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Experience of transcendence in the philosophy of Eric Voegelin – phenomenological and hermeneutic perspective

Summary

The primary purpose of dissertation is to analyze and interpret Eric Voegelin's concept of the experience of transcendence. The subject of examination are writings that belong to the later period of philosopher's work, mainly written between 1966 and 1985. Voegelin distinguishes three basic meanings of transcendence: 1) the transcendence of divinity, destination of transcending; 2) man's process of transcending, being-toward divine; 3) transcending as an eschatological movement, as it is movement in the direction of eternal and, as the author says, nontensional reality. Transcending is not an attribute of a substance called human. Transcending - as man's tension toward the divine ground existence - constitutes the very essence of man. For this reason, the author of *Order and History*, considers interpretation of the experiences of transcendence to be the kernel of philosophy.

According to the main hypothesis Voegelin not only criticized specific issues of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, and not only developed specific phenomenological topics and concepts, but practiced philosophy in a phenomenological way. I show that Voegelin's search for experience of order – which is identical to the search for the ground of order - is in fact a phenomenological search for the original experience. Phenomenology asks about the ground of phenomenality, about the ultimate ground of appearing of the appearance; phenomenology, therefore, examines the "how" of phenomena, their showing and their manifesting. For phenomenology, the ground is not a cause, but that what does not need anything else to appear, that which show itself. However, there is no return to the original and constitutive experiences except the return through the reading of the texts of those who once suffered this experiences. According to Voegelin the essence of existence remains unknown for the modern man since he fell victim to obscuring the truth of reality. This truth can be extracted from the writings of former philosophers and masters of religion. In other words, phenomenology is only possible as hermeneutics.

In the first part of the work, I present Voegelin's a critique of Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, as well as the most important phenomenological concepts for the author of the *Order and History*. Then I discuss Voegelin's philosophy of consciousness – firstly I refer to the paradoxical constitution of consciousness as both the embodied intentionality and the event of participation in so called comprehending reality. Paradoxical constitution of consciousness means that consciousness not only structures the experienced reality, but is also structured by it – as an event of participation it does not have immanent character for consciousness exists in the metaxy, In-Between. Secondly I consider the historical constitution of consciousness. The essence of history is the process of differentiation of consciousness, in which the differences between immanence and transcendence appear.

In the second part of the work, I focus on Voegelin's reading of Martin Heidegger's philosophy as the failure of transcendence. Then I move on to discuss transcendence in its original sense - as tension toward the divine ground of existence, which realizes itself in the form of theophanic event. The event occurs in the *metaxy*, In-Between of consciousness - it is an event of mutual participation. In the event, in transcending, there is nothing that concerns only man or only divine, every „moment“ of it has a character of reciprocity. Moreover, neither man nor divine are given outside the tension in the *metaxy* – tension is the only way of showing for both of them. This means: beyond the process of transcending there is neither the one who transcends (man) nor the One to Whom man transcends (divine). In the seventh chapter I analyze the third sense of transcendence – eschatology. According to Voegelin in the experience of transcendence eternity is also revealed and correlatively the reality is discovered as moving towards that eternity.

In the third part of the work, I interpret Voegelin's theory of language and symbol from the perspective of transcendence. Transcendence can only be expressed in an analogous symbol. Furthermore, symbol does not simply signify external reality, since it is a moment of theophanic event itself. In the last chapter of dissertation, I focus on the idea of balance of consciousness – a postulate of sustaining or remaining aware of the tension between the divine experienced in cosmos and in the soul. I find this postulate to be an „idol“ in the sense Jean-Luc Marion gave this concept. Voegelin's thinking bears a mark of specific contradiction: on the one hand, there is the author's postulate of completely opening to the self-revelation of divine, to God's manifestation; on the other hand, his thinking is determined by an unconscious prejudice – the metaphysical difference between what is material and what is spiritual. I show that this contradiction emerges when Voegelin analyzes the experience of Jesus Christ as it was expressed in the works of St. Paul and St. John the Evangelist. In this sense, Voegelin imposes restrictions on what can appear in the experience of transcendence – restrictions that are in conflict with how the phenomenon is given.

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