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Afterword: relationships between selfhood and transcendence

The contributions to this section present manifold and diverse examples indicative of a form of religion which we may characterise by its inextricable connection between selfhood and transcendence. However, religion is not necessarily dependent upon establishing a relationship between religious agents and transcendence, whether in scripture or praxis, nor does it inevitably imply that these agents need to be qualified as selves in a distinct manner. In short, neither selfhood nor transcendence is a necessary component of religion. Therefore, cultural objectifications of religion, which give evidence to the interrelation of selfhood and transcendence, embody a structurally specific type of religion which evolved at a particular time presupposing a certain complexity with respect to social formation. *Anders Klostergaard Petersen* refers to this fact by naming this particular type of religion as cosmos religion. It is a common conviction all authors of this section share that bringing selfhood and transcendence into a relationship has the structural potential of unfolding a dynamic of religious transformation that changes our understanding of selfhood as well as transcendence.

It is standard opinion in philosophy that selves are entities under a description. Unlike apples and pears, selves may not be spatially located and denoted, but very much consist in individuals' various linguistic and practical ways of relating to their own states of mind and affairs, whether present, past or anticipated. Whereas the capability of self-relation is an anthropological constant, the cultural significance of concepts of selfhood depends on the historically variable importance that is socially acknowledged and attributed to these kinds of self-relation. The most basic common denominator of the studies in this section consists in the fact that the mediation of the individual's self-relation through its relation to transcendence is indicative of a decisive authorisation of selfhood. Selves that relate to their own states of mind and affairs via their relationship to a transcendent and unconditioned power are endowed with a gravity of utmost importance. The contribution of the articles to the overall topic of religious individualisation consists in the exploration of the importance and seriousness that individuals – whether single, selected or all individuals – acquire for themselves as well as in studying the acceptance of this importance by their fellows and the social collective in which they are embedded and take part.

The sense of ‘a hidden and more fundamental level of existence’ calls for ‘beyonding’ the immanent – as Kenneth Burke (1966) has coined it – in the direction of a concept of transcendence ‘with a capital T’ (Dalferth 2012). It involves the concept of a power as reflected in its quality of transcending all symbolic means of appropriately addressing it. Whereas Anders Petersen’s contribution elaborates on the cultural and social presuppositions under which this sort of transcendence could historically emerge, the subsequent contributions reflect on various symbolic instantiations of it. Although there is good reason to claim a genealogical lineage, which leads from Eckhart’s mystical thought via Tauler into the mystical strands of pietism and their philosophical sublimation in Kant, Schleiermacher, and Kierkegaard, the essays of this section have not focused on this very lineage, but rather pinpointed how different texts which belong to diverse historical contexts nevertheless vary within the same overall structural pattern: their relevance for the plausibility of an overarching concept of religious individualisation has not been located in their contribution to the afore-said lineage but in unfolding a variety of symbolic representations of the intrinsic relationship between selfhood and transcendence. Whereas a lineage is always historically singular, the typological focus on common structures allows for the integration of a much larger range of religious sources. The texts therefore invite research on homologous instantiations of a dynamic between selfhood and transcendence in other cultural settings than the ones we have investigated.

Anders Klostergaard Petersen points out that it was ‘the Axial age transformation of religion’, as it was originally coined by Karl Jaspers in his monograph *The Origin and Goal of History* and only recently picked up by Robert Bellah (2011; Bellah/Joas 2012), which fostered a dynamic relationship between self and transcendence that eventually brought about such emphatic conceptualisations of selfhood as were much later on unfolded in European enlightenment and romanticism. He articulates the insight into the dependence of selfhood on the individual’s socially mediated interpretation and authorisation of his or her own states of mind and affairs in orientation toward an almighty instance of transcendence by suggesting we understand the result of such interpretation and authorisation as *suification*. Thereby, he alludes to a dynamic of increasing importance that individuals are socially allowed and expected to bring to their distinctness from the other, and particularly from the social context in which they are nevertheless embedded. According to Petersen, the Stoic tradition of philosophy as a particular life-form demonstrates how a dynamic between self and transcendence, as it had been established in axial age transformations of urban into cosmos religions – that is religions characterised by the intrinsic interrelation between selfhood and transcendence – ‘provided a transition towards a far greater emphasis placed on the self and the need for this self to engage in a deliberate process of training self-cultivation’.

Suification as self-cultivation, prompted by establishing a transcendence-mediated self-relation, may also be taken as a common characteristic defining concepts of selfhood as they have been promoted through the philosophical thinking of Meister Eckhart, Immanuel Kant and Søren Kierkegaard. In these thinkers we find different models of representing the intricate way in which individuals relate to their own states of mind and affairs, in particular in the context in which self-relation is understood as mediated by its relationship to a transcendent and unconditioned power. Moreover, self-cultivation is a proper term characterising this double relationship of the self with respect to itself and the transcendent because it stresses the transformative power expected to qualify the individual's encounter with the almighty. If individuals understand themselves in the context of meanings imbued with the authority of a transcendent power, they are expected to be fundamentally changed through this and to embody the effects of this encounter into their whole way of being.

This explains the importance of an attitude of passivity in the double relationship of the self to itself and to the transcendent instance, an attitude which nonetheless does not contradict the aspiration for self-cultivation: self-cultivation needs to be realised in a mode of being that expresses receptivity and responsiveness to the activity of the transcendent power. This is the reason for a basic conceptual familiarity between Eckhart's concept of *Gelassenheit*, as it is presented in Dietmar Mieth's contribution, and the idea of becoming oneself through self-surrender that is at the centre of Matthias Engmann's reconstruction of Kierkegaard's thought. Both are embedded in respective strategies of *suification* as self-cultivation, to use Petersen's phrase.

Mieth paraphrases Eckhart's concept of *Gelassenheit* as referring to 'the fundamental stance of self-distancing and surrender'. The believer shall let himself be found by God instead of searching for him. God's turning to us, according to Eckhart, takes place within us, and therefore has to be understood in terms of particular psychological states of passivity and receptiveness that suggest religious qualification. These states have to be learned, although they are subject to practice. It is this dialectic of self-cultivation through passivity that is also central to Kierkegaard's thought. Matthias Engmann emphasises the fact that for Kierkegaard the reader of his prose has to be introduced into a 'process of becoming oneself before God'. This takes the form of a particular praxis of self-surrender to the unconditional ground of one's own being: 'Most important is the acceptance of being dependent on the unconditional ground. That colours the idea of individualisation fundamentally as non-self-assertion'. The distinctiveness of Kierkegaard's thought consists in the fact that for the Danish philosopher this insight into the dialectic of self-cultivation cannot be propositionally communicated. His thought proves to be an elaborated reflection on the symbolic restraints of

thematizing the interrelation of selfhood and transcendence within the framework of modern existential philosophy.

One might think that the dialectic of passivity and self-cultivation does not apply to Kant's *Denkungsart*. But it is Matthias Engmann again, who points to structural affinities in Kant's and Kierkegaard's thought by comparing their respective interpretations of Job. The Job of both philosophers accepts God as 'the non-understandable ground of all being', a ground that in the philosophy of Kant is being subjected to a rationalist transformation which takes God to be the symbolic representation of the unconditioned validity of reason. *Magnus Schlette*'s contribution shows how this rationalist representation of the unconditional derives from a protestant tradition of inward-oriented religiosity rooted in pietist thought. And he points out that Kant elaborates a specifically rationalist version of the aforesaid passivity towards the transcendent power: it is particularly and with utmost intensity in experiences of the sublime that we as individuals are seized by the internal force of our self-awareness as moral beings, a self-awareness that transcends the confines of the individual and lifts him/her into the realm of mankind. Kant's aesthetic of the sublime displays a transcendentalised version of the dynamic of selfhood and transcendence.

In her contribution, *Elisabeth Gräß-Schmidt* also focuses on the Kantian emphasis placed on the self in relationship to an unconditional entity. Gräß-Schmidt takes the discussion of Kant further by concentrating on Schleiermacher's attempt to anchor religion in a transcendent instance with a counterpart in human consciousness. By linking the transcendent unconditional entity to human consciousness, she sees Schleiermacher as paying remedy for a problem in Kant's philosophy that the transcendent can be accessed only indirectly in terms of experience and communication. Gräß-Schmidt argues that Schleiermacher's thinking needs to be seen in close connection to Kant's philosophy. In its focus on individual consciousness in relation to the transcendent, we see a new instantiation of the selfhood-transcendence relationship, in which the absolute 'emerges as a dimension guiding knowledge and action in its effect in precisely this feeling or in immediate self-consciousness'. In this way, the unconditional returns as something that cannot be reduced to a postulate as in Kant's philosophy, but, in fact, has an experiential grounding in human consciousness. Thereby, the accent in Kant's thinking of the transcendental is relocated to the feeling of religious experience – something that would prove vital for subsequent romanticism.

With *Julie Casteigt*'s article we move in a slightly different direction, or rather we return to some of the typological questions pertaining to *suifaction* and posed in Petersen's contribution. Subsequent to the studies on incipient modernity, we here return to the distant past. If individualisation, understood in the sense of an independent and autonomous 'self' detached from any transcendent and

unconditional power, is a modern phenomenon only, how should we understand and describe earlier forms of behaviour and thinking in which the 'self' also comes to figure prominently? We already looked at forms of religion, such as the cosmos or Axial age type, in which the self takes a more prominent place in comparison to archaic or urban forms of religion. Casteigt also touches upon this question by suggesting that we may find glimpses of religious individualisation also in pre-modern Europe. In a detailed study, she discusses Albert the Great's *Super Iohannem* and shows how Albert is inspired by Greek-Arabic cosmology and how this cosmology enables him to highlight certain selves as being and acting in accordance with divine grace. In his view of selfhood, Albert differs from the preceding patristic tradition in understanding the exceptional witness of God as, indeed, constituting a very prolific self. In Casteigt's understanding, this 'self' constitutes an individual who receives his or her whole being from God. They are distinct in their selfhood inasmuch as they have been disconnected from their singularity as distinct persons existing at a certain time and space.

Thus, we come full circle as regards the argument of this section's chapters: how to designate and understand incipient and increasing degrees of selfhood suspended between a transcendent power and distinct sense of selfhood. We do not provide one definite answer, but we all call for greater awareness in terms of language, conceptualisation, models, and theory when posing the question of individualisation in general and religious individualisation in particular throughout human history.

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