



TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

Vol. 21, 2021

**A new decade
for social changes**

www.techniumscience.com

ISSN 2668-7798



9 772668 779000

The concept of transcendence in philosophy and theology

Petrov George Daniel

Theology Faculty, Ovidius University – Constanța, România

petrovgeorgedaniel@gmail.com

Abstract. The transcendence of God is the most sensitive and profound subject that could be addressed by the most enlightened minds of the world. In sketching this concept, the world of philosophy and that of theology are trying the impossible: to define the Absolute. Each approach is different, the first being subjected to reason, reaching specific conclusions, and the second, by understanding God's Personal character, appealing to the experience of living your life in God. The debate between the two worlds, that of philosophy and that of theology can only bring a plus to knowledge, while impressing any wisdom lover.

Keywords. God, transcendence, immanence, Plato, Cioran, Heidegger, Hegel, Stăniloae

I. Introduction

The concept of transcendence expresses its importance through its ability to attract the intellect into deep research, out of a desire to express the inexpressible. The God of Theology was often named and defined by the world of philosophy in finite words, that could not encompass the greatness of the inexpressible. They could, however, rationally describe the Divinity, based on the similarities between the divine attributes and those of the world. Thus, in the world of great thinkers, God bears different names such as *The Prime Engine*, out of a desire to highlight the moment zero of time, *Absolute Identity* and even *Substance*, to express the immateriality of the Cause of all causes.

All these names expressed the truth in a limited way, for the totality of the explanations of a metaphysical nature reached a climax in which they excluded each other. The reference to the Divinity through the prism of purely philosophical reasoning would isolate it either in terms of immanence, through the monistic options, or in terms of transcendence through the dualistic expressions that highlighted the necessity of the One-Multiple hidden in transcendence.

II. Transcendence from a Philosophical Perspective

II.1. Plato's philosophy

Transcendence can be defined by the expression "to go beyond" anything is subject to limitation of any kind. Throughout metaphysical history we see that this concept goes through various changes, and for their understanding it is imperative to penetrate the mystery of demonstrations from the most ancient times.

In great thinker Plato's time, transcendence became the prime subject of analysis in the question of the expression of Good. Plato achieved a parallelism between what can be defined as intelligible and what can be expressed as sensitive. For Plato, true knowledge implied the

existence of a neutral ground that was imperiously necessary for his knowledge. This neutral ground made the transition from known to knowledge itself. One cannot come to a real conclusion about knowledge unless linking the latter to its source, which to the great Greek thinker could only be the expression of the Good.

The analysis of the Platonian Good denotes a constant reference of the Latter to the intelligible, therefore rational, but, even with this reference, the Good is situated in an incomprehensible transcendence, where the intellect wishes to penetrate. From here we can conclude that the Good in Plato's vision is necessarily Super-intelligible, being the source that attracts the intellect. The Platonian Nous defines the intellect that is persuaded by Transcendence and that contemplates it through the continuous analysis of the Supra-intelligible Good.

The knowledge of the Supra-intelligible Good as a result of contemplation is totally dependent on the integrity of what we define as contemplative intellect. Within this intellect, hesitation and uncertainty do not have a formula of their own, so they do not exist. This inexistence is the result of the fact that Good is the absolutely infinite Substance, or as Spinoza highlights it, "the substance devoid of any denial" [1].

Moreover, Plato makes the necessary distinction between nous and dianonia, this second term referring of course to the form of dianoetic intellect [2]. Only in the dianoetic discourse can be found the error as opposed to what we define as contemplative discourse. The latter is devoid of the possibility of error, because in the contemplative assertion of the Absolute Affirmation, hesitation is impossible.

II.2. Transcendent and transcendental in Kant's philosophy

The great philosopher of German origin divides knowledge into two sections subject to delimitation through the prism of possible experience. This delimitation separates what is possibly cognoscible from what is totally inaccessible to knowledge. Anything beyond the possibility of cognoscibility is defined by Kantian philosophy as transcendent, and anything that can be expressed through possible knowledge is called transcendental. This division expresses, from the perspective of faculties, the intuition and the intellect. In addition, Kant also brings into question what can be defined as the supreme idea of reason, which is the transcendental ideal.

Through this ideal, a selection of determined predicates appears, resulting in the perfect Being that holds all the predicates, thus eliminating any form of denial. The totality of affirmative predicates is expressed by Kant as "ens realissimum" [3], defining in limited words the Being with the highest degree of reality.

Based on the above we can point out that philosophy has now a different perspective on transcendence. For the German philosopher transcendence is inaccessible to reason by the fact that the Supreme Being cannot be limited to being an intelligible subject for the human being. This limitation, found in Kantian philosophy, is not of an ontological nature, but rather has an epistemological status. Therefore, the fact that we cannot penetrate the mystery of the Supreme Being is not due to a limit imposed by the Divinity, but to the limitations of our nature in terms of receptive intuition.

What we define as ontological argument is totally rejected by Kant on the ground that thinking is incapable of limiting existence to expression through a concept. The distance between essence and existence is of immeasurable immensity. Limits are imposed by the concept that produces by definition reality, deducting the existence of the Divine from the definition expressed by the concept of God.

II.3. Transcendence in Hegel's vision

The whole Hegelian philosophy of transcendence is expressed by the dismantling of the opposition relationship between essence and Being. Thus, in relation to the Being, the question of transcendence can no longer be asked. Hegel, unlike other philosophers, seeks the pure Being, and this could be thought of as lacking any determination. Determination necessarily presupposes both assertion and denial, and non-determination is expressed by the absence and of both affirmation and denial. From the absence of any assertion, it is natural to express non-determination as pure nothingness, and by the absence of any denial it is natural to define the Pure Being.

Unlike other philosophical systems that retained either affirmation or denial, Hegel managed to completely eliminate them from a desire to express the identity of the Supreme Being. In order to be pure, it is absolutely necessary for the Supreme Being to be independent of any statement or denial, and therefore to have its own identity.

The logical conclusion of Hegel's philosophy is that God, the undetermined reality of the world, is identical to pure nothingness. The suppression of transcendence, through various speculative formulas, brings to the forefront of logic the concept of immanence, and Hegel can be understood as a pantheistic philosopher.

II.4. Transcendence in Heidegger's vision

For this great philosopher of German origin, transcendence can be expressed by putting in parallel the immanence and implicitly the contingency. The opposition relationship between these two concepts is achieved by the direct elimination of all accidental predicates and thus of all that can be defined as contingent property, thus leading to the expression of a totally unconditional reality.

This unconditional reality, existing in itself and by itself, expresses in the sense of theology, the concept of transcendence. In addition to the theological transcendence that speaks of God, philosophy brings to the fore another sense of transcendence that is inextricably linked to the absence of any limit that might sketch the Supreme Being.

The analysis of the historical thread shows that the two forms of transcendence are accepted at the same time, and are in no way separated from an analytical perspective. Also, according to the German thinker, both meanings of the discussed theme have shortcomings in defining the subjectivity.

Starting from the impossibility of defining subjectivity, it follows that transcendence necessarily presupposes transcending, in the sense that the Supreme Subject must not confine Himself to Himself and must exit from Himself. The absence of this transcending in fact negates the Subject and the essence of subjectivity, the latter being able to be defined only by transcending.

Transcendence cannot be accidental for the Supreme Being, and what we define as transcendence is the equivalent of theological immanence. Heidegger's Dasein, although he comes into contact with the world by transcending, yet He does not belong to the world, as material things do. Being existent in himself and by himself, the Dasein cannot formulate a basis for something given, therefore He seeks his ground only in Himself, so He is His own ground [4].

To explain transcendence, the German philosopher takes the steps to redefine its direction: "in the act of overtaking, the Dasein turns to the being, which is himself as self. Transcending is the self-ity" [5]. From this we understand that the transcendent term can define what is involved in overtaking, while also being the ultimate target of overtaking. Therefore, it is the

Dasein that is both the One who transcends and the One towards whom the transcending is carried out.

It should also be specified that the Supreme Being, the Dasein that Heidegger speaks of, is not the Christian God, for He is defined as being limited in being. The fundamental differences between theology and his philosophy stem from the German thinker's desire to get out of the ontical concepts of metaphysics after Aristotle. From the perspective of his thinking, the transcendence analyzed as separation between the Divine and the human would belong to the concepts of category and in no way to those of an ontological, existential nature.

II.5. The concept of transcendence in Emil Cioran's vision

In the philosophy of the great Romanian thinker, the presence of knowledge of the supra-intelligible Light is interdependent of the contemplative intellect. Divinity being light, the perception of this light by the intellect through contemplation opens the access of reason to the knowledge of God. From this we understand Cioran's inclination and desire to understand what we define as Christian mysticism.

The inability of the man who is still in the state of passion, thus subject to the materiality of the world, to have access to the Light, manifests itself in the person of the Romanian thinker as a dialectical explosion of the discursive intellect. From this powerlessness of nature resulted also the philosopher's continuous struggle with himself, being attracted on the one hand by the idea of God, as presented by the mystics of the Church, and, on the other hand, not understanding rationally what was expressed through mystical contemplation, he comes to define himself as the nihilist who does not believe in God and yet is obsessed with the idea of the penetration of the Divine mystery. "Curious how tiring is this idea of God. Its presence in consciousness is a continuous overwork, a hidden and exhausting fever, a destructive principle"[6].

This problem, due to the impossibility of rational penetration into the transcendence of God, is the foundation of existential contradictions that intellectually tire the only nihilist close to God in a very special sense. Unable to penetrate the mystery of divine transcendence, Cioran develops the need to present cosmic chaos and the inability of human reason to understand, and all this rebellion towards the Divine has as its essence the creature's deficient relationship with the Creator. "I don't know how people can believe in God, though I think of Him every day"[7].

The definition of the concept of transcendence starts in the philosophy of the great Romanian thinker from the imperfection of the world, a fundamental idea of his metaphysics, and the knowledge of the Divinity through the penetration into His transcendence is limited even by the existential elements of man. In other words, the man of society does not have the capacity, in Cioranian philosophy, to overcome the world of matter, like mystics do, and therefore he is subjected to existential boundaries.

However, unlike other philosophical systems, Cioran's God is close to that God presented by the mystical theology of the Church. Cioran does not base his thinking on logical claims that he detests for the fact that doubts cannot have a logical construction.

III. Transcendence from the perspective of Orthodox theology

God or the Supreme Being that philosophy speaks about is One in Being, three in Persons. As for His being, He is unknowable to the human being, but He reveals Himself and His will through Revelation. Therefore, God is partly knowable and in part incomprehensible from a rational point of view, for limited reason cannot in any way encompass the infinity of the One through whom all have been made.

The attributes by which we know God at the level of intellect are also of two categories: communicable, i.e. attributes that we can experience such as love, and incommunicable, i.e. attributes that we cannot experience such as the ubiquity and omnipotence of God, which belong to the Divine nature [8].

The impossibility of the reason to penetrate into The Transcendence of God is also due to the fact that man thinks spatially, and the Creator of all is beyond all spatiality. Therefore, God being love, He is revealing Himself to us, according to our capacity of understanding and closeness to Him. Thus, "God is transcendent and immanent through His own Reality" [9].

Covering God's being in definitions is impossible. His infinity goes beyond the possibility of understanding of our limited reason. He is not an impersonal cosmic power, but is a living, personal, self-aware God (Exodus 3, 14), the source of life (Timothy 4, 10), is intelligence itself (Acts 15, 18) and absolute freedom (Ephes. 1, 11).

The expression concerning His transcendence cannot be separated from His immanence, for we cannot formulate what we cannot rationally embrace from transcendence without putting in relation to what we can know by immanence. From a strictly rational perspective, the concept of transcendence is in a form of contradiction with that of immanence, for although they are logically opposite terms, they refer to the same God.

Transcendence emphasizes that God exists from Himself and through Himself having everything in Himself, so He is detached from every element of all that exist. Transcendence comes from above in the sense that it is the Divine who initiates it, and reason only tends towards it in a limited way, precisely because of the all too deep anchorage in what we define as the material, sensory world. The key to a higher penetration into the mystery of God is fulfilled, as philosophy recalls, through mystical contemplation, contemplation that implies in an absolute way the exit from the materiality of the world.

By the term opposite to transcendence, i.e. by immanence, we understand the permanent presence of God in creation, God being not only its creator, but also its providence. The things that reason defines as permanent, relative to God, lose their permanence in the Infinity of the Creator. The same is true of the definition of mathematical infinity. What is mathematically defined as infinite is demonstrated as finite by a correct reference to The Infinity of God.

If philosophical transcendence positions the Divine into an incomprehensible mystery, which naturally led to the emergence of a mutation from the spiritual realm to the material one, and reason has refused acceptance of what cannot be contained by the intellect, theology highlights God who operates in the world both through His transcendence and His immanence. This terminology is contrary only to the level of intellect that cannot overcome itself, but in God, these are by no means contrary expressing ways.

III. 1. Experience of God through purification of passions

From a theological perspective, the knowledge of God must be related to the spiritual state of the one seeking the highest knowledge. Thus, the purification of passions, that Emil Cioran also talks about when he recalls the theology of mystics, is absolutely necessary. This state of purification is a permanent process in which passions are replaced by the practice of virtues. The end point of purification is the acquisition of knowledge through love.

The first step of purification involves the liberation of man from any kind of bondage brought about by sin. Exiting from the materiality of the world, not being obedient to anything created, independence from material, this is a primary condition [10]. After this giving up of an external nature, an interior giving up is also necessary, i.e. to voluntarily renounce any impulse that binds man to the world. "He who truly loves God will no longer love the world, no longer care for the wealth, nor the glory of life, of any of all that is earthly" [11].

Once man manages to give up all that is material out of love for God, he follows the renunciation of his own will through full obedience that removes pride and implicitly empty glory, "for obedience means to stop trusting yourself all your life..." [12]. From this renunciation comes humility, repentance for life lived without God, and a crying that does not bring sorrow, but joy. Tears bring gentleness "for like the water slowly poured on the fire extinguishes the fire entirely, so the tear of true crying kills all the whine of anger and fury" [13].

After all this man acquires new powers, through the uncreated divine grace, through which he reaches the peace of the body and soul through ever deeper prayer, thereby strengthening faith, love and hope.

Taste from the blessing of purification, man often overcomes through contemplative prayer what can be defined by intellect, and this experience is called living in God. This experience of life in God raises the level of knowledge of what theology defines as transcendent.

IV. Conclusion

Since ancient times, both philosophy and theology have formulated expressions that express what is knowable and what is incomprehensible to human nature. Thus, philosophy was limited to the possibilities of intellect, which, being limited, could not rise to the highest knowledge of the Absolute Being. It follows that philosophical language has often spoken of the transcendence of God, without relating to Him personally, and thus without speaking to God. Instead, theology understood through divine Revelation the Personal Character of God, and through faith, hope, and love, in conjunction with the experience of living in Him, in the sense of purification of passions, came to a knowledge that allows him to speak both about and with God. It follows that the desire of the intellect to know the Absolute is in perfect harmony with our human nature which was created out of love by the Creator in order to be in grace communion with Him, but this communion can only be achieved by the liberation of passions.

Philosophical systems wanted to limit God to the level of intellect, rationality, and implicitly the language in which the intellect wanted to define Him, or Infinity cannot be defined. That is why the transcendence that philosophy speaks of does not refer to the Personal God in theology. The effect of rational misunderstanding of transcendence can be devastating for man, for it can lead to the elimination of what cannot be understood rationally, and thus to the elimination of God.

Through His immanence, God can come in the utmost proximity to man to eliminate, through uncreated divine grace, any distance between the Uncreated and the created, and through His transcendence, God will never be known in the totality of His greatness.

References

- [1] Baruch Spinoza, *Despre Dumnezeu, natură și om*, translation into Romanian by A. Axelrad, Bucharest, Lumen, 1919, p. 52.
- [2] Platon, „*Republica*”, in *Opere*, vol. V, translated into Romanian by Andrei Cornea, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1986, pp. 7-502.
- [3] Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure*, presentation by Claudiu Baciu, Ed. Paideia, 2015.
- [4] Martin Heidegger, *Ființă și timp*, Ed. Humanitas, Bucharest, 2002, pp. 25-32.
- [5] Ibidem, p. 36.
- [6] Emil Cioran, *Lacrimi și sfinți*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 2017, p. 110.
- [7] Idem, *Despre Dumnezeu*, anthology, selection of the texts by Aurel Cioran, Bucharest, Humanitas, 1997, p. 243.



- [8] Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, second edition, Ed. Zondervan Academic, 2020, p. 162.
- [9] Ibidem, p. 89.
- [10] Ioan Scărarul, *Scara Raiului*, *Patrologia Greacă*, 88, 631-1210.
- [11] Ibidem, P.G. 88, 653.
- [12] Ibidem, P.G. 88, 680.
- [13] Ibidem, P.G. 88, 828.