

Religious Hermeneutics of G. Oberhammer: An Experience in the Study of Implementation Human Existence

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ABSTRACT

G. Oberhammer is one of the most significant German-speaking Indologists of the second half of the 20th century. In his researches he seeks to build a universal hermeneutical concept that would be equally applicable to different religious traditions. Herewith he tries to execute it while basing of studying material from sacred texts belonging to the ancient Indian both philosophical as well as religious tradition. But as a result he reveals the transcendental essence and existential significance of religious experience regardless of the specific religious tradition into which it is inscribed, thereby making a significant contribution to modern theological and philosophical-religious discussions. His transcendental theory of religion is nowadays one of the most significant and interesting version of Pluralism.

Keywords: *Oberhammer, religion, human being, transcendental, encounter, openness, experience*

I. INTRODUCTION

Gerhard Oberhammer is one of the most famous German-speaking Indologists of the 20th century. The vast majority of his work is devoted to the study of religious traditions and religious texts of Hindu. Nevertheless, based on a study of Indian religious traditions, Oberhammer formed a method of analysis – a method of religious transcendental hermeneutics, which can equally be applied to the study of other religious traditions as well¹. This is possible because Oberhammer originally conceived his method as universal, since it is derived from the essential structure of human being and human knowledge. On the other hand, the result achieved by Oberhammer while using his method also turns out to be universal. Oberhammer manages to reveal the deep structure of human existence and religious tradition as such. It is for the study of the existential structure of human being, as

well as for revealing the deep structure of religious tradition, Oberhammer uses his method of transcendental hermeneutics. Why this method is equally well suited to the study of both of these structures will become clear from the further discussion. In the article would be concerned the inner structure of a human being and the role which the concepts of encounter, and openness play in that. After that it would be discussed how according to Oberhammer the comprehension of the transcendental is possible and what for consequences does it have for researching the inner structure of religious tradition. At the last part the article refers to the question about the language and its role for religion traditions and arising from this verity of religions which we find in our world in the past as well as today.

II. THE INNER STRUCTURE OF A HUMAN BEING

Revealing the structure of human existence, G. Oberhammer is repelled by the obvious and quite traditional characteristics of human being as a creature endowed with consciousness and self-awareness. Herewith, consciousness allows a person to penetrate into the secret of the existence of objects (both animate and inanimate) outside it. He perceives those whom he directly encounters here and now, as well as those that are distanced from him in space and time. But a person does not just reflect on objects outside of him and can know them. He is also able to wonder about his own

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¹ D. Berendsen, one of the few researchers of the philosophical heritage of G. Oberhammer, explains Oberhammer's desire to develop a universal method and find a universal foundation for all religious traditions, rooted in the deep structure of human being, referring to the fact that Oberhammer is a Roman Catholic. Thus, on the one hand, Oberhammer studied the sacred texts of the Hindu tradition for a long time, on the other hand, he, as a Catholic, felt the need to reconcile his scientific interest and his own faith. In our opinion, such an explanation is absurd and does not stand up to criticism [1].

existence and its inherent characteristics. And that is what is usually meant under self-awareness. Thanks to this characteristic of self-awareness, a person becomes such a kind of being, which is fundamentally different from all other kinds of being. It is because of this that man becomes man.

Hereby while trying to open the structure of these seemingly different characteristics from each other, Oberhammer comes to the conclusion that in their foundation they are identical. Both of them are modes of all one and the same activity, of the same manifestation of "Beisichseiende" (something like "being on one's own"), namely, its openness. The possibility of both consciousness as well as self-consciousness is due to the fundamental openness of the human being towards outside. It seems that there are fewer difficulties with consciousness here, since consciousness, understood as comprehension of the deep essence of something outside the self-being, initially implies an outward orientation, that is, openness to something outside the subject itself. However, Oberhammer emphasizes that the subject can come to the realization of himself, his comprehension (not necessarily conceptually captured, but also direct, intuitive) only through another, i.e. going out from himself in order to meet another and thereby returning back to himself, but not to himself as an isolated subject (as it was previously, before this going-out, but to himself, endowed with self-awareness of himself as himself, which is possible only through the previous (not in chronological, but in a logical sense) openness towards another. In other words, only by opening outward, the subject can turn from "Selbstverschlossenheit des nur Vorhandenen" (self-closedness of the just occurrent) to "Beisichsein" (being on one's own). And the difference between these two modes of existence just lies in awareness. Self-closed being does not know and does not understand either itself or the world around it. It is isolated from itself and the others. Whereas being on one's own realizes itself and opens itself towards an encounter, with another [2]².

III. ENCOUNTER, AND OPENNESS IN THE STRUCTURE OF A HUMAN BEING

In this context, the concept of encounter, is of fundamental importance [4]. It is the encounter, that becomes concentration, the consequential manifestation of the openness intrinsic for human structure as such. A man is a man only because he constantly goes out to meet both something outside of him and something in himself. Moreover, this openness takes on the features of intentionality. This is not such an openness to the encounter, when a person just accidentally runs into

someone or something. But this is precisely the desire for an encounter, the thirst for an encounter, the focus on it. The whole human being is focused on encounter, with something yet unknown. A human being is always in search of this encounter, always eager for it. Oberhammer calls this property of the human being as *Ausgriff* (something like "reaching for") and specifically leaves blank that second element in the connection of subject – reaching-for – object. The object, to which the subject is directed, in fact always turns out to be something unknown, always eluded from a clear definition and conceptualization, as well as conceptual knowledge. It is something that is only anticipated in this reaching-for, but is never attainable in its entirety. And this is not due to the properties of the object as such, but is included in the inner essential structure of the human being. A man himself is something that can never be completely satisfied with anything. That is why Oberhammer puts a certain "for-what" (Woraufhin) in place of the object in this ternary scheme, thereby emphasizing that in the process of analyzing the transcendental structure of human being and without violating the boundaries and methods established by us in this study, we can state this "for-what" only that our transcendental reaching-for is always directed outward and nothing more besides this. To say something about this "for-what", proceeding from their mere structure of a human being, is not possible. But is this even possible? To answer this question, we need to consider how Oberhammer presents the process of comprehension the transcendental.

IV. COMPREHENSION OF THE TRANSCENDENTAL

The transcendental Oberhammer describes with the words combination "Jenseits der Seiende" (something like "beyond being"). That means that the transcendental is always beyond the realm of existence. And only this is what we can say about the transcendental as such. In other words, in the realization of the transcendental, we can only go the way of negation. A person rushes outside himself in his own reaching-for. But that what is absolute outside of him must be at the same time something which is a completely different from him. And this turns out to be that what is non-being. Man is a type of being. When he goes out of him and opens up for encounter, with another kind of being, in this encounter, there always remains some component known to him, stemming from the internal similarity of the subject (a human being himself) reaching-for and what he is striving for within this reaching-for. The only absolutely other can be, for this reason, only that it is not in the realm of being, but is somewhere outside of it, being thereby nothing other than non-being [5].

² More detailed about concepts of subject and other by G. Oberhammer see [3].

It is to this something absolutely other that the human being rushes all the time in his reaching-for, which for this reason is called by Oberhammer as the transcendental. And as a completely other the transcendental constantly eludes human comprehension. Its comprehension is possible only in an act of direct grasp, contemplative in its nature and not burdened with concepts and notions. And even this grasp becomes possible only because the transcendental itself goes out to meet a human being, opens towards a human being. There is no encounter possible, without mutual openness. It is only such mutual openness both from the side of the subject of the transcendental reaching-for as well as from the side of the transcendental that appears in the place of this "for-what" of transcendental reaching-for of the subject, that makes this, albeit purely intuitive, grasp to become possible [6]. But precisely such a direct encounter, with the transcendental turns out to be what we often call nowadays as religious experience. And it, according to Oberhammer, on the one hand, is an integral feature of the structure of human being, on the other hand, it underpins the inner structure of any religious tradition as such.

V. LANGUAGE AND DIVERSITY OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

But how does the transition from a direct, always one's own religious experience of encountering the transcendental to a religious tradition take place? After all, it is obvious that a religious tradition is not identical to religious experience, even if we agree that the latter lies at the core of any religious tradition so that any religious tradition (each in its own way) is based on it. And what is religion then? Religion is a certain social and cultural institution, with more or less developed dogmatic teachings and an external ritual side. Both the first and the second can be transmitted from person to person, from generation to generation and even under some circumstances from nation to nation. Actually, thanks not only to the possibility, but also to the actual transmission of certain beliefs and rituals, we are talking about religion as a tradition. Tradition, however, can be either oral or written. But in any case, it is possible only thanks to the language.

Thus, in this way language and the ability of human being for speaking and telling enter the game and play an important role in process of forming religious traditions. Human being is able to speak about plenty of things, among them about his religious experience, about the experienced encounter, with the transcendental. A person puts his experience in language expressions, in words, in concepts. From this, legends and myths are born that underlie any religious tradition. It is this fundamental experience of the encounter the subject with the transcendental underlies

any religious tradition. But this experience of encounter, becomes possible and comes into reality just thanks the openness of transcendental to a person, thanks self-communication of transcendental. And that is what Oberhammer indicate exactly as Revelation [7], [8]. Thus, according to Oberhammer, it is precisely the experience of a direct encounter with the transcendental, which is then verbalized and conceptualized in one way or another and so forms the foundation of any religious tradition. And as a result of these different ways of verbalization, which Oberhammer calls also as mythicizing, appears a variety of religions of both antiquity and the present [9]. Therefore, we can talk about Revelation, in terms of the concept of Oberhammer, not only in relation to monotheistic religions, endowing the transcendental with personified features, but also in relation to polytheistic religions as well.

It is the ability of a person to talk on the one hand that makes possible the transfer of any religious experience, makes it possible for any joint comprehension of the transcendental (or his attempt), makes it possible to communicate between people, i.e. human society. But on the other hand, it is language that leads to diversity, and sometimes, with a misunderstanding of the true essence of religion and human being, and even to hostility, to religious wars. It is to hostility that we come if we try to assure ourselves that true knowledge of the transcendental is available to us and our religious teaching (no matter how fine it is), while to others it is not available. Whereas in reality everything is completely different. The truth that we tend to keep in mind when speaking of the truth of a particular religious teaching is the truth of words about the transcendental. But no human word can in principle convey the truth of the transcendental. Not a single word expresses genuine knowledge of the transcendental. For this reason, Oberhammer speaks of the verbalization of religious experience and the subsequent dogmatization as mythicizing. Our words about the transcendental are by their nature nothing more than signs indicating someone's encounter the transcendental [10]. They are only symbols of the transcendental, but not its very essence, not the transcendental itself, and not even the very encounter it as such. This is only its outward expression. And they make sense and can be useful only if they encourage each human being to open up to his own encounter with the transcendental, if they support and strengthen his (for each subject always and inevitably his own) transcendental reaching-for towards the self-communicating transcendental. Only with this understanding and with this use of religious traditions (any of them) can we say that they help a person in his realization his own human existence. Otherwise, these are only stones blocking a person's path to himself, to others and to the transcendental as such.

VI. OBERHAMMER AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL VALUE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Thus, although in his works Oberhammer did not raise the question of the epistemological value of religious experience directly, we can find in his concept an answer to this problem. Any religious tradition has its immediate, existential value. Any religious tradition has the right to exist and attract more and more new followers. But not one of them has the right to claim true knowledge about the transcendental. And not because the religion is false, distorted (intentionally or unintentionally) or moved away from its origins, which once contained the truth. On the contrary, not one of them has the right to claim true knowledge of the transcendental because such true knowledge of the transcendental within the framework of any religious tradition is absolutely unattainable. In other words, the question itself is absurd, not the answers to it.

It is true, that people tend to attribute exceptional value to their own religious tradition. And this is completely natural, since everything can be explained from the same transcendental structure of human existence which all people have in common. Each person directly experiences his own encounter, with the transcendental and ascribes exceptional significance to this event, since only the encounter, of the person with the transcendental makes the person free, leads the person to self-realization, and ultimately to salvation [11]. We can also say, that just the encounter, with the transcendental makes the individual to a human being [12]. Therefore, in the very belief of a person in the exceptional value of his own religious tradition, there is nothing surprising, strange or wrong. However, the problem arises at the moment when a person (or a whole community of people) mistakenly begins to believe that this exceptional subjective significance of an event has also an objective significance for each of us, should be equally significant for any other, i.e. tries to translate his own version of the conceptualization (or rather, mythicizing) of the transcendental to all others. It is this last strategy that underlies the very formulation of the question of which religion is true, since the answer here should indicate some one exceptional, having (or leading) a person to a closer connection with the transcendental than all others. But it is precisely this last and unthinkable, since in this respect all religions are equally good. Or if you look from the other side, they are equally bad or helpless, since none of them reflect the essence of transcendental better than each other.

At the same time, Oberhammer does not at all deny raising the question of the greater or lesser truth of the religious traditions of the past and present. However, this means only recognition of relative truth, or it would be better even to say, greater acceptability, greater conformity of a particular religion of a particular epoch

to the culture of a particular people or the lifestyle and current needs of an individual. Times are changing and morals are changing too. As a result, what was acceptable and seemed to be right in the past does not seem so now. This leads to certain changes in the religious tradition. But these changes should not be taken as an approximation to the truth or an extension of our knowledge of the transcendental. And even more so, they should not be taken as a reflection of changes in the transcendental itself. Only the form of verbalization and conceptualization has changed, which at this stage this or that community considers the most appropriate to the needs of its existence and seems to be the most suitable for it [13].

Thus, as we can see, the view offered by Oberhammer on religious traditions and the approach proposed by him to study them are pluralistic at its very core³. Oberhammer denies any attempt to erect any of the religions on the unreachable height of having a true knowledge of the transcendental. All of them are equivalent in assessing their epistemological potential in comprehending the transcendental. True comprehension of the transcendental is possible only individually and only in an intuitive grasp [17], any subsequent verbalization is inherently flawed and can only serve as a means of transmitting to others (and partly to oneself) knowledge about the very fact of the encounter, but is not able to convey the essence of the transcendental met in this encounter. At the same time, the whole human being is based on the fundamental openness of a human being towards the transcendental. Only this openness makes an individual to a human being, while being the essence of his inner structure [18]. Ultimately, it alone makes possible both the life of the person himself and the construction of society. But openness to the transcendental in Oberhammer's concept inevitably turns out to be religious. Encounter the transcendental is precisely what is called religious experience. For this reason, the transcendental structure of a human being essentially turns out to be identical with the transcendental structure of a religious tradition as such, based on religious experience (an event of encounter the transcendental) and no less characteristic of a person's ability to transmit knowledge about the

³ D. Berendsen believes that in this case, again, one should look for the reason for this in Oberhammer's scientific enthusiasm for the Hindu tradition, which in principle did not allow him to come to more distinctly Christianized concepts, and therefore to some kinds of Inclusivism, as we find, for example, by K. Rahner, with whose transcendental theology the concept of Oberhammer as a whole has many common features [14]. That Oberhammer comes near to the transcendental theology of K. Rahner can be traced not only at the level of the foundations of the transcendental theory of religion by both of them, but also in terminology. Thus, Ausgriff, one of the most important concepts by Oberhammer, in general terms resembles Vorgriff by Rahner and is called as by Rahner to emphasize the openness of a person to the transcendental and genuine orientation to it. For more on Rahner's Vorgriff, see [15], [16].

occurrence of this event in a language to the co-existing others, thereby showing all the same openness towards outside, only in its other mode of orientation. After all, openness outside, making up the root of a very core of human existence, cannot be one directed. This openness outside is manifested in everything, both openness to the transcendental and openness to other human beings. And the more a person is open to the transcendental, the more he is open to other people. And that is why any religious tradition can always be only communal.

VII. CONCLUSION

Summing up the above, I would like to once again note several key points of Oberhammer's conception on inner structure of human being and religious tradition. They are:

The transcendental structure of man is identical to the transcendental structure of religious tradition.

For this reason, both the transcendental structure of human being as well as the transcendental structure of religious tradition can be equally revealed and interpreted using the general method proposed by G. Oberhammer – the method of transcendental religious hermeneutics.

The diversity of religious traditions is an inevitable consequence of the transcendental structure of a human being.

Religious disagreements and disputes are due to a lack of understanding of the true inner structure both of human being as well as religious tradition as such.

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