Claudia Welz's research follows two paths. On the one hand, she discusses biblical and theological traditions and their relevance today. An example is the notion that human beings are created in the image of an invisible god. On the other hand, she examines human self-understanding and its limits through phenomenology, hermeneutics, philosophy of emotion, theories of subjectivity, psychology and psychopathology.

“I’m fascinated by existential questions. They concern, e.g., the meaning of life, faith and doubt, the problem of evil and suffering, and normativity: What is it that really matters despite the fact that we are going to die? What roles do phenomena such as angst, despair and self-deception play for people who are trying to recover from crises that may raise the question whether there is such a thing as a shared reality?” Welz asks.

“I investigate in what ways ambivalent feelings disclose the complexity of being human. Humans seek to understand who they are as they are not completely transparent to themselves. Human existence itself appears as a mystery that invites us to embark on a journey of discovery.”

Conscience, self-disclosure and self-deception

Welz, 38, became interested in Jewish philosophy of religion and literature while spending a year studying in Jerusalem. This forms the basis for her studies in memory, forgetting, and personal identity, as well as trauma, guilt and shame – studies that will be included in her forthcoming treatise Conscience, Self-Disclosure and Self-Deception: Emotion – Memory – Identity.

“When a person is caught in a self-created illusion, the illusion can trick not only the individual but also others. However, in a transitional phase, self-deception can function as a form of conflict management by simplifying confusing situations and provisionally excluding those aspects that would make life unbearable.”

In the Philosophy of Psychology, self-deception is either considered something that a person does intentionally and is responsible for, or something a person cannot control. Welz takes a nuanced approach by drawing on Søren Kierkegaard’s insight into the dialectical interplay between knowing and willing. She argues that there are several levels of consciousness at play. Therefore, one can keep oneself in the dark about the ‘knowledge’ one has with (or against) oneself. One might even ignore the ‘voice’ of one’s own conscience. Taken literally, con-science is one’s knowing-with oneself.

New fields of research

Welz's research is interdisciplinary. She combines theology with different philosophical approaches and discusses parallel and alternative developments in other sciences. Her award-winning Ph.D. dissertation, Love’s Transcendence and the Problem of Theodicy (2008), was defended at the Institute for Hermeneutics and Philosophy of Religion in Zurich. As a postdoc at the Center for Subjectivity Research, University of Copenhagen, she wrote her theological ‘Habilitation’ thesis titled Vertrauen und Versuchung (2010). And once H.R.H. Crown Princess Mary hands her the 1.2 million kroner prize, she can add the title ‘EliteForsker’ to her CV.
“It is with great pleasure and gratitude that I receive the prize. It draws attention to fields of research that I am passionate about.”

Welz plans on using the prize money to finish some larger research projects, as well as to prepare a research application for a new interdisciplinary Center for Modern Jewish Thought and Post-Holocaust Theology, Philosophy and Literature.

**Travel scholarships and Sapere Aude grants**

Some 17 EliteForsk travel scholarships worth 300,000 kroner each will be awarded to talented young PhD students. Five of these scholarships will go to PhD students at the University of Copenhagen. The recipients are:

- Kasper Steen Pedersen, Faculty of Science
- Trine Mygind Korsby, Faculty of Social Sciences
- Tor Biering-Sørensen, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences
- Peter Macus Kristensen, Faculty of Social Sciences
- Tue Heesgaard Jepsen, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences

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Claudia Welz, PhD, Dr. habil., took her Master’s degree in Theology at the University of Tübingen in 2003 and earned her PhD from the Institute for Hermeneutics and Philosophy of Religion, University of Zurich, in 2007. Her thesis *Love’s Transcendence and the Problem of Theodicy* was given “The John Templeton Award for Theological Promise.” As a PhD student, Welz was a visiting scholar in Copenhagen, Jerusalem and Hamburg. While working as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Center for Subjectivity Research at the University of Copenhagen, she wrote *Vertrauen und Versuchung*, which was accepted as her “Habilitationsschrift” at the University of Zurich.

Claudia Welz has received a number of research grants in Germany, Israel and Denmark – including postdoctoral fellowships from the Velux Foundation and the Carlsberg Foundation.