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SELF-IDENTITY THROUGH THE PRISM OF OTHER IN MEROLD  
WESTPHAL'S EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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**Abstract:** For the first time in the Ukrainian religious studies the article overviews the interrelation of the works of Merold Westphal, which reveal the specificity of the correlation of the ideas of S. Kierkegaard and E. Levinas. The peculiarities of S. Kierkegaard's and E. Levinas' interpretation of the biblical teaching *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* and its rethinking in the existential theology of M. Westphal are analyzed. The dichotomy I – Other is investigated in the context of realization of true Self and the search for the answer to the question that M. Westphal asks himself, which of the ideas will further unite people. It is shown that for E. Levinas it is infinity and ineffability that constitute the radical individual responsibility of each of us for our neighbour. S. Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, according to M. Westphal, tell about the idea of Eternal, and mainly based on the more expressive Christian idea of true God. It is proven that M. Westphal justified the inadmissibility of the Levinas post-biblical incorporation of religion into ethics, when it is the truth that becomes the criterion of a subject, but not kindness, freedom, sincerity; it is objectivity, not subjectivity. He opposed him the categoricalness of the Kierkegaard's principle, according to which religion is unconditional prerequisite of ethics.

**Key words:** Self, Other, faith, love, indirect communication, Religiousness C, revelation as immediacy, logic of solidarity, identity.

## 1. Introduction

The work “Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views” (2012) presents the five main directions of biblical hermeneutics today: the historical and postmodernist (Scott Spencer), the philosophical and theological (Merold Westphal), the atoning-historical (Richard Gaffin, Jr.) canonical (Robert Wall). And this, in our opinion, indicates the great contribution of M. Westphal to the tradition of interpreting divine proclamation and modernizing Christian thinking in modern age (Westphal, 2002; 2003; 2005; 2012; 2015; 2015a; 2016; 2017), in particular the rethinking of S. Kierkegaard’s and E. Levinas’ ideas (Westphal, 1992; 1995; 2004; 2008; 2008a).

The creativity of one of the most famous existential phenomenologists of religion, theologians and religious philosophers of the modern era, the honorary Professor of the University of Fordham – Merold Westphal has become famous in Ukrainian historical-philosophical and religious studies, first of all, due to the studies of K. Raida (1998, 2009) and G. Yemelianenko (2013), who consider it as a phenomenon of post-existentialist thinking, as well as R. Soloviy (2013), who relates it to the post-modernist tradition. Foreign researchers such as J. Davenport (2008), J. Ferreira (2001, 2008, 2009), K. Nielsen (2017), M. Paradiso-Michau (2007, 2008, 2012), J. Sands (2018), P. Sheil (2009), J. Stewart (2015), P. Stokes (2015) and other scientists pay attention to the conceptual similarity of the ideas of Levinas and Kierkegaard in their works. J. Ferreira writes about the direct connection between love and mercy in the works of Levinas and Kierkegaard in their interpreting the attitude of true Christian towards his or her neighbor. M. Paradiso-Michau emphasizes the infinite ethical responsibility in interpersonal ethical relations, which, according to Kierkegaard and Levinas, must rely on the original asymmetry or inequality in the interaction of I with the needy Other. A. Sandu proves, that for Levinas: „Meeting the Other is not a pursuit of the Other. Responsibility, as the ontological act, of being together with the Other, regardless of His response, is preferred to the pursuit as leaving the self. Therefore, responsibility cannot be bilateral; it is always the responsibility of the Self towards the Other. However, responsibility is a response of the Self to the call of the Other, regarded as Face, and this subtle movement within transcendence places ethics before ontology. Kindness appears before the conscience of kindness and the willingness to be good. The relationship of responsibility involves a relationship of love for the Other” (Sandu 2016, 34).

J. Davenport (2008, 169), describing the “Kierkegaardian project of agapetic ethics,” argues that “a special element of Kierkegaard’s faith is eschatological hope, whose significance goes down both in Levinas’ criticizing, and in Derrida’s protecting of “Fear and Awe.” Such an argument, in the opinion of the researcher, “is part of a greater critique of what I call “higher ethics” of the interpretation of the “teleological suspension of ethics” proposed by Kierkegaard”. A. Wells (2012, 71) considers Levinas’ criticism of Kierkegaard’s views as “isolated,” “immodest” and, ultimately, unrelated to the ethical and social dimensions of life, groundless and, on the contrary, proves that Kierkegaard’s thoughts are actually directly concerned with ethics, from which, even the thesis that “it is not necessary to be a Christian to recognize the transcendence of the Other” follows.

However, the issue of the conceptual correlation of S. Kierkegaard’s and E. Levinas’ ideas in their similarity and differences remains incompletely discussed today. In our opinion, it was M. Westphal who came up to the solution of this issue in his writings most thoroughly, as evidenced by his undoubted authority for the aforementioned scholars who regularly refer to the works of the American thinker. At the same time, the problem of determining the identity of selfhood through the prism of other is one of the central ones when considering the correlation of the ideas of S. Kierkegaard and E. Levinas. And in the writings of M. Westphal (“Transcendent and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul” (2004), “Levinas and Kierkegaard in a Dialogue” (2008)), it acquires a new theoretical and conceptual sound, which will be the subject of research in this exploration.

## **2. The dichotomy “I – Other” in the context of realization of “true Self”: Kierkegaard versus Levinas**

It is no accident that the section of the book “Transcendent and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul” “Kierkegaard: Towards Onto-Theological Love for God” M. Westphal places after the section “Levinas: on the Other Side of the Ontological Love for Neighbour”, deliberately breaking the historical interdependence of the philosophical thought’s development. In his work, “Levinas and Kierkegaard in a Dialogue”, M. Westphal (2008, 1) notes that he became acquainted with the works of E. Levinas after more than twenty years of work with S. Kierkegaard, and therefore he had to make up for the lost in the study of E. Levinas. The point is that in the interpretation of the American thinker, Levinas’ interpretation of the relations between the “I” and the “Neighbour” acts as a propaedeutics (on the one hand, an explanation, and on the other – a certain result) to the Kierkegaard’s existential dialectic. M. Westphal appeals to the ethical side of the “dialogic” phenomenology of E. Levinas,

in particular, to his concept of ethical responsibility, pity for the other, as the most important link of self-transcendence (self-perfection) of human beings. At the same time, he seeks to prove the heuristic expediency of extrapolation of the Levinas concept of the “neighbour” to the attitude towards God as a neighbour. That is, it proves the need to try “to think of God as a voice that appeals to us from heaven.”

This is practically the same as what we find in the works of S. Kierkegaard. According to Westphal (2004, 202), the ethical transcendence of E. Levinas provides a wonderful heuristic to get acquainted with the ideas of S. Kierkegaard about religious transcendence, since transcendence in their works has “the same structure”.

M. Westphal claims that the revelation implies an asymmetric “I-You” dialogue in which “You” has a priority over “I”. This opens the door to interpersonal religious transcendence, in which the cognitive dimension with its dialectics of unconcealedness and concealment is teleologically suspended in terms of obedience, trust, devotion and complicity.

Following S. Kierkegaard in his arguments, M. Westphal agrees with him that the experience of revelation is possible only through faith, which provides self-transcendence in front of the image (face) of the divine transcendence. Faith, as considered S. Kierkegaard, and then M. Westphal too, is not knowledge in the sense to which the speculative philosophy aspires. In order to preserve the mystery of faith as a subject of revelation, according to M. Westphal, S. Kierkegaard, using the example of the Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, mentions five ways of the abyss between the faith and knowledge:

1. Abraham’s faith is a meeting with “mysterium tremendum”;
2. Faith is a reaction to a paradox, that is, an attitude that can not be understood;
3. Faith as faith “in the power of absurd”;
4. Faith as a form of madness;
5. Abraham’s God is associated with the involvement of a personal language game (Abraham did not tell his relatives why his son goes to the Moria mount, because the “call of faith” has no verbal explanation). And in this, according to M. Westphal, it is the linguistic nature of Abraham’s loneliness that S. Kierkegaard emphasized.

S. Kierkegaard, according to the American thinker, treats faith as virtue, but not as an intellectual virtue, but as a moral virtue, in particular, manifestation of humility and courage. This courage is manifested through Abraham’s willingness to endure emotional trauma, shock and loneliness. The suffering that inflict such faith is related both to Abraham’s courage and his humility. Therefore, the essence of faith is rooted not in the cognitive sphere, but in the sphere of human freedom.

In the understanding of M. Westphal, the God of Abraham is not merely a substance, he is like a living being, who speaks, seeks revelation,

and is not only a manifestation of the God's existence, but a much more fundamental function of him, the will of God. In this connection, Westphal writes about the otherness of the transcendental voice. This interpretation of Westphal is similar to that of Kierkegaard's "indirect communication". According to Westphal (2004, 210), the Biblical thesis "so then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17) could be reworded by Kierkegaard as "faith is definitely hearing, hearing that welcomes the voice of God".

M. Westphal (2004, 216) argues that in the works of both E. Levinas and S. Kierkegaard the true otherness can be found not in ontology, but in ethics, or, in the Biblical language of Saint John Climacus, "not in the creation, but in the fall".

According to M. Westphal, thinking of S. Kierkegaard functions, first of all, according to the answer of Jesus to the question about the greatest commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind" (Luke 10, 27); and secondly, the thesis "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22: 37-39).

In the context of this last biblical position, M. Westphal, attempts to reduce the views of S. Kierkegaard and E. Levinas to a common denominator. However, he also emphasizes a certain difference between them. Thus, for S. Kierkegaard, in his opinion, he who says "I love God" but hates his brother, he is a liar. According to M. Westphal (2004, 216), S. Kierkegaard, rewording the aforementioned biblical thesis, introduces a peculiar ethical imperative of love for God, according to which "You must love yourself in the same way as you love your neighbour when you love him or her, as oneself". With this notion of "true self-love", according to Westphal, 2004, S. Kierkegaard introduces teleological humanism into his deontology, which can induce E. Levinas even to be nervous. But in this way he keeps the command and promise, the law and the Gospel in balance".

On the one hand, M. Westphal perceives S. Kierkegaard's understanding of self-transcendence as a self-denial critically, on the other hand, positively, because self-transcendence is a kind of discovery of one's own selfhood by a human being. In this regard, the American thinker suggests, "An insight as discernment should never be separated from responsibility, metaphysics from spirituality, and transcendence from self-transcendence" (Westphal 2004, 231).

In the work "Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue" M. Westphal writes about the proximity of the views and ideas of S. Kierkegaard and E. Levinas more thoroughly. He compares them in the context of revelation comprehension (revelation as immediacy and revelation as enigma and paradox), the concept of God (teleological abolition; the requirements of love and divine transcendence), heteronomy (the shock of a transcendental as heteronomous intersubjectivity, transcendence,

heteronomy and the birth of responsible selfhood), return (the “logic” of solidarity, the inverted intentionality: being orientation) etc.

When M. Westphal began to read E. Levinas, in particular, the work of the latter “Totality and Infinity” (1961), he was struck as with a lightning not as much with a difference, as with a consistency of views of E. Levinas and S. Kierkegaard (Westphal 2008, 1).

According to M. Westphal (2008, 69), for both Augustine and E. Levinas, divine transcendence is a radical enemy of human calm. S. Kierkegaard, like E. Levinas and Augustine understands divine transcendence in view of the demands of love. For them, the essence of love is determined by the Biblical commandments: “love thy neighbor as thyself,” “love is the fulfillment of the law,” “charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned,” “owe no man any thing, but to love one another.” It follows from these biblical commandments that God is the source and origin of love and that love for God is inseparable from love for one’s neighbour.

E. Levinas in his works rewards the above-mentioned biblical provisions in his own way: “You should not commit murder”, “You should not usurp my place in the sun”, “You should not allow me to die alone”. However, in fact, this is a kind of continuation of the Kierkegaard’s tradition at the end of the XX – beginning of the XXI century. But, according to M. Westphal, the Levinas’ ethical conception of God, in a certain sense, narrows the limits of transcendental perception, and therefore S. Kierkegaard seems to him a more sincere interpreter of the biblical God. After all, the Kierkegaard’s analysis, as it states Westphal (2008, 71), gives us a more powerful logical justification of hope, not the fear that God is truly personal to the one who loves first, and then requires love.

S. Kierkegaard, in the opinion of the American phenomenologist of religion, first of all, seeks to provide an understanding (for contemporary and future generations) of internalized, true, personal piety in contrast to the external, ostentatious, convenient, ecclesiastical piety. Therefore, the personal presence and communication of the “individual” (being alone, before God in secret) with the transcendental implies an understanding of God, who destroys Cogito and leads to the birth of a responsible selfhood (Westphal 2008, 103).

M. Westphal (2008, 105) agrees with Mark Taylor that “While Hegel is the genius whose vision inspires recent forms of socialism, Kierkegaard remains the greatest theoretician of contemporary individualism”.

As for transcendence, in his opinion, for Danish thinker, “the highest form of transcendence is neither cosmological nor epistemic (though he affirms both), but rather ethical/religious transcendence, or, as we have come to call it, existential transcendence” (Westphal 2008, 110).

Based on the opinion of both thinkers, M. Westphal claims that transcendental experience in the divine command is traumatic in the

heteronomous sense. And this, in his opinion, requires a decisive break with the aspirations of the modern both to epistemological and ethical autonomy. According to the American thinker, both S. Kierkegaard and E. Levinas were forced to “refuse to mind” in order to release the place for responsibility.

M. Westphal (2008, 110) examines the problem of revelation in the context of its understanding by E. Levinas as an enigma, that is, an incomprehensible phenomenon, a secret, as well as a Kierkegaard's paradox. At the same time, the American thinker believes that Kierkegaard's theses are more reliable, even when Levinas speaks of it just as a step “beyond the mind,” as a sort of madness or stupidity. At the same time, he argues that both the paradox of S. Kierkegaard and the secret of E. Levinas mean that the revelation is a mystery before which “the haughty human mind becomes powerless”.

*Revelation as immediacy.* As argues M. Westphal (2008, 21) we face with the definition of the notion of “immediacy” in the work of S. Kierkegaard “Fear and Awe”, where faith, as a response to the immediacy of divine revelation, is reflected as immediacy itself. Instead, M. Westphal (2008, 22) thinks that one has to remember that in the E. Levinas' works not only the face of a widow, orphan or stranger is immediate, but also the very “face speaks”, and the immediacy is in the call of the interlocutor, in whom the revelation is revealed. Both thinkers, E. Levinas and S. Kierkegaard, as Westphal (2008, 27) argues, took over the dominant traits of the Western tradition in philosophy to make variations on the subject of knowledge as memories (in the meaning of Socrates). But revelation, as they understand it, not only differs from memories but also destroys, distorts the balance and reveals the contradictions of this tradition. According to Westphal (2008, 36), both thinkers S. Kierkegaard and E. Levinas, are concerned with the question of whether the well-known forms of the postmodern challenge to the Enlightenment are simple variations of the same subject, which denies “radical otherness” in order to make philosophy (human mind in its reflexive manner) the ultimate arbiter of truth?

M. Westphal also pays attention to the discussion points in the views of S. Kierkegaard and E. Levinas. According to S. Kierkegaard, God in communion with a person, first of all, reveals himself in the “in the guise of Jesus Christ”, that is, appears incognito in the world created by him. For E. Levinas this is the face of the neighbour, that is, the recognition of the infinity of the neighbour transforms into a necessary and preliminary condition for the recognition of the infinity of God, while in the concept of the Great Dane it takes place vice versa. While for E. Levinas, ethics is a prerequisite for religion, for S. Kierkegaard, religion is a prerequisite for ethics. The American phenomenologist draws attention to the statement by E. Levinas, written by him in one of his works in Hebrew: “Judaism's sense (mind) should have priority over the Judaism prayer: the Jewish Talmud should have priority over the Jewish psalms.” In this case, M.

Westphal (2008, 47) concludes that “God of Levinas is not God of the Bible” and asks: “Are we dealing here with a postbiblical Jewish reduction of religion to ethics, one that would rescue ethics from bankruptcy in a postmodern world by returning to Feuerbach and transferring all assets of the divine bank account to the human account? Or is this rather an extreme Jewish version of the Christian warning “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters are liars”.

As M. Westphal asserts in his writings, the main link between the philosophy, conceived by E. Lewis as metaphysics of transcendence, or ethical attitude and religion, is best expressed in Kierkegaard’s language. For E. Levinas himself, as M. Westphal (2008, 47) writes, ethical is the teleological suspension of the religious. This formula, which resembles the attitude of S. Kierkegaard to Hegel in the XIX century, reproduces the analogous attitude of E. Levinas to E. Husserl and M. Heidegger in the XX century. However, M. Westphal emphasizes that E. Levinas’ criticism of main provisions of phenomenology does not foresee his passing into mysticism or falling into irrationalism, but is an ascent to a higher level of rationality. According to Westphal (2008, 48), this means that for E. Levinas the contemplative rationality, whose expression is pleasure, and instrumental rationality, the expression of which is ownership, represents the Mind, abandoned to its fate until they are teleologically suspended in the long-awaited, available, infinitely responsible rationality, the expression of which is transcendence.

In other words, the decentralization of the subject, which takes place in the structuralist and post-structuralist semiotics, is teleologically suspended by the decentralization of the subject, which takes place in an ethical sense. In the Talmud, this meaning is expressed by the statement that some prayers: “cannot penetrate to heaven, because all the heavenly gates are closed except those through which the tears of the sufferers may pass” (Westphal 2008, 49).

In the understanding of E. Levinas, the interlocutor always stands for another person. But he also identifies this interlocutor with God. Therefore, the American thinker believes that E. Levinas destroys the difference between the divine and the human, and thereby reduces religion to ethics. Religion, which is not based on an ethical attitude towards another, is an “empty and formal structure” by its nature.

Example of the Danish thinker concerning the Abraham’s sacrifice of his son Isaac in the work “Fear and Awe” also remained unacceptable for E. Levinas. The Levinas’ experience of resorting to religious experience or divine revelation lies in the responsibility for another and excludes such cases, because for him they mean an ordinary murder.



### 3. Concept of “Religiousness C” in M. Westphal’s existential theology. Religion – prerequisite of ethics.

Comparing the views of E. Levinas and S. Kierkegaard, M. Westphal develops also a rather original concept of religiousness, which, in his opinion, reproduces not only the specifics of understanding this phenomenon by various religious thinkers, but also opens the veil over its essence. “Religiousness A” in this concept is a kind of Socratic spirituality, “Religiousness B”, on the contrary, is based on the revelation, the Christian faith, the God-Man – Jesus Christ.

Christ is defined as a paradox, perceived in faith, because this fact cannot be recognized by the unaided human mind. The God incarnation in Jesus Christ, according to S. Kierkegaard is closely connected with the call to the Atonement, so that in time God, not only as a Teacher, but also as a Savior, is important for the Christian faith. Therefore, the Danish philosopher resists attempts to make Christianity “grounded,” and to turn the revelation into mind. According to M. Westphal, much of the research literature devoted to the analysis of S. Kierkegaard’s ideas stops at this point (in particular, E. Levinas, in his opinion, has stopped on the work “Fear and Awe”). But according to American researcher, S. Kierkegaard wrote much more, and it is in this “pseudonymous authorship” he resolutely moves towards revealing and cultivating the hidden inner sense of religiousness, and gives us something that the religious scholarly theory lacked. M. Westphal calls it the “movement to the Religiousness C”, or teleological (purposeful) suspension of “Religiousness B”.

The American thinker remarked, what I call “Religiousness C” contributes to the understanding that Christ continues to be the Paradox that one will believe in and will follow (Westphal 2008, 134-135). This is the answer to the question of M. Westphal, which of the ideas will further unite people. For E. Levinas it is infinity and ineffability, which constitute the radical individual responsibility of each of us for our neighbour. S. Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, according to M. Westphal, talk about the idea of Eternal, and mainly based on a more distinct Christian idea of true God.

Kierkegaard’s idea of Eternal involves accepting forgiveness and reconciliation through the death of Christ as Savior. The Levinas’ idea of Infinity includes the simulation of Christ’s life in relation to the neighbour. Here M. Westphal again emphasizes the similarity of the views of both thinkers formally and structurally. He also notes the relevance of the ideas of S. Kierkegaard and E. Levinas in the modern world. And especially those relating to the negative transformation of the spiritual life of people and spiritual decline. M. Westphal mentions that S. Kierkegaard spoke about the possibility of losing the person’s spirituality: “If people refer to the idea only massively” (apart from the individual distinction of the spiritual principle), in this case we, in the opinion of

Great Dane, receive violence, anarchy, rebellions; but if there is no idea for people in the masses and no individually separated essential spiritual principle, then we will have the result of both rudeness and uncouthness. For M. Westphal (2008, 135), this is reminiscent of Clemenceau's remark that America "is the only nation in history which miraculously has gone directly from barbarism to degeneration without the usual interval of civilization.

Therefore, M. Westphal argues that the Kierkegaard's logic of solidarity is an alternative to both modern savagery and degeneration.

As for E. Levinas, M. Westphal (2008, 141) speaks of "a radical turn from cognition to solidarity," which in the philosophy of the French thinker, in his opinion, is a kind of movement from both the Hegelian realism and the Husserlian transcendental idealism. French philosopher's criticism of these two philosophical systems is carried out with the help of the concept of "Inverted Intentionality". As M. Westphal (2008, 142) says in this case, E. Levinas seeks to overcome not the realism of common sense, but naivety, with which he "finds himself always before the object, without asking about the significance of its objectivity". The French thinker states that we have the philosophy of freedom, but also the lack of a philosophy of responsibility. Ethical transcendence, as E. Levinas thinks, is found in inverse intentionality, in which asymmetry resists all attempts to assimilate and absorb. However, this ethical transcendence involves love. M. Westphal, in order to more clearly explain the opinion of E. Levinas, again refers to the Kierkegaard's interpretation of love, in which it was argued that God commands "to love thy neighbour as thyself" (Westphal recognizes the relevance of S. Kierkegaard's ethics (which goes beyond the theology) for the modernity, as it relates to the present realities as well, in which people become those who they are or lose themselves. As M. Westphal notes, S. Kierkegaard has developed the divine command of love, which is retransmitted through the Bible, into the meta-ethics in his work "The Affairs of Love" (1847) (See Kierkegaard, 1995). As S. Kierkegaard himself writes about his work: "these are Christian reflections, so they are not about love, but about the affairs of love." According to the position of the Danish thinker, love cannot be described, because "God is love," and God is incomprehensible. S. Kierkegaard redefines the biblical aspects of spiritual love in relation to erotic love and friendship. In the work "Affairs of Love," he defines erotic love and friendship as a form of love for oneself. However, on the one hand, for the Danish thinker, this means that we should not love ourselves more than our neighbour. Christian love is the love of self-denial, on which the faith is based. Therefore, for the Danish thinker, love for oneself is disgusting. Love for a neighbour must be selfless love. In erotic love and friendship as a form of "self-love" everyone loves him/herself to some extent. Even when we love friends and lovers, we protect our interests. In addition, we are expanding ourselves to the recipient of mutual feeling, therefore, in

fact, we are also a part of the object of our own love. In true Christian love, on the other hand, one needs to love God unmercenary. According to Kierkegaard, “in erotic love, “I” is defined as a body – a psyche – a spirit, a beloved is defined as a body – a psyche – a spirit. In friendship, “I” is defined as a psyche – a spirit, and a friend is defined as a psyche – a spirit. Only in love to one’s neighbour it is manifested “I” (Selfhood), which loves, and is defined simply as a spirit, and his neighbour is quite spiritual. ... your neighbour is above all You”. Therefore, love for your neighbour is also “the most perfect love” and the one who “actually loves his/her neighbour, also loves his/her enemy”. Christianity in the command of love, in love to the neighbour, rises above the differences of the terrestrial existence. At the same time, love is the fulfillment of the Law of God and the earthly (secular) one. S. Kierkegaard also calls love a matter of conscience, because God “is in the heart of everyone in different ways, which is a matter of conscience; he makes the matter of heart a subject of conscience.” “Love is a matter of conscience and, therefore, must be from a pure heart and a true faith”. S. Kierkegaard also correlates love with such concepts as “duty”, “eternal debt”, “trust”, “hope”, “reconciliation”, “mercy”, etc.). In order to show the heteronomous origin of this command, which implies the possibility of reciprocal actions (the sacrifice of Isaac) S. Kierkegaard contrasts love as a requirement to two other forms of love: erotic love and friendliness. The latter arise naturally from the human understanding of their own inner voice and do not violate their usual perception by consciousness. On the other hand, the transcendental requirement to love your neighbor, especially when it is a widow, an orphan or even a stranger who may eventually turn out to be your enemy, is usually not perceived in the usual mode for a person – this is a “traumatic” transcendental voice. In the language of phenomenology, according to M. Westphal (2008, 149) this is the expression of inverse intentionality, the complete replacement of cognitive relations as they were understood by practically the entire Western tradition.

Reflecting on the dichotomy of the views of S. Kierkegaard and E. Levinas, M. Westphal ultimately refers to the work of the Copenhagen thinker, “The Final Unscientific Afterword to “Philosophical Fragments”, in particular, to the assertion that “the system has no ethics.” This statement by S. Kierkegaard, in the opinion of the American representative of existential theology, can now be summed up as follows: „If you start with the knowing subject unencumbered by ethical-religious responsibility, there is no way to bring the latter in later except by arbitrary fiat, and the temptation to do this will be dramatically reduced by the fact that the starting point places the discussion in a hermeneutical circle in which it is already presupposed that in our deepest essence we are knowers. The criterion of the subject is Truth and not Goodness, freedom and not responsibility, objectivity and not subjectivity. In short, while epistemology is not a sin, the epistemological fetishism of modern

philosophy, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, puts us not on the royal road to science but on the fast track to nihilism, a road paved with good intentions about intentional analysis" (Westphal 2008, 151).

Thus, it is quite similar to the fact that M. Westphal was a more attentive and penetrating reader of S. Kierkegaard than E. Levinas.

#### 4. Final thoughts

Consequently, the recognition of existential truth as truth in existence occurs through "existential maieutics" and the Spirit. They direct us to the truth of spiritual rebirth, the denial of the impartial objectivity and understanding of man as passion, where the highest passion is faith. It is measured by the absurdity and paradox, and as a subject of the study of S. Kierkegaard forms the direction of the research intentions of M. Westphal. An American philosopher and theologian in the comparative analysis of the positions of the "Great Dane" and E. Levinas comes to the conclusion that it is hardly possible to investigate only with the help of logic, rational thinking of the attitude of man to himself, the divinity and spirituality inherent in it, which traditionally anthropo-ontological dimension were presented as a synthesis of finite and infinite, temporary and eternal, freedom and necessity

And that the process of the spiritual life of an individual, the genetic code of his/her morality, is in fact more subject to the "theological mind," in particular, the explanation by the "invasion into human existence" of the phenomenon of the atonement of Jesus Christ, humility and humiliation of the latter as an example for believers. The comparative analysis of S. Kierkegaard's existential ethics and the ethical conclusions of the dialogic phenomenology of E. Levinas, directed by M. Westphal not only to prove the proportionality of these concepts in relation to the theological idea of self-transcendence of a person, or to the similarity of the critical direction of their authors in the analysis by E. Levinas of works of E. Husserl and M. Heidegger, and critics by S. Kierkegaard of Hegel's objective idealism, but also to reveal their inequalities in the inadmissibility of Levinas' "post-biblical" reduction of religion to ethics. According to deep conviction of M. Westphal, the bankruptcy of the latter in the postmodernist world, where "ethical is also transformed into a theological suspension of the religious", can only be prevented by the strict observance of the Kierkegaard's principle, according to which religion is an unconditional prerequisite of ethics.

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