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## *Towards a concept of «transcendere» in Husserl, Heidegger and Zambrano*

### **Abstract**

The article develops an investigation of the concept of *transcendere*, around the concepts of transcendence in Husserl, Heidegger and specifically in María Zambrano's book *La Confesión: género literario*. The author suggests that a concept of *transcendere* can be constructed on the basis of such fundamental notions as difference, movement and direction. The article goes on to argue that these notions create the conditions for an ontology that cannot be separated from ethics. The concept of *transcendere* may serve as a bridge between political and ontological thinking; the article suggests that this is the case in the thinking of María Zambrano.

### **Keywords**

Transcendence, Ontological difference, *Epoché*, Time, Zambrano.

### **Resumen**

Partiendo de los conceptos de trascendencia en Edmund Husserl y Martin Heidegger, el artículo investiga el significado del mismo concepto en la filosofía de María Zambrano, a través de su libro *La Confesión: género literario*. A partir de esta investigación pretende desarrollar un concepto de *transcendere*. Este último concepto implica una interpretación específica de la filosofía del «ser» en María Zambrano, en que consta una importante conexión a las teorías políticas de la misma autora mediante un imperativo ético. El artículo se centra en las divergentes construcciones de diferencia en Husserl, Heidegger y Zambrano. Intenta localizar la posición desde la cual trascendencia es posible en los tres autores y las cualidades o funciones que tiene la misma posición; la más importante de ellas la dirección del movimiento trascendiendo.

### **Palabras clave**

Trascendencia, diferencia ontológica, *epoché*, tiempo, Zambrano.

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It is striking, when reading one of Zambrano's early books such as *La Confesión: género literario* (1943),<sup>1</sup> that she developed her philosophy in close relation to the phenomenological discussion.<sup>2</sup> Even more so, it is possible to read *La Confesión* as an explicit response to a debate which took place between several successors to Husserl – among others, Max Scheler and Edith Stein – and, maybe most importantly, Heidegger. It's possible, through *La Confesión*, to situate Zambrano directly in the debate on the problems caused by the notion of phenomenological epoché and the transcendental subject in Husserl. Furthermore, that debate could be considered one of the important arenas in which Zambrano situated her first investigations. I will argue that Zambrano develops her own philosophical answer in a phenomenological discussion of this kind. The answer is developed in terms of a transcending function – Zambrano defines transcendence in various ways, as for example «opening way»,<sup>3</sup> or «going out of oneself»<sup>4</sup> – which I will call *transcendere*.<sup>5</sup> Starting with the formulation of a problem in Husserl, I will go on to discuss the development of an answer to the problem at the crossroads between the thinking of Zambrano and Heidegger.

At the outset one can mention two different concepts of transcendence, found in Husserl.<sup>6</sup> Both of them have to do with the relationship between the subject's consciousness and the objects of that consciousness. Husserl defined being as that which is posited, something that implies an a priori action of positioning. The phenomenological reduction that Husserl introduced, which we can understand as a form of positioning, converts entities into objects or phenomena. And since epoché in Husserl is an intellectual action or attitude it follows that the object that is, is in relation to a consciousness that posits it.<sup>7</sup> Since the positioning consciousness itself, in order for it to be, needs to be at the same time posited and performing the positioning, the question of the positioning of consciousness itself is raised. The consciousness becomes its own ultimate ground in this line of reasoning, at the same time both object and subject of its own positioning.

Husserl argues that entities as whole objects only become present to the subject's consciousness through a stream of perceptions in every one of which they are never fully present.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the objects become complete only after a uniting of various perceptions in the subject's consciousness. The concept of transcendence corresponds to this structure with its double meaning: a) Concerning the transcendental subject, transcendence as that function by which the consciousness is complete as the centre from which the perceptions are united, and as such not subjectable to reduction: or, put another way, the consciousness as transcendent in relation to its own stream of perceptions.<sup>9</sup> b) The position of the entities to the extent that they are beyond the subject's consciousness: that is to say, that it is only after the reduction that they are present as objects, and

1. Zambrano, M., *La Confesión: género literario*, Madrid, Siruela, 1995 (published for the first time in 1943 with the title *La Confesión: género literario y método*) In the following: *La Confesión*

2. Zambrano mentions Heidegger only once in *La Confesión* (pág. 23), faithful to her custom of providing few references (though they are more common in later books and articles). In *Los Sueños y el Tiempo*, for example, written in the form of separate articles during the 1950s but published as a book in 1992, she explicitly places her investigation of time and sleep in relation to the question of epoché in Husserl. Probably, in *La Confesión* she already had this discussion as a reference. A cursory look at the headings in *La Confesión* directly places the book in a phenomenological language, with subtitles such as «action» and «evidence.» It is also telling that the only mention of Heidegger in *La Confesión* is in relation to idealism. Zambrano accuses Heidegger of being an heir to idealism and, against him, stresses the necessity of transforming the idealistic subject. She also writes that confession must be understood as a protest against the subject that German idealism rediscovered. »Es también el Yo transcendental que vuelve a descubrir el idealismo alemán, la unidad única del sujeto del conocimiento que pone el pensar; con el ser, pues unidad él mismo, pone la unidad del sujeto.» *La Confesión*, ed. cit., págs. 92-93

3. Ibid. pág. 16

4. Ibid. pág. 37

5. Jonna Bornemark uses the concept of *transcendere* in the meaning of crossing borders, in her thesis *Kunskapens gräns, gränsens vetande*, Södertörn Philosophical Studies 6, Stockholm, 2009. Even though I follow her thesis to some extent, especially in the exposition of the concept of transcendence in Husserl, it is important to point out that the concept of *transcendere*, as suggested here, does not take on the same meaning as it does in Bornemark. This article can to some extent be considered an attempt to discuss the further possible meanings of the concept found in Bornemark.

6. See the excellent exposition by Jonna Bornemark in *Kunskapens gräns, gränsens vetande*, págs. 51-69

7. Husserl, E., *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch. Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, § 142)

8. Ibid., § 41, 44, 143

9. Ibid. § 57

10. Ibid. § 42

11. Zambrano articulates the relation between the concept of transcendence and time in various places. In the unpublished text, «El tiempo apariencia,» M-462 from 1956, she explicitly states that her own conception of both concepts should be considered a critique of Heidegger.

12. This is how, for example, Alexei Chernyakov understands Dasein in his *The ontology of time – Being and Time in the Philosophies of Aristotle, Husserl and Heidegger*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, 2002, págs. 115-117 and 218-219.

13. Not the only fundamental ontological structure, would I suggest. At the beginning of *La Confesión* (pág. 25) Zambrano states that the different genres correspond to different structures and necessities of life, of which the most important and equal to all is the necessity to express itself.

conceivable to the consciousness through a never «full» stream of perceptions.<sup>10</sup>

The structure raises at least two important questions. 1) How can a pure consciousness have knowledge of objects that are essentially different, i.e. not reducible to objects in a stream of perceptions? And 2) how are we to understand our own experience of consciousness as a whole if it is not as an object to that same consciousness? It is possible to find attempts to answer both questions in Husserl, but we will leave them aside for the time being and let the reasoning in Husserl serve as the starting-point of the discussion between Heidegger and Zambrano.

The first concept of transcendence in Husserl (concerning the transcendental subject) has at least two important traits. It is on the one hand an ontological ground that exists in and for itself, and on the other hand the foundational «without which» the presence of the objects would be impossible. The second concept of transcendence presents a problem in relation to the first one that has to do with a radical difference between the transcendent parties. Consciousness and entity are defined as radically different or beyond each other, which questions the very act of transcending – and therefore the possibility of knowledge. Paradoxically, the interpretation of transcendence in Husserl converts the concept into a limit-concept which focuses its attention on the two sides of the limit, rather than on the transcending movement that transgresses the limit. Transcendence can be said to tend towards transcendental positions rather than towards transcending movements in Husserl.

I would like to suggest that as an answer to this problem in Husserl, both Heidegger and Zambrano develop structures – albeit with somewhat different contents – that instead focus on the transcending movement. The concept of *transcendere* can be understood as the interpretation of these structures. The Latin verb *transcendere* that will be discussed in what follows has two important traits. It implies action or movement but it also underlines – being both infinitive and imperative – a fundamental difference between the transcending movements in Heidegger and Zambrano: that of the direction of the movement, and the ethical conclusions drawn from it.

Time, or temporality, is crucial for the understanding of the concept of transcendence in Heidegger and, dare I suggest, in Zambrano.<sup>11</sup> Dasein could be understood as that being which temporalizes itself in actions with the fundamental ontological structure of care (*Sorge*).<sup>12</sup> Without going into a detailed description of the concepts in Heidegger I would like to argue that it is possible to interpret confession, as presented in *La Confesión* by Zambrano, as a specific temporalization of a subject-being. In this temporalization, confession plays the role of a fundamental ontological structure.<sup>13</sup>

For Heidegger, Dasein is that being that is constantly submerged in action and interpretation so as to be able to act. In this action the entities become being-to-hand. Dasein temporalizes itself in dealing with things according to a primordial structure of care, which is the name Heidegger gives to the fundamental structure of any action and interpretation of Dasein.<sup>14</sup> Within the frames of the actions that Dasein performs the entities become being-to-hand in relation to the complex of other things being-to-hand and in relation to a specific way of acting of Dasein. Dasein casts itself on the entities as possibilities in the future and this is the fundamental structure of its being.<sup>15</sup> Dasein casting itself towards itself through the mediation of the being-to-hand as possibilities in the future can be understood as the constitutive elements of the concept of transcendence in Heidegger.<sup>16</sup> Transcendence can be interpreted as ontological in Heidegger since transcendence takes on the meaning of the movement with which Dasein «steps over itself,» which is equivalent to the movement of being as far as it is being-in-the-world: for, according to Heidegger, being-in-the-world is a structure that constantly steps over itself.<sup>17</sup>

Even so, a primary interpretation and «seeing» explains how the entities can be perceived as being-to-hand for Dasein to cast itself on, and the structure of care becomes visible in the actions with which Dasein is.<sup>18</sup> The kind of difference that makes a concept of transcendence possible in Heidegger does not seem to be the same as in Husserl. For Heidegger the difference does not lie between transcendental positions or qualities, but is instead constituted by and in a movement and its *direction towards*, as ontological difference.<sup>19</sup> It has been suggested that the ontology of Dasein could be understood as a topology;<sup>20</sup> this image is telling because it lets us see how Dasein's movement of casting or caring involvement in the direction of the future implies another direction in which Dasein as movement or action – the being of its beings – is shown. Ontological difference does not lie before the transcending movement but is the result of that same movement and it is constituted by what we could understand as a changed perspective – what we have called direction – towards Dasein itself.

The concept of transcendence in Heidegger serves our purpose of searching for a concept of *transcendere* in two ways. First of all it shows how transcendence can be thought of as primarily movement not presupposing entity. Secondly it gives us the opportunity to ask whether transcendence understood as entity's being in its direction towards itself and with the movement predicated by the structure of its own being can really be understood as transcendence in the sense of «going beyond».

Zambrano criticises the conception of being as a being with direction towards itself in *La Confesión*, stating that Heidegger is only an heir to German idealism.<sup>21</sup> For Zambrano the non-existent radical

14. Ibid. págs. 78-86 § 12

15. Heidegger, M., *Varat och Tiden - I*, Daidalos, Doxa Press, Lund, 1992, pág. 192, subsection 148 (*Sein und Zeit*, subsection 148)

16. Alexei Chernyakov writes in his *The ontology of time* (págs. 173-176) that the concept of Sorge in Heidegger can be understood as the heir to the transcendental subject in the sense of being that fundamental ground which is only to itself, or Dasein as the only being for which the question of being can be a question. To us, this seems to make an important difference: Sorge can only be considered a fundamental ground of Dasein in the sense that it is the relation with which entities draw Dasein into being as a particular structure of *activity*.

17. Heidegger, M., *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1988, 425 (*Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 425)

18. Heidegger, M., *Varat och Tiden - I*, págs. 107-114 § 17, subsections 77-83 (*Sein und Zeit*, subsections 77-83) and págs. 193-199 § 32, subsections 148-153 (*Sein und Zeit*, subsections 148-153)

19. Ibid. pág. 197, subsection 151 (*Sein und Zeit*, subsection 151)

20. Chernyakov, A., *The ontology of time*, ed. cit., pág. 196

21. Zambrano, M., *La Confesión*, ed. cit., pág. 23

22. Ibid. págs. 31, 98-100

23. Ibid. pág. 37

24. Ibid. págs. 56-57

25. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2008, pág. 5 (book I, v)

26. Zambrano, M., *La Confesión*, ed. cit., pág. 37

other in the philosophy of Heidegger is a problem and that is why the subject that emerges from the confession does so by an action which is at the same time the reduction of the heart and a direction towards the other.<sup>22</sup> We shall presently see what this means. As a starting-point I want to suggest that this radical other in Zambrano should not be understood as ontological difference in the sense of Heidegger, nor as difference in the meaning of the transcendental ideal subject and its objects. This permits the object in Zambrano to be at the same time other and recognisable, at the same time object of knowledge and present as non-reducible other. And within the conditions of this third difference the fundamental direction towards the other becomes a fundamental ethical imperative – *transcendere!* – with political and ethical implications.

As in Heidegger, the confession described by Zambrano is structured around a directed movement.

«Mas también se manifiesta en la Confesión el caracter fragmentario de toda vida, el que todo hombre se sienta a sí mismo como trozo incompleto, esbozo nada más; trozo de si mismo, fragmento. Y al salir, busca abrir sus límites, trasponerlos y encontrar, más allá de ellos, su unidad acabada. Espera, como el que se queja, ser escuchado; espera que al expresar su tiempo se cierre su figura; adquirir, por fin, la integridad que le falta, su total figura.»<sup>23</sup>

«La acción ha sido descubierta, en suma, sobre la caridad, sobre la vida trascendiendo hacia el prójimo y recibida por la de él, que salía también a buscarlos. Única acción verdadera, que por eso se llama 'vocación', porque es llamada, y no solo desde lo alto, sino desde los lados; llamada de los prójimos nuestros hermanos.»<sup>24</sup>

Confession starts with the feeling of being dispersed and lost in the multitude of creatures, feelings that incite a turning towards something that we cannot see but that we believe to be there. We believe that something is there because we see a sign of it, its appearance or its symbol or name. Just as Augustine, in his *Confessions*, calls out – Oh God! – in the hope of being heard, confession involves a first recognition, and interpretation of something being there. And just as God's name, according to Augustine, must be understood as a sign of his presence in the midst of fragmentation, so must the other also be interpreted in his appearance as a sign or symbol of his presence.<sup>25</sup> In this sense the experience of the other can never be direct, but must be understood as an expression of a present radical other who cannot be seen in any other way than by his appearance as symbol. We recognize the other as a symbol or as a point of direction in the confession, because we believe and hope that something is there. And paradoxically, the direction of the transcending movement is my own unity with something that is at once outside and inside myself. «Y al salir, busca abrir sus límites, trasponerlos y encontrar, más allá de ellos, su unidad acabada.»<sup>26</sup>

The transcending movement consists in a direction towards the other that is a direction towards myself (as is also the case with Dasein) but without losing the other as other.

In Zambrano, difference in the relationship between the other and me is based not on knowledge or direct experience but on recognizability and a primordial act of accepting.<sup>27</sup> Zambrano discusses this acceptance in terms of the reduction of the heart, which consists in leaving oneself open and in oblivion, so as to let the other show itself.<sup>28</sup> The confession is described by Zambrano as a movement towards the other through confessing one's existence, in the literal sense of Dasein as being-here or -there. The confession declares: I am here and I believe that you are there! The temporalization of a subject-being in Zambrano's *La Confesión* does not begin with turning towards something and inserting it in ones self-progression, but with a double declaration of presence, without yet having filled that presence with content: «...sobre la vida trascendiendo hacía el prójimo y recibida por la de él, que salía también a buscarlos.»<sup>29</sup>

In this somewhat displaced interpretation of Dasein – as a movement, but not solely my own progression towards myself – being's basic structure entails two equally present parties with the same capability to express themselves. Both parties are in the process of expression, both in the process of transgression and transcending. Being must then be understood as the unity of two things that are radically different, but not ontologically or essentially different (in which case the other could not be recognized as the same in the sense of being-there), which become a unit because of their direction towards each other. In this way the product of the transcending movement towards the other is in one sense being of the confessor himself, but in another sense himself as somebody other: a new unit and the only one possible, in unity with another.

This unity with the other, which Zambrano describes as a point of identification or a centre, is really the only subject-being we can talk about, since the confessor started out in dispersion and fragmentation.<sup>30</sup> And it is only through a continuous process of transcending and unity with the other that time and with it the subject as a whole becomes possible. In the confession Husserl's idea of the transcendental ideal subject could be said to have been turned inside out. Looked upon from the perspective of the experience of time created in the transcending movement towards the other, it is not the object but the subject that becomes whole in a stream of perceptions, through its own moving towards the other, with the other, in the other; not self-reflection, but recognizing the other as I let him see me.

In Heidegger the epoché can be said to have been turned into the reduction of the presupposition of the subject. And in Zambrano the reduction of the heart must be understood as that reduction with which the confession brackets appearances and fragmented

27. Ibid. pág. 41

28. Ibid. págs. 44-51, 78-79

29. Ibid. pág. 57

30. Ibid. págs. 40, 62-63

31. Ibid. pág. 23

32. We can find the notion of a-temporality and supra-temporality in *Los Sueños y el Tiempo*. Both temporalities correspond to that part of the subject-being that Zambrano names the «I».

33. Zambrano, M., *La Confesión*, ed. cit., págs. 30

34. Ibid. pág. 27 What I call the moment of confession should not be confused with the fact that confession always starts from the experience of lived time. This is why confession can be seen as temporalization; the moment of confession performs a continuous temporalization into time.

35. Inevitably the question is raised of whether or not there are different kinds of temporalization in Zambrano. I believe that several temporalizations are suggested in *Los Sueños y el Tiempo*. In *La Confesión*, Zambrano speaks of different literary genres that can lead to different kinds of knowledge, for example the Guide and Poetry.

being by recognizing them in order to reach a being in unity with them. It is with another that the confession creates unity, not with a subject-being's self nor with objects or tools, and it does so as a specific temporalization in direction of the other. However the unity is frail and only momentary, and needs to be repeated continuously; according to Zambrano, the subject needs to be reborn.<sup>31</sup>

According to this description, confession must be considered a-temporal,<sup>32</sup> a function rather than an actual process in time, repeated in the moment of confessing. But confession also has a close connection to time. Dasein temporalized itself through its actions towards the possibilities created in the meanings of the being-at-hand as a future. Since Dasein as the being of beings is only the product of those actions, it must always be understood as existing within temporality. But confession temporalizes the confessional subject differently. In time it is not primarily in the future that the confessional subject becomes, but through memory and recognition. With the same movement that directs and leads the confessional subject in its becoming with the other, time emerges as the recollection of a former unity.<sup>33</sup> Time is then to be considered the product of the confession, and the moment in which the confession takes place a-temporal.<sup>34</sup> Or in terms of the ontological difference: the confessional moment is the temporality of time and the transcending movement a temporalization.<sup>35</sup>

The notion of time in *La Confesión* suggests several things of importance for the concept of *transcendere* that we started out looking for. Firstly, the moment of the confession, in which a transcending movement towards the other takes place, is temporalization as such and must therefore be conceived as a-temporal. Secondly and on the other hand, confession is movement, and it can only be so if time is created in that same movement. This means that the confessional movement can be understood much like the *nunc stans* from which the first mover in Aristotle moves the world and creates it. Or as a moment within another movement from which the movement as such springs, only to disclose retrospectively the original movement in which the moment was part. In fact, since the moment of the confession cannot be movement without also being time, it constantly lapses into temporality. The confession can then be considered a constant tension between timely differences. On the one hand the other as other in time and on the other hand a confessional moment in which nothing is but fragmentation. Confession, as temporalization, creates difference while it creates unity as an a-temporal moment.

Such a double creation can only be possible if we understand the movement towards the other as a movement of *transcendere* that transposes, as Zambrano writes in the citation above, not only the limits of the subject-being but the metaphysical position of the other into an ontological position. The movement of *transcendere* is a movement crossing the limit of time and it can only do so if the

radical other is considered an «immanent» ontological position, as a symbol or indication of direction. But most importantly, confession as a movement of *transcendere* implies yet another direction in our topology. Zambrano writes:

En realidad son dos los modos de unidad que los filósofos concibieron para el ser humano: ésta de la identidad del ser en su forma pura inteligible, identidad de la idea, y la unidad de armonía de los estoicos; unidad de medida casi musical, en que la actividad es incesante para mantener la inmovilidad aparente.<sup>36</sup>

36. Zambrano, M., *La Confesión*, ed. cit., pág. 63.

37. Ibid. pág. 23.

Zambrano is speaking about the confessional subject, what we could call the becoming of being through the temporalizing actions of the confession. If confession can be understood as a moment, a «birth» if one will,<sup>37</sup> that needs to be constantly repeated in order for the unity to exist, then the repeated confessions must be understood as yet another stream or movement. The repeated moments of confession can in themselves be considered a stream where every confession is a moment within a movement. Transcending itself through its repeated incarnations this second movement must be considered supra-temporal. The direction of this second movement of repeated confessions is not towards the other. It moves towards nothingness – «la nada» – and this nothingness could possibly be considered metaphysical. Even so, this second movement is a fundamental part of the concept of *transcendere* that we want to outline in Zambrano. As the movement of the repeated confessions it constitutes the basis of the possibility of any being as such. The relationship between the two movements implied in the concept of *transcendere* could possibly be described as the difference between metaphysics and ontology. But considering their inevitable dependence it would be equally true to say that they raise doubts about that very difference.

As a conclusion, the movement of *transcendere* – which from the perspective of the temporalized subject-being is a point of identification – creates its own concept of difference. This is because the fundamental difference that makes *transcendere* possible is to be found between one direction and another in the transcending movements that form life. The difference conceived of in Zambrano allows for an ontological space which is from the beginning intimate, and ethical and which does not allow for self-identification. The confessional subject-being can then be understood as opposed to Dasein, as well as the transcendental subject who Zambrano claims to be fundamentally alone. In this intimate room, or point of identification unity the imperative side of *transcendere* becomes highlighted. And it is precisely here that I would like to suggest that Zambrano connects her political and philosophical thinking. In Zambrano, ethics and politics are connected to the fundamental question of being, through an imperative saying: In order for me to transcend in the direction of the other (i.e. to become) I must show myself. And by doing so I can let the other be seen, or allow him to be present.