

Original Paper UDC [124.2:177.9]:211.5

130.2Nancy, J.-L.

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ignaas.devisch@ugent.be, kathleen.vandeputte@ugent.be**Sense, Existence and Justice,
or, How to Live in a Secular World?****Abstract**

*It has been taken for granted that in western modernity we are dealing with a secularised world, an atheistic world where religion is no longer reigning the public sphere. In other words: a world where sense lies outside the world towards a world where sense is situated within it. If we follow the line of thought French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy sets out in his books *The Sense of the World and Dis-Enclosure*, we have to think world not as what has its sense within itself, but as what is sense itself. To live in a secular world, means to live in a world which is sense, a world that has become responsible for itself but never closes in itself. Nancy, thereby inspired by Martin Heidegger, claims that in a secularised world it is no longer a question of whether the world has sense, but that the world is sense. If we want to be atheists today, Nancy concludes, we no longer have to do with the question, “why is there something in general?” but with the answer, “there is something, and that alone makes sense.*

Key words

sense, existence, world, secularization, Christianity, Jean-Luc Nancy, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger

“The generalized secularization of the West is an indisputable fact. However, the evocation of this fact does not resolve the philosophical issue.”

Bernard Flynn¹**1. The world from a secular perspective**

From a Christian perspective the world is a place whose sense lies beyond it: a position Wittgenstein also seems to share in his famous expression 6.41 of his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*: “The sense of the world must lie outside the world”.² If secularization is our perspective, the most logical option seems to lie in a mere immanentisation of this other-worldly sense. If this logic would still make up the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy in *Dis-Enclosure*, its stance would be highly repetitive: are we not saying this for centuries now?

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Bernard Flynn, *The Philosophy of Claude Lefort: Interpreting the Political*, Evanston Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2005, pp. 112–113.

2

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, transl. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness; with an introduction by Bertrand Russell, London: Routledge, 2001.

Although we do not have many alternatives at our disposal in present thought, Nancy tries to tell us something different: unless we want to inhabit a negative version of Christian thought, we must look at sense in a completely different way, if we want to live in a secularized world, if we want to be “atheists”.

For this reason, Nancy dialogues with Wittgenstein in *The Sense of the World*, if only very briefly.³ Sense is not so much something that we “the secularized”, as the successors of God, now confer upon the world ourselves. If so, one would merely confirm the Christian idea that the world represents an absence of sense or an object whose sense is given from the outside by one or the other subject. What remains as our horizon is the world and nothing but the world. Sense is thus nothing other than co-existence itself. Being secularized is to be radically exposed to sense, to the world as such. At no moment is the meaning of the world given by a Creator. But if there is only this world, and it is no longer founded in and through otherworldliness, does Nancy not seem to confirm the classical thesis of secularization? Where, for a religiously-founded world, the sense of the world would lie in an instance beyond the world or acquire an otherworldly status, in a secular world, sense would be located purely immanently in the world.

It is precisely this idea that Nancy questions and nuances. An interesting angle for discussion of how Nancy proceeds is his relation to Wittgenstein’s already mentioned claim that the sense of the world must lie outside the world. Wittgenstein, as is well-known, regards the world as a given facticity as a plain and simple state of affairs. To this world, sense can be granted from outside it. But this “place” “outside the world” is thus also a place outside the totality of all places, a place without place as it were. The question then is how we can think such an outside nowadays? According to Nancy, Wittgenstein’s “outside the world” in this way still partially operates as the continuation of a Christian concept of the world whose sense lies outside itself.⁴ If we want to account for the “world as such” we must approach it from another direction:

“As long as we do not take into account, without reserve, the worldly as such, we have not gotten rid of demiurges and creators. In other words, we are not yet atheists. Being an atheist is no longer a matter of denying a divine instance that has reabsorbed itself into itself (and this can perhaps therefore no longer be called ‘atheism’). It is a matter of opening the sense of the world.”⁵

In other words, Nancy appeals for a rather Heideggerian move: if we are always “thrown” into sense and that sense places us in being-open(ed)-to, in a being-towards, then sense is always being-towards and it is this that constitutes co-existence, being towards the world as such. Any comprehension or understanding of sense thus already takes place from out of the opened horizon that the world is for us and to which we are always already exposed. That the world *is* – the global spacing or taking place as such – this is what sense is for Nancy:

“As soon as the appearance of a beyond of the world has been dissipated, the out-of-place instance of sense opens itself up within the world to the extent that it would still make sense to speak of a ‘within’. Sense belongs to the structure of the world, hollows out therein what it would be necessary to name better than by calling it the ‘transcendence’ of its ‘immanence’ – its *transimmanence*, or more simply and strongly, its existence and exposition.”⁶

That there *is* something, means that the world arises. The origin of the world, Nancy claims at several places in his work, takes place everywhere, over and over again in every singular act of sense, always momentary and local. *World* is always a plurality of worlds, an infinite passage of phenomena. The world

is structured as being-towards, as a relation – in all possible connotations of the word. The “plural singular origin” of the world is what comprises our co-existence. It is the naked structure of our “we-ness” in a world that is nothing but world. As the “trans-immanent” structure of sense, such an origin of the world lies not outside the world, but each and every arising of the world takes place as exposure, as transcendence in the world. Ultimately the sense of the world is thus a tautology. The world is structured as sense, and sense is structured as world:

“If we are toward the world, if there is being-toward-the-world in general, that is, if there is world, there is sense. The there is makes sense by itself and as such. We no longer have to do with the question, ‘why is there something in general?’ but with the answer, ‘there is something, and that alone makes sense’.”⁷

The world is the name for the sense of the “there is”. If the world *is*, and if existence no longer has sense but is sense, than there is no senselessness in this name, and man cannot declare its existence null and void. Nihilism and idealism sublimate one another at this point.⁸ The bankruptcy of the concept of the world as deriving from a first cause or an Idea thus does not cast us into an abyssal or rudderless world. It is not because the world no longer permits itself to be represented in a sense-bestowing totality that existence has become senseless or abyssal.

The world seen from a secular perspective can only be sense (and *vice versa*) if it has no sense (to lose). Sense is there just like the world is there: without any questioning why. Sense stands for existence itself, for the fact that I am opened to existence and to the world. That we are sense, that there is sense and that we are here, this is the radical demand and consequence of the opened space that the global world has become for us. Being in the world comprises the sense of our existence. To the extent that the world stands in relation to a creator outside the world, a God or a Subject, it can have sense. If want to live in a secular world, this (relation with a) creator has to fall away. The world then no longer has sense: it is sense. This is why Nancy can write:

“If the world is not the work of a God, this is not because there is no God, as if this were an annoying circumstance, a privative condition to which one had to accommodate oneself as best one could. (As if, in the final analysis, the world were not complete, as if the causal or final part of the totality had been simply amputated. Often, atheism has not known how to communicate anything other than this.) But there is no God because there is the world, and because the world is neither a work nor an operation but the space of the ‘there is’, its configuration without a face.”⁹

2. The incommensurable

“There is no God because there is the world.” But if there is the world, the question is: how to understand it? More exactly: how to think the secularized world we live in? Let us quote from the “Opening” in *Dis-Enclosure*:

3
Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*,
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,
1998.

4
Ibid., p. 55.

5
Ibid., p. 158.

6
Ibid., p. 55.

7
Ibid., p. 7.

8
Ibid., p. 79.

9
Ibid., p. 156.

“The West was born not from the liquidation of a dark world of beliefs, dissolved by the light of a new sun – and this no more so in Greece than during the Renaissance or the eighteenth century. It took shape in a metamorphosis of the overall relation to the world, such that the “inaccessible” in effect took shape and functioned, as it were, *precisely as such* in thought, in knowledge, and in behavior. There was no reduction of the unknown, but rather an aggravation of the incommensurable (which was no accident, if the solution to the mathematical problem of “incommensurables” – the *alagon* that is the diagonal of the square – furnished the emblematic figure of the birth of true knowledge and, with it or in it, the modelling or mathematical regulation of philosophy).”¹⁰

The sentence which fascinates us particularly in this quote is “that there was no reduction of the unknown, but rather an aggravation of the incommensurable”. It fascinates us, not only because of its content and its presence in other texts of Nancy’s *oeuvre*, but also because it relates the problem of secularization, including *sense* and *world*, to that of *justice*. This relationship may surprise the non-Nancy scholar, but for Nancy, justice is first and for all connected with the fact of our co-existence, with what is unique about every existence in its co-existence with other creations. He addresses juridical issues as religious problems, or the other way round, issues such as: the day of judgement, being judged and judging, being summoned, the law, the covenant, right and justice or being responsible. Nancy treats these issues in a way that enables him to demonstrate their “religious” origin.

In a small text called “Cosmos Basileus”, included in *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy discusses this topic by means of a reflection on the unity of the world.¹¹ He states that the unity of the world is nothing other than the diversity and, hence, the world’s non-unity. A world is always a plurality of worlds. Existing begins with the exposure to plurality and to sharing. The sharing of the world or co-existence is according to Nancy thus also the “law of the world”. The world has no other law than this; it is not subject to a sovereign authority. The world always means co-existing, being shared and divided, and is never a unity or a totality. Therefore the law of the world cannot be equated with the accomplishment of one or the other unity or totality. On the contrary, already in the opening sentences of the essay, Nancy describes the *nomos* of the world as the dissemination, the division and the allocation of sharing of everything.

Nancy’s elaboration of this is just as brief as the description of it. Things to be disseminated can be places we live in, but just as well portions of food or rights and duties. To the question of the just measure (of such a distribution), Nancy answers that the measure of covenant, of law or of absolute justice lies nowhere other than in this sharing itself, and in the exceptional singularity of everyone with everyone offered by this sharing. This means, according to our interpretation: because the world is not given once and for all, because there is no God which offers the Measure of the world, there is no perfect divide through which everyone would be assigned a fixed place. On the contrary, because the world arises in and through the taking place of every singular plural appearance, its division and its divide are at stake time and time again, that is within every one of us, with every appearance, and each time something or someone appears. Sharing or division is thus precisely that which connects the theme of the world or existence and that of justice. In this way, the covenant is also nothing other than co-existence. Co-existence is not something added to existence, as a phenomenon in itself. Co-existence is existence existing *as dividing-sharing*. As a consequence, justice means doing justice to what belongs to every unique, singular creation in its coexistence with other

creations. Justice is not primarily a matter of a singularity and only secondarily the relation of this singularity to others. That which makes the singular unique is at once that which puts it into relation. To do justice to the singular absolute-ness of one's proper being is thus simultaneously to do justice to the plurality of the singular.

To do justice does not mean we can dream of a world without injustice. In a world that tries to think itself as secular, there is no answer to the question *why* there would be injustice. The theological instances explaining or justifying this have disappeared. Justice no longer enters from outside the world to recuperate the world's injustice or to sublimate it, but is something given with the world, as the law of its act of donation. The world is itself the supreme law of justice – not the world as it is, but *that* the world is, that it always surges forth again, always plural singular.

This brings us back to the issue of the “incommensurable” to which Nancy refers in the paragraph *Dis-Enclosure* we quoted above. Already in *The Experience of Freedom* (orig. 1988), Nancy offers an interesting, rather illuminating statement about the incommensurable. Justice, he writes, can no longer be that of a right environment presupposing a given measure.¹² By this Nancy refers to the ontological order of an (ancient) world that gave a central function to the idea of a just measure. Let us give a brief summary in order to clarify his point, because it is crucial in Nancy's understanding of secularization.

The collapse of the idea of a just measure and environment refers implicitly to Aristotle's doctrine of the Mean. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes it as the task of the excellent person to discover the right mean and to keep the just measure.¹³ All excellence or virtue lies in the middle of two extremes and it is necessary to keep mid-way between the too much and the too little in order to retain the middle. The right mean is not an arbitrary choice of a free individual but a pressing task. To act virtuously is to act in accordance with the stable order of being: one must do the good in accordance with the good which is being. Keeping the middle path is therefore never just an individual matter. As a *polis*, citizens must strive together for the mean and comply with the superior structure that is the cosmos. The right mean and just measure are never purely moral matters but always questions of being. Every digression from the right mean is a detour from the unfolding of being and therefore always an ontological excess. The (right) mean is as it were the covenant of finite beings, of the closed cosmos of the ancient world. Or put differently, justice (*dikè*) is a question of the right modality of being.

Because Christianity has introduced the notion of infinity, and thereby indirectly paved the way for the infinite modern world, things changed substantially. Christianity instituted a remarkable relation between finitude and in-

10
Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: Deconstruction of Christianity*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2007, p. 8.

11
Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, transl. Anne E. O'Byrne and Robert D. Richardson, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

12
Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, transl. Bridget McDonald, foreword Peter Fenves, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, p. 75.

13
In Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, 1105b15–1109b25.

finitude, between measure and excess. Insofar as creation is created, its mode of being is one of finite dependence, but insofar as creation is the result of a Creating Act that comes into being *ex nihilo*, its covenant is that of incommensurability and infinity. What finite creature measures itself against is the universe, the All, the infinite expansion of the universe that brought Pascal into such turmoil. Nevertheless, such a notion of infinity has still maintained a supreme theological limit by which every right and wrong was finally judged. God was not only the maker of earthly things. God also added a cosmic dimension with his promise of another kingdom from which wrong will be banished. But with the retreat of God in the modern era, creation is thrown back increasingly on itself. Lacking any criterion or limit point, it becomes its own measure; but this only means that all measure, as something limiting human life from outside, is absent. Consequently, measure is constituted by nothing but excess. Creation can measure itself against nothing other than itself. One can therefore no longer properly speak about creation: it is now pure being that is its own measure. Precisely for this reason all former measures do no longer hold. Aristotle's world of right mean and just measure is miles away from here.

2.1. The incommensurable as a modern excess

It took six years for Nancy's above-mentioned suggestion from *The Experience of Freedom* to acquire more specificity. Nancy's main entry point for "Human excess" (1994) is keeping measure.¹⁴ In this essay, Nancy reflects on a form of excess or immeasurability that would be proper to a modern and thus secularized order.

First of all, Nancy describes modern time as a period of vast numbers. Of course one does not require Nancy in order to make this claim. It is obvious that modern time sustains itself with enormous numbers, imposing records and dizzying figures. These immense numbers initially seem to refer to a form of immeasurability or excess proper to our time. Everything is going faster and is expected to grow exponentially, and whereas from an optimist side we are told to be fascinated with this immeasurability, from the side of the pessimists we are warned for the uncanniness of it all. But these alternatives are precisely what Nancy puts into question.

Both positions, one can infer from "Human excess", fail to make a crucial step when thinking the place of this excess in modernity. According to Nancy, excess is found not so much in always larger and larger numbers. Although certain things are immeasurably large, we are still able to measure them and put the results into figures. One can, for example, measure how many millions of grains of sand there are in a handful, how many miles of books there are in a shop rack, or how many letters can be found in the collected works of Hegel. In our modern era, the immeasurable is always measurable: hence there is no measure *a priori* given from which the immeasurable is said to diverge. Excess, therefore, does not lie in huge numbers. Whether the world population is now twenty or thirty million makes no difference to the excessive. There is no fixed criterion against which we could measure these twenty or thirty millions, and it is precisely the lack of this criterion that shows how excess lies elsewhere. The ever-greater dissemination of vast numbers in our culture, such as computer memory or the price of a nuclear submarine, indicates not so much an aberration from certain established measures or norms, but rather an exponential growth of our responsibility for the world and ex-

istence. Numbers that measure the stock market or world population point to a certain connectedness or commitment: an engagement. For example, the risks and consequences of the growing impact of multinationals on our economy or of the ever-increasing world population show an urgent responsibility to act without any pre-given criterion. The excess of these figures lies not so much in the size and degree of their divergence from some criterion but rather in the responsibility that conceals itself precisely in the lack of such a criterion.¹⁵

In a secularized era, the “*humanitas*” of man reveals the excess and the immeasurability as the measure of all things; because of this, man must measure itself. This implies a *different ontological order*, a different status of what is. It is not without significance, for Nancy, that figures of genocide and other forms of extermination have become the semantemes or signifiers of modernity. Six million is, for example, inseparably linked with the six million victims of the Shoah. This number, six million, does not simply mean “a lot” or an “immeasurable amount”. This figure is in itself not immeasurable and does not indicate that a specific limit has been transgressed. Furthermore, how do we measure the deaths of ten Jews, or the extermination of hundreds of thousands of Armenians? Rather than a sort of excess, this sort of figures indicates a specific order, a proper register of engagement and responsibility. Extermination is literally an exhaustion of numbers, the counting out of a people to its existence as a totality.

With this, Nancy indicates the modern tendency to posit the excess of numbers of our world population as an absolute fact, as something that exists fully in itself; consequently, he calls for another covenant of being. More precisely, excess is its own proper covenant. The world is measuring itself, that is, as excess; it forms the measure of an unheard of measure. That the world measures itself means that it is engaged as a whole. Nancy gives the example of the Big Bang which, for him, is not a matter of something very large but of certain greatness (*grandeur*), in the sense of being its own measure. There is no measure against which the being of the Big Bang could be measured.

As stated above, the magnitude that is its own excessive measure indicates at the same time the criterion for an absolute responsibility. Once one takes the measure of the Big Bang, our responsibility for the universe is total and immeasurable. The Shoah, for example, is usually regarded as a form of excessive violence; but it no longer suffices to name the correct measure from which this excess would diverge. Responsibility must take on the posture of a similar excessiveness.

In this way, human beings receive their proper measure as an absolute, limitless responsibility. Such responsibility has no pre-given measure that would precede it, which is also indicated, for example, by the population explosion. The question is not only how many people the Earth can sustain; it is also a question of which people, and which existences. The grandeur of the number turns simultaneously into a moral grandeur: “the size [*taille*] of humanity becomes indissociable from its dignity”.¹⁶

14
The text appeared originally in the journal *Epokhè* and was later published in J.-L. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, pp. 177–183.

15
Ibid., p. 179.

16
Ibid., p. 180.

2.2. Justice

The problem Nancy brings up to us is how justice is to be thought from a secularized world that has become its own measure, and is thus simultaneously without measure. This perspective leaves us open to an engagement without measure, and this constitutes our existence. Here we resume our opening the question, that of *sense*. We saw that Nancy claims that it is no longer a question of whether the world has a meaning or makes sense, but that the world *is* meaning, is (as) sense. In the same way, the world in which we live no longer has a measure, but *is* measure. The new way of being – the different ontological order we discussed above – demands a new covenant. Furthermore, the world itself becomes that which institutes what is just and what is not. Justice does not come into the world from outside – the world lacks nothing – and is not given as a fixed measure: a secularized world has no foundation or overall aim. The world is itself the sharing and the dividing of justice and injustice such that justice is no longer a matter of a “(theo- or socio-)dicy” or *dikè*. Nancy writes in *The Sense of the World*:

“Neither *dikè* nor *dicy*’: this is a call neither for despair nor for hope, neither for a judgement of this world nor for a ‘just world’ – but for justice in this world, for justice rendered unto the world: that is, for resistance, intervention, compassion, and struggle that would be tireless and oriented toward the incommensurability of the world, the incommensurability of the totality of the singular outline, without religious and tragic remuneration, without sublation, and thus without discourse.”¹⁷

Precisely because *dikè* and “-dicy” have vanished, one needs a reflection on justice, sense and world, if one wants to think the secularization of the world. Something at the level of existence itself has appeared, and could profoundly influence our view on justice. In light of this, “Cosmos Basileus” begins with a reflection on the unity of the world.¹⁸ For Nancy this unity or totality is not a whole but a co-existence that as such *is* not (has no substance), but that comes into being through the plural co-existence of singularities. This is why justice is that which must be awarded to every existence “according to its unique, singular creation in its coexistence with all other creations”.¹⁹ This is also why Nancy speaks of a total responsibility that, once there is no longer any single “-dicy” or *dikè* to measure or limit it, precedes all laws. In *The Experience of Freedom*, Nancy describes this total responsibility as “an established or prevailing ‘just measure’ in the name of the incommensurable.”²⁰ By this, Nancy understands the fact that our responsibility does not stem from a just measure or from a self that is responsible only for its own legal obligations. Archi-responsibility precedes all measures and laws and even exceeds every self. This does not mean that one has to bear, always and for all time, ontically, an unlimited responsibility, nor that political or moral, juridical responsibility is to be assessed in concrete situations. This assessment is also a responsibility, but once the measure for it is no longer given in advance by a “-dicy” or *dikè*, all assessment of responsibility already starts from this archi-responsibility.

3. The Day of Judgement

Nancy’s strategy in his discussion of secularization and justice does not differ from the way he approaches other questions. He takes a number of already existing motifs or concepts and gradually “unpacks” them, so as to introduce

them into his own vocabulary with new meanings or changes in their meaning. His presupposition is that these concepts deconstruct themselves.

Now it is particularly interesting for the theme of the deconstruction of Christianity, that in the context Nancy discusses justice, the motifs are frequently religious in their origin: the day of judgement, being summoned or put on trial, the (second) coming, the absolute Other. Similarly to his treatment of the sense of the world, Nancy expands these religious motifs to existential matters, to the ontological conditions of possibility of existence. These conditions are central to his *oeuvre* in its entirety. Nancy's emphasis, in the context of justice as in all the other cases, is on the real multiplicity in which our existence takes place.

Existing, he emphasizes, consists not only in being open but also in being responsible. To be responsible means that we are always in relation to something. We are always already thrown into existence and must always be able to answer for our existence. In this responsibility, we are judged because our appearance is in the sharing that we are with and in respect to others. This structure of our responsibility and our being judged "simply" arises from the fact that we are *compearance*.²¹ We appear as *com*, and through this we are summoned by the co-existence that we have to be. We advene and such an arrival is never on its own, but is always both a sharing and a dividing, that is, a shared and divided being singular plural. According to Nancy, we are always already exposed to existence, always already summoned. I am already responsible even before I assume my responsibility. I must always already answer for my existence. This archi-responsibility summons me; I am exposed to it as a result of co-existence. The day of judgement is thus not a final judgement but, as Nancy puts it in *La Comparution / The Compearance*, conveys one's being exposed to existence at every moment of every day:

"There would thus no longer be a court to which we should compear. However, we find ourselves still in judgement. The Day of Judgment – dies irae, the day of divine wrath – is no longer a day at all... This day is thus an instant always in suspense, always a differed judgment that cannot be appealed. This judgment (justly) reaches a verdict in the name of the end. This is not an End set up as an Idea on the horizon; it is rather how we approach our own final horizon and how we do (or do not do) justice to that horizon. This is a simple judgment, without appeal; it is not subject to any superior law (droit) for it proceeds from that which precedes law. Have we done right (droit) by that which still has no right? Right by our existence itself – or since this word is subject to misuse in the singular – by our existences, by their community? Before this law without law we have never ceased to compear. In the end we compear there naked."²²

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J.-L. Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p. 148.

18

J.-L. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 185.

19

Ibid., p. 187.

20

J.-L. Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, p. 75.

21

Jean-Luc Nancy and Jean-Christophe Bailly, "La Comparution/The Compearance from the Existence of 'Communism' to the Community of 'Existence'", *Political Theory* 20 (3/1992), p. 372. In his text on compearance, Nancy

explains the semantic similarities between the French 'comparution' and its English equivalent 'compearance', both meaning 'to appear in court': "La comparution refers to the act of appearing in court having been summoned. 'Summoning' carries a much stronger notion of agency than the more disembodied comparution and lacks the commonality implied in the prefix. The Scottish commonlaw term 'compearance' – although foreign to most English ears – conveys the meaning exactly [...]." (Ibid., p. 371).

22

J.-L. Nancy and J.-C. Bailly, "La Comparution/The Compearance...", p. 372.

Once again, co-existence is the central point of reference. Here, too, Nancy begins from the radical idea that we can no longer think on the basis of any “-dicy”. With respect to justice, this means the bankruptcy of the idea of justice as a final settling of accounts: the undoing of all evil or injustice in an ultimate destination or aim. Such a conception of justice is, moreover, an indirect justification of today’s evil and suffering. The ambition of such justice is infinite in the sense that its aim lies in an order beyond every finite order, whether as a transcendent *civitas Dei* or as the realization of a free society in the future.

In order to avoid thinking justice in the sense of an infinite “-dicy”, Nancy explicitly conceives of it on the basis of a finite order of existence. What one, in an infinite vision of society, still regards as a final judgement or ultimate destination is in Nancy’s thought reduced to the ever-present and eternally arriving judgement within the finite horizon that is our existence. Indeed, not only has this infinite society become bankrupt, but the entities that formerly summoned us and functioned as the supreme law-giver, together with this society, have likewise lost their social ground and legitimacy.

One might say: to think as an atheist would thus also mean finishing first and foremost with every ontological foundation or principle that justifies evil. This is why Nancy speaks of a naked justice that no longer strives for the teleological sublation of all injustice in a society yet to come. The day of judgement takes place within the finite horizon of co-existence, and is therefore always a judgement without a summoning entity (be it God, We or the Other). This does not mean that henceforth all criteria for justice lie in me, in the sense of stemming from a literally autonomous subject that separates good from evil. If so, Nancy would be just another defender of an accomplished humanity, whereas it is precisely against this position that his critique is directed. Nancy grants theoretical primacy not to a law-making subject but to existence, to being exposed, to our appearance to and with others in the world.

Put differently, *nomos* is not the entity that founds the *autos* and its existence, but, on the contrary, the law to which every *autos* is exposed. Such exposure means being summoned and judged, *hic et nunc*. Or again: there is no longer any theological judge before whom we must appear. *Dies irae*, the day of judgement, is not a day that could ever occur in history but is the tribunal of co-existence before which we appear at every moment. Being exposed to co-existence is the law without law before which we continuously appear. The law without law is the command literally to do justice to the co-existence that is ours, a criterion before all criteria.²³ In responding to it, in the archi-responsibility in which we are always placed, we must do justice to existence, although it is never existence in general but always singular existences to which one does justice (or injustice). It is precisely by not reducing the law without law and co-existence to an ultimate (infinite) day of judgement that we do justice to a secular existence. To live in a secular world, means to live in a world which is sense, a world that has become responsible for itself but never closes in itself.

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**Smisao, egzistencija i pravda,
ili, kako živjeti u sekularnom svijetu?**

Sažetak

Činjenica da je zapadna modernost obilježena sekulariziranim svijetom, ateističkim svijetom u kojem religija više ne vlada javnom sferom, uzima se zdravo za gotovo. Drugim riječima, preobrazbom iz svijeta gdje smisao leži izvan tog svijeta, u svijet gdje je smisao smješten u njemu samome. Ako pratimo tijek misli francuskog filozofa Jean-Luc Nancya predstavljen u njegovim djelima *The Sense of the World* i *Dis-Enclosure*, moramo poimati svijet ne kao nešto što ima smisao u sebi samome, nego kao nešto što jest sâm smisao. Živjeti u sekulariziranom svijetu znači živjeti u svijetu koji jest smisao, svijetu koji je postao odgovoran za sebe ali se u sebe ne zatvara. Nancy, pritom inspiriran Martinom Heideggerom, tvrdi da u sekulariziranom svijetu više nije upitno ima li svijet smisla, nego da svijet jest smisao. Ako danas želimo biti ateisti, zaključuje Nancy, više se ne moramo suočiti s pitanjem »Zašto, općenito, nešto jest?«, nego s odgovorom »Nešto jest, i to samo čini smisao«.

Ključne riječi

smisao, egzistencija, svijet, sekularizacija, kršćanstvo, Jean-Luc Nancy, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger

Ignaas Devisch, Kathleen Vandeputte

**Sinn, Existenz und Gerechtigkeit,
oder, Wie leben in der säkularen Welt?**

Zusammenfassung

*Dass wir es in der westlichen Modernität mit einer säkularisierten Welt zu tun haben, mit einer atheistischen Welt, wo die Religion die öffentliche Sphäre nicht mehr beherrscht, wird für allzu selbstverständlich gehalten. Mit anderen Worten: Die Transformation von einer Welt, wo der Sinn außerhalb dieser Welt liegt, zu einer Welt, wo er innerhalb derselben liegt. Folgen wir dem Gedankenlauf, den der französische Philosoph Jean-Luc Nancy in seinen Werken *The Sense of the World* und *Dis-Enclosure* zum Vorschein bringt, dürfen wir die Welt nicht als eine den Sinn innehabende auffassen, sondern müssen sie selbst als Sinn betrachten. In einer säkularisierten Welt zu leben heißt, in einer Welt zu leben, die selbst der Sinn ist, in einer Welt, die für sich selbst verantwortlich geworden ist, sich aber nie in sich verschließt. Nancy, dadurch von Martin Heidegger inspiriert, behauptet, in der säkularisierten Welt sei keine Frage mehr, ob die Welt über den Sinn verfüge, sondern er beteuert, die Welt sei der Sinn. Wollen wir heute Atheisten sein, folgert Nancy, müssen wir uns nicht mehr mit der Frage befassen, „warum es im Allgemeinen etwas gibt“, sondern mit der Antwort „es gibt etwas, und dies allein ergibt einen Sinn“.*

Schlüsselwörter

Sinn, Existenz, Welt, Säkularisierung, Christentum, Jean-Luc Nancy, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger

Ignaas Devisch, Kathleen Vandeputte

**Sens, existence et justice,
ou comment vivre dans un monde sécularisé ?**

Résumé

*La conviction que la modernité occidentale soit un monde sécularisé, athée, dans lequel la religion ne domine plus la sphère publique, n'est qu'une présomption. Autrement dit : une transformation, à partir d'un monde où le sens réside en dehors de lui, vers un monde où le sens se situe en lui-même. Si nous suivons la pensée du philosophe français Jean-Luc Nancy, présentée dans ses livres *Le Sens du Monde* et *La Déclosion*, nous devons penser le monde non pas comme ayant un sens en soi, mais comme étant le sens lui-même. Vivre dans un monde laïque signifie vivre dans un monde qui est sens, un monde devenu responsable pour soi-même mais qui ne s'enferme pas sur soi-même. Nancy, s'inspirant de Martin Heidegger, affirme que, dans un monde laïque, il n'est plus question de savoir si le monde a un sens, mais si le monde est sens. Pour être athée aujourd'hui, conclut Nancy, nous n'avons plus à faire à la question « pourquoi est-il quelque chose en général ? », mais à la réponse « il y a quelque chose, et cela en soi fait sens ».*

Mots-clés

sens, existence, monde, laïcisation, christianisme, Jean-Luc Nancy, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger