Methodological Consequence of Application of Gerhard Oberhammer's Religious Hermeneutics to the Study of Indian Philosophy

Based on His "Begegnung als Kategorie der Religion Hermeneutik"*

Ruzana Pskhu

Department of History of Philosophy
Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN)
Moscow, Russia
E-mail: r.pskhu@mail.ru

Abstract—**The paper deals with some categories of Gerhard Oberhammer's Religious Hermeneutics like "Begegnung". The author tries to trace the history of this notion in the history of the European philosophy (particularly, the possible influence of Heidegger's "Sein und Zeit") and define the scopes of a new meaning, which was introduced by Oberhammer by this notion. The semantical area of the German verb "begegnen" (to encounter), used by Heidegger about 260 times in his "Sein und Zeit", shows the principal difference between the term "Begegnung", which is defined by Oberhammer as a category (precisely, 'Kategorie der Religion Hermeneutik'), and Heidegger's meaning of it. The methodological consequences of using of such a category for the Indian philosophy are rather unexpected. The study of vishıshtadvaita-vedanta theology demonstrates necessity in an elaborated methodologic and categorical apparatus with obvious philosophical dimensions. The last one is provided by Oberhammer's religious hermeneutics.**

Keywords—Oberhammer; religious hermeneutics; Begegnung; Heidegger; Indian Philosophy; vishıshtadvaita-vedanta; "Sein und Zeit"; begegnen

I. INTRODUCTION

This article is a part of the investigation, a few results of which are published earlier. We will mention here some of them to make clear the logic of this work. Investigation of Indian Philosophy, especially, its theological doctrines, broaches some special problems, which are the representations of various methodological approaches. We will mention only three of them [1]. The first one is called ad a phenomenological approach to Indian Theology. Its most famous adherent is John B. Carman[1], who followed the principles of the phenomenology of religion, the main task of which is defined as "the requirement negatively expressed: self-denial, letting the believer himself speak without our praise or blame into what he tells us; positively expressed, having an attitude of sympathetic and loving understanding toward the alien faith, which 'sympathy' alone can lead toward comprehension and proper evaluation" [2]. He tried to understand the doctrine of God of Rāmānuja (XI-XII) as sympathetically as it is possible for one who is outside the Hindu religion: a scholar, who is involved in the process of understanding of the other religion, constantly restrains himself in the emotional level. The question concerns only the aspect of the pattern and practice in the life of the believers of the other religion. In other words putting aside the question about truth transforms a religion into a kind of activity, which is chosen by people because they were born in this or that religious tradition or because it correlates to their personal taste. The real object of the phenomenology of religion is "the highest type of devotee, who worships God only for his sake and not for his/her own benefit" [3].

The approach, which is proposed by Francis X. Clooney[2], is based on three principles: 1) the comparative theology is not only the theoretical elaboration of some theological ideas of various religious constructions, but the constructive engagement with the possibilities of such a religious diversity [4]; 2) the comparative theology must be deeply rooted in a particular religious tradition: a scholar should understand the responsibility which he takes in face of his community for translating and explanation of the fundamental principles of the alien religious tradition; 3) comparative theology "is not about the uniqueness of Christ nor about whether Hindus are saved or not. It is different kind of theologizing practice because of a particularly that has its own dynamic that is different of religions and related field" [5].

Despite the undoubted advantages of both methodologies, each of them has some weak points. And that is why.

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[1] Joahn B. Carman, professor of comparative religion at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[2] Francis Xavier Clooney, professor at Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The phenomenological study of Indian theology imposes some limitations on a scholar, which can be overstepped only by his entering into realm of historical facts. The last one can help him to understand the concrete situation, based mostly on some historical, cultural and linguistic realia, not based only on his own religious and human background. The strong point of the phenomenological approach is demanding to keep balance between the requirement of self-restraining both in judgments and in sympathy involvement into religion under investigation, and the requirement of deep understanding the religious patterns, which lay in the base of a religious worldview. But this approach leaves the question about truth and values in its ambiguity. It is not clear at all what a phenomenologist of religion should do with his/her own understanding of truth and values. Should he correlate or make the choice or recommend something, based on the results of his/her phenomenological study? Or probably should he restrain himself from judgments forever.

Despite of fact that Clooney's comparative theology doesn't aim at construction of any kind of "God's eye view" or any kind of "view from nowhere" [6], Clooney's demand in respect to a comparative theologian to be rooted in his own religious tradition arouses some doubts, inasmuch it's not clear enough who is addressed by the terms "we", when Clooney is talking about "our religious tradition" or "we" in opposition to the others. Taking faith as a criterion and precondition for a comparative philosophy is rather questionable, because it means that someone, who doesn't belong to that tradition, is denied entrance. Is it possible at all to become altered in the process and "still remain a loyal to one's own tradition?" [7].

The third approach, presented by Gerhard Oberhammer, also deals with the reflection on a religious experience in the comparative perspective and is based on a system of special terms and notions, which creates in its turn the foundation of Oberhammer's religious hermeneutics. Among these terms, the most important terms are "encounter" (Begegnung), "mythization" (Mythisierung), "Self-presence" (Beisichsein), 'the Beyond-of-being' (Jenseits des Seienden) and so on. Prof. Oberhammer defines his approach as "an attempt to interpret the phenomenon of religion, not, however, in the sense of the theological understanding of what religion is, but in the sense of religion as a human phenomenon, unrestricted by dogmatic positions" [8]. In comparison with two previous approaches Oberhammer's approach gives the adequate place to a religious tradition in face of Transcendence. The key for understanding of the notion of Transcendence of Oberhammer's religious hermeneutics is the structure of the human subjectivity itself, which implies the openness of a subject to the other. The question of truth or values becomes pointless, because there is no ground for comparison of different religious traditions except the only one — Transcendence. The main concern of such an approach is designed as a question "why the encounter with Transcendence arouses and how the subject's inner world becomes the place where God occurs?" At least two Oberhammer's works are especially devoted to clarify this question (vide: [9]).

II.   METHODOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCE OF APPLICATION OF GERHARD OBERHAMMER'S RELIGIOUS HERMENEUTICS TO THE STUDY OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

It is rather interesting to trace the sources of possible influence of the European philosophical tradition on becoming of the key-terms of Oberhammer's religious hermeneutics. In this paper we will examine from the historical-philosophical perspective the term "encounter' (Begegnung). This notion is closely connected with two other term — the other and the subject. But in contrast with them the term 'Begegnung' is rather 'young' in the history of the European philosophy: as a philosophical notion it occurs only at the beginning of the XX century and has been always related to the concepts Me and You. This term is meaningful in the philosophy of religion of H. Cohen and in the philosophy of G. Simmel, who saw in this kind of relationship a foundation for society existence and concerns it not only instrumentally as a relationship between two different personalities and their mutual influence and interaction but as their substantial connection [10].

We see that the term 'encounter' and connected with it "Me'-and-'You'-relationship" are concerned both in religious and atheistic traditions of contemporary European philosophy in similar way. The difference would relate not to the content of the term, but to the final tasks of its applying. It is also important for different styles and trends of contemporary philosophizing, which involve this notion into their philosophical contemplations, like existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics.

In so called atheistic tradition of philosophizing (for example French phenomenology) it is common to underline the importance of "'Me'-and-'You'- relationship" and their encounter as a construction elements for someone's personality and subjectivity. Someone can discover himself as a Subject and Person only through the encounter with another human being who is in the same extent a subject and a person. Only in the encounter with another one can discover my own inner dimension, which is in the same time a dimension of my personality. The same idea is true for H.-G. Gadamer, who interprets the crisis of communication and education in terms of incapacities for inner encounter of persons with each other [11].

In the tradition of the philosophy of religion and religious studies the subject matter of an encounter is interpreted in terms of spirituality and the connection of human being with God the Almighty: God becomes the Subject and the Person, who creates the personal dimension of men due the encounter with them. Here God is considered as the Other, without whom we cannot uncover our interiority and spiritual depth. The main important phenomenon of human spirituality, which is regarded in terms of "'Me'-and-'You'- encounter", is found in M. Buber's philosophy [12].

If we take the philosophical tradition in the German language, then it is rather curious to know, that the stem of this word (begegnen) plays rather important role in Heidegger's "Sein und Zeit". Thus, Heidegger uses the verb "begegnen" in this work more 260 times. But nor 'Begegnung' nor the derivative words, are not the admitted

termes of Heidegger's philosophy. It is no coincidence that "The Heidegger Dictionary" doesn't mention them at all [13].

This stem is used by him in the following words, which are not felt as technical terms: 1) as an active participle "begegnend" [14]; 2) the finite forms from the infinitive "begegnen" [15]; 3) the nominalization of the causative form "Begegnenlassen" [16]; 4) as an active participle "nächstbegegnend" [17]; 5) as a noun "Begegnisart" [18]; 6) as a noun "Begegnischarakter" [19]; 7) as a noun "Begegnis" [20]; 8) as a verb "mitbegegnen" [21]; 9) as a noun "Begegnisstruktur" [22]; 10) as a verb "zunächstbegegnend" [23].

The main connotation, which is created by the derivatives of the "begegnen", and which is presupposed by the context of this work, is the following: beings (or entities) encountered (with) in the surrounding world or environment according our concern with them; we encounter them as equipment (ready-to-hand) for residing, as "just present-at-hand and no more". In other words, Heidegger uses the derivatives of the stem "begegn-" in non-personalist worldview, there is no possibility to exist through the ancounter to Transcendence. An as we know that is principal for Oberhammer's philosophical considerations and methodological elaboration of study of Indian philosophical doctrines. The last one needs not a philological method of interpretation of a text, but its interpretation. "Primär handelt es sich zunächst nicht um eine rein philologische Methode der Textinterpretation, nach der die Sprache der Texte dieser Heilssysteme interpretiert warden kann, wenngleich das hier mit "Hermeneutik" Gemeinte sekundär auch für das Verständnis der Texte von Bedeutung sein könnte" [24].

As mentioned above, in the work "Begegnung als Kategorie der Religionshermeneutik" prof. Oberhammer regards the term of "encounter" (Begegnung) as a basic category of the religious hermeneutics, which deals with the soteriological texts of different religious traditions of India. These texts tell something about human salvation and in this case could be understood as the project of existential fulfillment ("als Entwurf eines Existenzvollzuges"). "Natürlich kann es nicht Sache des Indologen sein, zu den grossen Fragen der Philosophie als solchen etwas zu sagen. Doch sind die Heilssyteme, von denen hier die Rede ist, eine indische Wirklichkeit, und so muss der Indologe, wie unbeholfen auch immer, diese Wirklichkeit, von der seine Texte handeln, zu verstehen suchen, und nicht nur die zeitbedingten Aussagen der Texte" [25]. There is a personal need for salvation, which lies in the base of any religious system and which gives to it the character of a soteriological project. The need for salvation leads a human being to the direct relation with existence and imparts in this expectation of salvation a new value of the soteriological system. The value is derived not from its theoretical significance, but only because of that soteriological expectation. That is why we talk here about a soteriological system mostly as an existential project, not only as theoretical system of categories. And what is the most interesting thing is to find the reply on the question how this soteriological system manifests itself in modus vivendi of a human being. Oberhammer supposes that to reply this question means to

discover a certain hermeneutical structure of any soteriological system in the religious perspective [26]. And here two important questions arouse: the question of the transcendental conditions of the fact that a person is able to the eternal salvation, and the question of how could be open to the future the presence of a person, who needs salvation. The soteriological systems open their essence for a subject who grabs the future of his own salvation. But the fact that he tries to grasp means that he doesn't have the salvation as actual. For these systems a real human being has not been saved, but only has a possibility to be saved in aspect of the future, expected by him. If we take into consideration the human existence, then such a grasping will be able only in the case of openness of a subject to the other, having lost his own identity. The other should be present for him as co-existent being to make this grasping possible. But this other cannot be another human being, in other words an individual being. At the same time it cannot be also nothing. The other only reports itself as openness for the possible encounter.

III. CONCLUSION

The difference (among others) between Oberhammer's notion of "encounter" and Heidegger using of this word is that the encounter, according prof. Oberhammer, means not only the worldy meeting of the subject with the other, but the encounter itself, inasmuch as "the Beyond-of-being" (Jenseits des Seienden) as a irrespective semantic reality of salvation becomes actual and involves into the indirect relationship with the subject. "In diesem Sinne meint der hier eingeführte Begriff der Begegnung dann nicht mehr eine innerweltliche Begegnung des Subjektes mit einem anderen als solche, sondern eine solche nur, sofern in ihr das "Jenseits des Seienden" als unrelativierbare Sinnwirklichkeit des Heils thematisch wird und in die Unmittelbarkeit zum Subjekt tritt" [27].

The most important methodological consequence of prof. Oberhammer's Religious Hermeneutics is, as I see it, very clear understanding of the structure of a theological system, created in the principally alien culture. Such an investigation requires a scholar to possess the capacity for clear thinking, which is similar to that, what René Descartes calls as a "clear perception" [28]. The last one is identical with the ability to the pure mathematic contemplation.

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