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Same and other: from Plato to Kierkegaard. A reading of a metaphysical thesis in an existential key

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Abstract

Aim. In his Kierkegaardian studies Jean Wahl states that there is a fundamental convergence between Plato and Søren Kierkegaard focused on the notions of identity

and difference. Wahl suggests a sort of transposition of platonic metaphysics into the sphere of personal subjectivity. This paper intends to explain this passage from the same to the other from Plato to Kierkegaard.

Concept. The article explains the passage from the same to the other from Plato to Kierkegaard. In both authors, the categories of being or not being, identity and difference, unity and multiplicity, becoming and rest explain the dynamic nature of the real.

Results and conclusion. In both authors, the categories mensioned above explain the dynamic nature of the real. But while Plato applies these categories to the inteligibile word, Kierkegaard applies them to individual freedom, which supports reality as a whole.

Cognitive value. Both searches lead to a single speculative answer and culminate in the same metaphysical categorisation, which applies analogously to everything real. Indeed, being and non-being, identity and difference, oneness and otherness, rest and becoming, explain the dialectic, intensive and relational dynamism of entia. At the same time, they essentially determine the power of human existence, infinitely possible and forever depending on the absolute.

Key words: Kierkegaard, Plato, categories, freedom, metaphysics, human existence

INTRODUCTION

The substantial convergence of Kierkegaardian and Platonic thought has been pointed out in Jean Wahl's *Kierkegaardian Studies*. The French interpreter argues that sin is a positive position, not a mere negation, and this cannot even be conceived; it is the affirmation of the being of non-being, so not an immediate but a mediate instance. The existence of otherness, of non-being, abstractly stated by Plato in *Sophist*, is here concretely asserted; and in *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard will state this idea still more accurately by showing that sin takes place, and is aware of its taking place, before God. "This before--God awareness is an essential positive component of the idea of sin" (Wahl, 1949, p. 215). In mentioning the connection between Plato and Kierkegaard for a second time, J. Wahl assert that the Absolute difference cannot be conceived by understanding. In this realm above understanding, the opposition between similarity and difference disappears, as does any other opposition, and Kierkegaard follows, on this subject, the tradition originated in the dialectic of *Parmenides* and continued by the negative theology upheld by mystics. There is a confusion of understanding here, analogous to that we experience in reading Plato's dialogue, which shows quite well the irony of understanding to itself. "Within us there is an unhappy love of the unknown" (Wahl, 1949, p. 354). This unknown, which is the absolutely different, "this other", the French interpreter explains, "is love" (Wahl, 1949, p. 354). J. Wahl's Platonising interpretation of Kierkegaard culminates in the following text:

> Such is Kierkegaard's paradox. For him there is a relation to a being that is not for us except in this relation and to whom we cannot be related. Never has the antinomy at the bottom of *Parmenides* been so deeply experienced. Nor has the antinomy at the bottom of faith, defined as the innermost relation and as a relation to something external at the same time, ever been better illuminated (1949, p. 354).

Hypothetically assuming the Wahlian interpretation, the following paragraphs will try to elucidate Plato and Kierkegaard's fundamental convergence in the light of the idea of otherness. The paradoxical reality of Kierkegaardian sin would be the existential equivalent of difference as required in *Parmenides*, suggested in *Sophist* and explained by the Dyad in Plato's unwritten doctrines. Such an assumption involves the transposition of Platonic metaphysics to the realm of finite subjectivity. Not only will this clarify the deepest speculative roots of Kierkegaardian thought, but will also enable a refoundation of supreme genera on the eidetic experience of one's own freedom through intensive and relational dialectic.

The present paper attempts to verify the passage from same to other, from the standpoint of the Platonic proposal as read in an existential key. In other words, the present text sets out to unveil the existential meaning of a central intuition, of an idea conceived absolutely and in all its purity: the idea of otherness, whose conceptualisation will enable either the confirmation or rejection of J. Wahl's view. To that end, I will briefly discuss some fundamental notions of Plato's metaphysics in order to approach Kierkegaard's thought.

Some principles of platonic metaphysics

Plato's metaphysics, as opposed to Parmenidean monism, modern identity philosophies and the superiority of difference over oneness and identity, appears as a pyramidal pluralism, whose apex is the pre-eminence of the One. Thus, the outcome of Plato's endeavour is a conception of the absolute that does not leave out multiplicity or oneness, being or non being, identity or difference, motion or rest, but incorporates all of them analogously into the eidetic foundation of the real.

In other words, the Platonic absolute has lost the inert rigidity of Eleatic reality, to achieve a dialectic vitality that takes appearances into account. To Plato, there is a dialectic of *the contingent* and a dialectic of *the absolute*. The Platonic dialectic of the contingent expresses the progressive, mutable, temporal and successive multiplicity proper to the sensible world, whereas his dialectic of the absolute expresses the simultaneous, immutable, non-progressive and eternal multiplicity proper to the intelligible world.

Platonic intelligibility is dialectic, which presupposes an attempt to conceive an ideal world that is dynamic and alive, an active eternity. In fact, the Platonic *eidos*, being in itself a simple, immutable and eternal essence, participates simultaneously in motion, life and thought. This participation enables it relationally to shape the becoming of the intelligible, which takes place in the ontological *koinonía* of ideas. Thus, the ideal *koinonía* involves the movement of thought, i.e. a genuine dynamism in which one idea refers to the other.

Now, the dynamism of the intelligible presupposes its own power, the ideal *dynamis* -hence Plato came to conceive being as active potency. He says: "My suggestion would be, that anything which possesses any sort of power to affect

another, or to be affected by another even for a moment, however trifling the cause and however slight and momentary the effect, has real existence; and I hold that the definition of being is simply power" (Plato, 1921, pp. 247e). Above the potency of sensible beings is the potency of the intelligible, i.e. the creative power of ideas, which are "the cause of things afterwards existing which did not exist before" (Plato, 1921, pp. 265b). Thus, the Platonic world of ideas constitutes an ordered whole, a multiplicity organised by a certain dynamic, which simultaneously organises both the ontological and the knowledge sphere, precisely because the power of the intelligible is the constitutive source of both.

But the simultaneous multiplicity of ideas would not be possible without the reality of identity and difference, of being and non-being, which is proposed by the theory of supreme genera as a condition of the possibility of the ideal world. In fact, according to Plato, a universal reality must exist that either encompasses and determines the whole intelligible world, or contains it intensively in its own reality. Such is the metaphysical consistency of the supreme genera, which may be attributed to the whole ideal world by virtue of the latter's inclusion in the former.

The supreme genera comprise three pairs of opposites: being and non--being, identity and difference, rest and motion, which are intended to account for the experience of the multiple and different. In this sense, in Plato's *Parmenides*, the negation of non-being, multiplicity and movement entails the negation of their opposites. In *Sophist,* the issue is further examined and the reality of non-being is admitted as a presupposition of the apparent, of error, falsehood, deceit, lies, etc., all of which point to being as non-being, and to the identical as the other. Thus, non-being filters into the sensible, discourse, thought, the intelligible, breaking them up and dialectically mobilising them.

For Plato, non-being has a certain reality, i.e. constitutes a certain way of being, on which its negation must be founded, just as the affirmation of the real must relate to a certain kind of non-being. In other words, being and non-being entail each other – they are relationally affirmed. Neither of them can be named without simultaneously evoking the other, because both result from their mutual implication, from their correlative reference. According to this, whenever the other exists, being is not for us (Plato, 1921, pp. 257a). This is because, once being has been affirmed, non-being follows from necessity, just as, once non-being is affirmed, the reality of being must necessarily be inferred. Both are founded on the same ontological density, and all to the non-being having been shown to partake of being, just as the latter does in the former.

Now Plato thinks that the link between being and non-being is not basically a contradiction, but rather the very difference of being in being. This is spelt out as follows: "when we speak of not-being, we speak not of something opposed to being, but only different" (Plato, 1921, pp. 257b). Negation then is not simply opposition but, above all, difference functionally established as a relative non-being from which absence and deprivation follow.

All that is real participates analogously in the difference of being, because it participates in the idea of other. In other words, the other is in being itself without making up its nature but, on the contrary, presupposing participation in being and sameness. For this reason Plato insists that about any reality we may rightly say that it is non-being and, on the contrary, insofar as it participates in being, that it exists and is a being. Difference and identity correlate by virtue of their mutual intelligible implication, just as being and non-being do - hence everything would be itself and another simultaneously.

Precisely because being is identity and non-being is difference, they enable both the oneness and the multiplicity of the real, shaping a variegated plurality full of contrasts. Each being is only one, but different and separate from many other ones. Both the conceptual and intelligible *koinonía*, and the sensible, existential, anthropological and moral one follow from this multiple universe made real by difference. Intercourse, communication, dialogue and responsibility to the other stem from difference.

Non-being does not in and of itself involve contradiction, then, but rather difference, as experience demands. Nevertheless, as the conceptual order demands, difference does presuppose contradiction, or, in other words, absolute otherness, which is capable of intensively containing any other distinction. Radical difference, affirmed as absolute contradiction, encompasses the whole intelligible world and rises above it as the supreme principle of all multiplicity.

But absolute difference, as a first principle of the real, is linked to an affirmative correlate, i.e. a supreme principle in which all oneness and identity participate. Such is to Plato the reality of the One, whose absoluteness can be negated only by the absolutely diverse, by the radical difference he calls the Indefinite Dyad or The Great and The Small. One and Dyad cannot be dissociated from each other. They call for each other, since pure otherness rejects singleness in itself. This first negation of the first is presupposed by all being and non-being, by the identical and the diverse, by the simultaneous multiplicity of the intelligible and by the successive and ongoing plurality of the sensible. Hence Aristotle, in discussing Plato's thought, refers to the opposition by contrariness (Aristóteles, 1953, pp. I, 1054 a, 25) between both principles, i.e. to the radical contradiction Platonic dialectic culminates in, or rather starts with.

The notions of these supreme principles point to the Athenian master's oral teachings, which he imparted to those initiated into his knowledge. In this sense, Plato's unwritten doctrine would contain the key to his system, and compel a reconsideration of his theory in the light of the indirect contribution of historiography to philosophical tradition. According to this oral tradition, Plato would claim that those principles are the primary elements and the most universal genera. Their duality does not negate the absolute supremacy of the One over the Dyad or that of both of them over being. In other words, principle duality breaks with Parmenidean monism and saves thought from the dualistic threat, insofar as it maintains the supremacy of the One and subordinates any other reality to it, even the negation proper

to the Dyad. If the original opposition of the first principles explains the multiplicity of the real, it is precisely because of the priority of oneness, which accounts for and enables every opposition and, therefore, every kind of dialectic.

The Platonic One constitutes the complicatio of every determination, and fulfils the function of formal and efficient cause of all beings. Indeed, every being is one because of the oneness constitutively reproduced in him, and is such because it receives from the one the limit that shapes its own being. If the One did not exist, there would be no oneness at all in beings, and, therefore, there would be no multiplicity either. In opposition to the unifying principle, the Dyad constitutes the absolute indetermination, limitlessness and indefiniteness from and in which both the sensible and the intelligible will be formed. Hence it works as a receptive and passive material principle. Duality is the difference of the One, and as such conditions and supports an indefinite multiplicity of other beings. Moreover, being absolute otherness, it accounts for all differences, all contrasts, all variations, all degrees and sizes of beings, for both the greater and the smaller.

Both the One and the Dyad are wholly present in the real, and are received by all its spheres by participation, because being is in itself a composite of oneness and duality, identity and difference. Now the different spheres of the real encompass the sensible, ideal and moral dimensions. Hence, the two principles constitute the cause of being, the foundation of knowledge and the source of value. Thus, they fulfil an ontological, knowledge and axiological function, according to which Oneness operates as good, truth, pattern, limit, measure, and the Dyad as their opposite.

Indeed, oneness amounts to limit, and thus determines the identity, subsistence and order of the real. Hence oneness is the fundamental categorical constituent of every being. But oneness, received by beings by participation as their structural law, is at the same time the essence of goodness, and therefore singular goodness is thus founded on the delimitation of multiplicity by oneness. The convertibility of oneness into goodness and vice versa, enables the direct passage from the ontological to the axiological or moral sphere. There is a correspondence between oneness, goodness and truth, on the one hand, and multiplicity, evil and falsehood on the other. But the functional polyvalence of the principles manifests itself not only at the level of the constitutive foundation of being, but also at that of its intelligible, sensible, knowledge and moral dynamism. Thus the One becomes mover and, especially, end of the real. Therefore, *entia* will be perfected by a certain reduction to oneness through the exclusion of non-being, which eats into the very core of being. Every reality outside the One, since it is another with respect to it, requires this reduction.

The present discussion should suffice to outline the basic meaning of Platonic dialectic as a relational dynamism according to which both sensible and intelligible beings unfold their identity by constantly clashing with the other. Without constituting their own nature, this otherness is nevertheless their very being in the non-being mode. Thus the real is, according to Plato, *dynamis*, energy, active

power that must intensify itself in dialectic opposition to the other. From the knowledge point of view, Platonic dialectic is a deepening experience that culminates in the ineffable. This eidetic experience apprehends that which is common to and constitutive of beings, up to that fissureless Oneness, outside which there can only be absolute nothingness, i.e. radical otherness.

Now this reality-shaping *dynamis* manifests itself in the human spirit as *éros*, i.e. as an active potency, as an ever-possible power that is therefore always deprived of its whole good. The otherness of love is in a sense its own *Penía*, dialectically tending towards *Póros*, which, constituting *éros* as well, expects to actualise its identity. The otherness of Platonic *éros* not only consists in its intrinsic deprivation, but also, in another sense, points to the pure, unmixed, absolute Beauty to which it aspires, and whose contemplation fecundates it (Plato, 1925, pp. 210b,c). Love, impregnated by beauty, is capable of procreating, begetting, producing, or rather, self-producing (if such interpretation be allowed) the spiritual being, existential identity and fullness bequeathed to it by *Póros*, its father, and present in *éros* as non-being capable of coming into this inheritance.

Love, touched by beauty, gives birth to that for which it was fecundated long ago; it breeds it; both near and far away from it, it thinks of it, and that which it has brought forth ends up by nourishing it, together with the beautiful object of which I have spoken; although the couple's community is infinitely closer than that between us and our children, and their affection sounder, because they share the most beautiful and longest living children (Plato, 1925, pp. 209c). This spiritual reality is the offspring of love. It starts from its own nothingness, from the other, and becomes such through the instantaneous touch of otherness in itself.

Hence the following Platonic assertion: the object of love "is generation and birth in beauty" (Plato, 1925, pp. 206d). Procreating and giving birth in beauty, love actualises being, renews it, produces it constantly. This is the only way in which a mortal being may achieve immortality - by "generation, because the new is always left in the place of the old" (Plato, 1925, pp. 207d).

To put it in a nutshell, *éros* makes the ascent through which the poor multiplicity of the real rises to the full richness of the One, that undiminished richness negated at the very origin of being to enable the multiple to be. Hence the intermediate nature of love, located between being and non-being, between oneness and otherness, as a bond that unites the whole with itself. Love is a bond of perfection because it negates difference, producing similarity.

From eidos to existence: the Kierkegaardian path

Leaving aside Kierkegaard's rejection of the abstract categorisation of Platonic metaphysics, which seeks to stress the existential categorisation of his own thought, I would like to dwell on a Kierkegaardian text: "Plato teaches that only ideas have true being. Thus it may also be said, and more truly, that only the human existing that relates to concepts, primitively assuming them,

reviewing them, modifying them, creating them anew, only that existing is interested in existence. Any other human existing is merely a copy existence, a particular case in the world of finitude that vanishes without trace and has never been interested in existence. And this applies both to any bourgeois's existing and, for example, to a European war, as long as it is not related to concepts, in which case real existing is, in spite of everything, due only to the Singular one, through whom this happens. But, whereas he who relates to concepts is interested, through them, in existence, such existing becomes then, naturally, a struggle against demons and against those forces whose existence would not otherwise show" (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. XI² A 63).

This paragraph makes the Platonic ideal world descend from its reality in itself to the concrete existence of the individual, whose ontological consistency will depend, according to Kierkegaard, on the ideal assimilation he freely performs. He does not deny the reality of the intelligible in itself, i.e. the subsistence of a conceptual reality pre-shaping all human knowledge. He would, therefore, be exempt from the criticism levelled at Hegel's unreal abstraction and at certain Platonic interpretation that, I think, aims at enhancing the value of singular existence. On the contrary, the Danish existentialist would affirm the consistency of the ideal. This seems to follow from a juvenile note:

> Sibbern made today, in his lecture, a very good observation: the existence should be admitted of a genuine ideal being that has, in itself, a certain being, even before expressing itself in actual being. This observation could be borne out by the fact that, in speaking of eternal truths, it would not be said that they are being created now, but that they are being revealed now, i.e. in the fullness of time (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. II A 305).

Now, the consistency of the ideal, subsisting perhaps, to Kierkegaard, in the divine mind, manifests itself particularly – and here lies his central interest – in singular existence. For this reason, the true being attributed to it by Plato, corresponds to the true being assumed by individual subjectivity in Kierkegaard's thought.

In other words, Kierkegaard approaches the intelligible, the ideal, from the standpoint of the eidetic intuition of singular existence. He does not stress the reality of the common and constitutive in itself, but rather the subjective experience of this "truth, "to me", this "focus", "this inner centre of gravity" thanks to which the human being may call himself "I" (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. I A 75). To the subjective philosopher he wanted to be, ideas are conceived as "the natural flowers of the tree of life" (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. I A 76). In this sense it can be clearly seen that they are, as they were in Plato's thought, *dynamis* self-manifesting the active power personal freedom constitutes.

In principle we might claim that Kierkegaard has performed a sort of existential turn in relation to Platonic metaphysics, by starting from the inner experience revealing the great categories of spiritual being, which is as legitimate as the external experience of sensible cosmos. The Athenian philosopher attempts to account for the ongoing and mutable multiplicity through the dialectic and relational dynamism of the absolute and eternal. Kierkegaard

seeks to explain empirical contingency and temporality through the dialectic, intensive and relational becoming of the free being, who achieves an absolute and eternal synthesis. To Plato, the supreme genera constitute the world in an orderly way. To the Danish existentialist, they constitute the realities ordering spiritual existence, through which history and the world will pass in order to obtain their own intelligibility in and through it. The ideal, made flesh and blood in inner life, i.e. existentially received by participation, concretises the mutable and temporal, and, touched by eternity, transforms, at the same time, the entire universe.

In my view, this metaphysical subjective or existential turn had been developing ever since transcendental philosophy turned Platonic ideas into thinking laws laid down by thinking itself, while transforming speculation into a theory of consciousness, a philosophy of the subject. Starting from that initial conversion, the Hegelian system advanced on subjectivity, declaring its identity with the object of finite consciousness, which is capable of consummating its self-reflection in the absolute idea, in order to concretise the abstract and intellectual concept of Platonic philosophy.

With Hegel, philosophy kept the intellectual specification stamped on it by modernity, as well as the correlation between the supreme categories, which are mutually implying, just as Plato had claimed. In fact, the ancient philosopher and the modern systematician coincide as to the reciprocal implication of contraries, which is present in every singular being in the form of a dialectic requirement that imposes itself on the unity and identity of the real. This means that, to both, reality would have a fundamentally dual structure, by virtue of which each contrary appears and continues in the other. Nevertheless, Plato and Hegel would disagree about the nature of the opposition: difference, multiplicity, indetermination to the former, and negation as a force that pervades and modifies every way of being to the latter.

The negative valence of otherness, represented as a destructive power, as an active force negating being, is also present in Kierkegaard. He shares with Plato and Hegel the idea of a fundamentally dual structure of the real, where contraries imply each other and oneness constitutes the remotest goal of aspiration. The Danish existentialist shares with the German systematician alone, however, the affirmation of the enormous dialectic potential of non-being.

As follows from this brief historical discussion, Kierkegaard would seem to have received from modern thought the speculative primacy of subjectivity, which echoes in him to such an extent that his philosophy may be seen as a theory of the subject. His subject reflects itself as the object of an impossible freedom. On the one hand, it manifests itself in the idea of an ideal I, which is shown to the spirit as the due end of its own becoming. On the other hand, it is being constantly belied by singular history and forever negated by the active presence of the other at the very core of sameness. The mutual implication of being and non-being, which amounts to the mutual belonging of identity and difference, corresponds thus to the dynamism of the I, which wants oneness in spite of the nothingness at the very bottom of its constitution.

The idealness on which Kierkegaard's interest focuses, regulates the subject's consciousness and affirms itself as a presupposition of that consciousness in the self-conscious position of the I, i.e. in the affirmation of a freedom that involves being and thinking, reality and intelligibility. Thus the idea is, to him, the product of a subjective action that, paradoxically, transcends its own immanence and grafts the subject onto the divine. Spiritual reality, which has become such through the vital realisation of the idea, possesses the unity, goodness and truth that Plato attributes to the real because of its participation in the One, and that Kierkegaard attributes to the human being that is transparently founded on God. As to the rest, Kierkegaard wants his God to escape the abstraction of the unmoved mover, in order to be conceived, together with the Platonic Absolute, from the existential point of view, as a living response to existential restlessness.

The idea conceived by Kierkegaard constitutes the end of existential aspiration, by which existence yearns to be what it is not yet, so that its non-identity may become truth and good and oneness. In this sense, the Danish thinker's concept of existence approaches that of Plato's *éros*, the "offspring of the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, which, therefore, is constantly striving" (Kierkegaard, 1920-1936, pp. VII, 81). Following in the footsteps of the Athenian philosopher, Kierkegaard conceives existence as a temporal and finite *Penía* begotten and fecundated by the *Póros* of eternity, as a self-producing force giving birth to itself in inexhaustible Light. The I is the fruit of that love, the most beautiful conception by the divine race, which wanted to conquer nothingness. And just as the first fiat is the only power capable of universal being, the fiat of human love is the only power capable of personal being. Hence the existential praise of the free power of *éros:* "It is an incredibly stupendous discussion of the power of love to ennoble a man, i.e. of the rebirth of man through *Eros*, which may be found in *Symposium*" (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. III A 61).

The *Penía-Póros* dialectic assumed both, by Platonic *éros* and by Kierkegaardian existence, is the anthropological embodiment of a metaphysical dialectic that constitutes the finite being as such and, according to Plato, the intelligible world as well. Now, a degree difference between both thinkers should be pointed out that becomes essential. Plato refers radical otherness to the supreme principles, and claims it is received by participation by the other beings as difference. Kierkegaard conceives Otherness as absolute contradiction and locates it in the immanence of the finite and relative subjectivity of the human being. In this sense, Wahl holds that "the existence of Otherness, of non-being, which Plato had abstractly stated in *Sophist*, is here asserted in concreto" (Wahl, 1949, pp. 215), to such an extent that "never has the antinomy at the bottom of *Parmenides* been experienced so deeply" (Wahl, 1949, pp. 451). Kept by finite subjectivity, non-being, difference, the other, constitutes its negation, for which the reason is twofold. On the one hand, finite subjectivity is the outcome of the metaphysical limit that constitutes it and separates it from the rest, as Plato maintains. On the other hand, it also splits away from itself, and counteracts itself, by virtue of an original possibility that is, paradoxically, the possibility of its being.

To Plato, "the One precedes separation and only with separation does number start. [To Kierkegaard] Oneness precedes contradiction, and only with contradiction does existence start" (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. III A 61). This primeval oneness may be construed either as the divine Absolute, or as the essencial constitution of freedom, which, foreshadowed by the idea, became lost at the beginning of existential becoming. If freedom had not fallen, if it had not been mortally wounded, finite being would not have begun, because all beginning presupposes nothingness.

Hence finite subjectivity is not for us constantly and from necessity. Indeed, it does not constitute an affirmation of being pure and simple, but has to emerge ex nihilo as the dialectic affirmation of being against nothingness and, more precisely, of freedom, i.e. spiritual being, against sin. In other words, in my view, Kierkegaard would find in the I the metaphysical structure that shapes, to Plato, the pure reality of the intelligible in itself. This means that the former's existentialism would include a universal categorisation of finite subjectivity, analogously valid for all beings, since, to him, a whole conception of life and the world may be deduced from the singular.

Parmenides and *Sophist*, fundamentally illuminated by the unwritten doctrines, represent Plato's endeavour to save the multiplicity of the real from Parmenidean monism. Analogously, Kierkegaard's existentialism would constitute an effort to save the individual from what he calls Hegelian pantheism. Now, their original intention would seem to have required resorting to otherness: to its supreme absolute contradiction valence and to its added value as power. The latter would be the power of the negative, metaphysically acting either on the plurality of the intelligible and sensible world, in order to shape being, or on freedom, to shape the I.

To put it briefly, Kierkegaardian otherness does not take place in the intelligible world, in order to provide the foundation of the immediate order of being, but in the inner experience of the singular, which justifies any reflected opposition between idea and phenomenon. In other words, the Danish existentialist would, from the Platonic standpoint, pass from a metaphysico-conceptual conception of experience to an ethico-metaphysico-conceptual one, since he sees free dynamism as the deepest origin of metaphysical knowledge. This can be seen, in a sense, in the following text: "Doubt comes either of relating reality to idealness – this is cognition, since discourse is about interest, and I am interested at most in something other than me, e.g. in truth. Or of relating idealness to reality, and this is the ethical moment, in which it is I that am interested in myself (...) Doubt cannot be overcome by system but by faith, just as faith has brought doubt into the world" (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. IV B 13). The text following this expressly refers to freedom as the origin of and solution to doubt.

If freedom constitutes the deepest root of metaphysical knowledge, it follows that a refoundation of the speculative sphere may be provided from outside the realm of the humanly rational. This is not merely a theory of knowledge problem, but an ontological question: Willing is located in the One, whereas

oneness is seen as the original possibility of the I, and finite reason as a consequence of evil. The bottom-up relating of the real to the ideal (to Kierkegaard the theory of knowledge problem is at stake here) entails a dialectic passage. But the top-down relating of the idea to the real (this is said to be the decisive issue) entails a pathetic passage. This is explained as follows: "Any man may conceive a pathetic passage whenever he wants, because for infinitude, which lies in pathos, courage is enough. Through a similar passage Plato claimed that God joined ideas to matter" (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. IV C 12). The Kierkegaardian refoundation of the speculative, while keeping the bottom-up dialectic of knowledge, conceives ethical action as the properly creative moment, analogous to demiurgic effectiveness. This is capable of reproducing in the world the real intelligibility presupposed by all knowledge intending to speak the language of infinitude and eternity.

This is not to say that the Kierkegaardian descent responds, from an ethical standpoint, to the Platonic ascent from the real to the ideal. If this were the case, we would simply speak of an existential application of the metaphysical, or of a theoretical guarantee of the moral, but never of theoretico-metaphysical thinking. To put it more accurately, Kierkegaard does not assume Platonic metaphysics as a speculative support of his existential philosophy or his ethics – he grounds ethics on itself, deepens it, and refounds his world-view on it.

And he can do it precisely because he has discovered freedom, i.e. subjective action in, by and for itself, which underlies all idealness and reality. The action of the I, which constitutes its own cause and effect, explains both knowing and being, according to the principle:

> I act ergo sum, because this cogito is something derivative, i.e. is also identical with «I act», i.e. is the consciousness of freedom in action, and therefore we cannot say cogito ergo sum; in other words, it is an attendant consciousness (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. IV C 11).

Freedom identifies action with self-consciousness in "doing the truth" (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. IV C 86) synthesising idealness and reality. The spiritual density of being is founded on this synthesis, not through pure contemplation but through the effective and paradoxical concretisation of what, without being, exists.

In Kierkegaardian terms, the active self-consciousness of freedom coincides with the consciousness of an absolute contradiction, or of a paradox, which, ruling out all dialectic continuity, compels the pathetic passage (Mahrik, 2018, pp. 5-13). Paradox, i.e. absolute difference, constitutes, to him, the essential form of finite freedom, which he assimilates to Christianity, remarking: "About the paradox and absurdity of Christianity nothing can be said, in my view, except that it is certainly the first form in both the history of the world and consciousness" (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. IV C 29). The first form of consciousness and of history, i.e. the form of freedom in act, is the very contradiction giving rise to existence, which is affirmed in the separation of the human being from God, the departure from the One, and the loss of unity.

In a text called "absolute paradox," Kierkegaard claims: "Because philosophy is mediation, it cannot end before placing the ultimate paradox in front of its eyes. This paradox is the Man-God" (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. IV C 84). The speculative density of the essentially paradoxical lies precisely in the metaphysical opposition through which freedom is aware of its being before God as before the chasm of qualitative difference, which only pathetic passage may bridge. Hence Wahl points to this being before God (the human beings' theandric reality) as an essential element of sin, i.e., as the other with respect to the *Other*. Moreover, difference, because of its paradoxical nature, surpasses finite understanding to become, quoad nos, and the subject of mystical experience (Pavlikova & Mahrik, 2020; Binetti & Pavlikova, 2019; Pavlikova & Zalec, 2019; Zalec & Pavlikova, 2019).

Thus, Kierkegaardian otherness takes places in finite subjectivity, and for this very reason constitutes, as Wahl claims, the most deeply experienced fundamental antinomy. This means that, to Kierkegaard, radical difference could not exist without the affirmation of human willing, which takes place absolutely in the affirmation of the aut-aut, and is inseparable from the self-position of good and evil at the very core of free dialectic. This is tantamount to maintaining the reality of sin as the voluntary position of the human being before God, self-presupposed by its own realisation, so that his action may be free and natural at the same time. In this sense, Kierkegaard claims that "sin presupposes itself and comes into the world in such a way that, in positing itself, it presupposes itself" (Kierkegaard, 1920-1936, pp. IV 336).

But sin, which is the difference of finite freedom, and therefore is not, to Kierkegaard, immediate, but reflected, absolutely opposes another Freedom, i.e. divine Freedom. It should be highlighted that here Kierkegaard departs from Platonic thought, since his dyad is not a necessary and independent derivative of the impersonal One, but God the Father's free and loving creation. What properly separates Kierkegaard from Plato is Christianity, which, since its very beginning, has asserted the Absolute's free paternity against the heathen.

Christian thought harmonises divine and human freedom by means of a spiritual round trip. Hence, in maintaining God's fatherhood, Kierkegaard departs from the inexorableness of the Platonic One, influenced by Christianity. To him the difference is that between two freedoms. Now, who causes the Kierkegaardian difference of freedom, God or the human being? The human being does, since his own position presupposes it, according to Kierkegaard. A second question arises: What is the metaphysical category of difference, of sin as presupposed by human freedom? It is qualitative difference, i.e. the distinction between infinite and finite, i.e. finitude.

Being the qualitatively different from the Infinite, finitude is certainly assumed and realised by the human being's free acting, in the sense that only in it is God acknowledged as such, which is inseparable from sin consciousness as human self-acknowledgement. Nevertheless, and in another sense, finitude is a necessity of free divine creation, because, although God may create or not,

once he decides to do it, he can only produce finite beings. Thus, qualitative difference is self-presupposed by his creative action, just as in the human being's case.

Thus, both freedoms produce the same differential effect. Both contain evil as a possibility, but, once in act, realise it as necessary. Here the Platonic universe coincides again with the Christian universe, and the dyad becomes an independent counter-power once the divine power has decided to create. The differential effect would comprise, then, the theandric synergy Kierkegaard defended, applying it to free acting, and, specifically, to the problem of evil, which he conceives as real position and not as deprivation. It is in this sense that I interpret the following Kierkegaardian text:

> Christianity has been the first to shed light on the concept of synergy, and, therefore, this is the first time finitude has attained worth, speculation support, and freedom reality. The first determination of Christianity by synergy is sin. Thus, sin is not just finitude, but there is a moment of freedom and a moment of free finitude in sin (1909-1948, III A 118).

To put it briefly, both finitude, contributed by God, and finite freedom, i.e. the I, contributed by the human being, co-operate on sin.

Kierkegaardian difference, then, or at least part of it, is human freedom or existence itself. This is separated from itself and the *Other* by the qualitative clash between the one and the multiple, rest and becoming, being and non-being, good and evil, the infinite and the finite, eternity and time, the ideal and history, limit and indetermination. Such opposition tears free action apart. To put it more clearly, freedom's self-position coincides with its negation, precisely because it is difference that is affirmed, which is perceived by subjectivity once it has found itself in front of God. Before God, the I is the other, and from now on it will seek its identity outside itself, abiding in the One, which disregards opposition and co-implies everything.

Finite freedom is the other with respect to the Only One in itself, its voluntary rejection, the first negation of the first, from which multiplicity, the rupture and dispersion of spiritual reality arise. It contains the contradiction of an aut-aut on and by which every form of dialectic is founded and made possible. Freedom has been born guilty and will always be another with respect to itself for as long as it lives. This enables the plurality of options presented to free will, the immediate dialectic of bad finitude or of the worst infinitude, the ironic indifference of aesthetics and the humour of the religious mocking the world.

Human guilt makes existence a mixture of two principles: an unlimited, indeterminate and infinite material principle and a limiting, determining and unifying formal one. The former makes freedom possible, the latter makes it necessary, but always as possible, from which the continuous contingency of its definition and oneness arises. As freedom is always guilty, existence is a paradoxical mixture, an absolute contradiction, and its being before God the moment of sin.

The becoming of Kierkegaardian freedom, which is ideal and real *dynamis* at the same time, unifies in itself the intelligible and sensible motion of the Platonic universe. Hence its immanent difference opposes, ad extra, both the purely finite and the purely eternal. However, it is the absolute dimension that operates the radicalness of the opposition, whereas there is always a degree of relativity regarding the finite, which enables repetition. On the other hand, the finite negates the finite only successively, whereas freedom denies itself completely before God, in the simultaneity of a being that conforms to that of the being on which it is founded. For this reason, freedom is the only reality capable of being by not being, negating its own life or living its own death, and eternally contracting a mortal sickness that reproduces and empowers evil like an essential metastasis. Just as Plato affirms the reality of non-being in *Sophist*, Kierkegaard affirms evil as a positive counter-power, an active power, or an almightily destructive position.

But freedom, which has certainly become another, is not another but in assuming its sameness, and though it produces difference, it only does it through participating in identity. Precisely because freedom participates in the One, sin affirms itself not only as otherness with respect to the *Other*, but also as otherness with respect to the same, i.e. as a loss of identity stemming from the fall of creation, a mixture of being and non-being. In this sense, it may be claimed that, as Kierkegaard puts it, "the result of the division of a unity in the spiritual world is always three, never two" (1909-1948, pp. IV B^1 148), i.e. the being, in Being, of non-being.

Participation in oneness is the inner aspect of freedom, the principle and foundation to which it is called back from the exile of separation. Precisely because of its inner character, oneness is, to Kierkegaard, "the true *plhrojoría*, which, growing stronger and stronger, turns the unforeseen winds farther and farther away, and, victorious, leads the human being beyond any obstacle" (1909-1948, pp. II A 253). Hence the irresistible force with which existence tends to the One, to the Whole, to the complicatio that negates all contradiction and "is wholly present both in each one in particular and in all" (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. III A 38). The omnipresence of the One-Whole makes all the Same, and freedom a promise of equality that has already been fulfilled, though it has not reached the crescendo of its intensity yet.

Identity, deformed by the fall, appears beforehand as the total rest of freedom, whereas its oneness, divided from itself, in essence foreshadows the coming back together of opposites. In other words, it signals the repetition of the multiple in the One, of becoming in the Immutable, of non-being in Being, of the finite in the Infinite, of time in Eternity. However, paradoxically, the return of freedom to its original condition is in itself impossible, because finite freedom is also, in itself, duality in difference. In this sense, only Oneness in itself may guarantee and bring about all oneness.

Only God can fulfil the identity of human freedom, destroying difference, and producing his own likeness. In other words, the coincidence of contraries can only be realised by he who overcomes all contradiction and is the source

of all perfection, whose simplicity rejects division, whose power ignores the impossible, and whose name is Love, because only love can turn evil into good. Love forgets sin, and its forgetfulness is tantamount to destruction. Through love there is forgiveness, and in forgiveness the reconciliation of the world is achieved. Not in vain does Wahl conclude "this other one is love" (1945, p. 354), which progresses towards *Love*.

Love is more perfect than faith, because whereas the latter attempts the paradoxical union of opposites, which is lost again each time, Love unites, overcoming difference, and producing likeness out of that which, precisely through likeness, keeps the purity of its otherness. In Love the purity of otherness shines as pure creatureness, unblemished, without confusion or separation, as creation devoid of all evil, because "*nihil extra Deum, nihil praeter Deum*" (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. III A 45) is left in it. To put it more accurately, Love destroys the evil of free finitude, but not finitude, the difference of the different, but not the different from the Equal, because its faithfulness is incapable of negating what it has once loved. Free finitude differentiates the other; divine Love makes it equal, like a bond that unites the Whole with itself (Plato, 1925, pp. 202b), preserving the purity of the other in its own sameness. In God everything shines, like those "*opposita iuxta se posita magis illucescunt*" (Kierkegaard, 1909-1948, pp. IV A 4).

However, the bond of Love is, to existence, a desideratum, an endless path along which the fullness of *Agaph* becomes known through slight touches. It will always be, in nos and quoad nos, the *penia* that desperately pays every instant of its light.

Conclusion

Just as the classical world embarked on the task of accounting for the external experience of the sensible, the modern world assumed the responsibility of explaining inner experience, be it ideal, moral or cognitive. And just as the Athenian philosopher starts with the language of immediate reality, and leaps from it to its intelligible foundation, the Danish existentialist considers the self-conscious language of individual freedom, in order to explain any other reflection through it.

But both searches lead to a single speculative answer and culminate in the same metaphysical categorisation, which applies analogously to everything real. Indeed, being and non-being, identity and difference, oneness and otherness, rest and becoming, explain the dialectic, intensive and relational dynamism of *entia*. At the same time, they essentially determine the power of human existence, infinitely possible and forever depending on the absolute.

Thus, the history of thought has repeated the same in the other, achieving the fundamental continuity characteristic of philosophical thinking, which may deepen indefinitely, but is constantly subject to limitation. Through repetition, thinking starts retelling, analogously, a story that has already been narrated,

and, by the end of its discourse, the ineffable experience that neither Plato nor Kierkegaard has been able to describe is once again left out.

The mystery of difference is neither Kierkegaardian nor Platonic. It has no name and, therefore, every name names it, in the inner silence that dialogue yearns for, resting on the equality for which the poor singular and existing *éros* keeps on longing.

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