

Communicating the Incommunicable

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BUTCH, A VIETNAM VETERAN I KNOW, could articulate no answer to the question, "What was Vietnam like?" He simply wore an expression of sorrow. But even that was vague and insufficient. I reasoned that the horror of recalling to one's mind the experiences of war would at least be a partial reason for Butch's silence. Yet, if he *had* imparted some of his recollection in the form of words and syntax, would he have imparted anything at all equal to what he had experienced?

Much of what we experience is at a sublinguistic level. Feelings toward others are seldom expressible in words alone—yet they are often mutually understood implicitly by each subject involved. Ethical and religious inclinations are also modes of existence difficult to communicate or justify with language. Indeed, there are numerous kinds of entities in our experience that do not lend themselves to formulation in sets of propositions. The experience *as* one's "experience of" is wholly different than the experience *as* viewed by an external observer. Love *as* viewed by the physician is a physiological condition of her patient. But for the patient, *as* she knows it, love is inexpressible.

This is not to say that words are in any way useless. Words, as direct communication, maintain the capacity to carry information from one individual to another for most practical purposes. Facial and other forms of expression carry still more. But how is it possible to communicate the subjective *as* the subjective? How does one communicate experience except in its subjective form *as* an experience of something? Certainly

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this cannot be achieved by cramming the subjective into judgments like "x = y" and then speaking or writing it to another individual.

Through both philosophy and method, Søren Kierkegaard and Socrates impart a valuable response to the issue of efficacious subject-to-subject communication. They recognize that certain knowledge, or "essential truth," as Kierkegaard calls it, cannot be passed from one individual to another by any direct means of communication. They suggest, however, that forms of indirect communication such as maieutic¹ stimulation of the other individual allow one subject to influence or help another in such a way that the latter attains important knowledge or experience subjectively.

The Problem in Husserlian Terms²

Greater explication of the problem of inter-subjective communication is necessary before proceeding to the responses of Kierkegaard and Socrates. Put in Husserlian terms, some aspects of the difficulty of communicating subjective experience become quite vivid.³ The fact that there are many things that can be effectively communicated objectively is undisputed. But that there are some things that cannot be communicated in their entirety through objective propositions is made clear by the phenomenological study of Edmund Husserl. For Husserl, the very most fundamental parts of consciousness are pre-predicative. They are the "objects-about-which" that give content to the simplest judgments we

¹This word has its origin in the Greek word for midwifery. It means to elicit new ideas from another person through a dialogue or other form of communication that allows the person to come to conclusions through subjective, or at least personal, processes or experiences.

²Exactly what Husserl says and the terms he uses sometimes vary from one of his books to the next. The Husserlian ideas and terminology I refer to here are primarily from the Churchill translation of *Experience and Judgment*, although they may be found elsewhere as well.

³Husserl is used here for practical purposes of elucidating the difficulty of some dimensions of inter-subjective communication. The intent is not to correlate Husserl's way of handling the problem (if he does) with that of either Kierkegaard or Socrates. To be sure, in many ways two philosophers could not be more dissimilar than are Husserl and Kierkegaard (or Husserl and Socrates).

make. These parts of experience are intuited in immediacy—not even yet as objects.⁴ No syntax accompanies these intuitions, and therefore no real direct communication of them is possible. As Husserl says:

The theory of pre-predicative experience, of precisely that which gives in advance the most original substrates in objective self-evidence, is the proper first element of the phenomenological theory of judgment. The investigation must begin with the pre-predicative consciousness of experience and, going on from there, pursue development of self-evidences at higher levels. (*Experience* 27)

We begin at the “pre-predicative consciousness of experience” because such experience is the most fundamental level of consciousness that still contains meaning. Pre-predicative experiences give us meaning before syntax; they might even be said to be pre-predicative knowledge. Thus *our* problem (which does not seem to be where Husserl intended to lead us): How does one communicate the pre-predicative parts of experience? For example, how does one communicate redness *as* experienced without making the recipient of communication the subject of experience?

We normally attempt to communicate the incommunicable through signs. We scratch lines on a page, call them words, and expect the reader to know exactly what we mean. Or we make noises and call it speech—speech that is meant to signify intricate subjective feelings and experiences. But signs are empty. They are insufficient to convey the meaning of that which they *mean*, without the hearer or reader having some sort of subjective experience to fill the sign.⁵ Take love, for

⁴When Husserl uses the term “intuition,” he seems to mean what we more commonly call “perception.” When he uses the term “intention,” he seems to mean what we more commonly call “conception.” The complex and difficult ideas he packs into these two words are by no means sufficiently embodied in the suggested synonyms; they are simply to assist those who are unfamiliar with Husserl.

⁵The concept of “filled” and “empty” intentions is a Husserlian manner of speech that refers to the depth of real experience one has with a certain intention. For example, one might intend or conceive *the word* “red.” But if one has no prior personal experience or intuition of redness, then the word will have little meaning—it will be empty.

instance. Although we could define it as this or that, the word “love” is a filled intention only when experienced subjectively. Our reasons for acting ethically—conscience, for example—also evade objective expression. These intentions are empty without something more than a simple proposition like “ $x = y \vee z$.”

For the observer who lacks experience, such emptiness in a sign is due to the fact that signs can function in the absence of what they signify—a word functions without the substrate’s presence. In making the distinction between signifier and signified, Husserl seems to have hoped to make possible a bridge between the two, or at least a founding of sign in one’s experience of the signified. John Caputo explains this point: “[This] worried Edmund Husserl, who wanted to return the intention to its fulfillment, to fill the sign with the intuitive presence of the signified, in order to avoid the ‘crisis’ precipitated by the absence of intuition” (197). But just as intuition is an experience of the object had by an individual person, bringing intuition back into the picture makes a meaningful sign nothing less than a sign of one’s own subjective experiences.

In his references to the pre-predicative, Husserl seems to be speaking only of our perceptions of simple things like color (“redness,” for example). But unless his “substrates” include the more subjective categories, such as emotions, our problem of inter-subjective communication does not lie exclusively in Husserl’s phenomenology.⁶ *Anything* that is impossible to communicate linguistically adds to the problem. Now, one might reasonably object that the seeming impossibility of communicating certain subjective things to another person is not a problem at all because communication of such things is unwanted—secrets not kept are not secrets. However, a closer look at the problem may lead such an objector to think twice. The practical matter of living with other subjects demands inter-subjective communication of some sort. Having some common subjective experiences seems to be a precondition for understanding one

⁶Although it is unclear to me whether emotions and other subjective things are really “substrates” for Husserl, it is clear that he does recognize that the subjective is not communicable in an objective manner. He explains, “Strike out the essentially occasional expressions from one’s language, try to describe any subjective experience in unambiguous, objectively fixed fashion: such an attempt is always plainly vain” (*Essential* 45).

another. Contact with individuals who lack life experiences similar to ours makes intolerance an easy temptation.

Furthermore, philosophical matters are influenced by our inability to communicate subjective experience. Particularly in the ethical and religious areas of philosophy, the individual experiences feelings or inclinations as to what *seems* right. Often, another thing just *feels* less ethical. Sometimes it seems that one's "objective" ethical reasoning is really only an ad hoc attempt to justify an ethics that is, in truth, based only on subjective feelings. Yet how can we explain such inclinations to another in justification of our position without somehow helping her step into our shoes? Even the process of contemplating a math problem and then coming to a conclusion on one's own leaves one with a more "filled intention" of the meaning and significance of the conclusion than simply seeing the answer at the back of the book. Right answers might work, but without tying the answer to some experience of inner reasoning, another false conclusion might just as easily replace it.

Introduction to Indirect Communication

If direct communication entails objective representation of what is meant, and the problem with direct communication between individuals through language or other means lies in the fact that it is objective, then the answer (if there is one) must be indirect communication. But such indirect communication is not necessarily to be found in nonlinguistic communication like gestures or facial expressions. Even in these, some direct proposition such as "I am sad" is often communicated implicitly. In indirect communication, the medium of communication used (whether words or other forms) is not so important as that to which the recipient of communication is subjectively related. For indirect communication to occur, the other person must be the subject *having* the experience or *finding* the knowledge—not the student simply hearing the authoritative "x = y" conclusions of the teacher.

With indirect communication, the direct relationship between initiator and recipient, author and reader, or speaker and listener is somehow severed. The two individuals are interposed. The recipient's relationship rests with an intermediary, not with the initiator. When I want my wife to see the sunset, I point toward it and instigate a relationship of experience between her and the sunset. The sunset is the intermediary that is the

source of both her and my experience. If I read *The Catcher in the Rye* and receive a more profound understanding of purity, when I recommend the book, I place the next reader in a relationship with the book as a reader to communicate what I had subjectively experienced. In some cases, through posing hypothetical possibilities, I might place the other person in a relationship with his own mind—he reasons and experiences the process of an internal dialectic to the end that his apprehension of the conclusion is often *filled*, as Husserl would say, in a way that is similar to mine.

The obvious dilemma that always follows this sort of indirect communication is the lack of guarantee that the other's experience of the intermediary is exactly like one's own. Indeed, that it would be *exactly* the same is impossible because, as a subject, the other person is part of the equation of experience. She is a variable. But a picture is still worth a thousand words. In the end, allowing the other to personally experience what one experiences *must* be more effective than objective communication of the subjective knowledge. While the indirect process ideally entails a relationship only between the other person and the object of experience, a direct communication of the object would include the object, the communicator, the sign, *and* the other.

Answers in Kierkegaard⁷

Kierkegaard attempts a form of indirect communication that, in many respects, is after the manner of maieutic stimulation. His own ideas on indirect communication seem particularly similar to what one of his pseudonyms, Johannes Climacus, sets forth in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.⁸ Climacus believes that for the existing human, subjectivity is the truth and cannot be communicated except through indirect means.⁹

⁷Kierkegaard's own position is difficult to place with precision because not only does he write with pseudonymous names, he asks us not to cite the pseudonymous works as his. Therefore, I will try to refer to Kierkegaard when an idea or method seems particularly his and to the pseudonymous author when citing specific works.

⁸See Evans. For this reason, I will focus on the *Postscript*.

⁹This is different than saying truth is subjective. Although some do interpret Kierkegaard in such a way, a close reading indicates that it is not his position.

Objective propositions and judgments yield no truth about the individual's existence *as a subject*. Therefore, for Climacus, there is an inverse relationship between objective certainty and importance because existence and decisions in existence are paramount.

Climacus asks, "Now, then, which of the ways is the way of truth for the existing spirit?" (*Postscript* 1: 193). And then he responds, "The way to be commended is naturally the one that especially emphasizes what it means to exist. [But the] way of objective reflection turns the subjective individual into something accidental and thereby turns existence into an indifferent, vanishing something" (1: 193). Objectivity throws existence out of the picture. For Climacus, when it comes to questions of ethics, religion, and existence, there is no language that can serve to objectively mediate two individuals, as there is with mathematics or logic. Climacus further explains that existential truth or knowledge about how to exist is the only *essential* truth: "Therefore, only ethical and ethical-religious knowing is essential knowing. But all ethical and all ethical-religious knowing is *essentially related to the existence of the knower*" (1: 198, emphasis added). How am I to live? What decisions should I make? With whom or what should I come into a relationship? In a word, how should I exist? These are the "essential" questions that precede all others for Climacus, and the one thing common to each is the word "I."

In his description of one aspect of indirect communication, Climacus uses the term "double-reflection." In one sense, double-reflection refers to the reflection made by each of the two subjects involved in any communication. In the first reflection, the communicator inwardly reflects and appropriates the existential knowledge—he makes it part of his existence. In the second reflection, the recipient of the communication experiences the same subjective process as he too appropriates the knowledge through his existence. As Climacus puts it, "the reflection of inwardness is the subjective thinker's double-reflection" (*Postscript* 1: 73). In another sense, however, double-reflection seems to refer to the outward nature of the word or sign that is communicated and to the inward action of appropriation on the part of the recipient. The word is first communicated, and thus in the first reflection the recipient has, as Husserl would say, an intention of the sign alone. But in the second reflection, knowledge is experienced or appropriated such that the sign is filled: "When a thought has gained its proper expression in a word, which is attained through the first reflection, there comes the second

reflection, which bears upon the intrinsic relation of the communication to the communicator and renders the existing communicator's own relation to the idea" (1: 76).

Climacus says that to communicate in such a manner as to allow double-reflection and existential appropriation of essential knowledge in the recipient requires self-control and a minimum of "meddling busyness" on the part of the communicator. This sort of indirect communication is a "freeing" of the other: "Just as the subjective existing thinker has set himself free by the duplexity [of thought-existence], so the secret of communication specifically hinges on setting the other free, and for that very reason he must not communicate himself directly" (*Postscript* 1: 74). Indeed, if essential truth is truly *essential*, and the only way to help another obtain such truth is by indirect means, then the act of making the other person free by choosing to use indirect communication (and not direct communication) is truly a form of giving. Kierkegaard further speaks of this point in *Works of Love*:

And in love to help someone...to become himself, free, independent, his own master, to help him stand alone—that is the greatest beneficence...if, note well, the one who loves also knows how to make himself unnoticed so that the person helped does not become dependent on him....The greatest beneficence, [which is] to help the other stand alone, cannot be done directly. (274)

Indirect communication is this *giving without being there*. The communicator assists, and yet hides herself.

Surely we would expect an advocate of indirect communication to communicate his point indirectly. At the end of the book, Climacus makes a surprising statement: "What I write contains the notice that everything is to be understood in such a way *that it is revoked*, that the book has not only an end but has a revocation to boot" (1: 619, emphasis added). Why would Climacus go through the trouble to write more than six hundred pages of prose containing many very difficult and ingenious ideas only to revoke the whole book? Such contradiction of word and action leads one to believe there is something more to this than just a flip-pant change of mind. Climacus makes this apparent when, referring to "the most pleasant of all readers," he explains: "He can understand that

the understanding is a revocation—the understanding with him as the sole reader is indeed the revocation of the book. He can understand *that to write a book and to revoke it is not the same as refraining from writing it* (*Postscript* 1: 621, emphasis added). If he had no reason for adding a revocation other than just to take back what he said, then he never would have published the book after the revocation. Furthermore, when Climacus says “the understanding with him as the sole reader is indeed the revocation of the book,” it becomes clear that his revocation has something to do with the reader’s individuality—with the reader’s subjective experience of the book.

Kierkegaard makes a similarly unexpected and ironic move when, at the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, he admits that all of his works that were published under pseudonymous names were actually written by him—that the pseudonymous authors (or “imaginary constructions,” as he calls them) are in fact fictitious creations. However, he proceeds to say, “In the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me” (1: 626). Indeed, this seems to be Kierkegaard’s own very blatant personal revocation of all his pseudonymous works—or at least of his relation to them. He confirms, “The imaginary construction is the conscious, teasing *revocation* of the communication, which is always of importance to an existing person who writes for existing persons, lest the relation be changed to that of a rote reciter who writes for rote reciters” (1: 263–64, emphasis added).

We are left to wonder what it is about Kierkegaard and Climacus’ works that makes the authors revoke them. After a hasty analysis, we might conclude that the authors disagree with what they have said, that in writing the books, they have come to understand that their ideas were false. But, as previously mentioned, this possibility is refuted by the fact that Kierkegaard published the works. Such a conclusion can be made only if we are talking about books *as* direct communication. But indirect communication is something completely different. Climacus writes:

Indirect communication makes communicating an art in a sense different from what one ordinarily assumes it to be in supposing that the communicator has to present the communication to a knower, so that he can judge it, or to a nonknower, so that he can acquire something to know. (1: 277)

Because a person cannot directly communicate subjective knowledge or existential truth to another individual, that individual must find or experience them on her own. Indeed, if another person did want to help in the process, he would have to do it in some indirect way, so as to allow the individual the genuine responsibility of experiencing and finding the truth subjectively. Kierkegaard says,

It also became clear to me that if I wanted to communicate anything about this [what it means to exist and what inwardness is], the main point must be that my presentation would be made in an indirect form. That is, if inwardness is truth, [objective] results are nothing but junk with which we should not bother one another, and wanting to communicate results is an unnatural association of one person with another. (*Postscript 1*: 242)

Essential truths cannot really be *communicated*—only *obtained subjectively*. However, indirect communication can be a means of helping the individual apprehend those essential truths for herself. But books traditionally *are* direct communication. They communicate a set of propositions *directly* from the author to the reader. Therefore, unless the author, the book, or the relation between the two is removed, any book can be said to contain direct communication.

As mentioned above, Climacus revokes his writings explicitly. Kierkegaard does so as well by abolishing any direct relation between himself and the words written by his pseudonymous authors. If they did not work in this way, they could not achieve indirect communication and would thus be in the precarious position of having one's method contradict one's philosophy. Jacques Derrida refers to Kierkegaard as "Kierkegaard de Silentio" (58).¹⁰ He further explains this peculiar name: "[The] pseudonym keeps silent, it expresses the silence that is kept. Like all pseudonyms, it seems destined to keep secret the real name *as* patronym, that is, the name of the father of the work" (58). In their revocations, both Climacus and Kierkegaard dissolve the relation between the author and the book, and thereby force the reader *alone* to

¹⁰This is a reference to another of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, Johannes de Silentio.

establish his own subjective relationship with the book and its contents: "The heterogeneity [of authorship] must definitely be maintained, that here is an author, that objectively it is not a cause but that it is a cause for which *an individual has stood alone, suffered, etc.*" (*Postscript 2*: 145, emphasis added). By maintaining heterogeneity in authorship, the author is "not a cause" of certain propositions being accepted by the reader—rather, he is the cause of the reader's standing alone and contemplating the contents of the book in such a way that he might find some essential truth subjectively. He *betrays* the reader into a relationship with the truth such that it becomes the reader's *own* truth.

Therefore, through revocation and pseudonymous evasion, Climacus and Kierkegaard allow the reader space to come to her own conclusions and have her own experiences, which will make the apprehension of essential truth possible. Climacus says that the "imaginary construction" of existential possibilities or pseudonymous authors "establishes a chasmic gap between the reader and the author and fixes the separation of inwardness between them, so that a direct understanding is made impossible" (*Postscript 1*: 263). Furthermore, "With imaginary construction [if] what is said is earnestness to the writer, he keeps the earnestness essentially to himself. If the recipient interprets it as earnestness, he does it essentially by himself....The *being-in-between* of the imaginary construction encourages the inwardness of the two *away from each other in inwardness*" (1: 264). Upon realizing that there is no author who takes credit for what is said in the book, the reader is forced away from making statements that begin with, "The author argues that x," and forced into making statements (if she makes any at all) that begin with, "I believe that x."

This is why Kierkegaard asks us to cite the respective pseudonyms instead of himself as we refer to his works. Instead of appealing to him, we are forced to appeal to an "imaginary construction," or an existential possibility. It is fallacious enough to base one's argument on an appeal to authority, but appealing to an *imaginary* authority seals one's coffin.¹¹

¹¹Climacus asks us not to appeal to his writings *at all* (see 1: 618). I recognize the irony in citing a book that specifically states, "let no one bother to appeal to [the book]." But this essay is, in some respects, in the form of direct communication and therefore should be expected to appeal to the relevant sources—even if they plead for us not to.

Kierkegaard also says he must be called the “author’s author” (*Postscript* 2: 110). Instead of quoting a set of propositions made by Kierkegaard, we must *relate* ourselves subjectively to the nature and words of an imaginary author.

For Climacus, the supreme example of an effective indirect communicator is God. Objectively, God seems both as silent and absent as any being can be:

No anonymous author can more slyly hide himself, and no maieutic can more carefully recede from a direct relation than God can...and only when the single individual turns inward into himself (consequently only in the inwardness of self activity) does he become aware and capable of seeing God.... And why is God illusive? Precisely because he is truth and in being illusive seeks to keep a person from untruth. (*Postscript* 1: 243–44)

Derrida notes this idea in his discussion of Kierkegaard in *The Gift of Death*. He quotes Paul’s writings in Philippians 2:12, “*but more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (emphasis added). And as Derrida further explains:

The disciples are asked to work towards their salvation not in the presence (*parousia*) but in the absence (*apousia*) of the master: without either seeing or knowing, without hearing the law or the reasons for the law. Without knowing from whence the thing comes and what awaits us, we are given over to absolute solitude. No one can speak for us; we must take it upon ourselves, each of us must take it *upon himself*.” (56–57, emphasis added)

And as Kierkegaard affirms of indirect communication, only by hiding himself does the giver truly help the other take the acquisition of essential knowledge “upon himself.”

By the time the reader is done with the book, Kierkegaard and Climacus have done the damage intended. The reader has read the book, *experienced* it, and found the essential truth that he will. Taking out the author strips the reader of what he may have objectively concluded (for there is no authority to whom he may now appeal) and leaves him

only with those beliefs and existential relations that are supported in subjectivity alone. The act of revoking their words is essential to the method of Climacus's and Kierkegaard's works in their support of subjectivity—an essential component to forcing the reader back on himself in inwardness.

Credit to Socrates¹²

No discussion on maieutic stimulation would be appropriate without giving some (or perhaps all) of the credit to Socrates. In admiration of Socrates, Kierkegaard writes:

This noble rogue had understood in the profound sense that the highest one human being can do for another is to *make him free*, help him stand by himself—and he had also understood himself in understanding this, that is, he had understood that if this is to be done the helper must be able to make himself anonymous, must magnanimously will to *annihilate himself*. (*Works* 276, emphasis added)

While Kierkegaard presents the recipient with a pseudonymous work, Socrates presents the interlocutor with incessant questions; never making a positive statement or judgment.¹³ Socrates initiates subjective reflection in every conversation.

¹²The old problem of citing Socrates and his method remains—is it really Socrates, or just Plato's words in Socrates' mouth? For example, Myles Burnyeat argues persuasively that the maieutic method is Platonic and not Socratic. While I realize that Plato's ideas are very much involved in what is used here (especially in the doctrine of recollection), I will leave the concern of distinguishing the two philosophers up to the Platonic scholars and refer to everything cited as Socrates for the sake of simplicity. Also, all works of Plato are cited with the traditional Stephanus page numbers.

¹³Indeed we could say that Plato undergoes the same "anonymous" indirect communication as Kierkegaard in that he puts his words in another's (Socrates') mouth. But for this essay, I am content to focus on Socrates alone.

In the *Theaetetus*, we find the term “maieutic” particularly applicable as Socrates compares himself to a “midwife” who never gives birth to his own idea, but often helps someone else in the process. In the dialogue, Theaetetus is suffering from the mental pains of coming close to producing a new idea, but cannot quite “give birth” to it. Describing his art, Socrates tells Theaetetus:

Now my art of midwifery is just like theirs in most respects. The difference is that I attend men and not women, and that I watch over the labor of their souls, not of their bodies. And the most important thing about my art is the ability to apply all possible tests to the offspring, to determine whether the young mind is being delivered of a phantom, that is, an error, or a fertile truth. (150b–c)

Socrates allows for the communication of essential truth by standing aside, while the other comes to conclusions on her own. He keeps himself from being misunderstood as the source of knowledge by putting his interlocutor in a relationship with herself—with her own contemplation.

Now we are bound to ask how knowledge can come from within a person who originally lacked the knowledge obtained. Socrates addresses this question in another example of his maieutic method in the *Meno*. He posits that knowledge might come from the immortal soul’s recollection of previous lives.¹⁴ He says, “So it is in no way surprising that [the soul] can recollect things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. As the whole of human nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only—a process men call learning—[from] discovering everything else for himself” (81c–d). In order to show that this is the case, he uses maieutic stimulation on an uneducated slave boy in order to teach him how to find the length of

¹⁴The *Meno* is particularly troublesome (with respect to the problem mentioned in note 12) because it seems to be a transition dialogue between the earlier and later Platonic dialogues that lean toward Socratic and Platonic thought, respectively. Whether this is what Socrates would have really said is put into question by the fact that Socrates, until this point, had rarely put forth his ideas in the form of a direct proposition as is made here regarding the doctrine of recollection.

a side of a square twice the size of a square for which the side length is known. Without telling the boy anything about geometry, Socrates proceeds by means of questioning to help the boy produce right answers. Even though he is using spoken words (as Kierkegaard used the written word), Socrates communicates indirectly because he gives the boy no propositions as to the facts of the matter. He allows the boy to come to an understanding of the geometry problem and its conclusion on his own, through subjective processes. To be sure, it is clear by this example that the medium of communication (whether speech, books, gestures or other methods) is not what makes communication direct or indirect. The difference lies in the relationships—that the recipient is put in an experiential relationship with something, rather than being *handed* propositions in some form.

Whether the source of knowledge produced subjectively is truly the immortal soul, as Socrates says, makes no difference to our discussion. Indeed, there may be some other source. The important point in Socrates' position is that he realizes that a method that allows subjective activity—as opposed to objective reception of signs from the teacher in the form of judgments—permits the acquisition of some forms of knowledge that one otherwise could not obtain. To be sure, if one did obtain ethical ideas (or other knowledge that is in some way based on subjective experience) from another in the form of a proposition, then the recipient would not have really obtained that knowledge. For Socrates, as for Kierkegaard, some inner activity or experience is necessary on the part of the subject for the knowledge to really mean anything to that subject. To again use Husserlian terminology, an intention of a sign or judgment cannot be filled except by the subject *experiencing* the contents in some way—whether through perception, inner contemplation, or another experience. Socrates' maieutic stimulation, like Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, forces the individual back on himself in inwardness.

Conclusion

The question of the possibility of inter-subjective communication is indeed more difficult than we have seen it here. Kierkegaard and Socrates in no way eliminate the problem. Yet in presenting us with maieutic stimulation and the absence of an authoritative author, these

philosophers do assist in our understanding of possible methods that allow for such communication. In indirect communication, we do not give knowledge; instead, we allow it to *be given* by the true source of experience.

As life itself suggests, the lack of such communication of subjective experience leads only to intolerance and lack of understanding between people. While we would not wish to actually experience Vietnam so as to understand Butch, we might find something within our own life experiences that “fill our intention” of what war is. In the philosophical world as well, certain aspects of our existence cause us to question deeply whether “world-historical” or positivistic views of human life are broad enough in their categories to include all of reality, both subjective objective. Perhaps we lean toward such narrow accounts of human existence because of the fact that subjective experience is so difficult to communicate, while objective ideas lend themselves easily to syntactic formulation. Though the objective route leads to knowledge in some form, Kierkegaard’s critique reminds us that such knowledge may not be the most *essential* knowledge. By presenting forms of indirect communication, Kierkegaard and Socrates give us some possible methods that communicate subjective experience—methods that communicate the incommunicable.

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