Merold Westphal
Transcendence and Self-Transcendence.
On God and the Soul.
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Merold Westphal argues for a philosophical grasp of the divine that is in line with both the recovery of transcendence and the postmodern concern for the decentering of the self. He examines the views of Martin Heidegger, Baruch Spinoza, G.W.F. Hegel, Saint Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas Aquinas, Karl Barth, Emmanuel Levinas and Søren Kierkegaard on transcendence. In order to accomplish the decentring of the self, divine otherness must stay irreducible. The reign of human subjectivity must be limited and relativized through the encounter with the Other. From the start we can anticipate the volume's culmination in the ethical argument for the transcendence of God. Our ethical choice of action presupposes faith in an otherworldly reality rather than knowledge of God. According to the book's inner logic, the cosmological transcendence (that God is not immanent in this world) dealt with in Part I is the basis of the epistemic transcendence of God (Part II) which in turn is a prerequisite for His ethical transcendence (that we cannot *know* God as a lawgiver) in Part III. Generally, it must be remarked that although all the relevant historical views fall into place where needed to make Westphal's train of thought perspicuous, the leading argument for the threefold transcendence could have been discussed more systematically.

The first part of the book is concerned with 'onto-theology and the need to transcend cosmological transcendence'. It is hard to deny that there is a minimization of cosmological transcendence in both, Spinoza and Hegel. Onto-theology makes God part of the intelligible structure of being as the most general or highest being. Through our grasp of this highest being, creation becomes intelligible. We can speculate why Westphal chooses versions of pantheism as his model of onto-theology. Most likely the decisive point is that God's immanence in the world seems to guarantee that He is epistemically as unproblematic as other objects of our intellect. This abandonment of transcendence is the starting point of this book.

Already for Spinoza, man is completely empowered in relation to God. In denying that there is a reality that exceeds our capacities of comprehension (60) Spinoza is also denying human self-transcendence, i.e., humans are not oriented towards a reality that is not at their disposal. Hegel is onto-theological in programmatically making all being intelligible to the thinking subject. God is nothing but the divine essence of human spirit. Although this is not explicitly discussed, the main thrust of the book is directed against Hegel. His pantheism is the opposite of the ethical transcendence of God

because He remains epistemically accessible whereas ethical transcendence presupposes epistemic mystery.

The second part of the book deals with 'epistemic transcendence: the divine mystery'. The dialectic of concealment and disclosure of God is needed in order to find a way to do theology that does not lapse into onto-theology. With regard to concealment, Westphal sees in Augustine, Aquinas and Barth authors with a very Kantian approach. Recall that for Immanuel Kant, real knowledge of God and of the world is denied to us. This is so because of the limitations of our human intellectual ability which alone we can study. In other words: in seeking knowledge of God, we can only know our human limitations. God remains in complete transcendence. There are, however, ways of making an image of God for human understanding. Rudolf Otto's famous book *The Idea of the Holy* refers to this transcendence rightly as *mysterium tremendum*, which means that the mystery transcends our understanding. God is incomprehensible and therefore awe-inspiring. On this view the epistemic approach is futile. What is known is essentially mystery. Barth says 'God is known as the unknown God' (158).

The last part of this volume deals with 'ethical and religious transcendence'. Levinas criticizes Edmund Husserl's view that the content of consciousness is everything there is. 'What exceeds the limits of consciousness is absolutely nothing for that consciousness' (188). Otherness, according to Levinas, cannot be reduced to the same and opens our horizon from the outside. Intentionality is the grasp of consciousness through which the other is reduced to the same. Based on the encounter with our fellow human beings we suffer the inversion of intentionality and experience human self-transcendence in redirecting our thought towards transcendence.

Westphal perceives clearly that Kierkegaard's God can be well understood in terms of Levinas' ethical otherness. For Kierkegaard, however, intersubjectivity on its own does not constitute meaning. The meaning of the world arises ' ... not from my I nor from my We but from the Thou whose voice disrupts the certainties and the securities of both the I and the We' (211). The ethical relationship with God is faith as listening. Here the concern for the epistemic access to God becomes less important. This ethical relationship allows for the coexistence of spirituality and metaphysics.

In conclusion, we can say that Westphal's very learned approach follows the method of historical contextualization of the argument. Although he is critiquing onto-theology as incompatible with transcendence, at the end of the book it is not yet completely out of the field. Don't we need to know God metaphysically as the Highest Being in order to understand the full meaning of His transcendence? Maybe this question sidetracks Westphal who wants to dethrone and not abolish onto-theology. The 'metaphysical' attributes of God need to be ' ... placed in a context where they are subordinate to the "moral" attributes' (231). I think that this subordination is one way of making contemporary philosophy of religion meaningful again. Hegel and Husserl are wrong because the reign of subjectivity has to be limited. This limitation

of our cognitive control is evident through the ethical dimension of the human awareness of God.

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