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Editorial

The existentially important problem of contingency has in recent times been the topic of discussion not only in the philosophy of religion, but also in psychology, in sociology and especially in empirical theology.

WUCHTERL 2019

Kurt Wuchterl, the German philosopher of religion, is one of the leading authors on the concept of contingency in the field of religion. In this journal, he defines a personal conviction as *religious-philosophically contingent* “if and only if the facts addressed in the conviction are judged to be ontologically contingent; moreover, that state of affairs resists all attempts by human action to eliminate the present non-necessity; this fact is also accompanied by existential interest; and finally, if the circumstances of the person involved trigger the need to deal with the phenomenon.” (Wuchterl 2019). His ideas have inspired research in empirical theology and religious studies who want to build theory on the human practice of interpreting human experiences as religious-contingent.

We are pleased that the philosopher of religion Kurt Wuchterl will present his phenomenological theory of the philosophy of religious contingency in an introductory article of this special issue on ‘Dealing with experiences of contingency’. His article is followed by four empirical articles that use Wuchterl’s theory (2011; 2017) as a starting point for their research. In their analyses, all four come to important insights for the development of a practical theory for dealing with experiences of contingency.

Jorien Copier, Chris Hermans and Theo van der Zee connect Wuchterl’s idea of the ‘Other than Reason’ with the concept of transcendental openness. The authors look for the relationship between school leaders’ experiences of contingency and how they formulate goals and aims for the future of the children at their school. They distinguish between three ways of handling experiences of contingency: contingency denial, contingency acceptance, and contingency receiving. They presume that school leaders who have received new insights

in their experiences of contingency (contingency receiving) formulate future aims more often than school leaders who have accepted or denied experiences of contingency.

In this journal, Wuchterl identifies three modes of dealing with experiences of contingency: contingency mastering, contingency acknowledging and contingency encounter. Yvonne Weeseman, Hanneke van Laarhoven and Michael Scherer-Rath challenge these divisions. In their research on highly sensitive children they confirm the findings of Kruizinga et al. (2017; 2018), who distinguish between four modes of dealing with experiences of contingency, namely denying, acknowledging, accepting and receiving. They assume that immanent agnostic forms of acceptance and receiving contingency do not automatically eliminate contingency, as Wuchterl claims with his dogmatic appeal to universal autonomous reason, but rather characterise open attempts at interpretation.

In this journal, Wuchterl defines contingency acknowledgment as acceptance of the limits of reason, and contemplation of the possibility of an Other than Reason. For Kant, the Other than Reason is things in themselves (*Dinge an sich*); for agnostics, it is the unknown; and for Christians, the religious dimension of an encounter with God. Egbert van Dalen, Michael Scherer-Rath, Hanneke van Laarhoven, Gerard Wiegers and Chris Hermans challenge this idea of contingency acknowledgement in their research into the experiences of contingency of terminal cancer patients. Some of these patients refer to tragedy as their interpretation of the experience of contingency. They acknowledge contingency, but do not yet acknowledge an encounter with something that defies all meaning. According to the authors, tragedy creates an unexpected new perspective, which leads persons out of the interpretation crisis related to the experience of acknowledging contingency.

Iris Hartog et al. combined theories of narrative identity and contingency to develop the “narrative meaning-making and integration of life events” theoretical model (Hartog et al. 2017). The model hypothesises that life events that conflict with a person’s “ultimate life goals”, or world view, may result in an “experience of contingency” (Wuchterl 2011; Kruizinga et al. 2017). To contribute to their understanding of this existential dimension of falling ill, and further validate the theoretical model, they examined the relationships between the concepts assessed using the RE-LIFE questionnaire (Hartog et al. forthcoming). They attempt to investigate quantitative empirical research on experiences of contingency in heart patients with the RE-LIFE instrument and regression-based serial multiple mediation analyses, to investigate the possible influence of contingency experiences on quality of life. Against the background of Wuchterl’s contingency theory, three variables are central here: ‘negative impact on life goals’, ‘existential meaning’ and ‘contingency acknowledging’.

According to Wuchterl there can be no religious coping with contingency, in the strict sense (see Wuchterl in this journal). The main reason for this is the unavailable character of an encounter in contingency. Jos Pieper examines the similarities and differences between a religious-philosophical approach to contingency and a (religious) psychological approach from the health sciences based on coping-theoretical insights. Pieper gives an overview of theoretical and empirical developments in coping research. His article ends with a discussion on how both approaches (coping theories and the religious-philosophical approach of contingency) may relate to each other.

Empirical research into the experiences of contingency challenges researchers to approach and conceptualise responsibly, from the contingency perspective. A number of methodological questions arise that are well worth asking in this context. As an example, Martina Kraml presents in her article how doctoral students perceive and conceptualise their research processes, and the factors that influence their writing of their dissertations. For example, horizons of meaning and epistemic concepts play an essential role. Dealing with contingency turns out to be the central challenge, especially in the supervision of dissertations. In connection to Wuchterl, the article demonstrates the importance of developing competencies in contingency encounters in research and teaching.

In line with this, the perspective of the researcher himself should also receive explicit attention. Paul van der Velde describes his experiences with a field observation in Bylakuppe, in South India, regarding the popular idea that Buddha was against the caste system. In the end, the research took an unexpected course that led the researcher to further reflection and further investigation of old textual sources. He describes this research experience as a case of creative contingency. That's the human capacity to articulate oneself about previous articulations, to react to previous actions. Every articulation is shaped by a distinctive, contingent, creative event.

Michael Scherer-Rath

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