In this paper, the idea of human existence is related to current issues of identities within a complex, technologically globalized modern world. Kierkegaard’s discourse seems very useful in this regard, because of its vivid narrative about obstacles arising from the superficial offerings of freedom and knowledge that essentially suppress the individual’s inner development. By conceptualizing existence and reason as polarities of human experience, it is not possible to implement the existential immediacy of the relationship between knowable structure of Being and the living issues of human beings. That is why, I suggest, their relating, which emerges from the qualitative nature of the state of presence – simultaneously belonging to individual’s interiority and to the external world – is of great importance.

KEY WORDS: modernity, reflection, despair, presence, existential turn

Situated between Being and Nothingness, human existence is confronted with the opposition of a desire for certainty, and a fear of existential annihilation. Human freedom seems threatened with the determinism of things, and all the negative aspects of modern existence. Like Rousseau who’s discourse informed humanity in the believes that neither political regime, nor property, could alienate the individual from his/her natural freedom and liberty, Kierkegaard acknowledged the freedom of individuals before God. Within the modern society (Kierkegaard’s „present age”) this freedom is often mislead and misused masking a despair that individuals need to reconcile in order to reveal themselves. Already in 19th century Kierkegaard could see clearly that the masking process in modern age is supported and fueled with the technology of society. That was already then recognizable in the press, public, and the state. Pretending to offer individuals more freedom and knowledge than any previous age, modernity actually stifles the personal inner subjective development of the individual.

Kierkegaard’s criticism remains rooted in the transformations of his understanding of „the revolutionary age” towards freedom, and contempt for authority within an individual. Kierkegaard describes that case of religion is much like politics. Christianity modified its doctrines to incorporate changes in modern culture slowly annihilating
traditional pre-modern beliefs and rituals. The contrast between modernity and the pre-modern world is thoughtfully revealed in Kierkegaard’s writing. Throughout modernity, the revolutionary drive fades away, and society become decadent. Instead of maintaining sincerity in practicing traditional ways and rituals, societies exacerbate anxiety and despair within individuals.

Within the notions of Kierkegaard’s work, in returning the individual to their true self, the despair is unavoidable. In modern circumstances, precisely the absence of despair could be the worst kind of despair that reflects itself from its very absence. Modernity is arranged in such a way that individuals are offered very tangible goals, based upon quantitative means that promise security through a secular progress. Almost century before The Frankfurt School’s critique of Western civilization in view of human emancipation, Kierkegaard warned about human consumerist tendencies. Modern progress is defined based upon artificially produced desires and the corresponding consideration of lifestyle choices. Thus, the consumerist challenge is happening within the individual in the endless cycle of reflection.

“This is why eventually not even a very gifted person is able to liberate himself from reflection... what the individual fears more than death is reflection’s judgment upon him, reflection’s objection to his wanting to venture something as an individual. The individual does not belong to God, to himself, to the beloved, to his art, to his scholarship; no, just as a serf belongs to an estate, so the individual realizes that in every respect he belongs to an abstraction in which reflection subordinates him.”

Reflection subordinates people to abstractions through a categorical apparatus and classifications through which order is introduced into each system. In this sense, the problem of reflection is connected with issues of instrumental rationality and technology (of society). It is deeply embedded in classifications and socially accepted values. A modern secularized mechanistic worldview, ruled by external values and purposes, and thereby contributed to the disappearance of a subject, is replaced by technology. The mechanistic worldview and consequent secularization reduces values to the immanence of materialistic humanism, depriving humans from the relationship with the holiness of a transcendent being.

1 Sickness; Part I, Section B, XI-140.
2 I have in mind between two world wars.
3 “Needless to say, his general philosophy remains fundamentally opposed to failing into the traps of consumerism” (Koteska 2016:24).
4 Two Ages; Section III, Part 2, VIII-80.
5 By its „logic of replacement“ of an information as the universal form of the construction of life. The replacement logic is the hybris logic (Paić 2017:9).
6 The environmental, social and individual sides of modern technological progress finally lead to a new option of the immanent holiness. That might be comparable with some aspects of posthumanism.
While secularized view of the world strives to establish technological control over nature and life, a secularized view of a human, as a „rational animal” limits the ethics and values. The power to control, which is principally misusable, is enormously magnified with the technological progress.

Although instrumental rationality annihilates the transcendent foundations of Being, it can not annihilate the experience of the existence with its dimensions of feelings, and intuition. The unfoundedness of freedom can make this experience lead to the abyss of despair and anxiety, but the human feelings and intuition can also create the fulfilling state of presence which become the source of individual’s connectedness to anything particular as well as to everything, to the whole.

Rational knowledge of the unfoundedness of freedom determines modern relationships within the world, but ultimately, it can not prevent the conscious approach to the world with a faith that is simultaneously the faith to the self and to the world, and that provides certainty independently from the *cogito*. In the conscious presence of an immanent being, the connection with the source is simultaneously the process of the opening to transcendence, which has been lost due to the dominance of the instrumental rationality. The experience of the presence in the existence, makes possible for immanence and transcendence to be connected. From this perspective it is possible to see them as the entangled spheres in an onto-epistemo-ethical wholeness.

The disappearance of traditional, metaphysically forced values, was the consequence of their external imposition with demanded adjustment of the subjective experience. Instead of the separation between immanence and transcendence, the possibility of the subject to open to the experience of emerging from nature (biology, and physics), through human world, to divine holiness and metaphysics.

To compare this view with Kierkegaard’s quest for the sincere interiority of individual’s existence, with the ethical values steaming from it, will help to overcome the fundamental hypothesis of a hypostatized Being. Instead of posing the unchangeability of the transcendent Being, in order to understand it in the abstract universality of categories, which are existentialy self-denying, isn’t it more realistic to acknowledge the processuality of Being with its ever-emerging transformations? We could imagine some indications of that approach through the history of philosophical thought – from inevitable metaphysical antinomias to necessity of the categorical binaries’ deconstruction.

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7 To what we give our faith – that is, at least for us, for in a case of equating the faith and the belief, we know that the belief can be illusory. But conscious faith is constitutive to the reality of that what is.

8 That includes encouragement of personal decision about development of the relationship with transcendent through the relationship with our neighbour (Repar 2016:14)

9 The traditional ontology assumed that „Being is the transcendence”, in order to „understand it in the universality of categories” (Paić 2017:11-12)
We need to remind ourselves repeatedly about the difference between what is, and what is understandable. However, this doesn’t mean that what cannot be understood should be ignored – as it is in modern science and technology approach, which is based on reducing this differences to its understandable parts. Now we need to acknowledge that as a denial of the fundamental dimension of existence which is vibratory present and intuitively intelligible. Now we should mark this as a key danger that is masked by modern worldview where the progress of technology ever more successfully takes over the human values.

It has already been said that in the background of these circumstances is a mechanistic approach. Behind it is the so called „scientific materialism” which neglects important spheres of material (natural) and spiritual (human) values. It is prone to associate itself with all kinds of ideological dogmatisms. Hence, the returning to the individual intuition and emotions is crucial as a way to connect with human higher values, and as a way to resist to the mechanistic paradigm of modernity which usurps our minds and our world. The same phenomena that we now recognize as features of modern age, Kierkegaard at his time called the „present age”, which testifies the repetitive persistence of modern societal phenomena.

The postulates of transcendence are presence not provable, nor are the attempts to establish what immanent reality is. That is precisely why we have reached the age of „post-truth”. While honest minds are willing to take the quest for the deeper understanding of truth, those cunning and power-hungry are exclusively focused on the instrumental truth and the useful side of the world. It’s not that they don’t pay attention to the possibilities of its misuse, but they deliberately take advantages of it.

The realm of ethics became a field of human choice – since evil may not exist in a strictly ontological sense, but it exists in human intentions and actions. Through them, the virtual can be transformed into the real. In the age of post-truth, one important side of the meaning of freedom of choice is to accept that, ultimately, we choose what we are going to believe to be real. What is considered real also depends on the measures associated with epistemological sphere and sobering issues of neutrality. Therefore, the individual should open up to recognition of the different sides of the whole in order to broaden horizons by (self)respect and awareness of the importance of high human values.

Concerning the issue of reflection, it is important to know that humans are capable of silencing the constant mental activity. In the midst of constant interior „chattering” (Kierkegaard’s term) the human beings is not capable to connect with themselves and stay unconscious of the subtle dimension of Being (traditionally it may be called „transcendence”, but scientifically it has been registered as kind of neuro-frequency). It is the alienation from ourselves that leads to the alienation from others. In such cases the mind is like a cage and human beings need to shift the consciousness to the body, the heart, and the soul.
That strikes the very spirit of Kierkegaard when he says: “the fact that reflection is holding the individual and the age in a prison, the fact that it is reflection that does it and not tyrants...”. Kierkegaard also thought that endless reflections over possibilities deflect any criticism or blame that would attack the core of the age itself.

The low frequency of human consciousness is reflected to the social sphere in the shallowness, which Kierkegaard call theatrical, banquet mentality, that also shows in gossiping and “parrot morality”. That is the enduring feature of the age od modernity, which superficial attitude resonates with fear and despair due to the separation from one’s own self and from high human values as well. According to Kierkegaard, that type of society is devoided of passion. The individual seeks something to do purely for the sake of action, but all actions and activities have been transformed into things that appear „theatrical”.

To understand the reasons for that state of affairs means to think again on the fundamental features of the modern world which mechanical technological progress is based on mind-body separtion, alienating humans from their sense of the presence in the world. Beginning with Cartesian project to overcome corporeal limitations and to free the mind for conquesting the world, modernity expelled axial human values of the pre-modern worldview and its annihilation of nature is escalate in the post-modern post-thruthness of the Anthropocene. We are looking now for the existential turn that is essential to avert disaster. Key answers may be very old, but still applicable.

Dominering civilized rationality reduced natural abundance of life and freedom and thereby devalued human existence. Ubiquitous evidence of it is not often recognized. Paul Feyerabend is one of its famous critics. His reaction to the petition, circulated by well-known European philosophers, shocked liberal creators of the document, because, according to him, philosophy is not intended as addition to the previously existing ways of living, but to express their replacement. Seeing categorial „treasures” as means of domination he wrote:

„The trouble is that the ‘treasures’ lack important ingredients of a rewarding human life, and that, in the search for objectivity and stability, their inventors had the tendency to push such ingredients aside. Compared with poetry and common sense, philosophical discourse is barren—and insensitive. It frowns upon the emotional bonds and the changes that keep humans going, which means that philosophers have destroyed what they have found, much in the way that the standard-bearers of Western civilization have destroyed indigenous cultures and ways of life and replaced them with their own idiosyncratic ‘treasures’”.

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10 Two Ages; Part III, Section 2, VIII-76
11 Feyerabend 1999:270
12 Feyerabend 1987:317
With its rationalized approach, modernity established control over what previously has been naturally given. The main treasure of symbolic thought, linguistic classifications, served modernity to separate humans from the flow of life, and to capture an infinitely diverse reality for the formal reductive system of knowledge.

Modernity proceeded with the Cartesian trend of disembodiment that excludes probable origins of human consciousness in an undivided self which preceeds humankind’s adoption of symbolic thought. With quitting with such a trend, Huserl’s phenomenology was expressed in the idea of foundational presence. Husserl never tires of asserting that one cannot dissolve things in consciousness. Phenomenological apel, “return to the things themselves” supposed to oppose to deconstructionism which denies anything outside language and symbolic culture, any meaning outside words.

However, now we should acknowledge that experience is not solely rational nor linguistic. Embodiment is crucial for the possibility of being present. Language has an inverse relationship to the presence because it separates us from the processual flow of life and make the body retreats. Thus, as Zerzan stresses, by denying the possibility of an imediated relationship with the world, modernity induced the believing that disembodiment and representation are unquestionable facts.13

Since Rousseau, who attacked representation in the name of immediate presence and transparent relationships, most philosophers take the opposite view which culminates in deconstructivism. Derrida viewed the notion of a transparent relationship as mere nostalgic fantasy, a result of the hegelian „unhappy consciousness” of modernity. „Not only that immediacy is no longer available to us because of complexity and modernity, Derrida holds, that it never existed at all”14.

The view that disembodiment and representation are inevitable facts of life coincides with the refusal to question a globalization of techno-reality. Zerzan sugests that by its function the technoculture take us further from ourselves and from the things as well. From the erosion of human connectedness, immediacy, and autonomy, the fragmentation of experience advances into all sectors of human life. As Heidegger, who refused to ground his thought in anthropological and historical reality, expressed, the essence of technology remains fundamentally ambivalent. He paved a way to post-modernism to emerge and grow from the thesis that overarching symbolic atmosphere, foundationless and inescapable, is made up of shifting, indeterminate signifiers that can never establish firm meaning. In this context, fusing organic life with a machine seems acceptable. The reigning civilisational ethos has denied the very possibility of any stable place of meaning and value. This sensibility disarmes critique and the intended result goes much further along than most people realize.

13 Zerzan, 2008:71
14 ibid
Convinced that between the human world and the technological world intersubjectivity emerges, Zerzan holds that a system of meaningful ties of the human mind-body to the cyberworld is represented. However, it fails to satisfy authentic human needs, and the greatest among them is human need for presence. Presence is the primordial quality of any existence and its absence is the measure of human impoverishment.

Modern age, as Kierkegaard described, lacks both passion and enthusiasm. Enthusiasm has been replaced by envy, which compels the individual to act provoked by the progress or possessions of another individual. This follows from the rampant drive for possessions and material goods. In this age defined by a fierce individualism, all social relations become a form of competition in which individuals strive after more extravagant trivialities. Contrasted to that is the nature of the revolutionary age. Rooted in the values of the French Revolution, it remained utopian even throughout the later communist era. With its romantic, utopian nature, the age of revolution is described as an essentially passionate age. „The age of revolution is essentially passionate and therefore essentially has culture”\(^1\)\(^5\)

With the global grow of complexity, it becomes visible what the destination of culture has been all along. Although symbolic culture has been a mediated or virtual reality long before what we call „media” existed, its consumption grow in importance as the rate of completion of technification accelerates. However, instead of more retreat from reality, we need a life-centered re-embodiment, a return to groundedness, presence the face-to-face.

The promise of communication is imbued with that dimension even in a virtual space during our present pandemic’s lockdown. Long before our present day digitalisation and normativisation of social distancing, Kierkegaard elucidated how modern (present) age’s lacking of passion has made association and concretion impossible. Instead, concretion has been replaced by a form of individuality that lacks many forms of traditional interpersonal interaction found in the age of revolution. „The immediacy [of reaction] of the age of revolution is a restoring of natural relationships in contrast to a fossilized formalism which, by having lost the originality of the ethical, has become a desiccated ruin, a narrow-hearted custom and practice”\(^1\)\(^6\).

Also an important issue of the present age is the ubiquitous drive to get the most out of possibilities in life. In Kierkegaards’s view, that means staying at the level of manipulation, instead of deeper involvement with anything particular. With this, Kierkegaard introduced a notion of nihilism. Whether concerned with maximizing pleasure, or being ethical, or mystic religious, individual misses what is really important

\(^1\)\(^5\) Two Ages, Part III, Section 1, VIII-58.

\(^1\)\(^6\) Two Ages; Part III, Section 1, VIII-61.
about human beings and that is commitment. The commitment is conditio sine qua non of life beyond despair.

In the modern age, people suffer because they don’t find anything in their life that’s fully meaningful and satisfying to commit to. Therefore, understanding Kierkegaard can be life-changing. His philosophy spreads awareness of the spheres of existence in human life whether they are consisting in keeping all the possibilities open, or in obeying the ethical principles and feeling good about doing right things, or in trying to devote to faith and the mystical religious sphere. Kierkegaard’s mission has been to demonstrate that philosophy can be liberating as a sphere where we realize ourselves, and not something mainly theoretical and abstract. He warned us about the modern way of living, acting and thinking, socially, politically and economically, that we are forgetting what is fundamental – our existence. In the 19th century, he wrote about essentiality of conceiving ourselves, and of thinking about our existence. Instead of living only in the Cartesian coordinates: “I think, therefore I am”, Kierkegaard initiated humans to wonder isn’t it the other way around, and to realize that existence precede everything.

In modern world the fact that we exist is not in the foreground. In the business, the social, the political and scientific world, dominates statistics which describes people as a set of variables and data. The mystery, and the questioning what is human existence passes in the background as if it is something unimportant. Science tries to explain human being as a set of things to understand, to grasp, to explain, and counts for nothing human existence. Therefore, Kierkegaard’s quest is amazing, and it is also destabilizing, especially for the fake lifestiles of modern society.

Instead of a denying of the very notion of reality, we can return to existentialism and acknowledge our inevitable concern for reality. We are already engaged in reality because we exist. The Kierkegaard’s quest on how to overcome abstract reasoning and turn to the essential fact of our existence shaped the whole of the 20th century. The primacy of the fact that human beings are „thrown” into the world without any choice became philosophy of existence. As Sartre said, everyone is taken by the real because to exist is to be outside oneself, to be in the world.18

It has become modern norm to have rationalized approach to everything, including ourselves. Although we may have trouble understanding Kierkegaard’s quest, in a time when new forms of alienation have a lot of impact on our lives, we have a lot to gain from rethinking what does it mean to exist. How do I find out what I am? Not by trying to find it out with reflecting and reasoning only, but mainly by experiencing life,

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17 “A life of faith... heightens the passion of commitment and moves one to the very limits of human existence. Becoming an actualized individual involves paradoxically transforming one’s own existence through faith...” (Khan 2013:7)

18 As Sartre said: „Tout est dehors, tout, jusqu’à nous mêmes.”(Sartre 1939: 30-33).
meeting others, doing something, exercising, working, since that is what means to exist: to be always already taken by the real. Hence, the way reality takes us is essential and it illuminates the deep meaning of existentialist philosophy. Asking something so ubiquitous that we don’t see it, is disconcerting because it demands us to abandon usual way of thinking.

The hope that the nature would always be there for us as at the first day is an inspiring perspective. An understanding of human origins, so categorically ruled out from modern world, may be among antidotes to problematic conditions determined by the technological civilization. Thinking how to make an existential turn demands the hope in the grace of presence. The awareness of individual’s interiority is important for a reconnection with presence. That is how creative transformations of an unbearable view of reality can happen. Taking right decision, which overcomes lack of rationally reachable guarantee for any choice, becomes possible only then. That is how reflection transforms with faith, which helps individuals to find authenticity in their engagements. Whether it is the kind of faith which relies on transcendence, or it prefers worldly immanence, it is the essential human response to paradoxies of existence which are rationally determined and imposed in modern society.

Jelena Đurić
The Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory
University of Belgrade

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Jelena Đurić

**Moderno doba i osećaj prisustva**

*(Apstrakt)*

U ovom tekstu ideja ljudskog postojanja odnosi se na aktualna pitanja identiteta u složenom, tehnološki globalizovanom savremenom svetu. Kjerkegorov diskurs izgleda veoma koristan u tom pogledu zbog svog živopisnog predočavanja prepreka koje proizlaze iz površnih ponuda slobode i znanja koje ustvari potiskuju unutrašnji razvoj individue. Konceptualizacijom postojanja i razuma kao polariteta ljudskog iskustva nije moguće ostvariti egzistencijalnu neposrednost odnosa između poznate strukture Bića i životnih pitanja ljudskih bića. Zato je od velike važnosti njihovo povezivanje koje, prema pretpostavci koju ovde ispitujemo, proizlazi iz kvalitativne prirode stanja prisutnosti koje istovremeno pripada unutrašnjosti individue i spoljašnjem svetu.

**Ključne reči:** modernost, razmišljanje, očajanje, prisustvo, egzistencijalni obrt