
THE PROBLEM OF THE ‘INDIVIDUAL’ CONCEPT IN THE KIERKEGAARD’S JOURNALS

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Abstract

This article focuses on one of the main problems of Kierkegaard’s thought: what is his concept of ‘individual’? What does it mean for Kierkegaard and how does Kierkegaard use it? In order to answer these questions, we will address his journals; first, the terminological and semantic problem of that concept. Second, the relationship between ‘den Enkelte’ and the concept of individual in general terms.

Keywords: single, specimen, copy, crowd, mass

1. Introduction

The thought of Søren Kierkegaard, without a doubt, has a series of aspects that point to a plurality of intuitions and valuable considerations about man in relation to his existence and, above all, to the centralisation of being as an individual. However, as a characteristic aspect (a complex and seductive one) of his philosophical legacy, it is the topic of communication. Indeed, communication in his philosophical work and the sum of his life experiences, contain a cryptic and, in other cases, evident, complexity regarding his conceptual position regarding man and his existential description.

In Kierkegaard, the category of “singularity”, “Enkeltheden” in Danish, constitutes an essential category of his thinking [1, p. 99], outlining the concept as a reality not expressible from the conceptual-rational but rather from the existential perspective, sustained in its own significant life experiences. It is in the life-thought relationship that the Kierkegaardian reduplicity is shaped, which reveals the richness of the subjective, of the self, and, more specifically, of the individual as opposed to the “mass” or the “crowd” [2]. The analysis of the singular individual points to a historical context and a precise scenario in which the capitalist notion of the individual, as well as the Marxist conception of the

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people and the mass, seem to interact. Indeed, the cultural and philosophical challenges facing Europe in the 19th century, as a result of the Enlightenment, the living and operating impact of Hegelian dialectic and, of course, the development of scientific positivism, provoked a romantic reaction in which the Danish intellectual can be placed.

Kierkegaard himself expresses, with respect to the individual: "I have nothing to do with the world. I have to do with the Individual, each Individual, or to each Individual." [3, p. 73] In this way, the deep interest of the Danish writer to denounce the sophistry of the 'mass' is noticeable, focusing attention on the meaning of the singular individual. Although Fichte and other philosophers (Nietzsche, Schelling, Descartes) reflect on the self, Kierkegaard adds the individual's relationship with God; that is, the Christian God and, consequently, a refined and complex anthropology that challenges the reader. A distinction is often made in the works of the Kierkegaardian Corpus between works of direct communication and indirect communication; in contrast, it is proposed to structure his writings according to the theme: aesthetic, ethical and religious. Thus, the purpose of this work is to analyse the concept of the individual in general in his diaries to indicate the way in which Kierkegaard manages to structure singularity existentially and conceptually. In this way, points of convergence between the explicit (direct) Kierkegaard and the pseudonym (indirect) Kierkegaard can be identified.

The expression individual, which comes from the Latin *individuum* (indivisible, undivided), means unity between units that cannot be further divided. This definition has to be evaluated in the deep waters of the Danish thinker, with which it offers a contemporary alternative against all the consequences of modernity. The issue of the use of pseudonyms in Kierkegaard reveals significant aspects of his thinking. In his work *The point of view* (1847), Kierkegaard expressed a hermeneutical key to his work: "The content, then, of this little book is: what I in truth am as an author, that I am and was a religious author, that my whole authorship pertains to Christianity, to the issue: becoming a Christian" [4]. In this way, the goal of presenting the greatness of Christianity with a high aim, is ultimately, the purpose of his work, the use of pseudonyms being a methodological tactic to achieve that end.

Regarding the singular individual (*den Enkelte*), García Martín says: "It can be argued that the category of singular individual is theocentric or christocentric; that is, the singular is an eschatological or theological self that stands for and before God" [5, p. 48], in such a way that the role or function of God in his thinking has an essential metaphysical and practical (vital) position in which individuality inexorably depends on the supreme individuality par excellence, which is God. The fact that Kierkegaard used 11 pseudonyms to sign his works of indirect communication and, moreover, the aesthetic and philosophical works for which he himself is known, encapsulates an ambiguity that mainstreams not only his thinking, but his life itself. The flashes of insight by *Johannes Climacus*, *Anti-Climacus*, *Víctor Eremita*, *Constantin Constantius*, *Johannes de Silentio*, among others, about the category of singularity, represent forms and points of view to

demystify the multitude, and, in addition, awaken and advocate each being (individual) as he or she is.

Kierkegaard was persuaded that Christianity is not a doctrine to be taught, but the relationship of the individual with God. This is the reason why is the individual so important for him. As Kierkegaard wrote in *The Moment*: "This is indeed a curious book, the New Testament; it proves to be right after all, because this individual, these individuals - yes, those were the Christians" [4, vol. XXIII, 120].

2. Terminology and semantics of the individual concept in general

The concept of 'individual' in Kierkegaard is presented in a complex way [1]. This complexity already makes its study and explanation arduous. And the first thing that can be done in that regard is to start with a presentation as a terminological and semantic analysis.

To that end we will try to synthesize all the problems in the following points: 1) analysis of the expressions used by Kierkegaard to refer to the concept of the individual, 2) the problem of translation and meaning of den Enkelte, 3) the problem of what it is and how to understand the relationship of said Kierkegaardian expression (den Enkelte) with that of the individual and, consequently, how this concept is articulated in its entirety.

2.1. Analysis of the statements

The diversity of terms or expressions that Kierkegaard uses to refer in his journals to the individual are the following:

- 1) *det enkelte Individ* [6, 7]: the single individual, concrete, isolated, alone, separated;
- 2) *Individet* [6, vol. II A, p. 5; vol. IIIA, p. 25; vol. XI 1A, p. 319; 7, vol. 1, p. 38, 783; 7, vol. 4, p. 4631]: the individual;
- 3) *det enkelte Menneske* [6, vol. II A, p. 516; vol. 2, p. 1982]: the single human being, concrete...;
- 4) *nogle enkelte Mennesker* [6, vol. XI A, 498; 7, vol. 6, p. 6430]: some single human beings...;
- 5) *den enkelte Person* [6, vol. X 2A, p. 480; 7, vol. 2, 2023]: the single person...;
- 6) *individuum/ατομον* (we put the Greek term as it appears in his text, without the gentle spirit and accent): taken from Latin and Greek respectively;
- 7) *enkelte eminente Individer/eminente Individer* [6, vol. XI A, 93; 7, vol. 6., p. 6335]: single eminent individual.../eminent individuals...;
- 8) *Væsener* [6, vol. XI 2A, 127]: individuals, creatures;
- 9) *individualitet* [6, vol. IA, p. 307; vol. II A, 474; vol. VIII 1A, p. 462; vol. XII 2A, p. 259; 7, vol. 7, 4070; vol. 2, 1981, 2003, p 2083]: individuality;
- 10) *Mennesket* [6, vol. XI 2A, p. 201; 7, vol. 2, p. 1818]: man, person, human being, individual;

- 11) *et enkelt Menneske* [6, vol. IX A, p. 63; vol. X 2A, p. 546; vol. XI 1A, p. 296; 7, vol. 1, p. 987; vol. 3, p. 2938, 4922]: a single individual...;
- 12) *den En* [6, vol. X 4A, p. 405; 7, vol. 3, p. 2965]: the/this someone/individual;
- 13) *Exemplaret* [6, vol. XI 4A, p. 42; vol. XI 1A, p. 319; 7, vol. 2, p. 2048, 2061]: copy, specimen;
- 14) *det enkelte Exemplar* [6, vol. XI 2A, p. 299]: the single copy, the single specimen...;
- 15) *en Enkelt* [6, vol. VIII 1A, p. 551; vol. IX A, p. 422; vol. X 3A, p. 607; vol. XI 1A, p. 325; 7, vol. 4, p. 4128, 4190]: a single individual...;
- 16) *hver Enkelt* [6, vol. X 3A, p. 52, 656]: every single individual..., each one;
- 17) *en saadan Enkelt* [6, vol. X 3A, p. 497; vol. X 5A, p. 122; 7, vol. 3, p. 2730]: such a singular individual, ...;
- 18) *nogle Enkelte* [6, vol. XI 1A, p. 107; 7, vol. 3, p. 2903]: some single individuals...;
- 19) *denne Enkelte* [6, vol. XI 1A, p. 227; 7, vol. 3, p. 2970]: this single individual...;
- 20) *hiin Enkelte* [6, vol. VIII 1A, p. 430]: that singular, that singular individual ...;
- 21) *den Enkelte* [6, vol. VII 1A, p. 20; vol. X 4A, p. 369; vol. XI 1A, p. 81; 7, vol. 4, p. 4110; vol. 2, p. 1906, 2050]: the single individual...;
- 22) *den Extraordinarie* [6, vol. VII 1A, p. 221; vol. X 5A, p. 121; 7, vol. 2, p. 2046]: the extraordinary, the extraordinary individual;
- 23) *Menigmand/den menig Mand/den simple Mand* [6, vol. II A, p. 223; vol. IX A, p. 340; vol. XI 1A, p. 234; vol. XI 2A, p. 434; 7, vol. 1, p. 1016; vol. 2, p. 1940, 1976; vol. 3, p. 2971]: the common man, the ordinary man, the simple man.

As we can see, the key term (which is also repeated in many cases) is that of 'Enkelt, Enkelte'. Therefore, it is justified that we devote more attention to it.

2.2. The problem of *kierkegaardian den Enkelte translation and meaning*

First of all, the Danish expression *den Enkelte* is not easy to translate, and in fact several versions have been proposed depending on the language and the researcher (it has been translated into Spanish as 'el singular' (Spanish word for the individual), 'el individuo singular' (Spanish word for the singular individual), or even as the 'ente' (Spanish word for entity), by the dreadful and incomplete edition in Spanish of the Kierkegaard diaries by María Angélica Bosco [8]; to French as 'l'unique' by N. Viallaneix [9]; to Italian as 'il Singolo' by C. Fabro [10]. The aforementioned expression is the nominal form of the Danish adjective *enkelt*, which means single, singular, loose, isolated, individual [11]. In this way, translated literally, it would mean the lonely, the singular, the loose, the isolated, the individual. Although it is impossible to have an exact translation that includes all the nuances of the Danish term (in addition to those that characterise it in Kierkegaard), we personally consider that the most accurate is 'the single individual' (in Spanish it would be that of 'el individuo singular'; fortunately,

both the Iberoamerican University of Mexico and Trotta Editorial in Madrid are publishing a new edition and translation of Kierkegaard's Journals into Spanish from Danish language of Kierkegaard's Writings, Czech translation: *Z denníků a papírů* transl. Marie Mikulova Thulstrup). It would also be the most honest option to pick it up as is without translating it; of course, with the proviso of knowing its general meaning and not only the one attributed to it by Kierkegaard. Or one could accompany the translation with the corresponding Danish term.

The terminology is important; one has to know it and be rigorous in its use. But this will depend on the meaning of the terms, that is, the semantics. Both aspects are involved. With regard to the expression *den Enkelte*, it is clear that the problem of its translation is that of its meaning; that is, the question of what Kierkegaard means by that expression, what Kierkegaard's conception is. In short, the problem of the 'concept'.

One should also be aware that the meaning of a term may vary in the texts of an author, or that he does not always use it rigorously. Therefore, it is also appropriate to take into account the contexts in which the term appears. This aspect is often essential to determine the exact meaning of a text. In the case of *den Enkelte* in Kierkegaard, we believe we can affirm that its meaning, although it may vary in different contexts of his work, and even his life, substantially and centrally is the same. Let's say that, as a category, Kierkegaard was quite clear about the value and scope of *den Enkelte*, although he was not always fully aware of it.

2.3. The problem of relationship between the kierkegaardian den Enkelte and individual concept

However, the truly important issue arises in relation to the concept of the individual in general. That is, what is the relationship - and how to understand it - between the concept of *den Enkelte* and that of the individual in Kierkegaard, as well as how they are distinguished (if one can do so).

In fact, one cannot completely identify both concepts. Although it is also true that they are similar in part. Expressing it in other words: every *den Enkelte* is necessarily an individual, but not every individual is imperatively *den Enkelte*. To be *den Enkelte* is to be 'more' than just an individual. But not something completely different. The '*den Enkelte*' arises, so to speak, from the very entrails of individuality, above and from it, but not in spite of or outside it. It is a virtuality that is inscribed in the same human individual, but which manifests itself specifically, in this or that as such. *Den Enkelte* opposes what is not in an individual way an individuality: the copy or specimen (*Exemplaret*), the mass or crowd (*Mængden*), humankind (*Slægten*) as such; that is, to everything that destroys or annuls individuality (*Enkeltheden*). Of course, including the power of modern technologies in our modern society [12].

Axiologically considered, *den Enkelte* has a value in itself, absolute [13]; it's something completely personal. That is why we can also affirm that to be *den Enkelte* is to be a 'person'. In this sense, the singular individual is one who is

positive and entirely a personal being, with a dignity that places him above any other worldly reality. In short, the single individual is to be oneself, unique and different from all the others, without this meaning one is no longer a human being, but just to be so in its maximum and optimal expression.

Therefore, the concept of *den Enkelte* must be understood within the concept of 'individual' (in the sense of human individual). The difference is intensity, degree, existence, value. Actually, talking about *den Enkelte* means talking about each one in particular, but not everyone in general. As a matter of fact, the human individual escapes all conception and his existence all comprehension, since the thought goes behind my existence or is a regression in Kierkegaardian terms.

If this is so, properly speaking, one cannot speak of a knowledge about humans; only of a knowledge of myself (remember the Socratic maxim); or of this or that concrete human being of flesh and blood through his or her biography. Because for him what defines and characterizes the *den Enkelte* is its existence. It is not a 'logical', philosophical question but a vital and existential one, whose horizon transcends us and whose meaning transcends us. We ourselves as such are involved in it to the point that our life goes to it.

In this sense, what it means to be a 'single individual' is something that each of us will have to discover. Individuality, 'my' individuality, that of each one is a journey of revelation in 'solitary' towards what makes us such, constitutes and gives meaning to our existence. Well, Kierkegaard made such a journey. Upon discovering himself he also discovered his uniqueness and vice versa. That is why we can affirm that '*den Enkelte*' was not merely an idea, a category and nothing more, but rather an existential revelation that happened in his life [14].

Finally, relationship between individuals means to take into account society, importance of civic virtues, dialogue and tolerance. Therefore, it is required a democracy [15, 16].

We would like to mention in this context ideas of Peter Šajda. His paper *Four Models of Social Involvement in Kierkegaard's The Single Individual* "identifies four models of social involvement in Kierkegaard's treatise *The Single Individual*. These models are embodied in four figures discussed by Kierkegaard: the professional leader of the crowd, the truth-witness, the politician who loves being a human being and loves humankind, and Kierkegaard himself as an author. The paper explores the motives, stances, activities and goals of these figures. It analyses their attitudes to the single individual and the crowd, as well as to politics." [17]

3. Conclusions

In truth - returning to the beginning of the argument - it is not that the concept of '*den Enkelte*' is within that of the 'individual', but that it is the same concept, but enriched and elevated to its maximum power.

In any case, it must also be said that, if it is a matter of intensity, some kind of scale must be admitted within the same concept; that is, intrinsic differences. Thus, as suggested above, the concept of the 'individual' and the same term '*den Enkelte*' can acquire different nuances within the Kierkegaard's work. In other words, we defend the idea of a teleological consideration of man [18].

Indeed, we must talk about the existence of an analogy within the concept. Paraphrasing Aristotle, it can be said that 'the individual is said in several ways'. And those ways have a relationship of similarity, and partly of greater or lesser dissimilarity, with the individual archetype that is the single individual. More clearly, it is possible to make a consideration of the concept of '*den Enkelte*' in itself and with respect to that of the 'individual', his identity and conscience [19]. All of which leads us to the need to establish a typology, that is, a classification that accounts for that complexity; and, secondly, a deepening and explanation of the meaning of '*den Enkelte*' considered in itself.

In our view, within the concept of the 'individual' in the Kierkegaard Diaries, one would have to distinguish between: a) *Exemplaret*; b) *den Enkelte*. The first of them, the copy, is the lowest type of individual; and its existence is worthless: it is one who has lost or does not have an individuality, who does not really reach the human condition and behaves like an animal. The second, on the other hand, is fully an individuality whose existence realises the ideal of the human condition: it is that singularity conscious of itself and of the value that its existence possesses. We must make a choice and we have to make our decision [20, 21], because every time is our time.

Kierkegaard's concept of individual must be understood from a Christian context and culture. These implications must be treated widely and deeply [22]. However, it has also philosophical, sociological and political assumptions very important for us nowadays [23].

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