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# Spirituality of Pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago: Existential Questions and the Meaning of Life

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## Abstract

Ontological security and basic trust serve as the essential framework of human existence, providing an unquestionable foundation for the concept of the meaning of life. However, in late modern society, existential questions - questions encompassing time, space, continuity, and identity - are suppressed, leading to constant exploration, reevaluation, and contemplation of these inquiries. This absence of a universal and binding value system contributes to a crisis of meaning. Rites of passage, such as the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, have the potential to establish a profound connection between individuals' lives and existential questions. Findings of a qualitative and quantitative content analysis of 32 pilgrims' travelogues confirm that the pilgrimage offers insights into existential concerns and creates a sense of firmness by mixing cognitive and moral elements. This blending suggests that the world is as it is because it is as it should be. Consequently, this conviction provides pilgrims with an interpretive framework for life, infusing their existence with meaning.

**Keywords:** existential questions, meaning of life, rites of passage, pilgrimage, Camino de Santiago.

## Rites of Passage

Van Gennep introduced the concept of three fundamental phases observed in rites of passage in tribal societies: separation, transition, and incorporation. In this framework, Turner (1969) developed the concept of liminality that refers not only to the middle phase but to the whole period. During these rituals, individuals enter a liminal space, which Turner (1974) describes as an "anti-structure" involving the disruption of the normative social order, including roles, statuses, legal norms, and obligations (p. 60). Turner explains that crossing the threshold leads individuals into a sacred space and time that exists separate from the profane or secular realm. In this liminal phase, where individuals detach from everyday structures, personal transformation takes place, followed by the reintegration of the changed individual into society. While van Gennep focused on *rites de passage*, Turner and Turner (1978) argue that pilgrimage can be viewed similarly. Pilgrims separate themselves from their community and often find themselves on the fringes of society during the

pilgrimage. According to Turner (1995), the relationships within the pilgrim community can be understood as a form of interaction between complete and individualized individuals, embodying the principle of "I" and "Thou" (p. 136). This kind of relationship aims for a homogeneous and unstructured community, emphasizing the whole person's connection to another whole person. Such wholeness adds existential value to companionships, while social structure provides cognitive value through designated statuses and roles. In the liminal state, individuals gain insight into the generic bond between people and develop a sense of shared humanity.

## Existential Questions

Giddens (1991) understands existential questions as questions related to the time, space, continuity, and identity of a person. He argues that to be ontologically secure is to possess 'answers' to fundamental existential questions which all human life in some way addresses (p. 47). Giddens associates the origin of freedom with the ontological comprehension of external reality and personal identity. For him, being implies possessing ontological awareness, which is not a fixed entity but rather something that individuals continuously create and maintain through reflexive activities. This awareness, along with the everyday routines it sustains, helps assuage existential anxiety by providing a framework for seeking answers to existential questions and establishing social stability (e.g., addressing queries such as who am I, where, and when).

According to Giddens, individuals' enduring pursuit of the existential question "to be or not to be" encompasses not only accepting reality but also the construction of ontological reference points. These reference points serve as crucial elements in navigating and living within the context of everyday life. They provide individuals with a framework for understanding their own existence and shaping their actions in the world.

He argues that tradition plays a significant role in shaping frameworks of action and ontological reference points by instilling a sense of solidity in things. However, tradition typically blends cognitive and moral elements, stating that "The world is as it is because it is as it should be" (p. 48). Giddens believes that tradition provides stability, even if explicit ontological concepts may significantly conflict with established traditional practices. Tradition serves as an organizing medium for social life, particularly tailored to ontological imperatives. It primarily organizes time by constraining openness to an uncertain future, which means that in contexts where traditional ways of life predominate, the past projects a variety of proven practices into the future. This imparts a sense of coherence to existence by bridging the past and the future. However, in late modernity, characterized by the separation of time and space, tradition has largely lost its role. Giddens describes this phenomenon as the development of the 'empty' dimension of time, the key lever that has also dislodged space from the place (p. 17). To illustrate this with a somewhat extreme (yet nonetheless real) comparison: in the past, people would gather at the village square at sunset, but during the COVID epidemic, we met virtually based on UTC on the link for video conferences. Thus, the separation of time and space has essentially emptied the dimension of time and detached space from the place (in our case, existing purely in the virtual realm).

Bauman (2000) offers a similar viewpoint on the influence of time and space in the context of globalization. He suggests

that the advancements in modern technology have reduced the importance of physical distance and space, leading to the emergence of "non-places" and a sense of "no-time." Consequently, time has gained prominence over space. As a result of this transformation, new foundations have been established for the present moment in which individuals exist. These foundations are characterized by a sense of timelessness and ubiquity, where the constraints of traditional notions of time and space are diminished or transcended. Giddens (1991) acknowledges the same shift and emphasizes its impact on the redefinition of the future. He asserts that individuals in all cultures, including traditional ones, distinguish between the future, present, and past, assessing alternative actions based on anticipated future outcomes. Late modernity intensifies this characteristic, as Giddens highlights. He asserts that the future is continuously drawn into the present by means of the reflexive organisation of knowledge environments. Consequently, individuals find themselves predominantly inhabiting an uncertain future that lacks solid ontological reference points rooted in tradition. Time appears devoid of substance, ways of existence become inconsistent, and the future becomes detached from the past, leaving the late modern individual in a state of uncertainty. The rise and spread of capitalism have played a significant role in the heightened individualization of individuals, placing the burden of managing their own lives squarely on their shoulders, as dictated by societal expectations. It has become the individual's responsibility to navigate uncertainty and seek meaning in their existence. Despite the awareness that the future entails constant risks, individuals tend to perceive it as something within their control. The prevalence of insurance and the significant investments made in insurance by both individuals and society as a whole in late modernity serve as an illustration of how people seek to manage risks and find a sense of security in an unpredictable world. In this manner, individuals, to secure themselves and seek a sense of security in an uncertain world, are, in a sense, dwelling in the future as they take measures to mitigate risks.

According to Giddens (1991, 1994), late modern society is experiencing a fragility in both ontological security and basic trust, which are crucial for individuals to find meaning in their lives. In contrast to previous eras, contemporary society lacks clear and definitive answers to existential questions, which results in a continuous process of exploration, inquiry, and self-reflection. Giddens portrays this condition as the rupture of a protective cocoon in late modernity, which erodes individuals' confidence in themselves, life, and the world, resulting in a diminished sense of ontological security, which is intended to provide certainty, security, and clarity to life, and helps to maintain individual identity and alleviate fears. The routines and structures that traditionally upheld ontological security are becoming increasingly scarce, causing a decline in individual well-being. As basic trust in oneself, others, and the world wanes, so does the sense of continuity and order in life. This situation, however, creates favorable conditions for the proliferation of crises of meaning, which, according to Berger and Luckmann (1995), are structurally embedded in contemporary society because in modernity economics, and politics, which are concerned with instrumental action and the rational making of sense of reality, have become detached from the higher order of values, religion, which is usually at odds with the logic of instrumental-rational action. As a result, the integration of an individual's life into a higher order of values is often limited to the private sphere, as Berger and Luckmann argue.

According to Giddens (1991), rites of passage play a vital role in connecting individuals' lives to existential questions. These rituals offer essential psychological support during significant life transitions and provide a framework for individuals to navigate and cope with transformative experiences. By participating in rites of passage, individuals can find solace and

meaning amidst the uncertainties and disruptions associated with existential concerns. These practices enable individuals to integrate themselves into a higher order of values, filling the void left by the separation of economic and political systems from religious frameworks in modern society. However, the diminished presence of such rituals in contemporary life creates a disconnect between everyday experiences and encounters that may evoke existential questions. This separation can undermine ontological security, as these profound questions and doubts often trigger underlying anxieties that individuals must confront. During times of personal crisis, the sense of ontological security becomes particularly vulnerable and can be directly challenged.

## The pilgrimage Camino de Santiago

The tripartite structure, originally defined by van Gennep as rites of passage and found to be present in most rituals, is also evident in the pilgrimage to Santiago. Scholars such as Margry (2008) argue that the Camino de Santiago has been rediscovered and reinvented by spiritual seekers, cultural enthusiasts, and those seeking tranquility, turning the pilgrimage into an individual rite of passage or a journey of self-discovery for many pilgrims. Schnell and Pali (2013) also view the pilgrimage as a personal ritual, suggesting that the trend of individualization in late modern societies is reshaping traditional collective rituals, leading to an increased emphasis on personal rituals. Therefore, rituals are not disappearing in contemporary societies; in fact, the authors view late modernity as an era marked by a "yearning for rituals." This trend is reflected in the significant increase in the number of pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago, with nearly 347,000 pilgrims receiving the Compostela, the certificate of completion issued by the Santiago Archdiocese, in 2019 alone (Pilgrim's Reception Office, 2020).

## Present Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the spirituality of pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago through their testimonies, focusing on what pilgrims say about their experiences. The narratives were examined to identify themes related to existential questions. The analysis aimed to uncover patterns and insights regarding the pilgrims' experiences and the role of the pilgrimage in addressing their existential concerns. It seeks to answer two basic research questions:

1. Is the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage an experience that triggers existential questions and questions about the meaning of life in pilgrims?
2. Does the experience of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage increase ontological security and fundamental trust, and give meaning to the lives of pilgrims?

Given the ontological and epistemological position of our study, which consists of subtle ontological realism (Hammersley, 1992) and epistemological constructivism (Raskin, 2002), it is based on the assumption that (1) there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions and theories, and that (2) our (including scientific) understanding of the world is inevitably a construction of our own perspectives and positions. Based on the second point, we have chosen an interpretive approach, which suggests that the best way to approach social reality is through the interpretation of actors'

understanding of events. Therefore, the use of pilgrims' travelogues seems like a suitable decision, although they are subjective narratives and not a direct insight into objective reality. By this approach, pilgrims' accounts of their experiences can be taken as a solid foundation for scientific conclusions.

## Method

I analyzed the spirituality of pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago within a research framework in which I developed a data-driven content theory that explains the experience of pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago in the late modern era. I conducted a qualitative and quantitative content analysis based on 32 travel narratives published in the Slovenian language as books until 2018 and recorded in the Slovenian library information system COBISS (Co-operative Online Bibliographic System & Services). The narratives were written by 23 Slovenian authors, one Croatian author - Ivan Kapetanović (2017), two French authors - Jean-Christophe Rufin (2015) and Jean-Marc Potdevin (2013), three American authors - Shirley MacLaine (2001), Patrick Gray and Justin Skeesuck (2018), and one Irish author - Brendan McManus (2014). The initial analysis of the narratives was conducted using the QDA Miner software, where I imported the travel narratives in RTF file format. Text coding was a central part of data processing. In the first step, I employed a one-step open coding approach to establish inductive, content-driven concepts by analyzing events or activities as potential indicators of the pilgrim experience. In the next step, I identified four main categories related to existential questions and the meaning of life: (1) Existence (occurred 1,067 times), (2) Human (467 times), (3) Space (427 times), and (4) Time (399 times). These categories were grouped into a higher-level category called Existential Questions, which appeared 2,360 times in the travel narratives. In the following sections, I will present the findings of the content analysis for each category and support them with quotes from the travel narratives.

**Table 1.** Concepts by Higher-Level Categories and their Frequencies

Higher-Level Category	Concepts	Frequency	%
Existence	Life, life energy, power of life, death, reality, truth, the meaning of life, transformation, light, warmth, vibrations.	1067	45%
Human	Soul, body, mind, spirit.	467	20%
Space	Here, churches, the energy of the place, sacred place, Alto del Padron, Mezeta, Cruz de Ferro, Monte de Gozo, Santiago de Compostela, Finisterre.	427	18%
Time	Time is essential, now, timelessness, present moment, measurement of time, happening now, happened in the past, will happen in the future, rhythm, taking time for oneself, transience.	399	17%
Total		2360	100%

## Time

During the initial analysis of the travel narratives, it became evident that time holds a paramount significance in the pilgrimage of the Camino de Santiago, with the pilgrims themselves exhibiting a keen awareness of its importance. In the

very first travel narrative, I formed the concept that time is essential, described by one of the authors as follows:

*"It has to be admitted that time plays an essential role in shaping the "real" walker. The Camino is time's alchemy on the soul. It is a transformation that does not happen immediately, or even quickly. The pilgrims who trudge along week after week come to realize this. Beyond the somewhat childish pride they may feel at having made a considerable effort compared to those who only walk for a week or so, they perceive a deeper and more humble truth: a short walk is not enough to shrug off old habits. It does not radically change a person. We remain rough stone, and for this stone to be carved it requires a more protracted effort; more cold, more mud, more hunger, and less sleep. That is why what matters on the Way is not where you arrive, which is the same for everyone, but where you start" (Rufin, 2015, p. 13).*

However, the concept of time holds not only quantitative significance for the effects of the pilgrimage but also involves another quality of time known as *kairos*, as described by McManus:

*"Kairos means 'out of time' or the 'opportune time'. It has a spiritual sense to it: time that is removed from the business of life, where the value of just being dominates" (McManus, 2018, p. 119).*

McManus also describes his experience of presence, which he encountered on the Camino:

*"I sat there for a long time, just being. It was God's time now, kairos time, outside of chronological time, when extraordinary things happen. This experience of living in God's love freely given was deeply consoling and satisfying. I had a strong sense of that 'giftedness', grace or blessing as I had not earned or deserved this in any way" (McManus, 2018, p. 201).*

In addition to the central concept of time, the analysis of the narratives identified ten different subconcepts within the Time category, with a total occurrence of 399 instances in all the analyzed narratives. These subconcepts include now, timelessness, present moment, measurement of time, happening now, happening in the past, will happen in the future, rhythm, taking time for oneself, and transience.

## Space

In the Space category, we included the following concepts: here, churches, the energy of the place, sacred place, Alto del Padron, Mezeta, Cruz de Ferro, Monte de Gozo, Santiago de Compostela, and Finisterre. Therefore, we also coded certain geographical locations that we consider significant turning points in the pilgrimage process. One of the Slovenian pilgrims symbolically presents Mezeta in such a light:

*"The blank page at this point in the book symbolically shows the space of sacred silence that conjures up the*

*infinity of abundant awareness on the extremely important part of the path - the Meseta. For in the silence and emptiness lies the sparkle of undiscovered layers of living that invite us to explore them" (Artnik Knibbe, 2016, p. 93).*

I suggest that the above citation clearly illustrates that Mezeta provides the proper context for seeking answers to existential questions. It involves the absence of external stimuli (emptiness and silence) and, through even repetitive movement (rhythm), enables a high level of awareness. By this, I refer to a level of awareness that is higher than the level of awareness in intersubjective reality, which, according to Giddens (1991), suspends existential anxiety based on daily routines (e.g., walking to work).

*"Was it really Meseta, a landscape with an endless plain without trees, that made me more aware of the magnificent energy that trees give off? The mighty trees that are connected to the earth and the cosmos. As below, so above. It is only among these mighty forests that one grasps and fully understands the essence of all connections. Here is a vivid picture of what the wise men of history have taught us all along. As above, so below. The deeper the roots of the trees, the stronger and higher into the sky they can grow and the more magnificently they can function. As a kind of metaphor for the fact that the more grounded we humans are, the more stable we are and the easier it is to connect to the Source. Simply, it couldn't be more so. Always taken for granted, but never seen in this way" (Vranjek, 2015, p. 173).*

## Human

The category Human encompasses several significant concepts, with "soul" appearing 173 times and "body" appearing 105 times in the analyzed travel narratives. Additionally, the concepts of "mind" and "spirit" are included in this category. It is notable that within the pilgrim community, these concepts transcend individual dichotomies and establish a sense of harmony or wholeness, as depicted in the following two quotes:

*"The body, mind, heart, and soul sit at the same table and form a loving family that accepts each other." (Božič, 2018, p. 214).*

*"My body, mind, emotions... all suddenly found themselves in the same space and time. Awareness emerged..." (Steblovnik, 2012, p. 125).*

Pilgrims, therefore, engage in relationships as integrated individuals. In such a formed community, the humanity of individuals, their existential qualities, and the associated sense of humanity are expressed. Turner (1995) explains that humanity encompasses the entirety of a person's relationship with another whole person, surpassing mere cognitive structures. In the liminal space of the pilgrimage, pilgrims are said to profoundly sense the primal nature of human beings, experiencing humanity in all its ineffable essence:



*"You know what I think? I think that on the Camino, the way we are is how we truly are in reality. It's in our nature to forgive, love unconditionally, believe and hope, and be rational, fair, kind, and moderate. Each of us is a little part of the same whole, and on the Camino, we sense that. We don't need any identity, or any filters, because we know that we can trust. We don't have to do anything" (Brumec, 2016, p. 129).*

## Existence

In the Existence category, which encompasses 45% of the codes, the most prevalent concepts are (1) life energy, which appeared 183 times in the travel narratives, (2) life, which appeared 181 times, and (3) truth, which appeared 130 times. Within this category, we have included broad concepts related to human existence. Drawing upon Giddens' assertion (1991, p. 49) that the eternal goal of the individual is the struggle of "to be or not to be," wherein one must embrace reality and establish ontological reference points for navigating everyday life, we contend that this struggle largely unfolds within pilgrims on the Camino. While the Space and Time categories capture the contextual aspect of this struggle, the Existence category delves into its content: the process of accepting reality and creating ontological reference points for living in the shared realm of intersubjective reality. The pilgrim seeks meaning in events and refrains from questioning why they occur (as they result from a series of decisions, circumstances, and coincidences), but rather contemplates what significance these occurrences hold for their own life. This quest can also be understood as the pursuit of answers to existential questions that contemporary society fails to provide for the late modern individual. Intriguingly, as the pilgrim becomes acquainted with this extraordinary reality, they encounter both universal truths about human existence (which pilgrims often experience in a strikingly similar manner) and personal truths, which they unearth through meaningful coincidences. These encounters are perceived as significant coincidences of external events aligning with their inner personal truths, thus unveiling their truth. As the pilgrim cannot causally or rationally explain these phenomena, they attribute them to the realm of miracles. This shift in perspective transforms their outlook on encounters and life at large. No longer viewing people and events as mere coincidences, they perceive them as keys that unlock their truths. Rather than seeking causes—why something happened—they begin to seek meaning—what it signifies for their life. Parallels to this line of thinking can be found in Jung's concept of meaning, wherein he advocates for the pursuit of meaning or purpose over causal connections. A similar inclination is observed among physicists who have shifted their focus to seeking connections rather than causes in the natural world (Jung in Franz, 2003). We exemplify this altered perspective with the following quotations:

*"We report to each other about everyday incredible coincidences that are not coincidences. We wonder about the messages they bring and guess who is joking with us. Sometimes we just laugh at the astonishing events as seriously hit by suspicious substances, but I swear we didn't touch them" (Remškar, 2017, p. 74).*

*"As the Camino works, these are random coincidences that we understand and decipher only when certain secrets begin to reveal themselves to us, which are actually not secrets at all. There is usually not enough time in*



*the rush of everyday life to be aware of them" (Vranjek, 2015, pp. 195–196).*

*"Life is a path, and the path teaches us, even about the fact that there are simply no coincidences. It would be too simple. They are just messages that we strive to understand and decipher with our higher consciousness. They come as they must; if we understand the first message, the second one comes, and then the third and fourth... If we listen to them, they skillfully guide us on the path of self-discovery. If we superficially neglect them, we miss opportunities for personal fulfillment" (Brečko in Močnik, 2009, p. 4).*

*"Memories of my life path came from reason, and reason is dualistic. Split into justice and injustice. Judgment and condemnation. That's why it can evoke emotions. Due to human nature, we feel joy, sadness, and everything in between. Nevertheless, above all this, when reason calms down, the soul and higher truth always stand. The soul is serene. Serene because it knows that everything is exactly as it should be. I am open to my path and my mission. Everything else will happen as it will" (Božič, 2018, p. 258).*

Just as tradition creates a sense of solidity by merging cognitive and moral elements and affirming that the world is as it should be, pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago likewise integrate cognitive and moral elements in expressing their explicit ontological beliefs:

*"There is a sense of silence within oneself, of harmony with oneself, a kind of self-sufficiency and awareness that what is, is enough and just right and that it is best for me as it is. It was this feeling that increased my ability to be aware and fully experience everything I saw, paid attention to, and directed my gaze towards. It was responsible for a strong awareness of everything surrounding me, and because of this feeling, I was internally strong enough to accept more than I would otherwise, and it seemed to me that I was communicating with the nature that surrounded me" (Močnik, 2009, pp. 177–178).*

Pilgrims also express the belief that life unfolds in harmony as if it follows a higher plan. Tjaša Artnik Knibbe hopes that this higher plan is oriented towards seeking harmony or balance:

*"And precisely the hope that the higher plan is always oriented towards seeking harmony, along with compassion for this collective energy, helps me maintain compassion in my heart even when I feel collective anger or rage in every cell of my body" (Artnik Knibbe, 2016, p. 199).*

The following excerpt from a travel narrative talks not about a higher plan but a greater plan:

*"All I could do was surrender. Surrender to the grandeur of life and the greater plan. With the trust that I am safe and that everything will be exactly as it should be" (Božič, 2018, p. 155).*

Bojana Vranjek speaks of the realization with Camino that we are not alone in the world and that we can trust that we are safe because everything is as it should be:

*"At the other end of the world, a tree awaits you... it waited. The tree of knowledge, that we truly are not alone in this world, that it is full of them, those we are not yet able to see, only to feel and trust that we are safe and that everything is as it should be all the time" (Vranjek, 2015, p. 221).*

Similarly, from her next quote, it is evident that she believes everything will be as it should be. We can also infer from the context that she believes in the purpose (an answer to the question of what) of spiritual experiences, even though she used the word reason (an answer to the question of why):

*"I became more and more convinced that I had come to the Pyrenees to die, on the other hand, I trusted so strongly that if I was called to this path, it was for a reason and they would help me make everything as it should be" (Vranjek, 2015, p. 23).*

Interestingly, based on the cited texts, it can be assumed that pilgrims (at least some) experience cognitive experiences that they primarily interpret in terms of purpose rather than cause. They believe that these experiences occur in an individual's life based on a broader plan, and they give them meaning by interpreting them as life lessons that lead to personal growth. These spiritual experiences of pilgrims also give meaning to pain and suffering in a way. This perspective is revealed in the text from the travel narrative of Nataša Jernejčič:

*"It is evident that we are connected with certain souls for multiple lifetimes and that we help each other conquer lessons. Although these relationships are often painful, that is how it must be if we are to grow and develop as souls. Once you accept this, it becomes easier to understand the connection with someone, easier to overcome the pain they have caused and forgive them." (Jernejčič, 2014, p. 29).*

From the above citation, it is also evident that the author has answers to existential questions, questions about time, space, continuity, and identity, and has formed an interpretive framework for life. This framework was also found by the pilgrim Ivan Gričnik during his journey on the Camino de Santiago. Gričnik identifies himself as a devout follower of the Roman Catholic faith, which serves as a significant source of comfort for him. In the first part of his book, he reveals that before embarking on the Camino, he did not know why he was undertaking the journey but believed that he would discover the reason along the way:

*"So that I may find the answer: Why do I have to go? And I did find the answer, indeed I did. To exchange the comfort of my own home for shared albergues, a full refrigerator for canned and dried food in my backpack, an air-conditioned car for dusty hiking boots, and to leave behind all the material possessions I have... I thought I had them, but in reality, they have me. I fear losing them. 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, He makes me lie*

*down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters..." (Gričnik, 2018, p. 12).*

Gričnik found his answer in a psalm that speaks of the meaning of life as the unconditional acceptance of one's fate as it is meant to be. The psalm guiding Gričnik does not provide an answer to the question of why but rather answers the question of purpose:

*"The psalm that accompanied me on my journey to Santiago. 'Fate has placed me on this path, I know not of another, and I will walk it as long as I have the strength. That is how it must be, that is my duty and my meaning of life. I do not question whether it is just, it is mine..." (Gričnik, 2018, p. 12).*

Similarly, Staša Lepej Bašelj discovered after completing the pilgrimage that her life is as it should be and that it must also include pain, as it helps us navigate through life more easily:

*"I realized that I wouldn't want my life to be significantly different from how it is, that the path I walk is the only correct one for me. This path taught me acceptance, it taught me to live and enjoy the here and now. How often do we complain about the crosses in our lives without realizing that it is through them that we walk more easily through life?" (Lepej Bašelj, 2009, p. 89).*

## Conclusion

In summary, in late modern society, the lack of clear and universal answers to existential questions undermines ontological security and fundamental trust. Consequently, the search for answers to existential questions, which pertain to time, space, continuity, and human identity, is left to the individual. In the liminal world, characterized by the absence of routines, habits, and the established order of everyday life, the pilgrim enters an anti-structure where they can experience themselves through the perspectives of significant others in their social milieu. It is a space where they free themselves from the constraints of social roles and encounter a different reality that transcends time and space. In this transcendent state, the pilgrim gains insights into the universal truths of human existence and discovers personal truths about their own life. The pilgrimage experience becomes a quest for answers to existential questions that are often unattainable in today's disenchanted society. The belief that everything in life is as it should be is widely shared among pilgrims. It provides them with an interpretive framework that infuses their lives with meaning. Through this framework, the pilgrim finds answers to moral and cognitive existential questions outside the confines of everyday reality in the liminal world of the pilgrimage.

This belief in the inherent order of existence, where everything is as it should be, has a profound impact on the pilgrim's sense of basic trust. The pilgrim trusts that they themselves are as they should be, embracing their own existence and identity. They also trust that others are as they should be, accepting the diversity and individuality of those around them. Furthermore, they trust that the laws of life and the world are as they should be, recognizing the natural order and the interconnectedness of all things.

This heightened sense of basic trust arises from the pilgrim's experience of the pilgrimage, where they encounter a different reality and gain insights into the universal truths of human existence. In this state of transcendence, they perceive the world as inherently aligned with its intended course, and they find solace and meaning in this understanding. This trust in the inherent order of existence provides the pilgrim with a firm foundation for navigating the uncertainties and challenges of life.

As a result, the pilgrim emerges from the pilgrimage experience with an increased sense of basic trust, which influences their outlook and interactions with others. This trust allows them to approach life with greater confidence, resilience, and acceptance, bridging the gap between their need for ontological security and the uncertainties of the contemporary risk society.

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