

Time (Dis)Closure. Learning From Christian Eschatology

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Topic

The primary aim of the project is the critical reconstruction of some aspects of the thought of the German theologian Franz C. Overbeck (1837-1905), hardly known and “neglected” by scholars so far. With a historical-philosophical approach, that mainly consists of historical-theoretical observations based on Overbeck’s (“aphoristic”) considerations, the purpose is to provide some hints for the implementation of the “theory of resonance”, which hopefully will benefit from Overbeck’s eschatological perspective.

Research Question

Is it possible to establish a comparison between *a.* the existence of contemporary man characterised by the continuous perception of lack of time, a condition that often leads to the persistence of discomfort or even

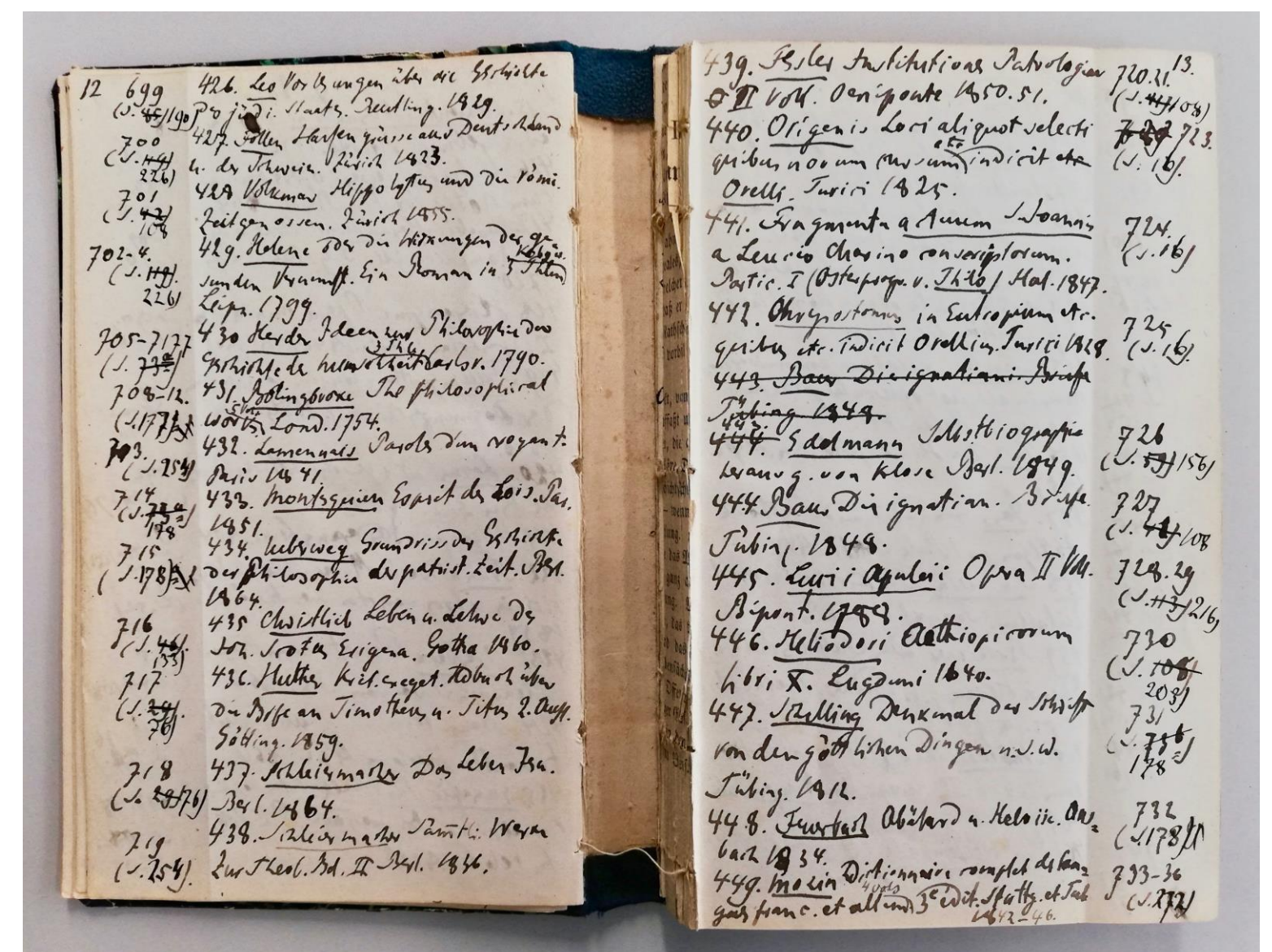
to diseases for which it is particularly complex to devise effective treatments; and *b.* the situation of the first Christians, who faced “the time that remains” (*Epistle to the Romans*) oscillating between fear (stress?), hope, endeavour to do good and live according to the “Buona Novella” and – why not? – an understandable desire for personal fulfilment to be achieved as soon as possible (since they were convinced of an imminent return of a judging Christ)?



Primary sources

Kirchenlexicon

- An extensive collection of reflections (for a never written profane history of the church) that Overbeck composed from 1856 until his death (most of the entries were compiled after his retirement in 1897).
- Consists of more than 20.000 sheets in (today’s) *octavo* (to which one could add another 15.000, that at the beginning were probably part of the *Kirchenlexicon*, now catalogued as “exegetical and patristic collections”). These 20.000 sheets would amount, with an approximate estimation, to about 30.000 pages of a today’s “common book”. 260 of the more than 4.700 entries they contain (about 5%) were published in 1995 in vols. 4 and 5 of Overbeck’s *Werke und Nachlaß* (1994-2010).
- A small compendium (*Christentum und Kultur*), philologically inaccurate, was edited in 1919 by Overbeck’s pupil, C.A. Bernoulli (1868-1937). This volume made Overbeck known to T. Mann (1875-1955), who shaped a character of his *Doctor Faustus* (*Doktor Faustus*, 1947) based on Overbeck, K. Barth (1886-1968), who, after reading it, rewrote his commentary on the *Epistle to the Romans* (*Römerbrief*, 2nd 1922), M. Heidegger (1889-1976), who, supposedly, after reading it, abandoned the study of theology for philosophy, W. Benjamin (1892-1940), K. Löwith (1897-1973), *et al.*



Results / Next steps

- Given the vastness of the sources and the risk of getting lost among the entries of the *Kirchenlexicon*, in the last period, profiting from the author’s background and the visit to “Overbeck Archive” in Basel (August 2019), where one “discovered” some curious and hitherto unresearched material, one decided to try to answer to the guideline issue focusing on the analysis of the philosophical aspects of Overbeck’s thought.
- In this year and a half, one collected, studied and structured the secondary literature necessary to shape the primary one to have everything available for the writing stage. Having collected a lot of material, the schedule of the author mainly consists of writing.

Sources

“Franz C. Overbeck Archive” at the University of Basel – photos by the author

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