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Immanent Possibilities & Beyond: Transcendence in Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Existence and in T. Rentsch's Phenomenological Hermeneutics

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01   See Max Horkheimer (1947), 22: "Meaning is supplanted by function or effect in the world of things and events." See also the interview Horkheimer gave the SPIEGEL in 1973 which is even more pessimistic (or fatalistic?) on this behalf than *Eclipse of Reason*.

02   See the volume edited by Norbert Bolz & Esther Gisberger (2008) on this issue.

03   See on this topic Peter Nynas et al. (2013); Péter Losonczi/Aakash Singh (2010); Ziebertz/Riegel (2008).

04   See Peter L. Berger (2013), who first represented the theory of secularization and who has recently edited a volume with the eloquent title Nach dem Niedergang der Säkularisierungstheorie ("After the decline of the theory ofsecularization").

05   See for instance Bolz/ Girsberger (2008); Graf (2004); Höhn (2007).

06   This is the fundamental claim for instance of Alvin Plantinga who aims "to show how it can be that Christians can be justified, rationally [...] not just 'ignorant fundamentalists' but sophisticated, aware, educated, turn-of-the millennium people who have read their Freud and Nietzsche, their Hume and Mackie" (A. Plantinga, 2000, 167). With regards to the new interest for issues of transcendence see also Vattimo/ Derrida (2001); Vattimo (2002); Marion (2007); Swinburne (2004); Caputo/Scanlon (2007); Reder (2013). Even Habermas, who earlier in his life had a rather distanced relationship with religion, is today suspected to have undergone a "theological turn" (see Austin Harrington, 2007, 45–61).

One of the fundamental phenomena of Modernity is the erosion of meaning[1]. In recent years, the discussion around the "come back of religion"[2] and the "post-secular society"[3] seems to affirm the problem of a deficit of meaning in (post-)modern society and to invalidate the conviction — firmly held by many — that secularization is inevitable and irreversible[4] and that it is accompanied by an increase in possibilities the individual can freely choose from to construct an existence that is experienced as meaningful and fulfilled[5]. If it would probably be an over-interpretation of the extent of the phenomenon if one was to talk unambiguously about a change of paradigm with regards to secularization, it seems at least possible, at present, to revisit the role transcendence can play for human beings as a *constituens* of meaning at the beginning of the 21th century and to argue in favor of approaches that allow for perspectives that go beyond mere immanence but without falling short of the state of the art of the knowledge attained in philosophy and the natural sciences over the last 250 years[6]. In the present paper, I will take up this problem of a crisis of meaning and argue that there is an intrinsic link between the possibility to relate existence to a perspective of transcendence and the possibility to "recharge" our being in the world with meaning.

The starting point of my reflections shall be a philosophy that might at first sight seem little appropriate for the endeavor of defending perspectives of transcendence in complete respect of the body of knowledge at the beginning of the early 21st century but which will, as I hope, reveal itself — at least in some, and in my opinion essential, aspects — as a very useful and instructive approach. The approach in question is the highly polemical defense of faith formulated by Søren Kierkegaard, who posits unambiguously that an existence without anchorage in transcendence is inevitably to be considered as an existence in despair and boredom. Kierkegaard's argument will uncover the problematic structure of the modern attempt of self-creation

through free choice among a number of equivalent possibilities. In a second step, I will illustrate that a crucial aspect of the argumentative structure of the highly intransigent, demanding, and provocative – and certainly in some aspects at least philosophically contestable[7] – Kierkegaardian apology of faith can indeed be identified also in a contemporary "state of the art" approach to transcendence which, even though it explicitly takes its distances from Kierkegaard's conception, remains intimately linked to the latter when it comes to the importance of faith for relating in a meaningful manner to the things of the world (understood broadly and thus including human relationships as well). This second approach is developed by the contemporary German philosopher Thomas Rentsch.

Beyond immanent possibilities: Kierkegaard's claim for transcendence

To understand the Kierkegaadian claim of the insurmountability of a transcendent perspective for a meaningful existence, I will take as a starting point his definition of Man, which is crucial for his argument. In *Sickness unto Death*[8], Kierkegaard defines very concisely: "Man is Spirit" (SuD). Shortly thereafter, he specifies that one of the fundamental characteristics of the human being is its synthetic structure: "Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal […]" (ibid.). Kierkegaard stresses that it is the human spirit – which he equates with the Self – that posits this synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal. Insofar as the human being is essentially characterized through its being spirit, Man is – in an essential sense – Man only if and insofar as he transcends immanence and relates himself to the infinite, to eternity. If he remains within pure immanence, he falls short of being a human and of being an authentic Self. As Man is thus incapable of fully realizing himself within immanence, this falling short of having adopted an authentic Self manifests itself in boredom and despair. The only option that remains to avoid conscious despair is, according to Kierkegaard, the drowning out of boredom and despair through *divertissement* in the Pascalian sense or, alternatively, through poeticizing a reality experienced as unsatisfying[9].

In the context of the present paper, the most important analysis Kierkegaard proposes concerns his interpretation of what he calls the *aesthetic existence.* This analysis is first developed in *Either/Or,* his earliest writing, which provides the preliminary Kierkegaardian reflections on this topic which he subsequently unfolds in more detail in *Sickness unto Death*[10]. It is in *Either/Or* that he abundantly and eloquently illustrates the seductive power and yet existential vacuity of aesthetic existence. His methodological proceeding is very particular as he develops his strongly ambivalent interpretation through a double–and perspectivist–approach. In a sort of literary fiction[11], he first lets an "aestheticist" express his world view and life style, which, in a reply to this aesthetic way of existing, is criticized and put into perspective by an "ethicist".

Through this double perspective, Kierkegaard makes very clear that the aesthetic existence appears to be appealing at first; however, such an existence cannot but inescapably fail and in the end leads inevitably into despair[12]. In this sense, the ethicist explains in the second part of the work that, "nothing finite, not the entire world can satisfy the soul of a man who feels the longing for eternity within him" (Kierkegaard 1987, 758).

Given that the aesthetic existence anticipates a certain number of fundamental features of the way of life in contemporary western society (or, to put it the other way round, as the modern western way of living could appear to be a trivialized form of the Kierkegaardian aesthetic existence[13]), it is worth insisting on the fact that Kierkegaard has the aesthetic existence inevitably shipwreck in boredom and despair. His explanation for this inevitable failure of aesthetic existence is related to the problem of a reduction of modern orientation to merely immanent perspectives. In focusing exclusively on immanent possibilities, the human spirit experiences the limitedness inherent to them. The immanent possibilities from which we can choose lack distinction and appear to be–in the literal sense–equivalent and thus exchangeable and random. According to Kierkegaard, as long as we remain within the realm of immanent possibilities, we lack a valid criterion of discrimination which would allow us to prefer one possibility rather than another[14]. In the framework of Kierkegaardian thought this is inevitable insofar as human

spirit, by essence, needs to be linked to transcendence and the question is, at this point, to what extent the link to transcendence helps overcome the problem of boredom and despair.

This interconnection of transcendence and meaning is very comprehensively developed and illustrated in Kierkegaard's analysis of one of his core concepts, the *instant* (or the *moment* according to other translations for the Danish *Øjeblikket*) in *The Concept of Dread,* where he posits that all possibility of a real presence is annihilated without its relatedness to eternity: "The instance," explains Kierkegaard, "is this ambivalent moment in which time and eternity touch one another, thereby positing the *temporal*, where time is constantly intersecting eternity and eternity constantly permeating time. Only now does the division we talked about acquire significance: the present, the past, and the future." (CD 79).

The crucial element in Kierkegaard's reflection concerning the problem of transcendence is in fact a double postulate: (1) that human existence, when limited to immanence, is an existence without presence; and (2) that it is thus a requirement for Man to complement and to complete the immanent perspective of the world by a transcendent perspective. Only through the relatedness to transcendence does immanence obtain a reality in an authentic sense. This is illustrated in *Either/Or* where the ethicist describes how, through the choice to relate oneself to the eternal, the possibilities of the immanent world become literally charged with meaning. Kierkegaard illustrates this by using the metaphor of "metamorphosis" (Kierkegaard 1987, 271): "Everything," the ethicist explains, "comes back again, but transfigured" (ibid.). Only through the relationship that is established with transcendence, life gains "beauty, truth, meaning, continuance" (ibid.). The meaninglessness and despair, the nothingness and groundlessness of aesthetic existence are transfigured into meaningfulness and hope through the absolute choice of the Self now grounded in eternity. In other words, the equivalent and meaningless immanent possibilities can only become meaningful and *our* possibilities in an authentic sense, if they gain reality through their being permeated by the eternal. In the instant in the Kierkegaardian understanding, transcendence is intruding on immanence and

thus charges the latter with meaning; on the other hand, the "intersecting" of eternity by the temporal guarantees that the synthesis incarnated by Man does not fail to take the temporal into account, as – Kierkegaard insists on this point – this is precisely Man's mission: to succeed in integrating both, the temporal and the eternal, in this synthesis (which, evidently, would otherwise not be a synthesis). Man thus remains inevitably and deliberately attached to immanence, but the embeddedness of the immanent – represented through immanent possibilities – in transcendence makes these very same possibilities come back transformed into authentic possibilities.

It should have become clear that Kierkegaard's proposal to escape from the erosion of meaning brought forth by Modernity through the sole focus on our immanent possibilities requires us to concede our dependence upon something that transcends us and the world. However, it is important to emphasize that Kierkegaard's approach is not to be understood as 'reactionary' or the expression of 'backwardness'. On the contrary, he makes a clear effort not to fall back into the traditional attempts to provide metaphysical ultimate justifications. Rather he contents himself with delivering the proof that a transcendent perspective is *existentially necessary* and at the same time *possible*. In other words, Kierkegaard does not overstretch the reach of human reason by succumbing to the attempt to give proof of the existence of God, but he claims that we existentially need the possibility of a perspective of transcendence all the while insisting on the fact that reason cannot deny this possibility. Reason, in fact, is not able to prove, nor to refute, the existence of God, transcendence is placed beyond the possibility of rational accessibility. In a certain way, to abandon the attempt to provide ultimate justifications is a major argumentative advantage, but his claim is at the same time an inconvenience: By placing transcendence beyond what is positively knowable, Kierkegaard's claim can certainly not be refuted scientifically; on the other hand, from a philosophical perspective, this claim of existential necessity remains a mere claim. However, his approach helps to carry the *possibility* of transcendence through the breakdown of traditional metaphysics with the advent of Modernity, as it is not concerned by the delimitations of

knowledge brought about by science. If and to what extent this approach may be updated for present times will be discussed later in this paper. At present, I would like to go over to Thomas Rentsch's approach to transcendence which, in some relevant aspects, will reveal similarities with Kierkegaard, even though it takes explicitly its distance from the latter, as previously stated.

The rationality of transcendence: Th. Rentsch's phenomenological hermeneutics of transcendence

Rentsch develops his reflections on transcendence in the context of the question of the possibility of meaningfully talking about God. Rentsch aims to show that phenomena of transcendence can or even have to be considered as accessible by reason, and he thus explicitly refuses to place faith beyond reason as was done by Kierkegaard. If the focus of his argumentation seems at first to be quite different form Kierkegaard's, I will try to show that in fact his intention is to ultimately promote a perspective on the world that is embedded in transcendence; and I will argue that it is precisely in this more implicit but finally central intention that we find common ground between the two approaches, where the existential relevance of both concepts unfolds.

In a study published in 2005, concisely and unambiguously in its focus called *God*, Rentsch first emphasizes that his primary aim is what he calls a *"Standortbestimmung"* of philosophy as a discipline, that is, to determine the "self-understanding of philosophy today" (Rentsch 2005, VIII[15]). One of his basic assumptions is that the question of God is still topical in the early 21st century. According to Rentsch, even under the conditions of post-Modernity, the question of God remains "inextricably linked to the question of an authentic meaning of our existence" (ibid., IX). However, what is particularly important for Rentsch is to show that if we want to establish a meaningful discourse on God we cannot fall back into traditional ways of dealing with the question. Philosophizing on God and transcendence must respect the philosophical state of the art: "A critical philosophizing cannot fall short of Kant's critique of ontology and metaphysics, Heidegger's critique of ontology, Wittgenstein's critique of language, as

16   "Ein kritisches Philosophieren […] kann heute nicht mehr hinter die Ontologie- und Metaphysikkritik Kants, die Ontologiekritik Heideggers, die Sprachkritik Wittgensteins, sowie die Gesellschafts- und Ideologie- bzw. Kulturkritik Adornoszurückfallen."

17   "Der Status der Rede von Gott kann nicht so bestimmt werden, dass einer uns bekannten, alltäglichen Welt I eine jenseitige Welt II räumlich-zeitlich-empirisch angestückt wird, eine Art Paralleluniversum. Wir können mit unserer Sprache, mit unserem Handel, mit unserem Denken und Erkennen die menschliche, endliche Welt nicht verlassen. Die Frage nach Gott und nach dem Status von Gott-Sätzen konfrontiert uns mit Grundfragen der Erkenntniskritik im Sinne Kants, die nach unserem eigenen, konstitutiv endlichen Wesen fragen. […] Indem die Sätze von Gott reden, indizieren sie, dass sie diesen eminenten Status haben, dass sie gerade nicht als empirische Tatsachenbehauptungen verstanden werden können."

well as Adorno's critique of society, ideology, and culture" (ibid.)[16]. It is thus for Rentsch crucial to reflect on the conditions of the possibility of a meaningful discourse on God from the highest level of philosophical knowledge. Departing from the philosophy of language of the later Wittgenstein, Rentsch specifies that a statement about God is not to be confused with a statement on an object in the world. However, as he argues with Wittgenstein, if the discourse on God is not referring to an "object" in this empirical sense, this does not mean that taking about God becomes necessarily and inevitably meaningless or irrational. Rentsch illustrates this as follows:

> The status of the discourse on God cannot be understood as if, beyond our familiar and everyday world I, there would be some world II that could be related to the former empirically, temporally, and spatially, a sort of parallel universe. With our language, our acts, our thinking and our understanding, we cannot leave our human and finite world. Through the question of God and the question of the status of statements on God, we are confronted with the most fundamental questions of the critique of knowledge in the sense of Kant, which ask about our own constitutively finite essence. […] In articulating statements on God, we indicate that these statements have this eminent status, that they are precisely not to be understood as empirical statements on facts. (ibid. 12)[17]

To legitimate the talking about God as a discourse on something that is not to be confused with the naming of facts within the empirical world, Rentsch claims that there is nothing extraordinary in talking about something which is not in this sense to be considered as 'facts'. In fact, as he states, we do that every day insofar as not only God, but reality as such cannot be reduced to a simple statement of facts on objects. Reality is not an agglomerate of 'objects' but reality, as *our* reality, is already a non-empirical phenomenon. With a certain proximity to Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world, he notes:

18   "Wirklichkeit ist die ganze, irreduzible Weltwirklichkeit, in deren Seins- und Sinnhorizont wir unsere Selbstverständnisse und Handlungsmöglichkeiten entdecken und entwerfen, um in Freiheit ein gutes und gelingendes Leben bewusst zu führen."

19   "Begreifen wir als wirklich nicht krude Gegenständlichkeit: Steine, Atome, Dinge, szientifisch reduzierte Quantitäten, sondern begreifen wir das Wirkliche als die konkrete Lebenswirklichkeit, in der Menschen im höchsten Maße vernünftige, freie und Sinn erfahrende und entwerfende Wesen sind und sein können, dann ist uns Gott nirgends näher als in authentischer existentieller und interexistentieller Praxis: wenn wir uns selbst transzendieren in Richtung auf authentische Sinn- und Geltungsansprüche in der gemeinsamen Wahrheitssuche, in Richtung auf Wahrhaftigkeit, Gerechtigkeit und Solidarität auch mit schwachen und hilfsbedürftigen Menschen. Die uns in diesen Richtungen erschlossene konkrete Lebenswirklichkeit lässt sich mit guten Gründen als die wahre, eigentliche Wirklichkeit bezeichnen, und somit Gott als *ens realissimum*."

20   "unvorgängige[n] Bedingung[en] der Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit unserer humanen Welt."

Reality is the entire reality of the world in its irreducibility. It is within the horizon of its being and of its meaning that we discover and develop our understanding of ourselves and our possibilities of action to lead a good and successful life in awareness and liberty. (p. 49) [18]

Building upon this backdrop, Rentsch specifies:

If we consider as reality not just crude objectity (*Gegenständlichkeit*): stones, atoms, things, scientifically reduced quantities, but rather the real within the concrete reality of life in which Men evolve in a highly rational way, as free beings open to and creating meaningfulness, then there is nothing in which God could be closer than in authentic existential and interexistential practice: If we transcend ourselves in the direction of authentic claims of meaning and validity in our common quest for truth, in the direction of truthfulness, justice, and solidarity also with weak human beings in need of help. The concrete reality of living revealed this way can, with good reasons, be called true and authentic reality, and thus God as *ens realissimum*. (ibid., 91)[19]

Rentsch thus introduces a postulate of transcendence which, in the initial analysis, relies simply and essentially on our being-in-the-world as such. Consequently, his argumentation starts with the evocation of three undeniable phenomena of transcendence which do not immediately make a claim for a 'beyond' in the vertical sense of the word, but remain 'horizontally' transcendent. These three phenomena of transcendence are only accessible for us insofar as we dispose of reason. Or, to put it differently: Rentsch claims that transcendence does not require us to go *beyond* reason, but, on the contrary, that its manifestations cannot be grasped except through reason. The three phenomena he is talking about are (1) the transcendence of *being*; (2) the transcendence of the *Self*; and (3) the transcendence of *language*.

According to Rentsch, these three phenomena of transcendence are nothing less than the "principal conditions of the possibility and reality of our human world" (ibid., 67)[20]. He

21   "[o]hne diese absolute Transzendenz ist keine Immanenz möglich, wirklich oder nur denkbar."

22   However, it would be erroneous to think that Kierkegaard is irrationalistic and hostile to reason *per se*. In fact, it is only within the – decidedly for him essential – framework of faith that Kierkegaard considers that we have to go beyond reason. On the other hand, there is evidence that Kierkegaard was highly interested in and fascinated by the natural sciences, as illustrates the following note in his diary: "I have been enthusiastic about the natural sciences and still am, but I do not think that I will make them my principal study. The life by virtue of reason [*Fornuft*] and freedom has always interested me most, and it has always been my desire to clarify and solve the riddle of life. The forty years in the wilderness before I reach the promised land of natural science seem too costly to me, all the more since I believe that nature can also be observed from a side that does not involve insight into the secrets of science" (Kierkegaard, 1999, 22). There seems, in this respect, to be some similarity with Blaise Pascal, who was fascinated by scientific reason as well but convinced that the questions that matter in an existential way cannot be answered by it.

23   See Rentsch (2005) 208: "Reason attains, through critical reflection on itself, the boundaries which are constitutive of the meaning it generates. The practical insight into these boundaries leads to the ek-static reason which does not simply split off and negate its link to transcendence but includes it critically, hermeneutically, and dialectically and tries to understand it. The word 'God' is the epitome of this insight, combined with the discourse of the miracle, the inexplicable, and the mystery as a disclosure of meaning" ("Die Vernunft gelangt durch kritische Selbstreflexion an ihre für sie sinnkonstitutiven Grenzen.

thus emphasizes the fact that, on the one hand, these phenomena are not empirical facts, but that, on the other hand, they are something fundamentally different from mere opinions, ways of perception, or perspectives. They are concrete without being material, and they are of the utmost importance for us as human beings insofar as "without the absolute transcendence" represented by these phenomena, "immanence is not even possible, real, or simply conceivable" (ibid., 78)[21].

One of the main aspects in his claim that these phenomena of transcendence not only are not irrational but even depend on reason is to stress the limitedness of the concept of reason forwarded by scientific-functionalist ways of thinking. His critique of the reductionist scientific conceptualization of reason allows Rentsch to refute the argument according to which the discourse on phenomena of transcendence is *per se* irrational. It is important to emphasize, says Rentsch, that transcendence, as a phenomenon, is "knowable, rational, and universal", criticizing all variations of "reductionist objectivistic-scientistic world views which cut off reason and transcendence" (ibid., 108).

It is clear, then, that Rentsch distances himself from Kierkegaard, who stressed the necessity to go beyond reason, that one finds God only via the absurd[22], and it might be useful to take a closer look at this difference. First, we can state that each thinker takes a distinct and diverging point of departure: If Kierkegaard is very clearly immediately interested in the existential question of how to live a meaningful life, Rentsch starts form a more theoretical standpoint, grounding his position in reflections on philosophy of language by starting with the argument that the *discourse* on God does not necessarily have to be irrational(ist). He backs up this claim by showing both that and how transcendence can be made accessible to reason. He even goes further, showing that we *need* reason to become aware of transcendence. In Rentsch's argumentation, the name "God" is not assimilated to a Kierkegaardian *credo quia absurdum*, but on the contrary plays the role of a stand-in for what he calls, with Heidegger, an "ek-static reason", even if it is accessible only *ex negativo* as that which, precisely, is transcendent with regards to us human beings[23]. However, in linking meaning and transcendence intrinsically, he remains, in this respect,

very close to Kierkegaard, a proximity that becomes even more striking in another – and crucial – context, as he attributes the highest existential significance to the relationship that we entertain with transcendence. Thus he states:

> This is why authentic processes of conversion are this profound and earthquake-like: When we enter into a relationship with ourselves that is based upon God, absolute meaning, and the miracle of creation, the whole understanding that we had until then of the world and of ourselves is transformed. In a certain sense, nothing remains as it was before." (ibid., 113)[24]

There is a striking parallel in this description of religious awakening and the passage from Kierkegaard's *Either/ Or* we examined earlier, where the ethicist talks about the "metamorphosis" the things in the world undergo as a result of this opening up to transcendence; and it is certainly not by accident that there is another element in Rentsch's analysis which seems to respond to the Kiergaardian concept of the *instant* as the category *par excellence* of our relatedness to the eternal. Rentsch proposes a conceptualization that is quite similar to Kierkegaard's. In this sense, Rentsch notes:

> We get partially beyond an understanding based upon finitude and transience and become open to potentials of meaning of transcendence and adopt thus the perspective of a meaning that cannot be eradicated by the transience of time: Eternity, not understood as infinite temporality and iteration, but as an *irruption of transcendence into immanence* […]. (ibid., 113/114)[25]

There are thus interesting parallels between the description of transcendence as an experience, as an irruption into immanent life, as it is proposed by Rentsch on the one hand, and Kierkegaard's illustration of the instant on the other. However, the major gap remains that Rentsch insists on the *rational accessibility* of the phenomena of transcendence he identifies and that he thus refutes the necessity to concede the "leap of faith" Kierkegaard argues for.

(23, cont.) Die praktische Einsicht in diese Grenzen führt zur ekstatischen Vernunft, die ihren Transzendenzbezug nicht bloß abspaltet und negiert, sondern kritisch-hermeneutisch und dialektisch einbegreift und praktisch zu verstehen sucht. Der Inbegriff dieserEinsicht ist das Wort Gott, verbunden mit der Rede vom Wunder, vom Unerklärlichen und vom Geheimnis als der Eröffnung von Sinn.").

24   Aus diesem Grund sind auch authentische Bekehrungsprozesse so tiefgreifend und grundstürzend: Wenn wir in ein auf Gott, absoluten Sinn und das Wunder der Schöpfung gegründetes Selbstverständnis eintreten, dann wandelt sich das gesamte Welt- und Selbstverständnis. In gewisser Weise ist nichts mehr wie vorher."

25   "öffnen uns den Sinnpoten-tialen der Transzendenz und haben so die Perspektive zeitüberlegenen, durch zeitliche Vergänglichkeit nicht tilgbaren Sinns wahrgenommen: Ew-igkeit nicht als unendliche zeitliche Endlichkeit und Iteration, sondern als *Hereinbruch der Transzendenz in die Immanenz* […]" (Rentsch 2005, 113, Hervorhebungen Th. R.). See Also: "Es gehört konstitutiv mit zu diesem seltenen Sinnereignis, dass seine wahre Bedeutung unter Umständen nur in wenigen Augen-blicken intensiv erfahren wird. In ihrem dauernden, den Alltag implizit tragenden Wirken ist die Gegenwart des Ewigen wiederum meist nur unbewusst gewiss." This is, trans-lated into academic language, what Kierkegaard had described in the *Concept of Dread* (see p.10 of the present paper).

26   On the various forms of meaning see E. Angehrn (2010).

27   On the possibility of preserving the idea of a personal God that can be addressed through praying, see E. Tugendhat (2003). If one does not necessarily have to agree with the distinction between religion and mysticism he introduces, I would be inclined to agree with him insofar as the image of a transcendent "father" who is taking part in our lives (see ibid., 111ff.), seems indeed to be problematic today.

The question is, then, how the above reflections can be linked more explicitly to the question brought up in the introduction: To what extent do Rentsch and Kierkegaard, with their respective approaches, respond to what can be called the 'need for transcendence' of the modern world? It is clear that both are most profoundly convinced that no immanent aims, circumstances, or objectives can fulfill Man's need for meaning, *meaning* understood in its most eminent sense[26]. Both, Kierkegaard and Rentsch claim that the configuration of the modern world is to some respect hostile to the generation of meaning in this sense, but the fundamental question that comes out of this claim is whether the link to transcendence as it is proposed by Kierkegaard and Rentsch, respectively, is convincing before the backdrop of the configuration of Modernity.

Here, both approaches have to be discussed separately in that their answers diverge in terms of their methodology, though they finally converge, in a certain sense, in their essence. It might seem that Kierkegaard's "leap of faith" is more difficult to defend as a claim in the early 21st century. This is certainly true in the sense that Kierkegaard, in his writings, sticks to a personal relationship to a personal God[27]. However, if one focuses more precisely on the *structure* of his argumentation, the judgment could be more nuanced. At no point does Kierkegaard go against scientific knowledge. Nor does his leap of faith necessitate the denial of scientific knowledge. Unlike some contemporary reactionary interpretations of Christianity, Kierkegaard places his conception of faith entirely beyond the reach of human reason and does not succumb to the problematic and today widespread temptation to defend as knowable what is not—which allows him to avoid bringing science and faith into a relationship of rivalry and claiming the superiority of faith within the realm of scientific reason and reasoning.

This battle cannot be convincingly fought by faith in the 21st century and Kierkegaard already saw that it could not reasonably be fought in the 19th century. Rather, Kierkegaard's major claim is that reason cannot provide the meaning that Man needs from an existential point of view. Faith and reason do not enter into conflict for Kierkegaard as both have their specific relevance,

28   Kierkegaard was perfectly conscious of this fact and it is not by accident that he never calls himself a philosopher but considers himself a religious author. See Søren Kierkegaard (1962 [1859]), 12.

29   In this point, Rentsch is as close to Wittgenstein as to Heidegger who both, in their respective manners, denounce the reductive character of the scientific and positivistic world view. Rentsch is actually one of the earliest researchers who in a detailed study stressed fundamental parallels in the thought of Wittgenstein and Heidegger (see his PhD thesis, Rentsch [1985]).

30   "Tendenz der westlichen wissenschaftlich-technischen Zivil-isation zu naturalistischen, biologis-tischen, neurophilosophischen oder funktionalistischen Selbstdeutungen des Menschen."

31   It is little surprising that he makes reference to the old tradition of negative theology which represents for him a model of orientation that still deserves our attention. See on negativity also Rentsch (2000).

but this relevance is situated at different levels. If this means, on the one hand, as was said above, that he does not deny scientific knowledge, it means, on the other hand, that faith can never be proven, but it can never be refuted scientifically, either. His claim is thus not to deny reason *as such*, but to throw overboard reason *in the act of believing*. Reason preserves its domain of competence and of relevance, but there is a realm beyond reason, which remains open for faith. In this sense, Kierkegaard's passionate Christendom remains as valid as it remains valuable. However, the main difficulty with Kierkegaard's position is that his claim of the necessity of faith and transcendence is not based upon a logic necessity, but on what I have called an existential necessity. This preserves it from entering into conflict with science and scientific rationality, but it weakens his point from a purely philosophical standpoint[28]; which leads to the position of Thomas Rentsch who, unlike Kierkegaard, tries to show, as we have seen, that the discourse on God can be *philosophically justified* and meaningful, and, in extension of this claim, that faith does not necessarily have to be irrational or irrationalistic. Thus, he approaches the problem by demonstrating that the currently prevailing understanding of reason is to be considered as highly reductive and can — and even needs to be — extended to phenomena that go beyond the mere understanding of reason as a capacity of grasping what is materially present[29]. This is a first result to retain: The advancement of knowledge that characterizes the past centuries does not authorize us to simply evacuate issues of transcendence as irrational. On the contrary, there is an important need for non-reductive philosophical approaches that help us overcome the limitedness of the dominant, one-sidedly naturalistic and — to use a more polemical adjective — simplistic world views. As Rentsch shows, there are undeniable phenomena of transcendence that no scientistic reason will ever be able to grasp because this kind of reductive reason does not look beyond the limits of immanence, even if transcendence undeniably breaks into and — transcends it.

32   Søren Kierkegaard very elo-quently alludes to the (modern) gap separating philosophical reflection from philosophy as a praxis of living that enters into play here in his ironic comments on Schopenhauer (see Schwab 2011, 329-382), as, unlike for Schopenhauer, for Kierkegaard philosophizing is meaningless if it does not have any impact on the philosopher's own life. Schopenhau-er actually refers himself explicitly to this problem when he writes: "For here also is seen the great distinc-tion between intuitive and abstract knowledge, a distinction of such importance and of general applica-tion in the whole of our discussion, and one which hitherto has received too little notice. Between the two is a wide gulf; and, in regard to knowl-edge of the inner nature of the world, this gulf can be crossed only by philosophy. Intuitively, or in concreto, every man is really conscious of all philosophical truths; but to bring them into his abstract knowledge, into reflection, is the business of the philosopher, who neither ought to nor can do more than this. [...] A saint may be full of the most absurd superstition, or, on the other hand, may be a philosopher; it is all the same. His conduct alone is evidence that he is a saint [...]. It is therefore just as little necessary for the saint to be a philosopher as for the philos-opher to be a saint; just as it is not necessary for a perfectly beautiful person to be a great sculptor, or for a great sculptor to be himself a beautiful person. [...] To repeat abstractly, universally, and distinctly in concepts the whole inner nature of the world, and thus to deposit it as a reflected image in perma-nent concepts always ready for the faculty of reason, this and nothing else is philosophy" (Schopenhauer 1969 [1844], 383–384). It is clear that Kierkegaard would in no case subscribe to this point of view.

Conclusion

To conclude, it seems possible to say that faith remains a *possible*—and important—cornerstone of the attempt of us humans to orient ourselves in the world, despite the current "trend of western scientific-technical civilization to have recourse to naturalistic, biologistic, neurophilosophical, or functionalistic self-interpretations" (Rentsch 2005, 19)[30]. Faith does not enter necessarily into conflict with enlightened reason as it is incarnated by the advances of knowledge in the natural sciences. The question of faith and the question of God are not in contradiction with science, but it would be better to say that science cannot even ask these questions in a meaningful way because it would otherwise transgress its own boundaries and domains of competence. For Rentsch, transcendence represents a phenomenon that appears at the limits of reason and remains thus negatively accessible[31].

However, if Rentsch seems to make the claim that the famous "leap" is unnecessary, one might object that in his approach there is no immediate nor necessary transition from the proof that there are phenomena of transcendence and that these are accessible for human reason to what is commonly called "faith" in the same sense as it is certainly possible but not necessary either to use the name of "God" for the phenomena identified by Rentsch. So I would argue that what causes this transition from the knowledge about phenomena of absolute transcendence to faith, inevitably remains inaccessible for human reason[32]. This would imply then that, in one sense, Kierkegaard was right to claim the there still is the necessity for a "leap", for something inexplicable and beyond reason and reasoning that allows us to take the step from the reasonably accessible to what faith means in its most eminent sense.

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Worlds within Worlds:
a Dilemma for Modal Realism

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In this paper I will present an argument that David Lewis' modal realism is self-refuting, and that the contradiction that makes it self-refuting can only be blocked by modifying certain other of Lewis' philosophical commitments. My argument will proceed as follows. First, I will briefly describe the motivation for and the main components of Lewisian modal realism. Second, I will explain Lewis' view of what it is for an individual or a set to exist in a world. Third, I go on to argue that Lewis' position creates a dilemma for modal realism: either each world contains all the other worlds as parts, which violates the principle that worlds are spatiotemporally isolated, or worlds are reducible to sets, which violates the principle that worlds are individuals. Finally, I briefly discuss a suggestion by Divers that strongly bears on this problem.

Modal Realism

I begin with a summary description of modal realism. Modal realism is motivated by the broadly Quinean view that quantifying over possibilia provides us with the best way of making sense of modal claims, a position that Lewis (1986a) defends in considerable detail as "a philosopher's paradise."

Lewis identifies possibilia with worlds. Worlds are concrete ("a big physical object" [Lewis, 1986b: 1]) and non-overlapping. They are non-overlapping because they are spatiotemporally, and therefore causally, segregated from one another. Items are spatiotemporally or causally related to one another just in case they are parts of the same world, and no two worlds share any parts. As Lewis says, "Worlds are spatiotemporally and causally isolated from one another; else they would not be whole worlds but parts of a greater world" (1986a: 84). So, the principle that worlds are spatiotemporally isolated entails that *no world can be part of any other world*. There is an infinite plurality of worlds, because every possibility — every way the world could be or could

have been — corresponds to the facts that obtain at some world. No constituent of a world can exist at more than one world, on pain of violating Leibniz' Law. So, talk of transworld individuals must be understood in terms of constituents of worlds and their counterparts at other worlds (where counterparts are understood as other-worldly constituents that are similar to them).

Modal realism allows one to translate modal talk into a non-modal idiom of possible worlds which, Lewis claims, should be understood realistically. A claim is possibly true iff it is true of some world, necessarily true iff it is true of all worlds, not possibly true iff it is true of no world, and contingently true iff it is not true of some worlds. With suitable modifications (which need not concern us here) the modal realist framework can also be used to give an analysis of *de re* modality. The concept of actuality is understood indexically. The *actual world* is just the world to which one belongs, and all worlds are therefore actual from the standpoint of their inhabitants.

Two Ways of Being in a World

To understand the modal realist view of what it is to exist in or "inhabit" a world, it is helpful to consider Lewis' basic ontological commitments. Worlds are composed of simple particulars. They are aggregates of Humean spacetime points instantiating "perfectly natural" properties, upon which other things in that world supervene. As he puts the point, "all there is to the world is a vast mosaic of local matters of particular fact, just one little thing and then another" (1986b: xi). The only non-individuals admitted into the Lewisian ontology are sets. Other non-individuals, such as properties, numbers, propositions, and events are reducible to sets, so if one quantifies over these sorts of entities, as Lewis does, then one must, on Quinean grounds, admit them into one's ontology. Lewis states that individuals exist in or "inhabit" worlds if they are parts of those worlds.

A world is a large possible individual; it has smaller possible individuals as parts. A galaxy, a planet, a man, an electron — these things inhabit their world simply by being parts of it. Just as the electron is part of the man, and the man in turn

is part of his planet which is part of its galaxy, so the galaxy in turn is part of its world. And so are its parts, and their parts,... since the relation of part to whole is transitive. Any possible individual is part of a world, and in that sense it is *in* a world. (As a special case a world is an improper part of itself). Worlds do not overlap; unlike Siamese twins, they have no shared parts. Thus...no possible individual is part of two worlds (1983b: 39).

But he also states that there are two other ways that we can think of entities being in a world. One concerns mereological sums of individuals existing in different worlds. Lewis (1983b: 40) describes these as impossible individuals and they need not concern us here. Finally, there is the way that sets are "in" worlds. Because "the whole-part relation applies to individuals and not sets...no set is in any world in the sense of being part of it" (Ibid.). Rather than thinking of sets as in worlds in virtue of being parts of worlds, Lewis proposes that we think of them as items that "exist alike from the standpoint of all worlds, just as they have no location in time and space but exist alike from the standpoint of all times and places" (Lewis 1983b: 39). Because we quantify over numbers, properties, etc. when we evaluate the truth of sentences whose domains are restricted to a single world, we can say that numbers, properties, etc., are "in" worlds only because they exist from the standpoint of those worlds.

In *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Lewis recasts the individual/set distinction as the concrete/abstract distinction. After initially stating that he is unsure about the basis for the distinction between abstractness and concreteness, he turns to what he describes as four conventional interpretations of the distinction, using each of them to arrive at a judgment about the meta-physical status of worlds. According to what he calls *the way of example*, some items, for instance "donkeys and puddles, protons and stars" (Lewis, 1986: 82) are paradigmatically concrete. "I am inclined to say," he writes, "that...a world is concrete rather than abstract–more donkey-like than number-like" (Lewis, 1986: 83). *The way of conflation* equates the abstract/concrete distinction to the universal/particular distinction or the set/member distinction. Lewis' verdict is

"that worlds are individuals not sets" so therefore "worlds are concrete" (Ibid.).

In terms of *the negative way,* abstract items have no spatiotemporal location, do not enter into causal relations, and are never indiscernible from one another, unlike concrete items. The key point in Lewis' detailed discussion of the negative way is that "whole worlds …cannot stand in spatiotemporal and causal relation to anything outside themselves" but they "can inherit concreteness from their parts" and so "worlds and their parts… are concrete" (Lewis, 1986: 85). Finally, *the way of abstraction* has it that abstract entities are abstractions *from* concrete entities. Lewis asserts that "worlds are concrete" as "they lack no specificity, and there is nothing for them to be abstractions from" (Lewis, 1986: 86). He concludes, "So, by and large,… it seems that indeed I should say that worlds as I take them to be are concrete; and so are many of their parts, but perhaps not all."

The phrase "but perhaps not all" might seem puzzling. It might be taken to mean that Lewis is entertaining the possibility that sets can be parts of worlds, but the context makes it clear that he is referring to the possibility that there are non-individual non-sets ("if universals and tropes are non-spatiotemporal parts of ordinary particulars that in turn are parts of worlds, then here we have abstractions that are parts of worlds" [86]).[1]

A dilemma for modal realism

It is not clear that the notion of something existing from the standpoint of a world can be reasonably construed as a notion of that thing being *in* that world without being part of it. But let us suppose that Lewis' explanatory strategy is satisfactory. In that case, every possible individual exists only as part of a world, and every set exists only from the standpoint of worlds, thus not allowing that individuals exist in worlds in virtue of existing from the standpoint of them or that sets are in worlds in virtue of being parts of them.[2]

In this section, I will argue that the claim that modal realism is true entails a contradiction. If modal realism is true, then there exists an infinite plurality of worlds. Given that the modal realist framework has it that truthmakers for modal claims are facts that obtain in worlds ("in" in either of the two senses specified by Lewis), it follows that the truth of modal realism itself must rest on facts that obtain in worlds. As I have explained above, Lewis accepts two interpretations of what it is for something to be "in" a world. Concrete objects are in worlds iff they are parts of worlds and abstract objects are in worlds iff they are accessible from the standpoint of worlds. But neither of these is adequate for the truth of the claim that there are possible worlds. If the claim that modal realism is made true by worlds having a plurality of worlds as their parts, this violates the principle that worlds are spatiotemporally isolated. And if modal realism is made true by a plurality of worlds existing from the standpoint of some world, this violates the principle that worlds are concrete.

The argument proceeds as follows.

1. Modal realism is possibly true.[3]
2. A claim is made possibly true by what obtains at some world.
3. If modal realism is true, then there is an infinite plurality of worlds.
4. Worlds are concrete individuals, not sets.
5. Each world is spatiotemporally isolated from the others.

These first five premises are uncontroversially core commitments of the modal realist framework. I now want to argue that their conjunction entails a contradiction.

6. If possibly modal realism is true, then there is an infinite plurality of worlds in some world.

(6) is entailed by premises 1 through 3. It might be interpreted in two different ways. It might be a claim to the effect that an infinite plurality of worlds exists from the standpoint of some

world. Or it might be interpreted as the claim that an infinite plurality of worlds is part of some world (that is, that each of these worlds is part of that world). So:

> 7. If modal realism is true, an infinite plurality of worlds is either part of some world or exists from the standpoint of some world.

If we interpret (6) as the first disjunct of (7), this contradicts (5). But as (5) is an indispensable component of the modal realist account of worlds, this interpretation is untenable. So:

> 8. It is not the case that an infinite plurality of worlds exists as part of some world.

This leaves us with the second disjunct:

> 9. There exists an infinite plurality of worlds from the standpoint of some world.

For (9) to be true, it must be the case that it is the infinite *set* of worlds, rather than the worlds themselves, that exists from the standpoint of some world. Put somewhat differently, for (9) to be true, it must be the case that the infinite plurality of worlds is an abstract object. However, although the set of worlds is, if anything, an abstract object, the worlds themselves are concrete individuals. In saying that modal realism is possibly true, the modal realist is saying something about the existence of concrete individuals (worlds) rather than saying something about a set. Consider the actual world w and just one possible world w^*. Suppose that w^* is in w in virtue of existing from the standpoint of w. This would require that w^* is an abstract object rather than a concrete individual which, according to Lewis, it must be.

So, given (5) it follows that:

> 10. It is not the case that an infinite plurality of worlds exists from the standpoint of some world.

But if that is the case, then, given (8) we must conclude that:

11. The infinite plurality of worlds is not in any world, and therefore:
12. Modal realism is false.

Addressing the problem

Divers (2002, also 1999) recognizes that Lewisian modal realism has difficulty giving an intelligible analysis of modal claims that are not restricted to worlds. He distinguishes between what he calls "ordinary" modal claims and what he calls "extraordinary" ones. Ordinary modal claims, such as "Possibly, pigs fly" are world-restricted claims. They are true just in case the possible item—in this case, flying pigs—are parts of some world. Extraordinary modal claims, such as "It is possible that there is a plurality of worlds" are not world-restricted, and must be treated differently than ordinary claims, because if they are treated in that fashion one must say that worlds are parts of other worlds.

Clearly, modal claims about modal realism need to be treated differently than other, more ordinary, modal claims. I have argued above that modal realism does not have the resources to do this, thus giving rise to the dilemma. Because Divers regards Lewis' explanation that abstracta are "in" worlds by existing from their standpoint as "at least ad hoc, worryingly vague, and perhaps even so improperly explicated as to merit classification as a primitive" (Divers, 2002: 89), he does not conceive of the problem as a dilemma. He proposes that sentences such as "It is possible that A iff A" and "It is possible that there is a plurality of worlds" should be considered as extraordinary modal claims. "It is possible that there is a plurality of worlds" should be expressed as something like the assertion that there are at least two non-identical worlds ($ExEy [Wx \wedge Wy \wedge \neg(y = x)]$). Hence, he suggests, the modal realist "appeals to the extraordinary interpretation of modal claims whenever she intends or interprets the associated non-modal content as content that is not world-restricted content" (2002: 50).

This is a significant departure from modal realism as Lewis

envisioned it, as it does not accord with Lewis' insistence that modal claims are made true by what is in all, some, or no worlds. It is not clear to me whether this solution is preferable to others, such as simply allowing that individuals can be in worlds in the same way that sets can be in worlds or exchanging modal realism for one or another ersatz version of possible world theory. But whatever the solution, it seems clear that some departure from Lewisian modal realism is required.
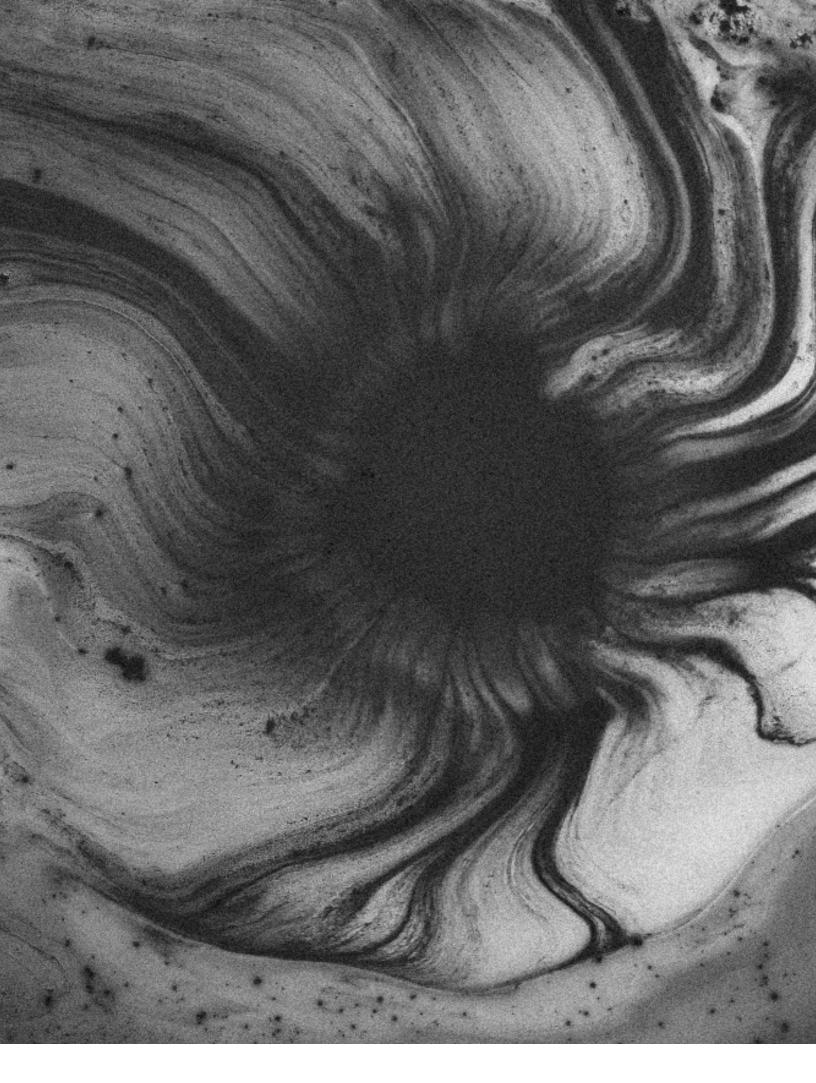
Conclusion

Lewis argued that modal realism is justified insofar as it provides the best account of the truth of modal statements. So, an orthodox modal realist—that is, one who adheres to modal realism just as Lewis articulated it—might say that we should assume the truth of modal realism in spite of the problem that I have elucidated because it still provides the best account of the truth of modal statements. Maybe yes, maybe no. Lewis did not regard the correctness of modal realism as a foregone conclusion. Although he argued that modal realism succeeds better than any of its alternatives, he also conceded that:

> Maybe the theoretical benefits to be gained are illusory, because the analyses that use possibilia do not succeed on their own terms. Maybe the price is higher than it seems, because model realism has unacceptable hidden implications. Maybe the price is not right; even if I am right about what theoretical benefits can be had for what ontological cost, maybe the very idea of accepting controversial ontology for the sake of theoretical benefits is misguided. Maybe—and this is the doubt that most interests me—the benefits are not worth the cost, because they can be had more cheaply elsewhere (Lewis 1986a: 4-5).

There is not yet, and perhaps will never be, philosophical consensus on whether the benefits of modal realism outweigh its costs. If my analysis in this paper is anywhere near correct, any such cost/benefit analysis needs to consider the dilemma that I describe.

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Photo by Joel Filip

In 2015, I assumed the role of editor-in-chief of *Auslegung*. With the help of the philosophical community at the University of Kansas, *Auslegung* published Volume 31 in 2015, followed by Volume 31 in 2018. Since then, the journal has undergone substantive changes in an effort to realize a new vision for the journal. So, it is worth making a few notes regarding our new editorial practices, our new graphic design as well as staff changes moving forward.

Firstly, I would like to express my deepest thanks to those that have contributed to the success of the journal. Many thanks are due to the philosophy department at the University of Kansas for nurturing *Auslegung* since 1973. KU has a rich philosophical community, and the journal is a reflection of this. Also, I would like to thank my predecessor Dr. Sean Meseroll for believing in me, and entrusting me with the journal. Sean's encouragement was instrumental in realizing this new vision for *Auslegung.* Finally, I want to thank the graduate students in philosophy at the University of Kansas for not only aiding in the editorial review process, but also in making the journal possible.

Auslegung has undergone substantive, stylistic changes. With the help of Naomi Shultz, a graphic designer based out of New York City, the journal now features a completely new design with a brand new cover and interior matter. After more than a year working together as well as a bunch of emails, I can safely say that the journal's design has far exceeded my expectations.

There were also some changes in regards to the editorial process and publishing frequency. Initial submissions are now reviewed by *Auslegung's* editorial board. If manuscripts pass the editorial review process, the editorial board sends the manuscripts for review. If accepted, the manuscript will appear in the following issue of *Auslegung*. As far as publication frequency goes, the aim of the journal is to publish one volume annually. This includes original articles, book reviews and response articles.

Finally, Alejandro David Tamez will be the new editor-in-chief of *Auslegung* effective Spring of 2020. I am confident that David's passion for public philosophy and his vision for the journal will take *Auslegung* very, very far. *Auslegung* has benefited greatly from his presence and I believe it will continue to benefit from it.

Marco Polo Camancho
Editor-in-Chief

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