and necessary individual choice, and not be an object of the subject's playing with the world and with itself. One may notice that this emptiness of consciousness is linked with some potential emptiness of meanings and senses in the case of an ironic verbal act.⁵⁷ And what is more, we may find a similar semantic emptiness and the subjective source of semantic choices, linked with the subjective phenomena of consciousness, in the Husserlian conception of the originatively empty semantic intention, which is individually, subjectively fulfilled by the language user, in accordance with its own experience and partially determined by the form of the proposition. “If the originally *empty* meaning-intention is now fulfilled, the relation to an object is realized, the naming becomes an actual, conscious relation between name and object named.”⁵⁸ In the case of Kierkegaard's conception of an ironic verbal act, this intention would be volitional, cognitive and semantic at the same time.

It is in this reflexive sub-stage that the irony leads to reflection on nothingness – the irony as the suspension of judgement about being, about its essence and about existence in general. Nothingness appears in the subject's consciousness as a phenomenon, as what is submitted to epistemological knowledge, but also as an object of emotional attitude and experience – mood. Thus, Kierkegaard comprehends nothingness as a certain content of consciousness – an object of reflection and consideration, not as what is factual, real, realised.

Nothing. But what effect does nothing have? It begets anxiety. This is the profound secret of innocence, that it is at the same time anxiety. Dreamily the spirit projects its own actuality, but this actuality is nothing, and innocence always sees

⁵³ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 258.

⁵⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 305, 320.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 249.

⁵⁷ Ibid., e.g. 248 (“The ironic figure of speech”).

⁵⁸ Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 192 (chapter I *Essential distinctions*) (emphasis in the original).

this nothing outside itself. Anxiety is a qualification of dreaming spirit, and as such it has its place in psychology. Awake, the difference between myself and my other is posited; sleeping, it is suspended; dreaming, it is an intimated nothing.⁵⁹

Therefore, nothingness is thought of as hypothetical, considered probabilistically as a certain possibility. It would not be a possibility in the sense of realised substantial or essential potentiality, but a possibility concerning what is possible to think, to present in the mind. According to Kierkegaard, the verbal act of irony would at least offer a double sense, and this duplication is possible due to the logical rules of dialectics and the literary and rhetorical rules of repetition. Following Husserl, one may say that the subjective semantic intention typical of irony, originatively empty, would be finally fulfilled thanks to this possibility of double sense.

5 Repetition and religious irony

One may say that in his early work, Søren Kierkegaard follows in Georg W. F. Hegel's footsteps and shows, in his own way, the transition from subjectivity, the subjective spirit, through a separate objectivity, to the absolute, understood as a certain goal, a direction that gives sense and meaning to the subject's journey. But this distance may only be *de facto* achieved by the subject in relation to phenomena, in relation to what is given cognitively – the content of its mental acts. This is because of irony as a cognitive act, and also because of an ironic subjective attitude, which may be considered as a kind of “natural attitude” in the Husserlian sense.

In his later works, Kierkegaard points to despair (*Fortvivlelse*) as the third aesthetic sub-stage. He considers it to be the result of a loss of not so much knowledge as of faith in existence – in purpose, direction, sense of existence. The result is despair, which has as its object nothingness understood no longer phenomenally, epistemologically, but ontologically – as non-existence within what is ontic. According to Kierkegaard, this leads to the ethical stage – despair (*Fortvivlelse*) and anxiety (*Angest*) resulting from the appearance of the phenomenon of nothingness in subjectivity which returns in subsequent stages as a kind of a metaphysical necessity – looking for an existence thanks to phenomena, though the phenomenon may be merely an illusion or fantasy. “Irony, however, has no purpose; its purpose is immanent in itself and is a metaphysical purpose. The purpose is nothing other than the irony itself.”⁶⁰ For existence and what exists, as Kierkegaard stresses, seems to be and is the very positivity, which is always complemented cognitively, phenomenally in the dialectic order of the universe of immanence (the immanent world of temporality, the mundane immanence of the earthly world) and Transcendence⁶¹ (the spiritual realm of Transcendence, the spiritual Transcendence), by the necessary negativity. And we are so afraid of this negativity, that in order to tame it, we face it in our speculations, arguments and reasoning. We tame the phenomenon, but we think we are taming what exists – the being of things and Others, up to existence in the fullest: Transcendence. It is precisely this phenomenon, which would refer to Transcendence and the faith in it, that would be dealt with by religious knowledge – a specific knowledge of faith, distinguished from theology, that is e.g., exegetic knowledge of the Bible and the principles of the Christian faith, especially considered in pamphlets published in the Kierkegaardian *Moment* series.⁶²

According to Kierkegaard, the discussed irony, as a certain consequent ironic attitude, would be characteristic of the aesthetic life stage, particularly of the initial, pre-reflective and reflective sub-stage, when the ironist acquires certain self-knowledge. It is exactly the theoretical irony, closed within the scope of subjectivity, that is the aesthetic attitude, however, not artistic. Such form can be acquired by irony when

⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 41–2; cf. 70–1 (resp. “ironic contradiction,” “Socrates’ ironic view”).

⁶⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 256.

⁶¹ Stan, “Immanence/Transcendence,” 209–14.

⁶² Cf. Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, 87–354.

it is mastered. “Irony as a controlled element manifests itself in its truth precisely by teaching how to actualize actuality, by placing the appropriate emphasis on actuality.”⁶³ One may say that irony is creative as an aesthetic attitude, as well as, when it assumes a form of practice – a communicative action, affecting the performed valuation and aims chosen by Others. It is creative in the means of an agent, i.e. an actor – performing a social role with a feeling of both engagement and distance at the same time. As such, the executive irony, also referred to as “dramatic” by Kierkegaard (theoretical, contemplative irony and practical, executive, dramatic irony⁶⁴), appears to be a combination of the direct and the indirect in expression, i.e. the expression of the subject in the directness of own sensual experiences, as well as, the expression of the means of communication (language, codes) along with communicating the meanings as certain mental content. It would be a direct communication due to the assumed, as an element of intersubjective knowledge, certain obviousness, or even an unequivocality of meanings communicated by means of language. Ironic communication is indirect in the case of ethical irony, because it is related to the ironist affecting Others (particularly, it is the “ironic” position of Socrates).

One may ask: what distinguishes between ironic expression of other communications, both direct and indirect, where verbal communication is intertwined with action, *praxis*, practical models in their ethical characteristic? It would be acquiring a distance in relation to the obviousness of the verbal communication, however, additionally, in relation to other cultural or social meanings and models, i.e. – according to Kierkegaard – “ideals” comprehended colloquially. In other words, direct communication does not assume creative attention, engagement of the recipient in receiving the message, while direct communication forces the recipient to assume a creative position regarding the message – to its understanding and interpretation for the purpose of own knowledge. That is what distinguishes aesthetic communication, the one from the initial pre-reflective stage of the aesthetic life, from ethical communication.

Already in the pre-reflective stage of life, irony appears as a certain condition of the possibility to distance self from the obviousness of meanings and senses given to the subject. Kierkegaard points out irony among other conditions for the possibility of achieving such reflective attitude towards communicated and received meanings, senses, as well as, of achieving a reflective attitude of the subject towards oneself – apart from argument-based logical speculation, cognitive and aesthetic contemplation, and doubt.⁶⁵ Simultaneously, all the aforementioned cognitive means of achieving distance regarding own knowledge, determine the passage to the reflective sub-stage of the aesthetic life stage, as well as, a passage from a passive attitude, imitative in relation to given meanings, models and ideals, to the creative attitude which gives the opportunity for the individual and self-aware expression of the subject.

One may say that Kierkegaard is considering duality, i.e. duplication, in reference to the two indicated orders of reality. Within the context of mundane immanent reality, duplication takes the form of repetition, within a temporal, diachronic plane, i.e. a repetition considered to be a certain sequence (duplication, repetition of a model). Diachronic repetition is of temporal as well as moving character, and it is, e.g. imitation, particularly, of role models – Christ (religious stage) and Socrates (ethical stage), as well as, of well-known public figures (e.g. actors in the case of the aesthetic stage).

Repetition thematizes movement most explicitly, and does so on multiple levels – through its title; its philosophical content; its narrative structure; and its metaphors and symbols. The book’s supposed author, Constantin Constantius, presents us with a philosophical discussion of his new category of “repetition,” suggesting that this should replace the concept of recollection which has dominated philosophy from Plato through to Hegel. Constantin’s comparison of recollection and repetition echoes the opposition between idea and movement found in the anecdote about Diogenes: recollection is a mode of knowledge, and retrieves a truth that already exists as Idea, whereas repetition is a movement of becoming, of coming into existence.⁶⁶

⁶³ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 328.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 254–7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 256–7.

⁶⁶ Carlisle, “Kierkegaard’s *Repetition*: The Possibility of Motion,” 522.

In reference to the transcendent reality however, it is a duplication within the plane of eternity, to say – duplication in an always synchronous, structural order, where it appears as the very idea of duplication in general. Kierkegaard notices the overlapping of both these orders of reality in our existence and in the cognition of which, i.e. the overlapping of repetition in the plane of diachrony and repetition in the plane of synchrony. It would be the repetition of duplication, i.e. reduplication within the temporal plane of reality, here and now. Such entanglement of repetition and duplication is exactly what can be found in irony related to the religious.⁶⁷

Irony, counterpoised with humour, highlighted particularly in reference to the biblical parables on Job (irony) and Abraham (humour), can exactly be called “religious.” It is a “situational irony” rather than “verbal irony.” It is based – as every irony – on the relation of duplication, which in the case of biblical parables, i.e. the juxtaposition of two perspectives: the divine Transcendence and the human immanence, becomes reduplication – an entanglement of repetition and duplication. Biblical parables pertain to Transcendence and recount about Transcendence to the reader who remains in the immanence of the mundane world. Exactly this combination of the experiences of mundane temporality of the biblical protagonist with the perspective of eternal Transcendence, the persistent reference to known, previous experiences and knowledge, may cause a humorous effect and allow to recognise the ironic attitude as appropriate not only for the immanence of the mundane world, but also for the transcendent eternity. The non-uniformity of both perspectives, the knowledge on temporality, and faith concerning Transcendence, is a challenge for the knowledge and the faith of Abraham and Job. The way of reacting and acting, known from mundane temporality, fails, and its repetition yields nothing; one must juxtapose and confront both perspectives, recognise the potentiality of different action, i.e. refer to Transcendence in duplication, attempting to place the previous models of acting, thinking and speaking there, by the power of repetition.

In other words, the existing subject tries to execute a certain phenomenalisation of the transcendent realm, using the knowledge concerning the well-known phenomenalisation of the mundane reality, and referring to obviousness of the world given here and now, to its manifestations given through experiences and lived-experiences. Dialectics and patheticness concerning the mundane domain, typical of the aesthetic stage, prove to be insufficient. Then, irony appears as a possible attitude that saves the biblical protagonist from doubt, revealing the insignificance of mundane temporality and own previous experiences in comparison with the Law of eternity, that is in force. However, eternity and its Law are given to him due to the knowledge on temporality and the faith in Transcendence, and afterwards, due to the crossing beyond this knowledge and its limitation. The paradox of the dual involvement of people in both orders finds a certain solution thanks to references to the rules of reduplication, ironical in particular. One cannot discard or resign from the mundane world of immanence, and it is a difficult path to Transcendence – a path, the bitterness of which weakens good humour, and from which one may distance self by means of irony.

It is easy to see that Kierkegaard considered biography in form of a story, as a certain social and cultural model of temporal and conventional character, within the scope of an admitted social and cultural normativeness. However, biography in the form of a mythical, as well as, religious (biblical) parable, would make the individual story of a protagonist, along with himself – into a certain ideal, a partial manifestation of an idea, i.e. an appearance of the original belonging to the plane of Transcendence in the plane of immanent, mundane reality. Therefore, Kierkegaard considered myth as that, which, to a degree, competes with, or threatens Christianity, i.e. religion (an issue on which he wrote i.a. in *The Concept of Anxiety* and in *The Moment*). It needs to be stressed that the Kierkegaardian opposition between myth and religion is linked with the distinction of various types of religiosity (A and B), with the indication of Christianity’s distinctness in the face of different religions, and with the acknowledgement of the special status of the Bible – which does not contain any mythical tales, yet persists as a historical document and as an example of a history “properly” comprehended. As is well-known, Kierkegaard disputed against the Hegelian conception of history as science concerning the manifestations (symptoms) of the Absolute Spirit and the Spirit of the

⁶⁷ Cf. Reece, *Irony and Religious Belief*, 30–52 (chapter *Irony in Religious Belief and Religious Biography*).

universal *Geschichte*. He referred to Schelling's concept of history apprehended as a "construction" which would have a definite, irrefutable methodological and ethical example – the Bible as a "sacred history."⁶⁸ In the form accepted and appreciated by different Christian churches, the Bible is a historical document – that is, a manifestation of definite facts – and it is neither a mythical story (*mythos* in the Ancient Greek sense) nor a tale with some fictitious elements.

One must highlight that Kierkegaard referred not only to the biblical story of Job (in *Repetition*, also in *Four Upbuilding Discourses*⁶⁹) and of Abraham (in *Fear and Trembling*⁷⁰). He characterised Greek myths, along with ancient tradition and antique tragedy in particular (the protagonists of Greek myths – Iphigenia and Agamemnon⁷¹) as biographical parables that constitute certain points of reference and models of individual biography in Western tradition.⁷²

Kierkegaard presented Abraham and Job as both biographical and mythical models. However, he often described trivial, daily life and biographies typical for their protagonists, as well as, created biographies of his pseudonymous authors (e.g. Constantin Constantinus *vel* Constantius, the narrator of the *Repetition*). On the example of the aforementioned two personal and cultural role models, being elements of either a mythical parable, or an usual narrative driven story, one may define repetition as imitation within the scope of culture, as well as, as a modification of the cultural model. In terms of mythical parables and their protagonists, Kierkegaard highlights certain analogies in mythical biographies – duplications and biplicity. Deleuze writes that in Kierkegaard's reading of the Bible:

Job is infinite contestation and Abraham infinite resignation, but these are one and the same thing. Job challenges the law in an ironic manner, refusing all second-hand explanations and dismissing the general in order to reach the most singular as principle or as universal. Abraham submits humorously to the law, but finds in that submission precisely the singularity of his only son whom the law commanded him to sacrifice.⁷³

Biographies that constitute an element of a myth, parables, may be submitted to repetition – imitation, because we grasp our own lives in reference to the myth, which is, this way, continually updated in repetition. Additionally, repetition is that which binds the individuals, the subjectivities in their experience and cognition, with their own existence. "He [a poet] explains the universal as repetition, and yet he himself understands repetition in another way, for although actuality becomes the repetition, for him the repetition is the raising of his consciousness to the second power. He has had what belongs essentially to a poet, a love affair, but a very ambivalent one: happy, unhappy, comic, tragic."⁷⁴ To write and to speak would be to recall repetition acting in analogy to the past, acting which is a certain actualisation of the past and a continuation of the individual's own mundane existence. It strengthens the feel of the reality of one's own existence in its both free and necessary becoming, while the uncertainty of one's own existence – with respect to mundane temporality, and particularly, to Transcendence – may be grasped with the help of an ironic attitude. It allows to consider both elements of every relation in a dialectical manner: the awaited certainty and the continuously revealing uncertainty, including the religious stage of life.

⁶⁸ The Schellingian concept of the construction of history as a science appears in *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums* (1802–1803), especially in the eighth lecture *Über die historische Konstruktion des Christentums* and the tenth lecture *Über das Studium der Historie und der Jurisprudenz*; the English translation *On University Studies*.

⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, *Four Upbuilding Discourses*, 109–24 (*The Lord Gave, and the Lord Took Away; Blessed Be the Name of the Lord*).

⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, e.g. 9–14, 15–24, 54–67 (resp. *Exordium, Eulogy on Abraham, Problema I*).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 79, 87 (resp. *Problema II, Problema III*).

⁷² Cf. Kierkegaard, *Either-Or*, part I, 137–64 (text *The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama*).

⁷³ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 7 (*Introduction*).

⁷⁴ Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 229 (*Concluding Letter*).

References

- Aristotle. *Rhetoric*. Translated by William Rhys Roberts. Mineola & New York: Dover Publications, 2004.
- Bravo Jordán, Nassim. "Irony." In *Kierkegaard's Concepts (Kierkegaard's Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, volume 15, tomes I to VI). Edited by Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, Jon Stewart. Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2014 (Abingdon & New York, Routledge, 2016). Cited: Tome IV, 30–5.
- Carlisle, Clare. "Kierkegaard's Repetition: The Possibility of Motion." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 13:3 (2005), 521–41.
- Cavallazzi Sánchez, Alejandro. "Dialectic." In *Kierkegaard's Concepts (Kierkegaard's Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, volume 15, tomes I to VI). Edited by Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, Jon Stewart. Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2014 (Abingdon & New York, Routledge, 2016). Cited: Tome II, 165–9.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Emmanuel, Steven M., McDonald, William, and Stewart, Jon (ed.). *Kierkegaard's Concepts (Kierkegaard's Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, volume 15, tomes I to VI). Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2014 (Abingdon & New York, Routledge, 2016).
- Evans, C. Stephen. "The Role of Irony in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*." *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 1 (2004), 63–79.
- Frazier, Brad. "Kierkegaard on Mastered Irony." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44:4 (2004), 465–79.
- Frazier, Brad. "Kierkegaard on the Problems of Pure Irony." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 32:3 (2004), 417–47.
- Hanson, Jeffrey (ed.). *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist. An Experiment*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010.
- Hegel, Georg W. F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Edited and Translated by Terry Pinkard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Logical Investigations*. Volume I. Translated by John N. Findlay. London & New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Jankélévitch, Vladimir. *L'Ironie*. Paris: Flammarion, 1964.
- Jaspers, Karl. *Philosophy of Existence*. Translated with Introduction by Richard F. Grabau. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.
- Kaftanski, Wojciech. "Redoubling/Reduplication." In *Kierkegaard's Concepts (Kierkegaard's Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, volume 15, tomes I to VI). Edited by Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, Jon Stewart. Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2014 (Abingdon & New York, Routledge, 2016). Cited: Tome V, 205–12.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Edited and Translated by Paul Guyer, Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Kemp, Ryan. "Repetition." In *Kierkegaard's Concepts (Kierkegaard's Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, volume 15, tomes I to VI). Edited by Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, Jon Stewart. Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2014 (Abingdon & New York, Routledge, 2016). Cited: Tome V, 225–30.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Concept of Anxiety. A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin by Vigilius Haufniensis [Begrebet Angest. En simpel psykologisk-paapegende Overveelse i Retning af det dogmatiske Problem om Arvesynden, af Vigilius Haufniensis, 1844]*. Edited and Translated with Introduction and Notes by Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling. A Dialectical Lyric by Johannes de Silentio [Frygt og Bæven. Dialektisk Lyrik af Johannes de Silentio, 1843]*. In *Fear and Trembling. Repetition*. Edited and Translated with Introduction and Notes by Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong, 1–123. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Repetition. An Essay in Experimental Psychology by Constantin Constantius [Gjentagelsen. Et Forsøg i den eksperimenterende Psychologi af Constantin Constantius, 1843]*. In *Fear and Trembling. Repetition*. Edited and Translated with Introduction and Notes by Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong, 125–231. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either-Or. A Fragment of Life edited by Victor Eremita [Enten-Eller. Et Livs-Fragment, udgivet af Victor Eremita, 1843]*. Part I-II. Edited and Translated with Introduction and Notes by Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates [Om Begrebet Ironi med stadigt Hensyn til Socrates, 1841]*. Edited and Translated with Introduction and Notes by Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Four Upbuilding Discourses [Fire opbyggelige Taler, 1844]*. In *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*. Edited and Translated with Introduction and Notes by Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong, 291–401. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Moment [Øieblikket, 1855]*. In *'The Moment' and Late Writings*. Edited and Translated with Introduction and Notes by Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong, 87–354. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments'. A Mimetic-Pathetic-Dialectic Compilation. An Existential Plea, by Johannes Climacus, published by S. Kierkegaard* [Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler. Mimisk-pathetisk-dialektisk Sammenskrift. Eksistentielt Indlaeg, af Johannes Climacus. Udgiven af S. Kierkegaard, 1846]. Edited and Translated with Introduction and Notes by Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Philosophical Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy by Johannes Climacus, published by S. Kierkegaard* [Philosophiske Smuler, eller, En Smule Philosophi. Af Johannes Climacus. Udgivet af S. Kierkegaard, 1844]. Edited and Translated with Introduction and Notes by Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Lippitt, John. *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.
- McCarthy, A. Vincent. "The Ethics of Irony in Kierkegaard." *Kierkegaardiana* 12 (1982), 57–68.
- Perkins, Robert L. *Hegel and Kierkegaard: Two Critics of Romantic Irony*. Jamaica, NY: St. John's University, 1970.
- Reece, Gregory L. *Irony and Religious Belief*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002.
- Rush, Fred. *Irony and Idealism. Rereading Schlegel, Hegel and Kierkegaard*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Schelling, Friedrich W. J. *On University Studies* [Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums]. Edited with Introduction by Norbert Guterman, Translated by Ella S. Morgan. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1966.
- Söderquist, K. Brian. *The Isolated Self. Irony as Truth and Untruth in Søren Kierkegaard's 'On the Concept of Irony'*. København: C.A. Reitzel, 2007.
- Stan, Leo. "Immanence/Transcendence." In *Kierkegaard's Concepts (Kierkegaard's Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, volume 15, tomes I to VI)*. Edited by Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, Jon Stewart. Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2014 (Abingdon & New York, Routledge, 2016). Cited: Tome III, 209–14.
- Stewart, Jon. *Søren Kierkegaard: Subjectivity, Irony, and the Crisis of Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Stokes, Patrick. "Uniting the Perspectival Subject: Two Approaches." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 10:1 (2011), 23–44.