Kierkegaard as an Educational Thinker: Communication Through and Across Ways of Being[1]

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Attempts to build bridges between Kierkegaard and current educational debates or dilemmas are in danger of appearing facile to friends of Kierkegaard, and opportunistic or irrelevant to each opposing side in educational controversies. In hope of reducing such extravagant risks, this essay explores some aspects of Kierkegaard on communication and on ways of being, i.e. his spheres or stages of existence. Communication through ways of being seems relatively straightforward. Communication across ways of being can seem either absurdly complicated or (if aiming at unravelling such complications) wonderfully illuminating. This Kierkegaard could become a creatively awkward, Socratic partner in educational attempts to critique and deepen current accounts of language and communication, narrative and accountability, reason and justification, personal and social development, emotional intelligence and (of course) moral and religious education (with or without 'spiritual' development) as well as political or citizenship education. Wittgenstein found in Kierkegaard one lifelong Socratic conversation partner. If other educators can do this in their own ways, Kierkegaard can still breathe more lively passion into the cold embers of educational discourses.

INTRODUCTION

Through many areas of contemporary education, there is an apparent 'passion' for spelling out everything, for figuring everything into an omnivorous accountability. Admirable aspirations for clarity, openness, access and responsibility somehow turn, all too easily, into grotesque parodies of these educational virtues. We are surrounded by well-intentioned ambitions for us to learn and teach how to mind our minds, to develop meta-cognitive management or ownership of our own learning of skills, language, abilities, interpretations, attitudes, beliefs,

emotions and so on. Moreover, all this is supposed to happen with or without the parental guidance of the state and its semi-independent agencies, all working more or less consciously, more or less happily and openly, with the pressures of global capitalism and its markets. Responsibility for our own mental and emotional, as well as social and cultural, existence somehow sways on the brink of sliding into a totally economic accountability which needs to comfort itself with the rhetoric and icons (corporate logos) of consumerist choice in the supermarkets of culture. For an unusual analysis of, and response to, this situation, drawing on a deep understanding of European cultural traditions, see Boyle (1998).

In this situation, educational thinkers are more than ever torn between the problems of how best to conserve and retrieve the riches of the past as living traditions ('how to invest most shrewdly in cultural capital') and how best to critique and transform or go beyond these traditions in more multicultural approaches, or in less historically encumbered approaches ('how to asset-strip and re-invest most painlessly and efficiently'). Kierkegaard saw himself in a situation where Christian and other traditions (e.g. Socratic enquiry) were either freezing over or were being corruptly retrieved. Close to the heart of his strategic response to this intolerable ('absurd') situation, was his development of different voices, or roles or identities, in his own authorship. If Kierkegaard's audiences can recognise something of themselves in him with his different voices, they may also recognise something of him (with his voices) in themselves and in one another. Such interpretive exchange both calls for, and generates, lively, painful, empathic, playful, pedagogic imagination, in which a love of learning may metamorphose into a learning of love. At least in part, Kierkegaard learned something of such possibilities from Hegel's 'ethics of recognition', now brilliantly retrieved, in spite of distortions in earlier Hegel interpretation, by Robert R. Williams (1997). Implicitly, at least in Kierkegaard's 'pseudonymous' writings, and more explicitly in Hegel, the interpretive exchanges involved in the ethics of reciprocal recognition can be seen or heard as reverberations of their respective Christological and Trinitarian convictions. As fellow Lutherans, their apprenticeship in Christianity was exercised with internal Lutheran controversies over how to interpret the *communicatio idiomatum* (that is, the communication, sharing or exchange of the divine and the human in Christ, in harmony with the reciprocities constituting the triune life of God—see Pannenberg, 1968). For Hegel, this works out into an ethics of recognition for which 'Love is the consciousness of my unity with another so that I am not isolated by myself, but gain my self-consciousness only in the renunciation of my independence, and by knowing myself in relation and union with another' (*Philosophy of Right*, section 158, addition, used as an epigraph by Williams, 1997, p. v).

For Kierkegaard, Hegel, in an impatient grasping for an intellectual totality, did not appreciate the full potential of communication as

interpretive exchange and so, the corruption of the best being the worst, became the target of Kierkegaard's playfully bitter ironic critique. In this critique, Kierkegaard and his readers have to get their interpretive exchanges moving in the right direction if they, and we, are able to do better than Hegel. The wider scope for irony here includes the possibility that we, Kierkegaard's readers, will unwittingly re-enact Hegel in our attempts to appropriate or apply, place or dismiss, Kierkegaard himself, so that the discomforted teacher (Hegel) is, after all, superimposed on his unruly pupil. If we are to avoid giving either Hegel or Kierkegaard the last laugh, we had better proceed with some care, so as to appreciate the possibilities for more reciprocal hilarity, *hilaritas* being an essential element of the *convivium* or, to go Greek, symposium. If we have, so far, only been able to hear in Kierkegaard's voices the resounding of our own discordant, cacophonous voices, the notion of 'interpretive exchange' may still serve as a promissory place-holder for more polyphonic, perhaps even symphonic, possibilities of listening and reading. At the very least, we may reasonably hope that better interaction with Kierkegaard will assist us and others in appreciating and celebrating the many-layered richness of language and communication.

Kierkegaard's understanding of communication, especially as shown in his own practice of indirect communication, offers helpful signposts for exploring his work and influence on others, including Wittgenstein. Indirect communication is also a provocative and promising theme to trace across areas of educational controversy. Finally, it is also a way of illuminating implicit or submerged types of theology at work in educational discourses. This is too much to try to justify adequately in a short paper. However, I can signal a direction in which to travel and suggest some confusions worth avoiding.[2]

To try to reduce injustices regularly inflicted on Kierkegaard, we need to fight our ways through a jungle of misleading stereotypes, some of which are older ones and others of which are relatively recent. This is, however, a struggle which I believe to be deeply worthwhile, in spite of those who claim that Kierkegaard is too difficult, too dangerous or too damaged to be trusted or admired as an educator. If Rousseau's *Emile*, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Geist* and Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* are archetypes for earlier or later versions of the *Bildungsroman*, i.e. the novel of educational development and self-formation, then so are Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings, such as *Either-Or*, *Fear and Trembling* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. For Kierkegaard, education as *Bildung* is development in indirect communication, i.e. in the communication of capacities. In the context of this essay, such capacities appear most centrally as capacities for interpretive exchange.

Amongst older unfair stereotypes are Kierkegaard as Anti-Reason; as fideist, turning the Lutheran pre-occupation *with* faith into faith *in* faith; as the gloomy Dane (whose name in old Danish means 'Churchyard'); as the romanticiser of his own masochistic suffering; as the ultra antisocial individualist; and as the father of existentialism preaching that we must

choose to choose everything, as if to become our own fathers. Amongst the more recent unfair stereotypes are Kierkegaard merely as a premonition of deconstructive non-communication, as the closet Hegelian suffering from a bad dose of anxiety over Hegel's influence on him, as the pioneer of the reduction of religion to psychobabble, whether analytic or therapeutic, and as a crypto-recatholiciser of the Lutheran reformation. Against these stereotypes, a closer reading of Kierkegaard on communication provides correctives.

COMMUNICATION

While Romantic and Existentialist readings of Kierkegaard have conspired to project the image of the lonely genius, his lineage is illuminating and belongs to his message. Kierkegaard is the first major writer to explore communication in both breadth and depth. Hegel, Feuerbach or Marx might have done so, but did not. Kierkegaard did, at least in part because of his passionate concern with Socrates as represented by Plato, with Jesus as represented by *New Testament* sources, with the brilliant rhetorical theology of Augustine and Luther (and possibly Pascal), with the eighteenth-century German thinkers Hamann and Herder and their rediscovery of language and consequent critique of Kant, and with Hegel's more robust sensibility for spirit or mind, i.e. *Geist*, with its mediating role in passion, recognition and renewal. Communication, broadly and deeply understood, is arguably a main theme, if not 'the theme' (Peters, 1999, p. 128, n. 40), of all Kierkegaard's writings, both his pseudonymous works and those published in his own name.

   Key terms for 'communication' themselves resonate with energy in the force field of Kierkegaard's writing, an energy contrasting with their inertness in the banalities of some recent communication theory and skills-language. 'Communication' is, admittedly, a Latin-English word, not a Germanic-Danish word. However, it is likely that Kierkegaard, with a classical schooling, was well aware of the Latin significance and associations of *communicare*, etc. This Latin verb means to share, impart or make common. It is related to words such as 'community', 'communion', 'common', 'meaning', 'munificent' and *Gemeinschaft*. That is, the significant root is *mun*, as in the Latin *munus*, being concerned with gifts or duties offered in public spheres. These gifts or duties could include gladiatorial combat, other kinds of public show or tribute and rites to honour the dead. Similarly, there was nothing essentially private or mentalistic about 'communication'. Even more significantly for Kierkegaard, 'In classical rhetorical theory, *communicatio* was also a technical term for a stylistic device in which an orator assumes the hypothetical voice of the adversary or audience; *communicatio* was less authentic dialogue than the simulation of dialogue by a single speaker' (Peters, 1999, p. 7 and n. 8). Here communication involves an attempt to speak on behalf of others.

This is close to Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms and not too distant from Plato's dialogues. For Kierkegaard, his pseudonymous authors may sometimes express or explore views which Kierkegaard attributes to his readers, or his misreaders, or some previous version of himself, as well as perhaps sometimes his own current view or approach. In the latter case, the pseudonym can function as a distancing device, either to encourage readers to take responsibility for their reading and response, or in order to suggest the radical incompetence of all human authorship, authority and responsibility in the light of divine communication in the Word (the creative *Logos*) become suffering, dying, human flesh on behalf of others (*John* 1:1ff.). This, the most paradoxical of all possible communications, can be seen as the prototype for all appropriate interpretive exchanges and for the ethics of recognition and reconciliation which flows through this way of being and across all others.

Kierkegaard's own word for communication is *Meddelelse*. This is the Danish cognate for the German word *Mitteilung*. The associations here with being in the middle or being between can connect with notions of communication as exchange, sharing, reciprocity or dialogue. However, the word can also connect with notions of language as mediating thoughts, intentions, and so on, that is, notions of language as a means or medium, one of the media. Amongst its most powerful recent connections for Kierkegaard were those with Hegel's key terms for mediation or reconciliation, that is, *Vermittlung* and *Vermitteln* (Inwood, 1992).

Consequently, whatever Kierkegaard's own intentions in using the phrases 'direct communication' and 'indirect communication', for many of his readers, as he was obviously well aware, the Danish phrase for direct communication was analogous to the Hegelian expression, 'immediate, that is, unmediated, communication', while the Danish phrase 'indirect communication' was analogous to the Hegelian expression, 'mediated communication'. For Hegelians, one could say, relatively unmediated communication is more product than process, relatively context-free and disembedded, while relatively mediated communication is more process than product, relatively context-bound and embedded. Accordingly, Hegelian development or *Bildung* requires that we tack, this way and that, between these complementary contrasts, in order to progress.

These are grounds for seeing Hegel's own work in general as situated across a borderland between, on the one side, earlier mentalistic and Cartesian dualism between mind and body, for which the ideal model of communication should or could be ghostly telepathic exchanges between two disembodied minds and, on the other side of Hegel's borderlands, subsequent, more robustly holistic, approaches to mind and body, including the work and influence of Feuerbach, Marx and Darwin. However, the above considerations about direct and indirect communication, in the context of Hegelian terminology, suggest that, in these respects at least, Hegel's influence pointed away from a mentalistic or dualistic approach to communication.

Kierkegaard's ironic and humorous, as well as bitter, critique of Hegel, far from implying consistent rejection of his influence, sometimes detracts from appreciation of the extent of Kierkegaard's indebtedness to Hegel, thus illustrating Harold Bloom's (1973) thesis in *The Anxiety of Influence*. Later in this paper I will be arguing directly from Kierkegaard that, in respect of direct and indirect communication at least, he continues in the same anti-dualistic direction. If this can be confirmed, then Wittgenstein's criticism of a private, mentalistic version of direct and indirect communication (see, for example, Wittgenstein, 1967, 426) should be read as aimed, not at Kierkegaard himself, but at a Cartesian misreading of Kierkegaard which is contrary to the whole direction of Kierkegaard's influence on Wittgenstein and Wittgenstein's admiration for Kierkegaard.

In Kierkegaard's mind, there is a pattern of three analogous oppositions, that is, Socrates versus Plato, as the latter is misrepresented in textbooks of Platonic metaphysics (Szlezak, 1993), Kierkegaard himself versus Hegel, and Jesus versus Christendom. On the side of the angels, Kierkegaard wants to be a student of, or witness for, Socrates and Jesus. On the side of the powers of darkness, there is a tendency to assimilate Platonism and Hegelianism and Christendom, with reference to their political as well as intellectual and other dimensions. There is an irony to this which Kierkegaard should have been capable of appreciating. By far the most powerful portraits of Socrates, as the ironic teacher of irony, are those given us by Plato. By far the most powerful sketches of Jesus, as the critic of religious and Christian betrayals of humanity, are given by *New Testament* writings which are the product of processes in the first-century Christian communities and preserved by subsequent forms of Christian community. In the case of Kierkegaard himself, the same symmetry would require Kierkegaard, the enemy of Hegel, to be dependent on Hegel and his followers. At some level, Kierkegaard was perhaps aware of his dependence on Hegel, in the sense that we all depend on our enemies insofar as we let our identity be shaped by this opposition. This insight is itself highly Hegelian and helps to show, at some level of understanding, one possible sense of praying for one's debtors and enemies. The contest between Kierkegaard and Hegel, which continues today through their partisans, should also be seen as a quarrel between two Lutheran interpretations of Lutheran tradition, and as a quarrel which echoes, in Kierkegaard's case, something of the ambivalent relations between fathers and sons, or parents and children, not to mention Abraham and Isaac, as portrayed by Kierkegaard in his controversial book *Fear and Trembling*.

We should not let these post-Freudian resonances obscure what Kierkegaard claimed to hold against Hegel most of all. It is not just that Hegel is allegedly a humourless and un-ironic metaphysician, but that he loses himself and his followers in his system, that the system substitutes itself for human life and Christian life, that Hegel claims the system to be as complete and closed as the best possible circle, that this system is an apotheosis of Christendom's betrayal of Christ and used as an

ideological self-justification by the complacent time-servers and self-servers of the established national church and of established institutions of formal education. Kierkegaard's campaign against Hegel is, in summary, a prophetic 'no' to intellectual and educational idolatry. Such idolatry is typified by focusing on the product of communication, what is to be communicated, so as to obscure, distort and reduce the processes of communication, how communication belongs within the *how* of human life and the *meta-how* of a genuine, live spiritual tradition, with its distinctive criteria for making sense and for self-critique, in this case Christianity.

How far Kierkegaard may be fair or unfair to Hegel is beyond the scope of the present discussion. But his criticism of Hegel's closed system applies to attempts at systematic closure after Hegel, whether in the name of the unity of science, or of the end of pre-liberal history, or the triumph of feel-good culture. The language of recent educational planning and management frequently exemplifies similar assumptions about closure of meaning. Many current versions of accountability suggest such closure. The accountable teacher, or super-teacher, is supposed to join in the game of pretending that set targets, policies and intended learning outcomes all have a fixed, closed-off meaning of their own. Otherwise, much comparison and measurement would become even more blatantly questionable and emptily ritualistic. Accountable lecturers must be able to give precise accounts of how they spend every pound of public money. Audit trails of documentation provide defensive positions, but also bases for aggressive advances in the competition for resources, and so for survival. Thus schools, university departments and other educational structures can be reduced to a number in an overall rank-ordering. To promote fitness for survival, under the aegis of a closed-off ideology of social Darwinism, everyone needs both to audit everyone else and to audit themselves. In these auditing processes, the audited and the auditors become increasingly deaf to other voices and meanings, deafened by the monotonous incantation of superstitiously supposed closure of meaning in the interests of quantification and measurement. Such closure of meaning forms the nightmare circle of an amphitheatre in which all are supposed to be gladiators against all, before falling on their own swords. By contrast, Kierkegaardian communication, with its opening of levels and sites of meaning towards one another in creative and liberating ways, would be expressed in a spirit of collegial supportiveness and exuberantly convivial constructiveness. Here, the really or supposedly stronger could enrich the supposedly or really weaker, in freely reciprocating endowment.

Kierkegaard's approach to communication is informed by Plato's dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, a rich and much discussed work. In it, Plato's Socrates comes forward as a very early theorist of communication and its failures (Peters, 1999, p. 51). Towards the end of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates sums up his case against the relatively new communication skills or technology of writing. His worries about the use of writing are that it diminishes memory or oral tradition, lacks the interaction of live

dialogue, disseminates its seeds at random and makes ghosts out of live, embodied speakers and listeners. Such worries come close to Kierkegaard's concerns about direct communication with its attempted closures of meaning.

Similar worries have been provoked by the coming of printing, television and computing, each new technology of communication being experienced as disruptive of existing familiar and trusted ways of communication. However, even conversational language is not free of such problems. By contrast with the *Phaedrus*, the *New Testament* writings appear not to register as a conflict the differences between communication as face-to-face interpersonal dialogue and communication as wider public dissemination. See, for example, the parable of the Sower, a parable about parables. Rather, these two models of communication seem already, by about 100 AD, to be experienced by certain circles as complementary and potentially mutually enriching (compare Peters, 1999).

Why then does Plato ironically warn his readers to be mistrustful of writing such as his? Can it be to communicate that what matters as much as, or even more than, *what* Plato's Socrates or Plato's other pseudonyms say is *how* they say it, and *how* his readers read it and discuss it? Certainly the use of irony by Socrates and Plato, to communicate the opposite of what would normally be understood by what they say, is not just a matter of mere play or joking, but a provocation and invitation to join them in the activities and processes of thinking, or in becoming more capable communicators of what it is like to desire and seek truth, goodness and understanding. Thus Kierkegaard's master's thesis on *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates* marks an important stage in Kierkegaard's developing awareness of the dimension of language commonly associated with Wittgenstein's later philosophical work, and with Ryle, Austin, Grice and Searle, that is, the performative, pragmatic aspects of our linguistic practices, but also of Kierkegaard's awareness and appreciation of how our language and other communication skills, abilities, capabilities and so on fit, or fail to fit, together with the rest of how we try to make sense of our existence and how we try to live.

INDIRECT COMMUNICATION

The main sources for Kierkegaard's own understanding of indirect and direct communication are to be found in his posthumously published *Journals and Papers* (1967, Vol. 1, pp. 252–319, sections 617–681 and pp. 518–521, editorial notes), in the pseudonymous *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* attributed to Johannes Climacus—John the Ladder-Climber, derived from an Eastern Orthodox theologian and saint (1992, part 2, section 2, ch. 2, etc.), and in *Practice (or Training) in Christianity* (1991, pp. 123–144).

By 'indirect communication' Kierkegaard means communication of a capacity or capacities, an ability or abilities, a skill or skills, that is,

communication of *how* to do or become. Non-verbal as well as verbal communication abilities can make contributions, as can writing and reading. By contrast, for Kierkegaard 'direct communication' refers to communication of information, that is, of knowledge or belief that such and such is *what* is the case. The key word for indicating indirect communication is 'How', while the key word for indicating direct communication is 'What'.

Here it is appropriate to recall the younger Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus* and elsewhere, stressing the difference between what can be *said*, in propositional language, and the *unsayable*, which shows itself in the *how* of aesthetic and ethical activity and attitudes. The older Wittgenstein, in the *Philosophical Investigations* and elsewhere, has both criticised and developed his earlier understanding of Kierkegaard so as to stress the importance of human practices, which give words their meaning in use and show whether or not we, as individuals, know how to go on. What Kierkegaard means by indirect communication is close to what the later Wittgenstein deals with in terms of the grammar of language. From this perspective, Kierkegaard's direct communication would be an illusion created by abstraction.

Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* (1949) aims to dismantle (in a proto-deconstruction) the dualistic mythology of the mind as a ghost in a machine, by relying heavily on differentiating between *knowledge that* and *knowledge how to*, that is, between propositional knowledge and procedural knowledge, skills, abilities and so on. It is not clear how far Ryle was influenced directly and/or indirectly by Wittgenstein, but he was certainly influenced by Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which he reviewed with appreciation (*Mind* 38, 1929, in Murray, 1978, pp. 53–64). Heidegger's *Being and Time* is influenced both explicitly and tacitly by certain aspects of Kierkegaard. Of course, Heidegger explicitly and Kierkegaard less explicitly (see Roberts, 1998) are also influenced by Aristotle's insights into practical understanding or practical wisdom, that is, *phronēsis*. The status we should attribute to *phronēsis* and to procedural knowledge, as to indirect communication, remains open to question in current controversies, where it becomes tangled with stereotypes of socio-economic class and gender.

Now, if *direct* communication is what we offer or receive as the *product* of communication, then *indirect* communication is constituted by the *process* or *processes* of communication. As already mentioned with reference to Hegel, distinctions between product and process are often context-sensitive and relative to circumstances. This raises the question whether Kierkegaard understood direct and indirect communication as a simple dichotomy or as the poles of a gradual continuum. Kierkegaard stresses that indirect communication is self-involving or a matter of 'inwardness', in his own terminology, that is, a matter of personal assimilation and individual responsibility. However, we can be more or less self-involved in *how* we communicate an ability, both in the sense of expressing it, in the sense of sharing it, and in the sense of

helping others to develop it. Similarly we can be more or less self-involved in or with *what* we communicate.

Moreover, there are learned capacities and skills involved in communicating mere information of minimal importance or in communicating claims about whatever we may wish. When we are learning these capacities, the task often involves much self-conscious effort. However, if the skills or abilities are well learned and assimilated, they become part of our unselfconscious fluency. When Kierkegaard (1968) and his pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus, write of truth as subjectivity, what is intended is that we should focus on the reliability with which we may harmonise, integrate and own our linguistic, cognitive and other capacities and dispositions, both self-conscious and unselfconscious, together with the reliability of our intentions. Here is a point of contact with current pedagogical approaches which stress the need for us as learners to become more responsible for our own learning, to develop ownership of what and how we learn, and to develop as our second nature the kinds of meta-cognitive approach which are modelled by good teaching, remodelled by learners in overt response and then internalised by learners. See, for example, the importance given, in the teaching of writing skills, to drafting and redrafting, in the hope that this will be internalised into the way each student reviews and revises, not just their own writing and speaking, but their own thinking, with or without overt script or conversation. This can be seen as a development of Vygotsky's approach to learning (see Bogdan, 2000).

Truth can be understood as the reliable product of reliable processes which are firstly inter-subjective and then intra-subjective, as we learn how to review and revise our beliefs, desires, projects and so on, so as to correct them and ourselves according to the recognised criteria, grammar, rules or standards. Moreover, the same processes mean that, over the longer term, we can also review and, as necessary, revise our criteria and standards. Such are some of the ways in which subsequent generations seem to be catching up with Kierkegaard's voice as Johannes Climacus and his notorious claim that 'truth is subjectivity'. What comes to us reliably, as a standard or reminder of reliability itself, needs to be recognised and responded to reliably by us, who are thus called and drawn into reliability. The holy otherness of 'truth', in platonised currents of epistemology, approximates to ideal reliability.

Previous paragraphs tend to confirm that there can be many degrees of directness or indirectness in Kierkegaard's understanding and practice of communication. This suggests that Kierkegaard's explicit accounts of communication can be clarified as follows. Communication is more *indirect* where, with reference to self and others, the relevant abilities are less equally shared and more self-conscious. It follows that *indirect* communication will be more needed by parents communicating with children and by teachers, trainers and educators communicating with learners, or wherever else there may be similar contrasts of ability. Thus indirect communication can often only be pursued by putting

oneself in question with and on behalf of others, beginning again where learners are.

This more differentiated account of direct and indirect communication matches well with Kierkegaard's own differentiated account of 'outwardness' and 'inwardness'. Kierkegaard's use of this latter pair of terms is not dominated by the mentalistic dualism of outward public body and inward private mind, attributed to Descartes and to certain versions of Platonism, and denounced as the Cartesian 'ghost in the machine' by Ryle (1949) and, in their own ways, by many others, including Wittgenstein and Dewey. Rather, for Kierkegaard, more outwardness normally means less personal involvement, assimilation and responsibility, while inwardness means more self-involvement, assimilation and responsibility. Consequently, Kierkegaard's frequently strong stress on inwardness does not necessarily imply philosophical solipsism, political individualism or pietistic narcissism.

The greater the difference between the capacities or abilities of those involved in communication, the greater the need for more or better *indirect* communication. For while *indirect* communication may show equal respect, care or love for those who presently appear to have lesser levels or different kinds of capacity, the aim is to help others to develop, or at least to provide situations in which others can better try to develop for themselves, the capacities they need. As Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus writes, 'The very maximum of what one human being can do for another in relation to that wherein each man has to do solely with himself, is to inspire him with concern and unrest' (Kierkegaard, 1968, p. 346). Against some gurus of counselling as empathy, Johannes Climacus warns us to respect the other person's privacy, otherness, mystery, in our attempts to understand. Socrates was one who took on the risks of putting himself in question by inspiring others 'with concern and unrest'.

It is as if the indirect communicator, to quote again from the same source, tries 'to say something to a passer-by in passing, without standing still and without delaying the other, without attempting to persuade him to go the same way, but giving him instead an impulse to go precisely his own way' (Kierkegaard, 1968, p. 247). This does not sound like the usual picture of a classroom, seminar or tutorial. It seems more like the kind of person-centred counselling which Carl Rogers advocated and practised, though with more sensitivity to the other's need for privacy or secrecy (not just the counsellor's need for this), and more sensitivity to existential and spiritual dialectics, as we seek to communicate across different ways of being. However, the idea that each of us may need to develop our own sense of responsibility, for how we relate to our own and other ways of being, does capture at least part of Rogers' project and is sufficiently Kierkegaardian to support Rogers' claim to have learned something from what he called 'existentialism'. It also fits in with the Kantian theme of taking responsibility for our beliefs, projects and experiences. Of course, Rogers and others would have advice to offer about risks of transference and counter-transference

involved in the ethics of reciprocal recognition and interpretive exchange, risks inescapable in developing some forms of indirect communication.

KIERKEGAARD'S SPHERES, STAGES OR WAYS OF BEING[3]

To try to understand Kierkegaard's rationale for indirect communication better, we need to consider, all too briefly, his existential dialectics involving differentiated stages of existence or spheres of life, and the way these dialectics express his understanding of Christian theology. These matters distinguish him from Rogerian person-centred educators. I offer a simplified account of Kierkegaard's most influential version of these ways of being, starting with aesthetic existence, then considering ethical existence, then religiousness type A and finally religiousness type B.

Education, training and research belong to Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage, insofar as this is the sphere most dominated by differentiation in capacities between individuals, and insofar as education, training and research are dominated by interest in differentiation according to inherited capacities and/or arbitrary, contingent factors, whether these are environmental or attributable to nature and nurture. See, for example, the following passage:

> You are always hovering above yourself, but the higher ether, the more refined sublimate into which you are vaporized, is the nothing of despair, and you see below you a multitude of areas of learning, insight, study, observation which for you, though, have no reality but which you quite randomly exploit and combine so as to adorn as tastefully as possible the palace of mental profusion in which you occasionally reside. (Kierkegaard *Either/Or* from Hannay and Marino, 1998, p. 329)

Each of Kierkegaard's stages or spheres can be lived in better or worse. As with Hegel, and with Bruner's spiral curriculum, we may be able to revisit earlier stages from later stages, so as to evaluate them better, to transform them and to integrate them better into our ongoing life story. As younger inhabitants of each stage, we often suppose it to be the end of the story and so cannot easily see how it may relate better or worse with other stages. We have difficulty in seeing the wood for the trees. Above all, we fail to see how a further stage, or sphere, beyond the present one, may be able to solve problems which cannot be solved and perhaps cannot even be well recognised or properly described as problems at the present stage.

Hence the feeling of risk-taking, or jumping or leaping, when we first attempt a transition to a more fully developed, better balanced stage of life. Hence the function in Christian discourse, and no doubt in other traditions, of the 'stumbling-block', the scandalous paradox, the absolutely absurd. Examples range across the whole phenomenology of human experience and religion, from simple hidden objects or meanings, which challenge us to find them (compare Bull, 1999), to

riddles and puzzles, mazes and labyrinths, rites of passage and ritualised ordeals, to the full-scale demand for an ongoing transformation of mind (reversal, turning-around, conversion, repentance—which may be life-long) involved in coming to terms with the mismatch between finite beings and the infinite. This mismatch, as Kierkegaard sees it, is compounded by a further mismatch between the perverse self-corruption of finite beings and the infinite holiness which gives and shows itself in the countermovement needed to overcome, through undergoing, the tangled struggles of mismatching. For Kierkegaard, the spiritual function of the absolute paradox, of the power and wisdom of God expressed in the weakness and folly of a crucified Jew, seems to be this: to show those who can see nothing but absurdity in this the need for a transformation which involves learning to recognise in this apparent absurdity the gratuitous countermovement which overcomes the opposing, genuine absurdity of finite beings trying to act as if infinite. Kierkegaard's point is that such learning takes a lifetime of learning through becoming, involving interpretive exchange. It cannot be taken for granted at any point, as if it could somehow be magically conferred, for example in baptism, or in the direct communication of a conceptual system. Accordingly, the function of paradox is emphatically *not* to demand a sacrifice of intellect as such but to help us rediscover how ongoing development and transformation continue to involve risk. The paradox also functions to prevent us from accepting or imposing any closure of intellect, reason or transformative development, so that we may responsibly relate our own life to authentic infinity or absoluteness in the only way possible, that is, a way of indirect communication, via interpretive exchange, which would come to find us in an unending giving and an unending calling. Time and again, in the phenomenology of existence and of spirituality, it appears that we do not have or control a capacity for such transformative development and that recognition of this incapacity may be a crucial prelude to receiving from beyond just this capacity to go on into a richer version of creation or reality, a version repeating, retrieving, renewing and fulfilling what we supposed we had simply to surrender at an earlier stage. This is Kierkegaard's corrective for common developmental approaches in education.

The leap from aesthetic existence to ethical existence involves what Frankfurt (1988) has described as second-order desires and Charles Taylor as strong self-evaluation, that is, taking responsibility for one's desires and capabilities as elements constituting one's identity as an agent in discourse and in society. Despair over our incapacity to integrate our inherited characteristics and circumstances, and capacities and desires, and sense of what is enjoyable, marks the threshold between the aesthetic and the ethical stages. Becoming an ethical agent involves making some progress towards better planned co-ordination of these demands and our responses to them. We identify ourselves ethically as the authors of the project of making narrative sense of our lives in terms of our choosing our sense of identity less unjustly, less impulsively, less arbitrarily, less unreliably, less egocentrically and so on. Contrast current

educational rhetoric about learners needing to take responsibility for learning and owning it, within contexts of consumerist choice and accountability.

However, just as aesthetic despair focuses on the arbitrariness and implausibility of privileging one chance physical or sensory characteristic, or capacity or desire, as the key to how we make sense of our identity, our meaning and worth, so ethical despair focuses on the emergent arbitrariness and implausibility of our privileging whatever higher capacity we make the key to our ethical identity, whether this capacity is our perceived rationality or capacity for altruism, or for fairness or for planning effectively, or for self-actualisation. For how can what is only one part of our existence give meaning and value to our existence as a whole? Such impossible projects, which we attempt repeatedly, could only succeed in constructing an unjustifiable hegemony of one part of our existence over against others. This argument of Kierkegaard's is a renewal of the insistence of Paul and of Luther on the real folly and weakness of our attempting to justify ourselves by our good works, and so missing the genuine wisdom and power to be received from beyond as we cross together the repeated thresholds of despair.

Contrast self-evaluation in contexts of managerial performativity and Weberian instrumental rationality. In these contexts we are tempted to justify ourselves by accepting the goals already chosen for us and given to us, so that we need only bother ourselves about the means. Moreover, even the means are managed for us by the required closures of meaning already mentioned. Thus we are offered some system of ever-improving planning and measurement of outcomes, with its multiplications of details and data, within currently safely constructed and curtailed meanings. How much 'safer' this appears than opening oneself to the uncertainties, with all the terror they may induce, of spontaneous interaction with pupils and students and peers, for which we need what Keats called the 'negative capability', and Kierkegaard called the Socratic religion, of living inclusively with our questions, openly appropriating our doubts, uncertainties and dilemmas, without the panic tactics of scapegoating or retaliation, or resorting to dogmatism or scepticism as ideological weapons. From the perspective of this way of being, it is a matter for irony or humour that some of us seem to suppose we can ensure, through closure of meaning, that everything is transparent, foreknown and successfully managed.

Kierkegaard's Socratic religion of negative capability is his criterion for the best that would be possible in human development, including religious development, apart from the transformation attributed to the humanity of God in Christ. Socratic religion is the core of what Kierkegaard calls religiousness type A. It involves a relatively paradoxical impression, when seen from prior stages or lesser ways of being, from which we want to ask, 'But how can creative and liberating transformations of meaning and understanding emerge from such uncertainties and dilemmas?'

Type A can be summed up in Wittgenstein's version of it. Wittgenstein recognised that Christianity can be seen in terms of religiousness type A: 'In Christianity it is as though God said to human beings: Don't act a tragedy, that is to say, don't enact heaven and hell on earth, heaven and hell are *my* affair' (Wittgenstein, 1998, p. 21). For Kierkegaard, religiousness type B (i.e. the Christianity of Paul and Luther) then appears as the positive side of the negativities of type A, just as proactive love for strangers and enemies is the positive side of non-retaliation, and just as proactive interpretive exchange is the positive side of reactive, somnambulant transference and counter-transference.

For Kierkegaard, in religiousness type A one realises and lives out the impossibility of treating one relative part of one's life as if it were or could be absolute, i.e. able to give meaning to the whole, or rather, to give *fixed* or *final* meaning to the whole. Here fixity and finality would be marks of idolatry. This is why Simone Weil could describe the love of the good or of God as the constant refusal of idolatry, and why Wittgenstein described his philosophy as aiming at liberation from idols, pictures or stereotypes that hold us captive, preventing us from learning how to go on.

For both religiousness type A and B, indirect communication is central. For:

> God himself is this: *how* one involves himself with Him. As far as physical and external objects are concerned, the object is something else than the mode: there are many modes. In respect to *God*, the *how* is *what*. He who does not involve himself with God in the mode of absolute devotion does not become involved with God. (Kierkegaard, 1967, Vol. 2, section 1405)

Even if we think of everyday, would-be secular, communication about finite forms of good, to focus on the *what* or the product of communication so as to conceal or exclude the *how* or the process of communication is to be in danger of promoting a false absoluteness, reification or idolatry. If we try to think of what infinite or absolute good could be, then any *what* or product of communication becomes idolatrous if we try to abstract it from the *how*, the process, the way in which infinite or absolute good may give itself to us and call us and ours into transformative development towards or into itself.

If this is correct, then what is wrong with stopping at religiousness A? Well, there are problems of understanding, of trusting and of enacting, and these problems interact with each other. As Kierkegaard's account of Abraham and Isaac, in *Fear and Trembling*, shows, and as Kierkegaard's own struggles with his relationship with his fiancée and with his father show, we struggle to make sense of religiousness A because of our own dependence on others, and because of their dependence on us, and because we need to struggle to try to achieve more just, more liberated and more caring forms of interdependence with one another. Because of rivalry and would-be exclusion between

one form of finite goodness and another, we find it hard to recognise and trust that, in Wittgenstein's words, 'the infinite doesn't rival the finite. The infinite is that whose essence is to exclude nothing finite' (Wittgenstein, 1975, p. 157, section 138). But how can we trust the type-A level of paradox and so the level of demand for transformative development which this level of paradox is used to make on us? Well, the use of paradox in Kierkegaard's is to open up, require and communicate transformation. The greater the paradox, the greater the transformation and communication.

Religiousness type B is the free, non-negotiable fulfilment of the promise of type A, as well as its judgement and transformation. If type A is the best that can be achieved by religion within the limits of Socratic reason, then type B is characterised by the freedom and grace, the holiness and love of divine self-sharing in and through the humanity of Christ. The relatively modest paradox of type A is trumped by the absolute paradox of type B, i.e. the paradoxicality at the heart of Christianity, that the eternal wisdom and power of God are at work in and through the scandal of the folly and weakness attendant on a particular human being executed under the authority of the Roman governor of a minor, restless province. This absolute, type B paradoxicality can be seen both to transcend and fulfil the lesser, type A, paradoxicality. For the infinite capacity and transformation communicated in this divine self-communication is as absolutely beyond all of us, and beyond each part of each of us, as it is absolutely for all of us, and for each part of each of us. The depth of divine solidarity shows paradigmatically the height of divine glory. Absolute transcendence and absolute immanence work together to overcome the misunderstanding, mistrust and misguidedness which so afflict religiousness type A. Our closed-up meanings are opened out into the potential infinity of interpretive exchange, with its ethics of recognition and reconciliation.

> Eternally speaking, there is only one means and there is only one end: the means and the end are one and the same thing . . . In time and on earth one distinguishes between the two and considers that the end is more important than the means . . . Yet . . . to gain an end in this fashion is an unholy act of impatience.[4] In the judgement of eternity the relation between the end and the means is rather the reverse of this. (Kierkegaard, 1938, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*, p. 202)

Kierkegaard remains a witness to how the way of indirect communication (as means, as process, as how we can communicate), promises, and offers us in advance, the end of ends of communication, which we may go on seeking. Kierkegaard calls this the quest for 'the sublime in the pedestrian' (Kierkegaard, 1941, p. 52; compare Kierkegaard in Hong and Hong, 2000, p. 98). How we walk together may embody and so communicate the goal we seek. Interpretive exchange in which each self recognises itself in the other, and the other in the self, with the ethics

inherent in this, can be seen as the sublime in the pedestrian ways of education, even when these ways seem to be hopelessly tangled. Moreover, because religiousness B, or whatever may be its equivalent in other cultural or spiritual traditions, is the fulfilment of the way of being and communication which disrupts and transforms all lesser ways of being and communication, it preserves within itself their key elements, i.e. the authentically aesthetic, ethical and Socratic.

One major consequence of this way of thinking, working and loving is as follows. Our current counter-attempts to reduce and close down communication, to confine it within the realm of partial transformation which we can negotiate and control, in contexts of education, science, knowledge, research and so on, need to be reversed. Such reversal is gestured towards by Kierkegaard in terms of individual and shared retrieval of the past through interpretation, by Wittgenstein in his hope that his work would help to bring light for individuals in the darkness of the times (1967, Preface), and by Coleridge and Keats on negative faith or negative capability. Perhaps even Dewey, writing on the enrichment and expansion of communication, perception, experience and community, through the overcoming of immanent dualisms in the long journey of education, can show us something of such transformation. However, it is more clearly Kierkegaard, with his reminders and retrievals of transformative paradoxes, who echoes traces of how we may move on, beyond any absoluteness claimed by outward or inward teachers, as we embody for each other the gift and demand of an always greater, always other way of being.

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NOTES

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2. Some confusions can be avoided by using Kierkegaard's Danish texts, rather than their English or other translations. For those of us not able to read Kierkegaard in Danish, the retranslation into English by Howard and Edna Hong of all Kierkegaard's writings provides a generally more reliable version than earlier English translations. For those of us with too much to read, the Hongs have crowned their monumental achievement with a one-volume anthology of Kierkegaard, the most comprehensive anthology of his works ever produced in English (Hong and Hong, 2000). Where I have quoted from pre-Hong translations, this has been for ease of access, in passages where the sense is not, I think, materially affected.
3. In this section I am indebted to Weston (1994) among many others.
4. Compare Hegel: 'Impatience demands the impossible, namely, the attainment of the end without the means' (*Phenomenology* in Hodgson, 1997, p. 99). Kierkegaard's own important analyses of patience are summarised by Harned (1997).

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