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FROM “CLASSICAL” TRANSCENDENCE TO “POST-TRANSCENDENCE”: AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

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The article traces the origin of the concept “transcendence” in the Axial Period when its classical definition was articulated according to which transcendence is a sphere beyond the sensually given world: in Judaism it is represented by God who stays beyond created nature, in Platonism – by the world of perfect and eternal ideas. The article shows that classical interpretation of “transcendence” is based on dualism and the vertical hierarchical structure of Being. On referring to I. Kant’s, M. Heidegger’s, E. Levinas’, L. Wittgenstein’s and G. Vattimo’s views, the article sketches the radical shift in its definition that was made in Modern philosophy. Contemporary definition of transcendence concerns transcending the human self in the world, not the world itself. It is proven that the authentic Christianity has been distorted by classical interpretation of transcendence and can be restored only in the age of “post-transcendence”.

Key words: transcendence, immanence, world, God, self, Axial Period, secularity.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Transcendence” is not a monosemic term and involves a variety of contexts: ontological, theological, epistemological and anthropological. This concept has a wide range of definitions depending on what is being transcended: sensible world, self, Being or even transcendence itself. Yet all of them share in common some fundamental points: first, necessity of a “border”, since “going beyond” means going beyond something, and a bound is needed to demarcate “here” and “there”; second, objectification and representation – namely, transcendence is understood as something that “goes beyond”, something that represents a counterpart in the binary oppositions constituted by the “border” (inside/outside, self/other, world/God etc.) [8, p. 2; 10, p. 169–170]

Examination of all definitions in detail would be quite an extensive enterprise; and so, in order to fit the scale of this paper I suggest to start with focusing on the following questions: When did the concept “transcendence” appear? What was its initial meaning? And is this meaning still current? Therefore, the **aim** of the paper is, on tracing the historical origin of the concept “transcendence”, to unfold its classical interpretation and to sketch its transformation in the contemporary philosophy.

2. AXIAL AGE BREAKTHROUGH

Probably, the most crucial, essential achievement of the Axial Age consists in “man’s reaching out beyond himself by growing aware of himself within the whole of Being” [5, p. 4]. Along with facing his own limitations and powerlessness, on the one hand, and plunging in the depth of his selfhood, on the other hand, Axial man discovers transcendence – something *beyond*: the beyond of the immediately given self (that is being unveiled under the guidance of self-reflection), the beyond of the sensually given world and the beyond of the temporality (that overcomes history). Hence, the Axial Age introduces the *dualism* of within/beyond, immanent/transcendent, temporal/eternal that was unknown before. Let us take a closer look at the distinctive features of the earlier “pre-axial” worldview and at the consequences that this dualism entails. However, as it is well-known, there are five paths of Axiality deployment: in India, China, Iran, Palestine and Greece; and each of them involves some kind of a specific, distinctive interpretation of immanent/transcendent correlation [10, p. 73–78]. Thus, it’s necessary to emphasize that cases of Palestine and Greece exclusively will be in focus of the paper, whereas these two types of Axiality affected the direction of the contemporary Western philosophy development.

The initial interpretation of transcendence in the Axial Age – which we might call the “classical” one – presupposes its *spatial* definition: transcendence is understood as a particular dimension, terrain, space beyond “this” sensually given world. Moreover, patriarchal model that the concept “transcendence” arose within determines a strict top-down hierarchical relationship between the immanent and the transcendent, on asserting the superiority of the latter [8, p. 4]. Therefore, Axiality introduces differentiation, and the unity of homogeneous pre-axial world is broken.

Pre-axial cosmology was based on the immanence of the divine: gods belonged to “another world” but this “otherness” was not beyond nature or opposite to it; consequently, gods were not “extra-mundane”, they were immanent in the world, and thus, nature was seen as enchanted – sacred and homogeneous. Society – integrated as well in nature – was free of differentiation and distinction, the early pre-axial polytheistic religions sustained social order of a radical unity [1, p. 70; 2, p. 371]. Cyclical interpretation of time fitted the picture, since it did not clearly articulate time dimensions (past, present and future) – they overlapped and merged into undifferentiated and repetitive flow.

The Axial Age brings a radical rupture in understanding of reality, establishes a sharp disjunction between here-below and beyond in which the beyond is privileged as a higher metaphysical and/or ethical order. However, the two cases in question – Palestine and Greece – have dissimilar interpretations of the beyond elaborated in Judaism and Platonism, respectively.

Judaism defines God as radical transcendence: God is taken out of nature; He is totally outside the cosmos, not only spatially but temporally as well. He creates nature but belongs to the beyond of it. This leads to disenchantment – and, consequently, to rationalization – of nature, when the magic spell, the sacred canopy embracing nature is destroyed and the homogeneous mythological reality is broken by the opposition between transcendence and “this” world. The unitary and undifferentiated cosmos of mythology is bifurcated by the ethical sphere. From now on, moral behaviour, internal choice and ethical responsibility in the face of God are much more important than any external, physically performed rituals that mythology was “prescribing”. Hence, a new type of relationship between the individual and the group is formed insofar as an individual self is manifested as moral evaluator that refers primarily to the transcendent God [6, p. 55, 88].

In Platonism we find a contrast between the immanent changing world and the transcendent eternal changeless world. This opposition is explained with the famous Cave allegory. Plato describes men imprisoned in a cave for their entire life and chained so that they can see a wall behind them and cannot turn around. The fire is burning behind them and by the light of it they can see shadows of objects moving along a walkway which is in front of the fire. The shadows and the echoes of the unseen objects – this is the only world that the prisoners have ever known. When one of the prisoners has been released and then returns back to the cave to tell the others about the true world he has seen outside – nobody believes him. “The allegory draws on a special... difference between *inside* and *outside* that suggests not only that there are two “spaces”... but that we can move from the immanent world inside the cave to the transcendent world outside the cave” [3, p. 148]. Hence, Plato demarcates the transcendent and the immanent in two ways: *ontologically*, on emphasizing the priority of the transcendent, and *epistemologically*, on opposing the intelligible world as the only possible source of truth to the visible world that misleads us, provides us with nothing but illusion.

The Christian tradition adopts this Platonic interpretation and modifies it into the idea of *divine* transcendence. Mediaeval Christianity synthesizes elements of Judaism with Platonism, and consequently, transcendence is pretty much radicalized. As we mentioned, for Plato the transcendent world of ideas served as permanent unchanging foundation of the visible world and as the source of our true knowledge, whereas to know meant to cognize ideas, not the appearance of things. Thus, transcendence is reachable and intelligible. The Christian traditions places the ideas in the mind of God whose “beyond” is inaccessible for human beings. The creature can never penetrate the mind of the creator; it is restricted with the realm of the created nature, of the immanence. The truths that we can grasp are the truths of “this” created world; our true knowledge “corresponds to what is the case in creation, but the criterion of this correspondence is to be found... in the eternal ideas of the divine mind” [3, p. 149]. Our mind can grasp only a partial actualization of the eternal truths in the created order, we can cognize only their incomplete manifestations in creation, but we can never know these eternal truths as such.

Christian theology describes God in three aspects: as God (Absolute Transcendence itself), as Creator (Absolute Transcendence that serves as foundation and condition for distinction between immanence and transcendence) and as Revealer (Absolute Transcendence that reveals itself to his creatures). Knowledge of God as Creator cannot be read off from his creation, but exclusively in the light of God’s self-revelation. Hence, we have no access to Absolute Transcendence beyond our Immanence but only within our Immanence where God discloses himself. In this case – as Karl Rahner puts it – we see God’s self-transcending through self-revelation: God self-transcends to the side of Immanence, of his creation without ceasing to be God. Human transcending entails only negative theology, because we can never reach the beyond, we just posit a differentiation between immanence and transcendence – and thus, we are capable for grasping Absolute Transcendence only in negative terms [3, p. 163–166, 173]. So, if – whatever it means – we can know something of God, it is not because our reason can comprehend God, but because God breaks in into the immanence of human history. God self-revelation in Jesus Christ means that God makes himself accessible and comprehensible in human terms. Christianity, finally, makes God close, not by saying that he is immanent in things, but by showing that he constantly transcends himself and reveals himself to human beings.

Thereby, discovered in the Axial Aged and radicalized in the Middle Ages, the concept of transcendence establishes a deficiency of the mundane sphere and, therefore, its dependency on the eternal, ideal world beyond. “This” world – which was the only possible in the “pre-axial” period – loses its value, once the split is made. Nevertheless, together with the decrease of the mundane sphere the increasing necessity of its rehabilitation comes. “It poses a question of the ways in which the chasm between the transcendent and the mundane orders can be bridged” [4, p. 200]. Eventually, on trying to restore its value, the mundane sphere obtains its self-sufficiency and independency of the transcendence due to secularization process.

3. MODERNITY ON THE PROBLEM OF TRANSCENDENCE

By means of deism in the early Modernity, secularization eliminates the reference to the eternal truths of the divine mind [See: 7, p. 262–274] and defines cognition solely in terms of the correlation between human mind and the world. After the abolishment of the eternal truths of the divine mind *epistemic transcendence* is defined as the infinity of what can be known; meaning, that there is always something more to be known than we in fact know and that this “more” is reachable for our mind. So this kind of *logical transcending* consists in the passage from one idea/concept to another, a new one.

Yet, on referring to the problem of transcendence in “Critics of Pure Reason”, I. Kant claims that there are limits of our knowledge and distinguishes transcendence outside in the world and transcendence outside the world. I. Kant notices inaccessible transcendence in self-knowledge as well. He explains that in a statement “I know myself” the I who knows is different from the I that is known because there is an irreducible difference between a self-representation and the act of self-representing (when I represent my self-representation) [3, p. 162].

In the 20th century some other aspects of transcendence are emphasized. M. Heidegger, E. Levinas and L. Wittgenstein claim that there is something beyond the everyday experience, but this “beyond” is not spatial anymore, it is interpreted in the context of being, ethics and language.

M. Heidegger explains transcendence in terms of Dasein that “is itself the passage across”. Dasein surpasses things in encountering them within the world; therefore, transcendence is Dasein’s being-in-the-world. M. Heidegger denies the definition of the world as things in the world; instead, he defines the world as the way we relate to things and to others. So, we do not move to something invisible beyond the world, because the world is already the invisible “how” of our behavior in it [11, p. 3–4]. Unlike spatiality of the Axial Age definition of transcendence, M. Heidegger opens a horizon of temporality. In being-towards-death the possibilities and potentialities of selfhood are projected onto temporal horizons (the past, the present and especially the future); therefore, it constitutes the “beyondness” that is needed for my thinking and actions. Death is the ultimate horizon of my possibilities of selfhood.

For E. Levinas, transcendence means the ethical relation between the self and the other. This is a “horizontal” transcendence that suggests self-transcending, whereas “vertical” transcendence consists in going above or to the depth of the immanent world. E. Levinas defines the transcendent as the other person whom we can never understand fully and adequately because we see him/her from our own point of view, and who remains radically different from us. Therefore, the relation with the other is a relation with Mystery. Ethical transcendence means not merely going beyond my Ego, but rather it is becoming another in the experience of the Other. When I am cognizing an object, I remain myself without being fundamentally changed; but when I am encountering the Other, I return to myself not as I was before, because the Other puts me into question.

Beyond ethical context anthropological aspect of self-transcendence deploys in two ways. First, self-transcending is described as discovering a “true self”. To become a “true self” means to create, to construct the self in contrast to some pre-given identity, to break through social and cultural determinants. Secondly, self-transcending is claimed to be an openness toward the presence of others, their values and ideals. Here it is an overcoming of self-identity, critical deconstruction in order to become accessible to others [3, p. 169].

L. Wittgenstein chooses a different context for interpretation of transcendence. He emphasizes that there are things (like being-as-a-whole etc.) that *transcend* our ability to express them, not everything can have representation in language, and thus, we need to remain silent about this things.

However, all these approaches focus on the man who is transcending himself, who is going beyond himself in ontological, epistemological or ethical sense. They have nothing to do with transcendence in classical (“Axial”) definition where not the man but the world (the reality) is being transcended.

4. “POST-TRANSCENDENCE”: IN WHAT SENSE?

Modernity (from the 19th century) is characterized as a loss of transcendence [2, p. 371].

G. Vattimo proves that now we live in the age of “post-transcendence”, for classical transcendence is left behind as so much metaphysics. G. Vattimo refers to philosophy of F. Nietzsche and concludes that nihilism entails “weakening of Being” which means a crash of metaphysical systems. He explains that within the contemporary philosophy relativization puts the end to the strictly hierarchized structures of metaphysical thinking and the strong concept of objective reality; Absolute Truth fades away together with inviolability of moral absolutes. Metaphysics is based on “the belief in an objective world order, which must be recognized so that thought might conform with its descriptions of reality and its moral choices”, “in the ideal world order – in a kingdom of essences that lay beyond empirical reality” [9, p.13–14].

Metaphysics is refuted not only by nihilism, but also by the development and the specialization of sciences, the proliferation of cultures, the fragmentation of life spheres, by “the Babel-like pluralism of late-modern society” that have made the belief in “a unified world order impossible to conceive” [9, p. 15]. Hence, the end of metaphysics – “weakening of Being” – opens hermeneutical horizon: when there is no objectivity, we need to find a common background based on understanding and interpretation of each particular situation, as far as the reference to the epistemological correspondence with objective reality is not possible anymore.

The end of metaphysics evidently leads to the collapse of “metaphysical theology”. I. Kant puts God into the noumenal world, and thus, he denies all efforts to say anything about God on the basis of metaphysical arguments. F. Nietzsche consequently claims that metaphysical, transcendent “God is dead”. Therefore, transcendence – in its classical definition – dissolves in immanence. As I. Dalfert puts it: “In the secularized modern version Plato’s view is not simply reversed, but rather the whole distinction between immanence and transcendence... is rejected: we do not live in an immanent world where we lost the feeling for transcendence, but we live in the only world there is” [3, p. 148].

The collapse of Platonic dualism implies the end of transcendence and the rebirth of the sacred in this (earthly) world. Transcendence of God is vanishing irreversibly. God cannot exist somewhere beyond our spatial-temporal reality anymore, so he dissolves in the world; he is not alienated of this world anymore but incarnated. This is called *kenosis* of God – self-emptying of God – when he comes down from the transcendent world and incarnates in Christ. Thus,

metaphysical God of Scholastics – who was considered as the first mover, the first cause and the ultimate purpose of the world – disappears. Rationally grounded certainty in God's existence is now replaced by the faith in his existence that relies upon the trust to the words of Revelation. Transcendent God of metaphysical theology underlies the very structure of reality and guarantees the legitimacy of its hierarchy, whereas God of the end of metaphysics reveals himself through the Book – through the Bible. To grasp his revelation we need to *understand* and to *interpret* the Book – and here again we step on the field of hermeneutics. And since we face *understanding* and *interpretation*, we need the criterion for them.

“Weakening of Being” refutes Platonic principle of objectivity but G. Vattimo emphasizes that, indeed, subjectivity was brought forward long before Kant by Christianity – as St Augustine claimed: “in interiore homine habitat veritas” (“the truth inhabits an inner man”). G. Vattimo indicates that the authentic Christianity has always been “non-metaphysical” addressing the human subjectivity manifested through love, compassion, care and mercy, and in our days – when it has finally released of the Platonic dualist metaphysical framework – it can fully accomplish itself in this world. Hence, Christianity, says G. Vattimo, provides us with the criterion for our hermeneutical enterprise – and that one would be *love*, since in the contemporary pluralist world only love can serve as the common background for the interpreters' community and establish principles of respect and tolerance [9, p.47–49]. G. Vattimo asserts that Christianity is designed for *this* world not for beyond, its essence consists in applying teaching of Christ in *this* world, overcoming hostility between religions and creating a common background for dialogue. He proves that this is what a true secularity consists in and that through secularity the authentic Christian message is being fully deployed.

5. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, there is no single interpretation of transcendence. It is a multidimensional ambiguous term, and its diverse meanings have been emerging throughout history. Each of these meanings deserves a separate full research, while only some of them were sketched out in this paper. However, the point was not to embrace all of them, but rather to show how a usage of and a reference to the very distinction between transcendence and immanence had affected human worldview and had changed contemporary social life. Classical definition of transcendence directing a person towards something perfect, ideal and constant beyond this world lost its ground in the contemporary philosophy, and thus, concept of post-transcendence is justified. Although, post-transcendence does not presuppose the absence of God who was attributed with transcendence by classical theory – on the contrary, through authentic Christianity (not affected by Platonic dualism) it entails immanentization of transcendence, which means that from now on God is present here, in *this* world, and thus, the significance of *this* world is being reevaluated.

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ВІД „КЛАСИЧНОЇ” ТРАНСЦЕНДЕНЦІЇ ДО „ПОСТ-ТРАНСЦЕНДЕНЦІЇ”: ОГЛЯД ПРОБЛЕМИ

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У статті здійснено історико-філософський аналіз трансформації значень поняття «трансценденція». На основі розгляду онтологічного, теологічного, гносеологічного та антропологічного контекстів виокремлено класичне визначення трансценденції та досліджено його місце у сучасній філософії.

Будучи одним із найважливіших досягнень Осьового часу, поняття «трансценденція» стало для людини відкриттям сфери «по той бік» чуттєво даного світу. Невідомий міфологічній свідомості дуалізм вічного/часового, трансцендентного/іманентного радикально змінив уявлення людини про структуру Буття. Якщо в до-осьовому періоді дійсність сприймалася як гомогенна і навіть боги належали до «цього» світу, то поява поняття «трансценденція» ознаменувала строге розмежування двох вимірів: земного і небесного, фізичного і духовного, матеріального і ідеального – та встановлення чіткої

ієрархії Буття, яка приписувала чуттєво даному світу недосконалість та залежність від трансцендентного. Відтак, доведено, що класичне визначення трансценденції передбачає, по-перше, *просторове* розмежування і *вертикальний* поділ (між вищим і нижчим рівнями Буття), по-друге, вихід за межі *чуттєво даного світу*. У період Осьового часу дуалізм найбільш яскраво проявився в юдаїзмі та грецькій філософії, тому в статті беруться до уваги саме ці два варіанти Осьового часу – Палестина і Греція, – які, до того ж, стали фундаментом для модерної європейської філософії.

У юдаїзмі Бог стає трансцендентним, виходить за межі природи: є її творцем, але належить до сфери «по той бік» чуттєво даного світу. Відтак природа втрачає сакральність і зазнає «розчаклування». Трансцендентність Бога є не лише просторовою, але й часовою, оскільки він перебуває поза часом – у вічності. Платон розмежовує трансцендентне та іманентне у двох аспектах: онтологічному (надаючи перевагу трансцендентному як досконалому) та гносеологічному (протиставляючи світ ідей як єдине джерело істини видимому світу, що вводить нас в оману). Середньовічне християнство, синтезуючи юдаїзм та платонізм, вміщує платонівський світ ідей у розум Бога. Людина як творіння Боже не може проникнути в розум творця, а отже, спроможна пізнавати його ідеї тільки через їхній прояв у створеному Богом світі. Абсолютна істина стає для людини недосяжна, людина спроможна пізнати стільки, скільки трансцендентний Бог відкриє їй, проявляючись в іманентному світі. Отже, як показано у статті, класичне визначення трансценденції, сформоване у період Осьового часу і радикалізоване у Середньовіччі, утвердило недосконалість земного світу та його залежність від сфери трансцендентного, вічного, ідеального. Як наслідок, намагаючись відновити свою цінність, земний світ через деїзм Нового часу звільнився від впливу трансцендентного і, врешті, завдяки тривалому секуляризаційному процесу досягнув самодостатності, а трансцендентний «Бог помер», як висловився Ф. Ніцше.

У XVIII ст. І. Кант переносить Бога у сферу ноуменів, а отже, заперечує будь-яку можливість метафізичного обґрунтування Бога. Дуалізм зазнає краху разом із класичним визначенням трансценденції. Тобто Модерна філософія не просто реабілітує іманентне, а відкидає сам ієрархічний поділ на трансцендентне та іманентне. У XX ст. поняття «трансценденція» більше не передбачає додання меж чуттєво даного світу, рух вгору до чогось вічного і досконалого. Трансценденція відтепер стає «горизонтальною», означає вихід людини за межі своєї власної самості, свого Я у *цьому* світі, в межах самої іманентності: М. Гайдеггер пояснює трансценденцію як буття-у-світі, Е. Левінас визначає її як зустріч з Іншою Особою, Л. Вітгенштайн говорить про здатність Буття виходити за межі нашої можливості виразити його в мові.

Отже, з покликанням на аргументи Дж. Ваттімо доведено, що є всі підстави називати сучасність добою «пост-трансценденції» – добою, коли зазнає краху трансценденція у класичному визначенні. Метафізичні системи, побудовані на дуалізмі та вертикальному ієрархізованому баченні Буття, більше не функціонують, віра в Абсолютну істину та об'єктивну дійсність поставлена під сумнів – у добу «пост-трансценденції» людина відкриває суб'єктивність і опиняється в плюралістичному світі. Бог більше не виконує роль першорущія, першопричини, гаранта ієрархічної структури Буття. Бог більше не є трансцендентним, недосяжним. Бог розчиняється в іманентності, втілюється у цьому світі. Бог осягається не розумом, а вірою через витлумачення Откровення. Відтак, християнство, спотворене класичною інтерпретацією трансценденції, саме у добу «пост-трансценденції» отримує можливість повноцінно здійснити себе у *цьому* світі через концепти Боголюдини та любові як критерію комунікації і взаємодії.

Ключові слова: трансценденція, іманентність, світ, Бог, самість, Осьовий час, секулярність.

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