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Poetics and Politics: Rengger, Weber, and the *Virtuosi* of Religion

John-Harmen Valk

Introduction

Rarely does the published work of Nicholas Rengger directly engage the thought of Max Weber, a rather interesting lacuna given the centrality of Weber to the international political themes and thinkers with which Rengger engaged over the course of his career and in response to which he sought to carve out his own unique stance. Weber features in the title of Rengger's unpublished 2001 inaugural lecture at the University of St Andrews, and a book manuscript on which Rengger was working at the time of his death was to explore the significance of Weber's 'Politics as a vocation' lecture with respect to several present-day dilemmas of ethics and politics.¹ It is only in *International Relations, Political Theory and the Problem of Order* that Rengger indicates at any length the great significance that he sees Weber's thought holding for international political theory, and yet even this discussion is rather limited.²

¹ The title of Rengger's inaugural lecture is 'Kant, Weber and Dr. Pangloss: world politics between progress and tragedy'. A tentative title for the book manuscript communicated to the author was *Global Politics as a Vocation*, a brief synopsis of which can be found in the Notes on Contributors to Daniel R. Brunstetter and Cian O'Driscoll, eds, *Just War Thinkers: From Cicero to the 21st Century* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018).

² Nicholas J. Rengger, *International Relations, Political Theory and the Problem of Order: Beyond International Relations Theory?* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000a), pp. 9, 44, 60, 62, 204.

This chapter therefore explores Rengger's notion of the modern anti-Pelagian imagination – a notion that figured prominently in his later work – with respect to Weber's thought. It traces affinities between Rengger and Weber in their diagnoses of how rationalization and the concomitant loss of an ethic of brotherliness characterize the modern disenchantment of the world. Rengger's wish to sustain an ethic of brotherliness meets its limits, however, in so much as his delineation of the relationship between theory and practice militates against the desire to root lives within networks of living concern. The chapter thus explores Rengger's distinction between theory and practice, poetics and politics, in light of Weber's discussions of the *virtuosi* of religion which feature prominently in Weber's writings on the sociology of religion, but which also play a central, albeit more recessed, role in his discussion of ethics and politics as outlined in his 'Politics as a vocation' lecture.³ The chapter problematizes Rengger's insistence on a staunch distinction between theory and practice, and poetics and politics more specifically, arguing that there is a need to recognize the important influence of the poetic, world-disclosive force of the lives of exemplary figures like Weber's *virtuosi* of religion upon politics so as to sustain the sort of politics of limits and the centrality of mercy and charity that Rengger himself so values.

The chapter begins with two sections discussing themes that Rengger shares with Weber – a critique of rationalization and a problematization of the loss of an ethic of brotherliness. In order to unpack the latter theme in Rengger's thought, it explores his discussion of the philosopher Charles Taylor's rendering of Ivan Illich's account of the parable of the Good Samaritan. A subsequent section flags the dilemma that confronts Rengger's desire to situate mercy and charity at the heart of human existence and which arises from his delineation – itself revealed to be embroiled in significant ambiguities – of theory and practice. The chapter then turns, in the following section, to Weber's emphasis on the *virtuosi* of religion, supplemented with insights from Paul Ricoeur, Talal Asad, and Charles Taylor, in order to suggest an alternative understanding of the relation between poetics and politics that might sustain the priority to mercy and charity that Rengger himself desires. This alternative understanding, the chapter notes in closing, might resonate to a certain degree with what the chapter previously highlighted as a weaker reading of Rengger's theory and practice distinction.

³ Max Weber, 'Politics as a vocation', in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds and trans), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

Weber and Rengger: rationalization

The modern anti-Pelagian imagination towards which Rengger motions shares with Weber a criticism of what Weber famously termed the modern disenchantment of the world. The modern disenchantment of the world, according to Weber, arises with:

the knowledge or belief that if one but wished one *could* learn it at any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service.⁴

Modern disenchantment entails the loss of belief in mysterious forces at play in the world. Yet, modern disenchantment is not merely a stripping away of belief, according to Weber; what at heart characterizes disenchantment is a shift in belief, a shift from the belief in mysterious forces to the belief that all problems are in principle solvable by the application of human reason. The process of modern disenchantment is thus better understood as a dual vector of disenchantment and of re-enchantment in the form of rationalization. The disenchantment of the belief in mysterious forces gives way to a re-enchantment in the form of a belief that all problems are in principle solvable. Hans Morgenthau, who draws significantly from Weber, provides an apt articulation of the emergence of this vector of rationalization that marks the modern disenchantment of the world when he states:

The Age of Science has completely lost this awareness of unresolvable discord, contradictions, and conflicts which are inherent in the nature of things and which human reason is powerless to solve. For this age the problems which confront the human mind, and the conflicts which disturb and destroy human existence, belong of necessity to one of two categories: those which are already being solved by reason and those which are going to be solved in a not too distant future.⁵

⁴ Max Weber, 'Science as a vocation', in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds and trans), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 139, emphasis in original.

⁵ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* (London: Latimer House, 1947), p. 175.

Weber rejects the modern faith in the inexhaustible application of human reason. This is the case, for one, because the rationalization of the world has led to the differentiation of distinct spheres of action – economic, political, aesthetic, erotic, and intellectual, for example – each of which are oriented towards ultimate and incommensurable values.⁶ Science is simply incapable of adjudicating between these ultimate values, implying that human calculation cannot ultimately master the modern disenchanted world. The clash of value spheres forces a choice between ultimate values that transcends the capacity of technical rationality. Far from being wholly secularized, the modern disenchanted world is, like the ancient one, a ‘polytheistic’ world.⁷

Second, Weber rejects rationalization because of the dangers to which it gives rise. It ‘dethrone[s] this polytheism in favor of the “one thing that is needful”’.⁸ This attitude is particularly problematic in the political realm, Weber notes, where it quickly transforms into a chiliasm preaching the merits of ‘the use of force for the *last* violent deed’.⁹ Weber here speaks specifically of revolutionary socialism, but the point might be applied more broadly, as Morgenthau does, when he speaks of the liberalism of Woodrow Wilson who argued that: ‘The war for national unification and for “making the world safe for democracy” is then indeed ... the “culminating and final war for human liberty”, the “last war”, the “war to end war”’.¹⁰ The impetus to override the ‘polytheism’ of the differentiated value spheres spurred on by a rationalistic faith in the propensity of human reason for mastery leads not to the end of conflict but breeds it further.

Taking his cue from Michael Oakeshott, Rengger draws attention to this vector in a similar manner and affixes to it the title of rationalism. For the rationalist, states Rengger, the conduct of practical affairs is at heart a matter of solving problems, the mere management of crises through the application of reason. Rationalist politics is perfectionist in that the rationalist understands there to be no political problem to which there is not in principle a rational solution, and which is by extension thus the perfect solution; lacking in this perspective is the notion of a resolution which is merely the best given the circumstances. Rationalist politics is also a politics of uniformity. The rationalist may acknowledge that there is not a universal solution capable of addressing all of the ills of political society. However, on the rationalist

⁶ Max Weber, ‘Religious rejections of the world and their directions’, in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds and trans), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 331–57.

⁷ Weber, ‘Science as a vocation’, pp. 147–8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 148–9.

⁹ Max Weber, ‘Politics as a vocation’, p. 122, emphasis in original.

¹⁰ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man*, p. 51.

perspective, the solution for any particular ill is always and everywhere applicable for all like ills.

According to Rengger, this rationalist politics exhibits several pitfalls. For one, rationalism rests on a priority to technical knowledge, a form of knowledge understood to comprise a set of rules that can be learned and applied in practice. This technical knowledge contrasts with a practical knowledge which is learned only in its use and which thus cannot be explicitly articulated in rules. Rationalism is problematic also because of its presentism. It encourages a particular form of thinking fixated upon solving the crises of the moment, the result of which is the squeezing out of other modes of thinking such as the historical. The ensuing danger, warns Rengger, is that ‘we are likely to become prisoners of the assumptions of the moment, some of which may well have created the problems in the first place’.¹¹ Rationalism thus closes off other ways of understanding that might emerge in the process of approaching the past on its own terms rather than from the perspective of the present’s felt need. Seeking distance from the present is precisely one way of addressing present problems, for it affords the possibility of seeing how others identified and addressed their own problems. Recognition of present problems can arise precisely from the pursuit of other forms of understanding which are not problem-driven.¹²

Rationalism is problematic, moreover, because of its blindness to the realities of the human condition. The problem with rationalism is that it attempts ‘to make human beings something other than what, in fact, they are’.¹³ In this respect, Rengger agrees with Morgenthau’s assertion that the problem with rationalism is that it thinks that the *animus dominandi*, the

¹¹ Nicholas J. Rengger, ‘Political theory and international relations: promised land or exit from Eden?’, *International Affairs* 76, 4 (October 2000), pp. 755–70 (769–70).

¹² Rengger, ‘Political theory and international relations’, pp. 765–70. It should be noted that Rengger’s discussion of rationalism’s weakness does not here exhibit the contours of the stauncher theory/practice distinction characteristic of his later work, discussed later. Rengger does here allude to distinct modes or voices, and he also flags the risk of the ‘Platonic temptation’ that lures the philosopher into thinking they can help in the real world of politics. However, the discussion remains at the level of a warning rather than of a more assertive claim that theory cannot become practice. On this more assertive claim, see Nicholas J. Rengger, ‘Epilogue: tragedy or scepticism?’, in *The Anti-Pelagian Imagination in Political Theory and International Relations: Dealing in Darkness* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2017), p. 167. The issue discussed in the following paragraph is presumably one factor leading to the shift in Rengger’s understanding of the theory/practice distinction, along with a solidification of the lines between voices discussed later. The downplaying of attention to practical knowledge is presumably another. On the latter see Nicholas J. Rengger, ‘Practical judgement: Inconsistent – or incoherent?’, in Mathias Albert and Anthony F. Lang, Jr (eds), *The Politics of International Theory: Reflections on the Work of Chris Brown* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019b), pp. 55–68.

¹³ Rengger, ‘Epilogue’, p. 165.

insatiable lust for power that supersedes even the limits of human selfishness, can be excised and that the conflicts that arise from it can be solved.¹⁴ Otherwise stated, rationalism has always operated with the assumption ‘that there was a shortcut to heaven, and that heaven would and could be built on Earth’.¹⁵ But this, according to Rengger, is only to accentuate the ills faced in the political realm. Quoting a couplet referenced by Oakeshott, Rengger highlights the problems with rationalism: ‘Those who in fields Elysian would dwell / Do but extend the boundaries of Hell’.¹⁶ Indeed, it is this warning about the reduction of politics to problems and the thought that such problems lend themselves to the perfect solution that underpins Rengger’s critique of modern just war theory. Such rationalist reasoning, in Rengger’s view, leads not to a reduction in the use of force as its self-justificatory claim would suggest, but rather leads to a ‘*deepening* of the uncivil condition that international politics already resembles’.¹⁷ Evident in this statement are parallels with Weber’s warning about the last violent deed.

Weber and Rengger: brotherliness

Rengger’s discussion of the modern anti-Pelagian imagination also shares with Weber the sense that, beyond rationalization as a central aspect of the modern disenchantment of the world, there is another key dimension which might be understood as the inverse side of the same coin. This is the concomitant loss of an ethic of brotherliness. Weber traces the decline of an ethic of brotherliness from kinship societies through salvation religions to modern society. Kinship societies, notes Weber, are structured around an ethic of brotherly reciprocity, but this brotherliness is marked by a primacy to natural blood ties and marital ties understood to hold a certain power deserving of respect. There is thus an evident in-group/out-group character to this ethic of brotherliness along kinship lines. Salvation religion shatters kinship ties by devaluing blood and marital ties in favour of ties to fellow members of the religious community; in so doing, it transfers and extends the ethic of brotherliness from familial ties to the religious community. In place of familial ties, the suffering common to all believers serves as the basis for brotherly relations. The significance of this move, for Weber, is that the

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 162–3.

¹⁵ Nicholas Rengger, ‘Bull: a double vision?’, in *The Anti-Pelagian Imagination in Political Theory and International Relations: Dealing in Darkness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 25.

¹⁶ Michael Oakeshott, ‘The Tower of Babel’, in *On History and Other Essays* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 194, as cited in Rengger, ‘Epilogue’, p. 168.

¹⁷ Nicholas J. Rengger, *Just War and International Order: The Uncivil Condition in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013a), p. 162, emphasis in original.

ethic of brotherliness becomes potentially universal: 'its ethical demand has always lain in the direction of a universalist brotherhood, which goes beyond all barriers of societal associations, often including that of one's own faith'.¹⁸ As this ethic of brotherliness is absolutized, the demand for brotherliness extends from neighbour to humanity, and even to one's enemy.¹⁹

The rationalization indicative of the modern disenchantment of the world, however, signifies a loss of such an ethic of brotherliness. The logics of the value spheres subvert any relation of brotherliness. In the economic sphere, the logic of supply and demand determines an object's worth, and the market economy actively discourages intervention so as to prevent any distortion to the logic of supply and demand. As a result, the manner of exchange is divorced from the individual will of participants who, out of a sense of ethical obligation to kinsfolk or to the lesser-off, might adjust prices accordingly. The logic of the market has no space for brotherliness, and the impersonal forces of the market thus turn around to master humanity.²⁰ A similar development occurs in the political sphere, which according to Weber pertains to 'the distribution, maintenance, or transfer of power'.²¹ In so much as the function of the state is ultimately to manage the external and internal distribution of power,²² the political sphere is itself divorced from the concrete instances of personal relations. This is the case either because the striving to share power or to change the distribution of power entails the domination of persons and thus the reduction of persons to things, or because bureaucratic management follows rational rules of the maintenance of order rather than following any regard for the person.²³ In both the case of the modern rationalized economy and the rationalized state apparatus, what is lost with the depersonalization of modes of conduct is brotherly engagement, that is, the loss of love or *caritas*.²⁴

It is a similar sense of the loss of an ethic of brotherliness that also troubles Rengger about the modern disenchantment of the world. Indeed, on several occasions, Rengger refers to Oakeshott's statement that 'no rationalistic justice (with its project of approximating people to things) and no possible degree of human prosperity can ever remove mercy and charity from their

¹⁸ Weber, 'Religious rejections', p. 330.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 329–30.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 331–3. See also Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Vols. 1–2, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), p. 636.

²¹ Weber, 'Politics as a vocation', p. 78.

²² Weber, 'Religious rejections', p. 334.

²³ Weber, 'Politics as a vocation', p. 78; 'Religious rejections', pp. 333–4; *Economy and Society*, p. 975.

²⁴ Weber, 'Religious rejections', p. 334; *Economy and Society*, p. 1188.

place of first importance in the relations of human being'.²⁵ However much Rengger never really dwells on the point, he here provides a glimpse of the importance of relations of brotherliness to his thought and the direct link that he, like Weber, sees between rationalist politics and the loss of an ethic of brotherliness. In fact, it is the sense of brotherliness exemplified in the virtues of mercy and charity that sits at the heart of his anti-Pelagian sensibility. That the virtues of mercy and charity are the very reason for such an anti-Pelagian imagination is evident in Rengger's statement near the end of *Just War and International Order* about the need for:

an Augustinian recognition of the limits of our knowledge and a humility towards our capacity to alter the conditions of our existence – an 'anti-Pelagian' recognition if you will – and [a humility] that accommodates us to the continuing importance of charity and mercy and the possibilities that exist for us to make spaces for these and related virtues in our world.²⁶

To contest rationalistic politics is, for Rengger as for Weber, to attempt to redress a loss of the brotherliness of direct relations.

Rengger's review of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* provides a further picture of the place of this sense of an ethic of brotherliness in Rengger's thought. It is striking that of the 'over 874 pages of hugely erudite and often quite stunning virtuoso argumentation' that comprise the book, Rengger chooses to comment only on Taylor's engagement with Ivan Illich's reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan. What intrigues Rengger about Taylor's account of Illich's reading is the manner in which it brings to light 'the astonishingly radical claims' which have been hidden by the very familiarity of the parable.²⁷ The parable is given in response to the question 'Who is my neighbour?'. According to the parable, a traveller is robbed, beaten, and left to die. Both a priest and a Levite, who are important figures in that Jewish society, pass by the dying man. But, a Samaritan, a reviled outsider, stops, binds the dying man's wounds, and

²⁵ Michael Oakeshott, 'Scientific politics', in *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, edited by Timothy Fuller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 108, as cited in Nicholas J. Rengger, 'Tragedy or scepticism? Defending the anti-Pelagian mind in world politics', *International Relations* 19, 3 (2005a), pp. 321–8 (326). See also Rengger, 'Epilogue', p. 163; Ian Hall and Nicholas Rengger, 'The Right that failed? The ambiguities of conservative thought and the dilemmas of conservative practice in international affairs', *International Affairs* 81, 1 (January 2005), pp. 69–82 (81).

²⁶ Rengger, *Just War*, p. 175.

²⁷ Nicholas J. Rengger, 'On theology and international relations: world politics beyond the empty sky', *International Relations* 27, 2 (2013b), pp. 141–57 (145).

brings him to an inn to recover. Taylor, Rengger notes, highlights the typical, modern reading of the parable according to which the answer to the question ‘Who is my neighbour?’ is understood to be not those who belong to one’s specific group or nation but rather any human being. All human beings are to be, without discrimination, the recipients of one’s assistance. This reading conveys a lesson in a specific direction. It fixates on a movement out of the parochial, out of the particularity of belonging, and it translates that movement to a universal register of moral rules which dictate how one should behave. On this reading, the parable represents one of the sources from which springs the universalist moral consciousness of modernity.

Taylor notes that for Illich, however, such a reading entirely misses the heart of the parable. The point of the parable is not to convey a new set of moral rules that are universally applicable, but rather to disclose a new way of being. It is indeed the case that the parable depicts a Samaritan who shatters the regnant notions of belonging, of insider and outsider. But, he does not do so out of any sense of moral duty; rather, he does so out of a sense of being called by the dying man himself. In this sense, the parable does not motion towards universality, whatsoever, if universality is understood as a sort of categorical grouping classifiable according to its sharing a common property such as being members of a specific nation-state or being bearers of rights. Rather, the parable initiates a new network of *agape* – the love of God for humanity – that extends outwards and links ‘particular, enfleshed people to each other’.²⁸ This sort of network resembles kinship networks in that it consists of brotherly relations rather than a shared category. Yet, it also splits from kinship networks in that this new network is not bound by an existing ‘we’; it creates links across the insider/outsider distinction in favour of a mutual togetherness based not on kinship ties but on *agape*. Rengger summarizes this reading by stating that: ‘One might put it like this: the point of Illich’s argument is to emphasise the *particularity* of the Samaritan – the point of the general [modern] way of reading it is to emphasise his *universality*’.²⁹

Now, the problem for Illich and Taylor, and indeed for Rengger, is that, in the very desire to sustain the spirit of this network, an effort is undertaken to institutionalize the personal relations by the introduction of rules and the division of responsibilities. This normalization of the network gives rise in turn to modern bureaucracies and their rationality and rules that pertain to impersonal categories of people. It thus initiates

²⁸ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 739, as cited in Rengger, ‘On theology’, p. 146.

²⁹ Rengger, ‘On theology’, p. 146, emphasis in original.

a ‘fetishism of rules and norms’. More troubling, implies Rengger in quoting Taylor, is that:

A world ordered by this system of rules, disciplines, organizations can only see contingency as an obstacle, even an enemy and a threat. The ideal is to master it, to extend the web of control so that contingency is reduced to a minimum. What role, for example, does (or could) contingency play in contemporary analytical international ethics, for example. By contrast contingency is an *essential* feature of the [Samaritan] story as an answer to the question that prompted it. Who is my neighbour? The one you happen across, stumble across, who is wounded there in the road.³⁰

The subsequent danger of this banishment of contingency, notes Rengger, again drawing from Taylor, is that codes are not innocent. Codes establish themselves as a response to deep metaphysical needs, and indeed codes are not altogether eliminable. But, they quickly become fetishized, and they can even feed into a sense of moral superiority and also serve as the basis from which to characterize other groups as evil and inhuman. This sensed superiority justifies battles against ‘axes of evil and networks of terror’ until suddenly ‘we discover to our surprise and horror that we are reproducing the evil we defined ourselves against’.³¹

In his brief review, Rengger suggests that Taylor’s characterization of Illich on the Good Samaritan raises two points of relevance for international relations. For one, he suggests that it raises questions about dominant approaches to international ethics with their focus on global distributive justice and the related institutionalization of distributive structures. Rules are not avoidable, he notes, but it is important to think about rules within the context of the critique of norm fetishism that Taylor and Illich bring to light. Second, he notes that Taylor’s allusion to the war on terror as the end result of rationalization and indicative of the loss of an ethic of brotherliness ‘is too direct to need much commentary’.³² In both instances one can see the centrality of mercy and charity to Rengger’s thought. A rush towards institutionalizing mechanisms of distributive justice can lead to a loss of brotherliness in that it depersonalizes relations between enfolded individuals. The loss of a certain humility regarding the limits to knowledge and capacity likewise banishes mercy and charity in the push to impose universal norms and codes on unwitting and different populations.

³⁰ Taylor, *Secular Age*, p. 742, as cited in Rengger, ‘On theology’, p. 146, emphasis in original.

³¹ Taylor, *Secular Age*, p. 743, as cited in Rengger ‘On theology’, p. 147.

³² Rengger, ‘On theology’, p. 147.

Rengger: theory and practice

Now, Taylor concludes his discussion of Illich with a point that Rengger does not mention. On the question of how to resist the perils of code fetishism, Taylor states: ‘We should find the centre of our spiritual lives beyond the code, deeper than the code, in networks of living concern, which are not to be sacrificed to the code, which must even from time to time subvert it.’³³ Rengger would here presumably agree, albeit with the caveat that, as Rengger notes and Taylor himself acknowledges: ‘This message comes out of a certain theology, [but] it could be heard with profit by everybody.’³⁴

To root lives in networks of living concern beyond the code means certainly, for Rengger, to give primacy of place to an ethic of brotherliness, to the virtues of mercy and charity, and to create spaces in which those virtues can be practised. But, it means also, and more fundamentally, to adopt a sensibility that would be distinct from Taylor as well as from Weber. As Rengger states:

Oakeshott’s injunction to remember charity and mercy is his oblique way of saying that the best ways of dealing with the dissonances of the world depend upon us accepting human life and its vicissitudes as it is and they are, neither trying to wish them out of existence, as Pelagians do, nor overly romanticise them, as some other anti-Pelagians do by talking of the ‘tragic’ character of existence.³⁵

To prioritize mercy and charity is to operate from a certain scepticism which accepts human beings and human action as ‘simply what they are’, without attempting to rid existence of its imperfections and without lamenting those imperfections as tragic.³⁶ It is to adopt the habitude of what Oakeshott calls the ‘religious man’. The ‘religious man’, on this view, lives the present as though it were eternity. In contrast to the ‘worldly man’ who fixates on the perceived immortality of some distant future, the religious man lives for the moment free ‘from all embarrassment alike of regret for the past and calculation on the future’.³⁷ This articulation of the habitude of the ‘religious man’ shares much with the description that Oakeshott gives to poetry; for, as poetic activity delights in that which has appeared, so too

³³ Taylor, *Secular Age*, p. 743.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 743, as cited in Rengger, ‘On theology’, p. 147.

³⁵ Rengger, ‘Tragedy or scepticism?’, p. 327.

³⁶ Rengger, ‘Epilogue’, p. 164.

³⁷ Michael Oakeshott, ‘Religion and the world’, in *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, edited by Timothy Fuller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 37, as cited in Rengger, ‘Epilogue’, p. 165.

does the ‘religious man’ delight in the world as it is. The two blend into each other when Oakeshott states that: ‘To listen to the voice of poetry is to enjoy, not a victory, but a momentary release, a brief enchantment.’³⁸ At the interpersonal level this ‘religious man’ is one who delights in the exchange of conversation with fellow convives without the felt need to end somewhere or accomplish something.³⁹ There is thus a direct link between this scepticism and an ethic of brotherliness of direct, personal relations and the wariness of rules and codes which can hinder the flourishing of such interpersonal exchange.

From the standpoint of Rengger’s sensibility, however, there is a major issue confronting this endeavour to root lives within networks of living concern deeper than moral rules and code fetishism, that is, in Rengger’s terms, deeper than rationalism. For the alternative sensibility to which Rengger motions is one that is poetic; and, on his own insistence it cannot pass over into practice. The world of the poetic and the world of practice cannot be elided.⁴⁰ In this respect the poetic is one voice among others – including also, importantly, history and philosophy – that falls under the umbrella of theory.⁴¹ And theory, Rengger adamantly asserts, cannot ‘become “practice”’; to become, of itself, an engagement in the world or give rise to such an engagement’.⁴²

Rengger is unfortunately rather elusive on his reasoning for why it is the case that theory cannot cross over into practice, and poetics into politics more specifically, providing only sporadic inferences as to the specific dimensions of Oakeshott’s philosophy upon which he bases the claim. One presumably key reason is the central tenet of Oakeshott’s philosophy that human experience is marked by a number of distinct modes which simply cannot be run together. Thus, Rengger insists that the voice of science, unlike history and philosophy, is inappropriate to an understanding of the realm of politics.⁴³ Likewise, he claims that the:

point of political theory is to consider a whole gamut of possible ways of understanding and interpreting the world in which we live,

³⁸ Michael Oakeshott, ‘The voice of poetry in the conversation of mankind’, in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Methuen & Co, 1962), p. 247; see also Nicholas J. Rengger, ‘The boundaries of conversation: a response to Dallmayr’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30, 2 (2001a), pp. 357–64 (363).

³⁹ Rengger, *Just War*, p. 174.

⁴⁰ Rengger, ‘Epilogue’, p. 165.

⁴¹ Rengger, ‘Boundaries of conversation’, pp. 362–3; ‘Political theory and international relations’, p. 770.

⁴² Rengger, ‘Epilogue’, p. 167, emphasis in original.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 164–5, 167.

its history, the values (many and diverse) which constitute it and the possibilities of conflict and co-operation within it and how we should understand and interpret them.⁴⁴

The historical voice is, for Rengger, crucial amid the effort to explore the diversity of ways of understanding the world and its history. Yet, what distinguishes the historical voice – the exploration of thinkers and traditions from previous eras – is its distancing from the problems and mindsets of the contemporary world so as to better understand how those in a different age both framed and responded to their own problems. To adopt the historical voice, asserts Rengger:

is most emphatically not to be ‘problem-driven’ or ‘problem-solving’ in our approach, because it is to understand that very often we recognize our ‘problems’ as such only on our way to other kinds of understanding, and it is the pursuit of such understanding that is the appropriate disposition of political theory.⁴⁵

The philosophical voice, marked by its pursuit of a matter internal to the endeavour, in the task of theory is ‘to follow the argument wherever it goes and to be as honest as one can be about one’s assumptions, presuppositions and conclusions’.⁴⁶ Both at the level of history and at the level of philosophy, then, there is a distinct mode of experience and a distinct voice that separates the process of theoretical reflection from the world of practice.

Rengger provides even less indication as to why the poetic voice specifically might be understood to be modally distinct from the world of practice.⁴⁷ Perhaps it is the case because, as Oakeshott specifies in his essay ‘The voice of poetry’, the realm of poetry pertains to delight whereas the realm of practice pertains to the desire for pleasure through manipulation and exploitation;⁴⁸ in this respect poetry becoming practice would cease to be poetry because desire so construed is fundamentally at odds with delight. And yet, this supposition is complicated by Oakeshott’s own admission that friendship and love, while still pertaining to the realm of practice rather than the realm of poetry, are ‘ambiguously practical’ because they are, like delight, concerned with

⁴⁴ Nicholas Rengger, ‘Progress: Kant, Mendelssohn and the very idea’, in *The Anti-Pelagian Imagination in Political Theory and International Relations: Dealing in Darkness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 16.

⁴⁵ Rengger, ‘Political theory and international relations’, p. 770.

⁴⁶ Rengger, ‘Kant, Mendelssohn’, p. 16.

⁴⁷ Rengger, ‘Epilogue’, p. 165.

⁴⁸ Oakeshott, ‘Voice of poetry’, pp. 207, 217.

‘whatever it turns out to be’.⁴⁹ It is complicated also because of Oakeshott’s admission that: ‘Having an ear for the voice of poetry is to be disposed to choose delight rather than pleasure or virtue or knowledge, a disposition which will reflect itself in practical life in an affection for its intimations of poetry.’⁵⁰ Such a statement seems then to infer a certain crossover between the worlds of the poetic and of practice.

Given this closer relation between the world of the poetic and the world of practice, presumably another key reason for Rengger’s insistence that theory cannot become practice, one separate from the modal distinction point, flows from his agreement with Oakeshott that human beings and human actions are simply what they are.⁵¹ Rengger quotes Oakeshott’s response to Hans Morgenthau that highlights this perspective on human existence: ‘the situation [Morgenthau] describes – the imperfectability of man – is not tragic, nor even a predicament, unless and until it is contrasted with a human nature susceptible to a perfection which is, in fact, foreign to its character’.⁵² The problem with Morgenthau, according to Oakeshott and Rengger, is that he romanticizes the human condition because his very way of depicting the situation takes on the hues of tragedy by resting upon a notion of the perfectibility of human nature. Counter to the optimism of liberal progressivism, Morgenthau diagnoses the imperfectability of human nature; he contests the Kantian notion of a transformation of the will. And yet, Morgenthau’s reason for lament at this situation arises only because he still compares it with its opposite – human perfectibility. Now, whereas earlier the distinction between theory and practice pertained to the distinction between voices – the historical, the philosophical, the poetic, and all collectively contrasted, as theory, with the practical as itself a voice – here the distinction seems to contrast the real world (of practice), which in this case is not a voice, and understandings of the world (the world of theory). Both the rationalistic reformer and the tragic vision of a Morgenthau problematically operate within the logic of a world according to which understandings of the world – the perfectibility of humanity – are the measure of the world’s true character.

Yet, to render Morgenthau’s perspective as a problematically romantic aestheticization of the world sits seemingly uneasily with Oakeshott’s idealism from which Rengger draws, according to which it is not possible to access the world as it really is shorn of the understandings that make it up.⁵³ For, it would seem that, according to this rendering

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

⁵¹ Rengger, ‘Epilogue’, p. 164.

⁵² Oakeshott, ‘Scientific politics’, p. 108, as cited in Rengger, ‘Epilogue’, p. 163.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

of Morgenthau, the diagnosis of the human condition can be made in the first instance – human beings simply are what they are – and only secondarily superimposed with a normative stance of response – a certain ‘bohemian nihilism’.⁵⁴ Rengger seems to imply as much when he speaks of how the world from the perspective of an anti-Pelagian imagination will look different, not because many of its features will be distinct, but ‘because the logic of how they are understood and what follows from that understanding will be very different ... the sceptical anti-Pelagian imagination offers a world viewed from the perspective of a different scale of values’.⁵⁵ Rengger here implies the existence of an underlying reality replete with its inherent features, the response to which hinges upon the logic of the sensibility adopted. It seems all the more apparent in Rengger’s acknowledgement that Oakeshott does think that theory, whether in its historical, philosophical, or poetic voices, can serve to fend off the ‘corruption of our consciousnesses’, by which Oakeshott means that they can better reveal the nature of the world and help in resisting being rhetorically seduced by ‘ambiguous statements and irrelevant argument’ that would falsely portray the world in a different way.⁵⁶ And yet, however much these voices might afford a better view of the world, Rengger still insists that they cannot become practice. This is the case not only because of the modal distinction – to clarify a view of the world is not to approach the world as to be manipulated – but also because they cannot ‘help build a better world’ both because the world is intractable and because the intractability of the world pushes attempts to master it into measures that are folly and often worse than the problem.⁵⁷

In light of the ambiguities in Rengger’s discussion of the distinction between theory and practice, poetics and politics, one manner by which to read his position might be a weaker one, namely that poetry, as world-disclosive, cleaves more to traditional knowledge attained only in use and thus cannot be formulated into an explicit set of rules.⁵⁸ Accordingly, poetry cannot become a direct engagement in the world in the sense of providing a roadmap forward; it can provide at best a sort of inchoate ‘know-how’ or orientation in the world. This would seem to align more closely with Rengger’s emphasis on the need to sustain the content of an ethic and the need for adverbial rather than substantive procedures to guide political

⁵⁴ Rengger once employed the term ‘bohemian nihilism’, in conversation with the author, to characterize his sensibility. Disparate statements in his written work also suggest such a label. See Rengger, *Just War*, p. 30; ‘Epilogue’, p. 168.

⁵⁵ Rengger, ‘Epilogue’, p. 168.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 167; ‘Boundaries of conversation’, p. 362.

⁵⁷ Rengger, ‘Epilogue’, pp. 167–8; ‘On theology’, pp. 146–7.

⁵⁸ Rengger, ‘Political theory and international relations’, p. 766.

conduct, that is, procedures that guide the manner of conduct rather than the destination of that conduct.⁵⁹ It would also fit better with Rengger's insistence that we should indeed celebrate the *persona* of the 'religious man' and that it is this sort of *persona* to which we should aspire if we do not wish our politics to decline into an uncivil condition,⁶⁰ this because the aspiration after a *persona* implies the poetically-inspired entraining of a *habitus*.⁶¹ Indeed this weaker reading would seem to capture better the inclination of Rengger's earlier work where he emphasizes the importance of practical judgement and also a threefold understanding of political theory,⁶² an understanding that includes not only the historical exploration of how it is that a society has arrived at where it is, but also the important task of asking 'what we should seek to build – what associations, what institutions, what identities – to live our lives better, to minimize our failures and our fears, and increase our chances of, as Socrates would have put it, living *well*'.⁶³ It is this task that Rengger more closely links with practice, stated explicitly and in rather distinct contrast to his later work: 'There are, of course, many ways of theorizing, but it seems to me that one of the central assumptions we should make is that the type of "theory" we need the most is in fact one which is rooted in practice.'⁶⁴ Indeed, here exhibited is a closer alignment with the neo-Aristotelianism of Stephen Toulmin from whom Rengger takes a greater distance in one of his last publications, a piece in which he explicitly returns to the theme of practical judgement that marked some of his early work, but now in a manner much more closely aligned with an Oakeshottian insistence on the distinction between theory and practice.⁶⁵ However much one might draw out a weaker reading of Rengger's sensibility, therefore, it is overshadowed, certainly in his later writings, by his insistence on a staunch separation between theory and practice, poetics and politics. Moreover, this weaker reading is one that, while he may leave it open even in his later work in so much as he still holds to the possibility of fleeting reform, however rare,⁶⁶ he spends little time defending or elaborating. A certain way out of the impasse

⁵⁹ Rengger, *Just War*, pp. 170–1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁶¹ The emphasis on habit in Rengger's first book represents another instance of a weaker reading of his stance. See Nicholas J. Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995a).

⁶² Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity; International Relations, Political Theory and the Problem of Order*.

⁶³ Rengger, *International Relations, Political Theory and the Problem of Order*, p. 201, emphasis in original.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁶⁵ Rengger, 'Practical judgement'.

⁶⁶ Rengger, 'Epilogue', p. 168.

Rengger's ambiguity presents to any attempt to root lives in networks of living concern thus meets its limits.

Weber supplemented: an alternative

A turn back to Weber can locate a point from which to start thinking about a more nuanced notion of the relation between theory and practice, poetics and politics, and one which makes possible the rooting of lives in networks of living concern framed by an ethic of brotherliness. Weber's outlook is undoubtedly one marked by tragedy, if not outright despair. While one might wish to demur from the tragic and despairing tone, what is still important in Weber's sensibility is the evident desire or longing for the ethic of brotherliness which he recognizes to be vanishing with the onslaught of rationalization. This sense of desire is not the desire of which Oakeshott speaks when he characterizes the practical realm as the pursuit of pleasure through manipulation and exploitation. This is a desire and longing more akin to the poetic delight of which Oakeshott speaks, a delight in the joys of living well together. That this is a desire for living well together is evident in the examples of brotherliness that Weber holds up. He refers, for example, to St Francis of Assisi as a *virtuoso* of religion who takes on the mendicant life not in order to use others as a means towards sustaining his own needs and pleasures, but rather so as to live in brotherly relations with fellow human beings and also with the physical world, this by welcoming their receptive generosity as a transformative gift. Such *virtuosi* like Assisi succeed in living a life that is 'not of this world' while still working very much in the world, and this without succumbing, Weber notes, to the political means of violence.⁶⁷ It is also evident in the fact that Weber commends those unfit for the pursuit of politics to instead take up brotherliness in personal relations as a more admirable response than succumbing to bitterness or capitulating to regnant powers.⁶⁸ It is evident too when he speaks of being moved by youth groups motivated towards genuine acts of brotherliness.⁶⁹ In all these cases, Weber's desire and longing is for the delight of living well together with others in relations of brotherliness not governed by the impersonalization of power.

Now, however much Weber evinces a desire for this brotherliness, he equally insists that politics is not the realm in which it is to be practised. It is in this respect that he insists that an ethic of ultimate ends, and in particular that of brotherly love, is at odds with an ethic of responsibility. The responsible politician must act without appeal to any such final grounds proffered by

⁶⁷ Weber, 'Politics as a vocation', p. 126; 'Religious rejections', p. 332.

⁶⁸ Weber, 'Politics as a vocation', p. 128.

⁶⁹ Weber, 'Science as a vocation', p. 155.

the ethic of ultimate ends. Yet, Weber does still reconcile the two such that an ethic of ultimate ends is not altogether absent. The politician who truly lives out the vocation of politics, for Weber, is the heroic individual who, in the face of the meaninglessness of the world, nevertheless acts according to ethical limits. The true politician, for Weber, is precisely a Nietzschean hero who creates value through pure force of the will, but not in such a manner that would represent an unhinged will to power that flagrantly runs roughshod over all those in its wake. The true politician in a disenchanted world is that individual who in creating values precisely creates limits. In this respect, sense can be made of Weber's insistence that an ethic of responsibility does not preclude an ethic of ultimate ends; indeed, he insists that it is the heroic individual who holds the two together, albeit always in tension, in the appropriate manner. The politician who declares: 'Here I stand' makes a statement of ethical justification – of value creation – as to why they refuse both to equate a perspectival notion of ultimate ends with the character of reality and to impose that notion upon those under their authority at all costs. This claim is not a claim to absolute principle, but a claim to the refusal of insisting upon absolute principle; it is a self-justificatory claim for not insisting on following the course of the absolute, irrespective of the consequences.

David Owen and Tracy Strong's attention to Weber's notion of maturity is helpful in understanding how Weber sees the possibility of a certain rapprochement between an ethic of conviction and an ethic of responsibility.⁷⁰ The mature human being for Weber, they suggest, is one who, in the face of the inevitable tension between one's values and the context of one's life, acts in a manner whereby one takes 'both the conditions and terms of one's own life and values upon oneself and make[s] them one's own'.⁷¹ Maturity is therefore to reject as a crutch the conviction that one's stance holds transcendental warrant which can thus enable a refusal to face up to the realities of one's context and the consequences that will result from one's actions. To take one's position in the world upon oneself as does the mature human being is, for Weber, according to Owen and Strong, an act 'that is taken in a kind of void'.⁷² There is no guarantee that the position is the appropriate one – it is legitimated only by the impressiveness of the freely chosen commitment of the one who takes the stand⁷³ – and yet one takes responsibility for assuming it. This sense of maturity, state Owen and Strong, finds its roots in Kant's discussion of Enlightenment as the casting

⁷⁰ David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, 'Introduction', in David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (eds) and Rodney Livingstone (trans), Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), pp. xl–xlv.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. xlii.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. xlv.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. xiii, xlv.

off of the tutelage of tradition,⁷⁴ but it represents a radicalization of this line of critical inquiry in a Nietzschean vein in so much as it refuses even the security of the transcendental structures of reason as a source of meaning.⁷⁵

The Nietzschean voluntarism inherent in Weber's sense of the mature politician is undoubtedly central to his emphasis on an ethics of responsibility, but Owen and Strong's rendering of this stance as in a void misses important nuances to Weber's standpoint. Owen and Strong note that a vocation for Weber is both active and passive. It is passive, they note, in so much as one gives oneself to that which calls. Yet, Owen and Strong accentuate the moment of decision which, importantly for maturity, makes of the call one's own. Moreover, they suggest that this decision in favour of acknowledging the call is undertaken 'without reference to any grounding or act other than the freely chosen commitment of individuals to their own particular fates'.⁷⁶ Any link between a call and the response to it, therefore, lies wholly upon the side of the active, mature individual who makes the call their own. But, this rendering fails to adequately foreground the dimension of feeling, of being moved, that even Owen and Strong at moments recognize in Weber's thought. That which groundlessly legitimates the mature politician, they suggest, is nothing more than the very impressiveness of their actions which represent a manifestation of what is authentically human. The operative place of impressiveness would imply, therefore, that there is a dimension of desire at play which, in turn, both suggests that the dimension of passivity is more extensive and that it calls into question the notion of decision undertaken in a void. In Weber's radicalized Kantianism, a movement of desire oriented by the dignity and nobility of the mature *persona* motivates the bringing together of an ethic of conviction and ethic of responsibility in an appropriate and authentic way, just as for Kant, as Taylor notes, the dignity and nobility of rational agency commands respect and moves him.⁷⁷

Beyond the moment of passivity and desire in Owen and Strong's own rendering of Weber on maturity, moreover, Owen and Strong miss altogether the language of being moved that Weber employs also with respect to those who take up an ethic of brotherliness in the realm of personal relations. Indeed, Weber himself does not fully acknowledge the implications of his admiration for the *virtuosi* of religion when he discusses the reconciliation of the ethic of ultimate ends with the ethic of responsibility. Weber misses how the very inclination to an ethic of limits is mediated by the worlds of

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. xliin n68.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. xiv–xix.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. xiii.

⁷⁷ Charles Taylor, 'Iris Murdoch and moral philosophy', in *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 11.

brotherliness poetically disclosed by exemplary figures like the *virtuosi* of religion who capture his imagination, spur his desire, and thus motivate his action for a politics of limits. As Paul Ricoeur notes, striking about Weber's discussion of politics as a vocation is the great respect that he holds for the ethic of brotherliness and which he locates in various individuals and traditions.⁷⁸ It is precisely because of the very absolute ethic that Weber reads in the Sermon on the Mount, for example, that Weber sees a dilemma calling for responsible judgement.⁷⁹ The inspiration of this absolute ethic in its gesture towards alternative relations of brotherliness spurs one to take upon oneself the responsibility for one's actions, and in so doing to guard also against the danger inherent in the responsible use of force which is the slide into a ruthless *machtpolitik*.⁸⁰ Hence the ethic of responsibility is not a mere exertion of will, but rather the practical judgement of a will motivated by desire for the ethic of brotherliness perceived in poetically disclosed worlds that capture its imagination.

The nobility of the maturity of the responsible politician highlighted by Owen and Strong presupposes the dignity of the *persona* who exemplifies an ethic of brotherliness in personal relations. The choice of Weber's mature politician is mediated historically and religiously by way of the lives of exemplary figures like the *virtuosi* of religion. One might go even further, as does Talal Asad, to suggest that this mediation occurs not simply via the worlds poetically disclosed by such figures, but also, and perhaps more importantly, by way of a *habitus* constituted through embodied traditions shaped by the exemplary figures that have gone before. The 'Here I Stand' is not an expression of will that creates value in the face of a void where all choices lie on the table; rather, it is the expression of the feeling that one has no other choice given the sort of person that one is.⁸¹ Authenticity is here not a cultivation of an 'aesthetics of the self', but the outgrowth of a learned

⁷⁸ Paul Ricoeur, 'Éthique et politique', in *Lectures 1, Autour du politique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), p. 238. For an insightful account of Ricoeur's reading of Weber, one which has helped in the crystallization of thoughts drawing from Ricoeur in this paragraph, see Ernst Wolff, *Political Responsibility for a Globalised World: After Levinas' Humanism* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript, 2011), pp. 228–33.

⁷⁹ It would be important not to understand this absolute ethic in the form of command. For, it arises precisely in the form of a world poetically disclosed that speaks to the imagination and constitutes desire. A poetically disclosed world calls for interpretive judgement rather than blind obedience.

⁸⁰ Paul Ricoeur, 'The tasks of the political educator', in David Stewart and Joseph Bien (eds), *Political and Social Essays* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1974), p. 288.

⁸¹ Talal Asad, 'Free speech, blasphemy, and secular criticism', in Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood, *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech*, The Townsend Papers in the Humanities, No. 2 (Berkeley, CA: Townsend Center for the Humanities, University of California, 2009), pp. 20–63 (45–6, 62n42).

body that has cultivated appropriate capacities and aptitudes such that it acts within a world the contours of which are already marked by a certain ethical shape.⁸² While a desire-driven *habitus* of this sort complicates any sense of autonomous self-fashioning, it also does not represent a blind obedience. For, aptly performed action ‘requires not only *repeating* past models but also *originality* in applying them in appropriate/new circumstances’.⁸³ On this view, then, the ‘Here I Stand’ is not the distancing from desire that Owen and Strong claim,⁸⁴ but rather the result of a historically- and religiously mediated cultivation of certain desires – in Weber’s case, the desire constituted by an exemplary ethic of brotherliness – over others – the desire spurring pursuit of a *machtpolitik*.

The merit of this Ricoeurian and Asadian addendum to Weber is that it shows how Weber’s language of being moved by the *virtuosi* of religion, however much overshadowed by his insistence upon an ethic of responsibility as expression of will, highlights the manner by which the poetic enters the practical, political realm. The lives of exemplary figures poetically render worlds that speak to the imagination and constitute desire, and by so doing entrain a habitude, an *ethos*, that predisposes action in particular directions. As Taylor notes, not only do the lives of exemplary figures fine-tune a sense of what it means to live well, they also move others.⁸⁵ In moving others, their poetic rendering entails a sort of half-step to becoming practice, for it steers action down certain avenues.

Rengger revisited

Rengger’s account, however admirable his emphasis on mercy and charity, unfortunately lacks such a link between poetics and politics, between theory and practice, evident in this supplementation to Weber. As such, Rengger’s account risks providing no indication of how the limited reform that he insists is possible might be brought about, that is, how lives might be rooted in networks of living concern. A weak reading of Rengger’s insistence on the distinction between theory and practice might be just such a place that could benefit from this account of the worlds poetically disclosed by the actions of exemplary figures like those *virtuosi* of religion whom Weber mentions. This weak reading would need to be tilted towards Rengger’s emphasis in

⁸² Talal Asad, *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), pp. 74–5.

⁸³ Talal Asad, ‘Thinking about religion, belief, and politics’, in Robert A. Orsi (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 36–57 (42), emphasis in original.

⁸⁴ Owen and Strong, ‘Introduction’, p. xlv.

⁸⁵ Taylor, ‘Iris Murdoch’, p. 12.

his early work on a political theory driven by the question of what would need to be built in order to increase the chances of living well. So too would it need to pursue Rengger's indication that if one were actually to speak of the carry-over of theory into practice, then one would need 'to consider the things on which at least the political world of practice most obviously relies – rhetoric, motivation and how to change it, the psychology and ethics of conversion',⁸⁶ and in particular to consider how any argument would need to take the form of an imaginative exercise outlining an alternative vision that shows why one should see the world in a distinct light.⁸⁷ It would also need to consider Rengger's statement that:

We might finally agree with [Stephen R.L.] Clark and Plato that it is the job of 'poets' – a group that includes philosophers and perhaps even political scientists – to give voices to the wind. In doing so, perhaps Political Science and International Relations – and even elements of politics and international relations – might be changed out of all recognition.⁸⁸

For it is in such an assertion that Rengger seems to grasp Taylor's point about the poetic force of the *virtuosi* of religion, namely that they can raise others to a vertically higher plane from where a particular dilemma might be seen differently such that new possibilities might be entertained.⁸⁹ Such poetic force makes reform, however fleeting, possible because it lessens the intractability of a world in which people are purportedly simply what they are. It certainly does not furnish any code or blueprint, which both Taylor and Rengger, in any case, see as papering over both moral dilemmas and the issue of moral motivation while also eviscerating charity.⁹⁰ But, it does imply that, by constituting the capacity for practical judgement, the poetic can instill a recognition of the value of mercy and charity and effect a half-step towards creating the space within which such virtues might be exercised.

⁸⁶ Rengger, 'Kant, Mendelssohn', pp. 16–17.

⁸⁷ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity*, pp. 169–70; 'Politics and international relations', in Mervyn Davies, Oliver D. Crisp, Gavin D'Costa, and Peter Hampson (eds), *Christianity and the Disciplines: The Transformation of the Disciplines*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2012b), pp. 167–82; 'Post-secularism: metaphysical not political?', in *The Anti-Pelagian Imagination in Political Theory and International Relations: Dealing in Darkness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 152.

⁸⁸ Rengger, 'Politics and international relations', p. 180.

⁸⁹ Charles Taylor, 'Perils of moralism', in *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 349–50.

⁹⁰ Taylor, 'Perils moralism', p. 365.