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BETWEEN HEGEL AND HAWKING – KIERKEGAARD CONTRIBUTION TO EPISTEMOLOGY



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Abstract

Background: This presented study focuses on the issue of the possibilities and limits of human rationality in the theory of knowledge from the perspective of Søren Kierkegaard. His opposition to the Hegelian rationalism of his time anticipates similar opposition to the strict naturalism of this time represented by Stephen Hawking. Kierkegaard's perspective of understanding the basic categories of human existence form an intricate texture consisting of more central and more peripheral beliefs, mutually supporting each other, while referring to such concepts in their fundamental philosophical positions.

In the study, we present Kierkegaard's relevant starting points and arguments with which he addresses the problem of a hyper-rationalistic approach to life, regardless of whether it is a metaphysical ambition or an existential understanding of life.

Conclusion: We argue here that Kierkegaard's concept of existential passion, directed in the hope of an infinite future, provides not only the necessary framework for finding answers to contemporary epistemological challenges, especially in the field of the humanities, but also a good protection against the trap of idealism and strict naturalism.

Keywords: Epistemology – Kierkegaard – Naturalism – Free will – Metaphysics.

Introduction

Researching the world and man's place in it represents an interdisciplinary project in which individual disciplines represent a part participating in the overall picture of reality. The nature and essence of reality continues to be the subject of research and passionate debate with regard to the hermeneutics of the interpretation of established facts. In this study, we focus on two representatives of the rationalist approach to epistemology. On the one hand, there is the philosopher

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G. F. Hegel as a representative of supreme idealism with his prevalent rationalistic approach.² On the other hand, there is S. Hawking as a phenomenal natural scientist, as a representative of strict naturalism with an exclusively rationalist approach, with idealistic ambitions in some sense, since „*there is more to the universe than its physical aspects*“³ Human freedom, responsibility for the surrounding world, the nature of his spirituality and the possibilities as well as the limits of human knowledge, form a crucial intersection where both approaches meet. Søren Kierkegaard starts from the coherence of the practical identity of the single individual, that requires whole-hearted commitment towards ideals and the hope that our ideals are realizable.⁴ This forms the starting point of his critical-reflexive efforts in examining the world and interpreting knowledge about it.⁵

In the history of natural sciences, it is customary to talk about paradigmatic breaks in epistemology, in which, under the pressure of empirical evidence, a space is opened for a new explanation of the observed facts. A typical example can be the problem of corpuscular-wave dualism. Scientists describe it as empirical manifestations of a certain nature and character of the matter of the universe known to us at the atomic and subatomic level. The tension between the two interpretations within the framework of classical Newtonian physics, found its solution in quantum physics, which remains relatively stable to this day. What is interesting is the fact that even within this paradigm there are tensions that open up questions that go beyond the horizon of current knowledge.⁶

A relevant example can be Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which can be interpreted in terms of the so-called Copenhagen school (Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg) and also according to the school of David Bohm. While from the point of view of scientific criteria and predictability, both these positions represent equivalent, equally simple and acceptable interpretations, the philosophical consequences of which are different. From a philosophical point of view, a certain dispute persists between the two positions. The former perceives the universe as an indeterministic entity, while the latter prefers a deterministic model of the world. The discussion of this problem shifts our thinking to a different position while opening perspectives that leave the problem (e.g. the essence of human decision-making) open and interwoven with questions of a new type.

In the development of scientific knowledge, this is a natural process that, if it takes place within the framework of correct procedures, usually stimulates human knowledge. It also can often trigger a Kuhnian change of the scientific paradigm, both on the side of the natural sciences and the humanities.

Hawking' cosmology oscillation

The work of the phenomenal theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking ranks among the most respected voices in the cosmological community today. However, in the period from 1988 to

2 Darrel Moellendorf, "Racism and Rationality in Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit," *JSTOR* 13, no. 2, (1992): 243-255.

3 Sean Carroll, *The Big Picture – On the Origins of Life, Meaning, and the Universe Itself* (New York: Dutton, 2017).

4 Roe Fremstedal, "Kierkegaard on the Metaphysics of Hope," *Heythrop Journal* 53, no. 1, (2012): 51-60.

5 Roman Králik, "Kierkegaard and his Influence on Tillich's Philosophy of Religion," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 11, no. 3, (2015): 183-189; Roman Králik and Ľuboš Török, "Concept of relationship God-Man in Kierkegaard's writing 'What we learn from the lilies in the field and from the birds in the air'," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 12, no. 2, (2016): 65-74; František Murgaš et al., "Happiness or Quality of Life? Or Both?" *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13, no. 1, (2022): 17-36.

6 Vladimír Thurzo, "Transhumanism, Suffering, Death and the Search for Meaning," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 1, (2022): 52-65; Ľubomír Hlad et al., "At-Risk Youth in the Context of Current Normality – Psychological Aspects," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13, no. 2, (2022): 285-296.

2010, he overcame a fundamental shift in thought that appears to be paradigmatic in his theses addressing the problem of the Great Singularity and the Theory of Everything. In his work *A Brief History of Time* (London: Bantam Press, 1988), he leaves the question of the existence of the Creator open in the name of the Great Singularity. He considers the *Theory of Everything* (TOE) to be unprovable in principle, arguing with Gödel's theorem. Moreover, every physical theory is inconsistent, incomplete and self-referential, as „*we are not angels observing the universe from outside, but we ourselves and our models are part of the universe they describe... Some people will be very disappointed if there is no final theory that will be determined by a finite number of principles. I used to belong to that camp too, but I've changed my mind. I am glad that our efforts to understand the world will never end and we will always face the challenge of discovering new ones.*“⁷ However, in his later book (co-authored with Leonard Mlodinow) *The Grand Design* he again changed his mind and made unequivocal claims that, surprisingly, not only refute his previous theses but goes much further. They develop concepts that need to be examined in the light of the philosophy of science and especially with regard to the ethical consequences that they bring with them at their core.

His theses is based on the idea that not philosophers, but scientists have become the bearers of knowledge about the universe. This decisively expands human knowledge in the intentions of the classical definition of the mandate of philosophy. Therefore, it considers it legitimate to postulate the claim that „*philosophy is dead*“⁸ and has lost its meaning and justification and thence physics has taken its exclusive place in epistemology. It introduces the concept of „*effective theory*“⁹ here, which serves us as a tool and expression of knowledge, since we are currently unable to describe the observed system in all its complexity so that we can model all the processes taking place in the system in detail. However, its essence corresponds to the belief that the entire universe is „*determined by physical laws*“¹⁰ And since humans are „*only collections of fundamental particles of nature*“¹¹ and at the same time we cannot solve the relevant equations determining our behavior, we use the „*effective theory of human free will*“¹² as we use the effective theory chemistry to explain the behavior of atoms and molecules in a chemical reaction. Here, Hawking defends the belief that human behavior, that is, his world of thoughts and motives, is determined by physical laws such as the „*orbits of the planets*“ because humans are no more than „*biological machines and free will is only an illusion*“.¹³ Consequently, the validity of human reasoning and assertions becomes questionable and the validity of psychological, sociological and ethical categories loses the necessary foundation. This side of Hawking' reasoning remains unaddressed. Moreover, the very nature of the understanding of the quantum nature of the world, does not give much reason for such an interpretation of phenomena, which would strictly be based on determinism.

Hawking's strict naturalism must face the challenge of epistemological reductionism, which raises the question of the competence of science itself. As Ratzsch points out, „*one of the in-*

7 Stephen Hawking, *Gödel and The End of Physics*. Retrieved from: <http://www.dampt.cam.ac.uk/strins02/dirac/hwking/>

8 Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design - New Answers to the Ultimate Question of Life* (London: Bantam Books, 2010): 32.

9 Hawking, Mlodinow, *The Grand Design*, 32.

10 Hawking, Mlodinow, *The Grand Design*, 31.

11 Stephen Hawking, *Gödel and The End of Physics*. <http://www.dampt.cam.ac.uk/strins02/dirac/hwking/>

12 Stephen Hawking, *Gödel and The End of Physics*. <http://www.dampt.cam.ac.uk/strins02/dirac/hwking/>

13 Stephen Hawking, *Gödel and The End of Physics*. <http://www.dampt.cam.ac.uk/strins02/dirac/hwking/>

herent limitations of science is its inability to provide evidence for the results it produces.¹⁴ What does he mean by that? It is based on the following consideration. Indeed, if there is a part of reality that is outside the methodological definition within the given science, then precisely such reality will be beyond the limits of its competence. If knowledge as such is reduced to a field of definition given exclusively by scientific knowledge, a real threat becomes the possibility that a person will have his knowledge covered only within the framework of correlation with relevant reality, but not with being, as such, in all its complexity and totality. Unfortunately, Hawking can no longer contribute to answering questions related to his own oscillating cosmology. His cosmological project of strict naturalism, which he left behind, however, does not provide space for the existential self-expression of a single individual, in the terms of authentic freedom, passion, love, despair and the hope of self-actualization in time.

Hegelian static system

While Kant left the question of absolute reality open from the point of view of the phenomenal and the noumenal, Hegel defended the position of strict idealism, according to which the ultimate reality is Spirit, the absolute Idea. The subject of human research is reality, which is not material but mental. Everything is just our mind (Geist), therefore „*The Real is the Rational and the Rational is the Real.*“ According to Hegel, the more a person opens himself up to rationality, the more reality is expressed in him.

Hegel belongs to the giants of continental philosophy, who influenced not only the world of thought of his contemporaries, but in a certain way also influences the thinking of today. In his effort to rationally explain the world and man's place in it, he created a systematic tool of descriptive procedures that resulted in a logical system of knowledge. With his dialectic of thesis + antithesis and synthesis, he established another system of reasoning, while his ambition was to penetrate the essence of developmental and creative processes. Hegel's concept of dialectics has two serious and important consequences. The first is the concept of freedom. Synthesis as a result of these conflicts leads to a fuller expression of the Absolute Mind and also to the stage of self-realization in the sense of freedom. The ultimate culmination of these processes will be the Mind, completely free from any limiting forces. The second is the concept of the development of society as such. In Hegel's world of Absolute Mind, the present is more important than the past in every way. Such an approach to history creates a dangerous space for the relativization of absolute values, even logic that „*for so long the bastion of absolutes and fixed points, was subject to change and development.*“¹⁵ One consequence is the unification of reason and faith under the roof of the Absolute Mind. The Christian God thus merges with the Absolute Spirit, which is graspable by reason, as it is self-expressed and projected in human thought converging in its knowledge to infinity.¹⁶

Hegel is taken to be a hyper-rationalist holist, whose central claim is that the Absolute is the Idea, and that everything there is can be understood as the actualization, in nature and across historical time, of the Idea. But across Europe, then down those decades, the objections were more often directed at his uncompromising and totalizing rationalism. He was charged by his „*inability to do justice to the unfathomable human individual, to the concrete particularity of human existence, to the role of unreason in human motivation, to the contingency of historical*

14 Del Ratzsch, *Science & its Limits* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2000).

15 Peter Hicks, *The Journey so Far – Philosophy through Ages* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

16 Jozef Krupa, "Návrhy na spresnenie teologickej terminológie v slovenčine: Tretia časť," *Studia Theologica* 24, no. 3, (2022): 81-103; Jozef Krupa, "Spresnenie výrazu „neveriaci“ ako príspevok k rozvoju cyrilometodského filozofického dedičstva," *Konštantínove listy* 15, no. 2, (2022): 160-169.

change, and to the phenomena of interest to psychoanalysis, like repetition and the death drive.¹⁷ Hegel's world of Ideas has become a system in which there is no place for mystery in the biblical sense. It can be said that the *God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob* ceases to be a transcendent entity in the metaphysical sense, but becomes a rationalist project, in which there is no place for the existential expression of his own being.

Kierkegaardian answers

In 1800, Hegel published *Fragment of a system*, in which he wrestled with the problem of how to overcome opposites, namely between finitude and infinity. For Hegel, these opposites cannot be conceptually unified without one of them dissolving into the other. The moment their unity is declared, their difference is denied. According to Hegel, the synthesis of these opposites can only occur in living, not in thinking. In this, he creates space for religion, to which philosophy is subordinate. For Hegel, Christ discovered an infinite life within himself, therefore unity can be achieved in a life like Christ and in a life of love. Love and not thinking becomes the bridge that unites the opposites of the finite and infinite. However, the inexorable system of rationalist dialectics led Hegel to the need in which philosophy should think about what religion lives. Here Hegel launches into a world of new logic, at the end of which religion is subordinated to philosophy.

It is interesting that in 1844 Kierkegaard published his *Philosophiske Smuler eller En Smule Philosophi* (Philosophical Fragments), where, in the person of Johannes Climacus, he addressed a similar issue to Hegel's. Here he resonates with Schelling, who, unlike Hegel, claims that human reason cannot explain or understand its own existence in its totality. In Schelling view: „*For either the concept would have to go first, and being would have to be the consequence of the concept, which would mean it was no longer absolute being; or the concept is the consequence of being, then we must begin with being without the concept.*“¹⁸

In *Philosophical Fragments* Climacus sets a critical mirror to Hegel's rationalism through a rigorous logical analysis of the dialogue between Socrates and Christ. In the Socratic world, man is the center of himself. The whole world emerges in him, because his self-knowledge is equivalent to the knowledge of divinity. However, if he already knows the truth, he does not need to learn it, which is contrary to the existential experience of a person who longs to know the truth and essentially longs for a reality that transcends him. However, the Socratic teacher, unlike Christ, cannot give anything essential and existential to the student. The paradoxical expression „*Similitudo Christum inter et Socratem in dissimilitudine praecipue est positia*“ does not have the ambition to grasp the contradiction academically, but to reject speculative dialectics in the name of existential experience. For Kierkegaard, truth is essential and therefore subjective. However, if it is to remain truth, it must have a source of truth outside itself in an external sense, while it is embraced existentially in an internal sense. The moment of a person's inner decision, his freedom thus receives great weight and importance.¹⁹

Kierkegaard reproaches Hegel for failing to distinguish between necessary being and contingent being, and thus failing to distinguish how we know necessary and contingent truths. For Kierkegaard, human existence takes place from the actual to the possible. In the term „reality“ he puts the world of abstract reality in the form of statements, mathematical expression, while it is not a matter of contingency in time (*være til*). However, by *existere* he understands the being of

17 Robert, B. Pippin, *Interanimations: Receiving Modern German Philosophy* (Chicago: The University Chicago Press, 2015).

18 Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

19 José García Martín et al., "The problem of the 'Individual' concept in the Kierkegaard's Journals," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 16, no. 2, (2020): 39-46; Peter Kondrla et al., "Philosophy of Education in Post-metaphysical Thinking," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13, no. 2, (2022): 19-30.

a person that happens in time, „... for possibility is annihilated by actuality. Precisely by coming into existence, everything that comes into existence demonstrates that it is not necessary, for the only thing that cannot come into existence is the necessary, because the necessary is.“²⁰ Similarly, he perceives physical reality dialectically in the sense of „imperfection“, which refers to the historical dimension of reality in time, and „perfection“, which refers to eternity, which is indifferent to history. He thus indirectly reproaches Hawking for his ignorance of the existential tension between „what“ and „how“. Assuming the denial of the relations between actual and possible, between necessary and contingent, according to Kierkegaard, we would end up in a closed system in which there is no room for life.²¹

According to Climacus, the essence of faith is subjective. A person cannot be objective by definition. On the contrary, it remains a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal and as such will protest against Hegel's dialectic, which wants to mediate absolute contrasts (*Vermittlung*). Thinking with the tools of the dialectic of contradictions can only address the immanent world. Man's faith points to the transcendent, in which human reason encounters the absurdity of paradox, as it faces a reality that transcends the world of reason and philosophical speculation. God, for Climacus is not the Absolute Spirit moving the world historical process, but is the Lord who rules this process. This is also why an individual can realize the ethical level of his existence only in an „ethical relationship with God“,²² since God is the one who demands everything ethical from man. Part of the tension between the temporal and the eternal, between the finite and the infinite, is not only the idea of „teleological suspension of the ethical“,²³ but also Kierkegaard's understanding of hope. According to Kierkegaard, hope must be seen in relation to hopelessness and despair, because true hope is hope against hope, with the possibility of future potential variability. Kierkegaard's view is, that it is only on Christian grounds that general hope can be consistently sustained, which implies that human (temporal) hopes are unstable and limited.

Conclusions

Hegel and Hawking stand on two opposite imaginary sides of the philosophical spectrum. While the former is a strict idealist, the latter is a strict naturalist. However, both have a common tool for grasping reality, and that is rationalism. The difference between Hegel and Hawking is also in the way of their thought trajectory. While Hegel was based on the conviction of the centrality of the dialectical relationship of the conflict between thesis and antithesis, which led him to a system in which both nature and spirit were stuck, Hawking put the conviction of the naturalistic nature of the universe at the centre. Consequently, for him only physics has a mandate for a person to truly know the world. This means that ethical, sociological, psychological and theological categories are only variations of „effective theory“, while the only essence of the world is the quantum processes that make it up. Hawking's movement is the opposite of Hegel's: he began with cosmology and beliefs about the nature of the universe and ended with a deterministic perception of the subjective world of man. For both thinkers, however, the result is the same: man is ultimately the result of deterministic processes taking place in time and space. Although Hegel works with concepts such as freedom, passion, love, hope, God, faith, etc., they are practically only subjective projections without existential content. Unlike Hegel, Hawking

20 Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments or Fragments of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

21 Roman Králik and Ľuboš Török, „The Moment“ Kierkegaard Attack upon Christendom,“ *Euroepan Journal of Science and Theology* 12, no. 3, (2016): 45-53.

22 Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript To Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 140.

23 Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

categorically rejects human freedom and ethical categories, reducing the phenomenology of them to a subjective illusion.

Kierkegaard's approach is fundamentally different from Hegel and Hawking. Kierkegaard placed at the center of his grasp of reality the individual who is aware of himself and relates to the surrounding world as well as to himself in a conscious way. Since for Kierkegaard reality has a paradoxical character, even the inner world of a single individual is double-minded. In his existentialist paradigm, hope forms a key horizon that goes beyond the boundaries of what is known, empirically experienced, and conceptually imaginable. The absolute paradox of God in time thus forms a universal framework to which Kierkegaard relates his understanding of freedom, social responsibility, passion for life, the radicality of choice and the meaning of life in a teleological sense. This is also why a fundamental ethical shift from a descriptive to a prescriptive (*is/ought*) perception of the challenges of an individual's life, which faces different social and historical contexts, has its place in his work.²⁴ With his ethical and metaphysical realism, Kierkegaard brings lively stimuli to the ongoing discourse on issues of meta normative anti-realism, constructivism and value relativism in current epistemology.

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- 24 Marian Šuráb, „Recommendations of Pope Francis on Rhetoric,“ *Polonia Sacra* 26, no. 2, (2022): 7-32.

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HOLISTIC EDUCATION OF SENIORS IN THE EASTERN EUROPEAN MODEL OF THE U3A



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Abstract

Background: The paper focuses on presenting the concept of a holistic model of seniors' education in Universities of the Third Age (U3As) in different Eastern European countries and is a combination of the authors' reflections, research results and experience.

The authors indicate the problems and challenges associated with an ageing society. These are factors that contribute to the growth of the importance of gerontology in science and the need to educate adults in this field as well as to support seniors facing the challenges of everyday life. It was noted that it is education that can increase public awareness, improve the quality of life of seniors, avoid some of the consequences of ageing and prevent social exclusion.

The purpose of the UTA is to educate seniors and spread knowledge. There are different models of education that are adopted and used by different countries, and at the core of these are mainly volunteers who take on different roles. Currently, UTAs can benefit from various forms of support and funding from such sources as local governments, grant programmes or EU funding competitions. Federations associating UTAs are also being established.

Conclusion: Regardless of the model of education, it is possible to observe several relationships typical of each of them, which allows us to speak of an Eastern European model of education of older people. Several characteristics of UTA-type institutions have been identified. The Polish influence on the development of seniors' education is significant.

Several problems associated with the Eastern European model of UTAs have been identified, including the mismatch between the needs of seniors and the educational offer, or the too non-scientific approach to the organisation of activities. It is crucial to support cooperation between gerontologists, organisers and sponsors and recruit staff.

Keywords: Education of seniors – Holistic education – Universities of the Third Age – Eastern European model of the U3A – Ageing society.

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