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Editorial

Keeping up with Habermas

Jürgen Habermas is one of the greatest living philosophers. At the age of ninety-five, he is still very active in producing new ideas and books. These books are normally written in a dense style and long sentences, but with mastery and originality. Keeping up with his long productive philosophical life is an arduous task, and you have to read all his writings to see whether he has made adjustments to his thinking or not. Therefore, I was pleased to receive information of an Online talk at the Institute of Philosophy and Psychology of the Romanian Academy at the end of last November on the new development in Habermas' ideas. The talk was by the German philosopher Christian Thein who has recently published a book on Habermas' latest thinking. The book *Habermas and the Genealogy of Post-Metaphysical Thinking* (2024) has not been translated into English, and so attending his talk was a welcome opportunity to hear an overview of his main thesis.

The book and the talk are both a review and analysis of Habermas' thinking in the light of his latest book *Also a History of Philosophy: The Project of a Genealogy of Post-Metaphysical Thinking,* (2019), which has been translated into English in two large volumes. The book, as was explained by Thein, is a break with Habermas' thinking before the turn of the century and reports a new phase of the development of his thought, a phase that sees the emphasis on rationality as embodied in social practices.

One way of understanding this change is to view it from a biographical perspective as a development of Habermas' thinking over a period of more than half a century. This can be summarized into three broad stages. In the Marxist and Critical Theory phase, which extended until 1979, the best book was his *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968). The second phase included Habermas'Communicative Act Theory and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. This period extended until the millennium and was characterized as Post-Metaphysical Thinking. The third phase started at the turn of the century and can be described as a new version of Post-Metaphysical, or maybe termed Post-Secular thinking, in which the significance of religion has been considered.

It is significant in my judgment that Habermas started thinking about metaphysics in the third stage when he reached eighty. Perhaps it is natural to consider ultimate questions when reaching an advanced age, but it is also an important recognition by Habermas that philosophy has to come down to the actual practices of individuals and societies. Consequently, it becomes obvious that religion, if that is what metaphysics means in this context, becomes important.

It could be argued that metaphysics has been used in two senses, the purely philosophical sense, and the much wider and religious sense. But I think the aim of Habermas is to bridge the gap between the two, hence his interest in Christianity and its significance for European philosophy, which is part of his new genealogical approach. This approach is one of reading the history of philosophy from the present moment. It is worth mentioning that Habermas' interest in religion became obvious after his meeting with Ratzinger in 2007, who became Pope Benedict XVI. After that meeting, Habermas wrote 'to exclude religious voices from the public square is highly illiberal'. and he called for a new dialogue between faith and reason.

Apparently, all this becomes clear from his new book on the history of philosophy, which I am told is a genealogy of Western thought. According to one reviewer, 'In contrast to conventional histories that focus on movements and schools, Habermas takes the dialectic of faith and knowledge as a guiding thread for analysing key developments in the thought of major figures such as Augustine, Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham and Luther that constitute milestones in the genealogy of Post-Metaphysical thinking'.

There are two points to be made here. The first is that Habermas is writing a history of Western philosophy in which religion in the Christian form is important, which leaves room for other religions, such as Islam and Judaism. The second is that in his emphasis on practices he is not a social scientist and is not involved in empirical research. However, my understanding is that in both cases he takes notice of the changing reality of life in the West in the light of the introduction of large communities from other parts of the world, and the role religion plays in their original culture and their daily life. In all this, Habermas brings philosophy down to the new reality in the West. My own take on the above is that we need not abandon the idea of rationality in favour of faith, but should heed Habermas' call for a dialogue between the two.

The Editor

Human Knowing And Being

So man, who here seems principal alone,
Perhaps acts second to some sphere unknown,
Touches some wheel, or verges to some goal;
'Tis but a part we see, and not a whole.
...

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is man.
...
But when his own great work is but begun,
What Reason weaves, by Passion is undone.

Alexander Pope

WILLIAM BISHOP

This early 18th century European view from Alexander Pope in his '*Essay on Man',* transposes into verse the 'pantheistic' philosophy of Spinoza supposedly held by Pope's patron, Lord Bolingbroke. Pope: '*All are but parts of one stupendous whole / Whose body nature is, and God the Soul'.*

Man in the World

The overriding European worldview today is conditioned by scientific materialism, accelerated in the 19th century by Nietzsche's declaration that God is dead. So the historical trajectory has been from the centrality of God in relation to Man, to Man's centrality, and abolition of God in favour of a mechanical world with Man as spectator, until now, when we have an electronic age in which Man becomes a quantum of data, leading possibly to the abolition of Man, and the ascendance of the Artificial.

In his book , *Adventures of Ideas,* A. N. Whitehead said: '*The importance of man as the supreme example of a living organism is beyond question. Yet when we try to express the general notions thus involved, and their bearings upon conduct, at every step controversy arises'.* Indeed, this raises the question of the reliability of knowledge.

Broad knowledge includes theoretical, academic, scientific, professional, practical and tacit knowing and has application to different levels of existence or being. The word 'being' is important because the human *being* is the subject that *is*, and not an object. If such a 'subject' could comprehend the relevance of all available knowledge at the different levels of life, that would be life-changing. Such a person would be a *generalist*, after the fashion of Whitehead, who expressed his attitude to philosophy in *Process and Reality*: '*A European tradition of philosophy deriving from Pythagoras is over-reliant on the mathematical method of deduction, whereas philosophy works by descriptive generalizations where deduction should only be used as an auxiliary mode of verification'.*

The study of man can be approached from above (with theology) downwards, or from below with physics, where matter rises to form 'complex systems' through 'emergence'. Our starting point affects our perspective and methodology but should not alter the facts (only their interpretation). Alternatively both starting points can be taken into account, since evidence reveals interaction in which, besides emergence, there is influence from the higher to the lower level of organization. A higher operational principle is integrated within the component parts, and meaning or purpose lies in this higher principle, while the parts form the entity. If this is the case then all meaning lies at the higher levels of organization: that is to say, at the moral, spiritual or religious level of reality. Fields of knowledge can be orientated according to their relevant levels of being, but starting from matter could confine cognition within the methodology and presuppositions of scientific materialism, interpreting all phenomena at that level. So in considering a synthesis of current knowledge there is an immediate clash between the approach of metaphysics and physics.

We assume the existence of 'objective knowledge' in spite of Proclus's ancient insight: *'Knowledge subsists according to the nature of the knower, and not according to the nature of what is known'.* Here it is clearly stated that knowledge depends on the ability of the knower to know. Up-dating Proclus,

A. N. Whitehead

Alexander Pope

Carlo Rovelli, in *Reality Is Not What It Seems,* tells us: '*What we can know is something concerning the system and ourselves. Knowledge is intrinsically relational; it depends just as much on its object as upon its subject. The notion of a 'state' of a system refers, explicitly or implicitly, to another system. Classical mechanics misled us into thinking that we could do without taking account of this simple truth, and that we could access, at least in theory, a vision of reality entirely independent of the observer'.*

The Pinnacle of Nature

In a letter to Eckermann dated 13 February 1829, Goethe made a vital distinction between inorganic and the organic: '*The divine, however, works in the living, not in what is dead; we find it in all that is in the process of becoming and transformation, but not in what is finished or frozen. Therefore reason, with its tendency toward the divine, engages only in what is alive and in the process of becoming, and the intellect only in what is finished and rigid, in order to put it to use'.* What Goethe calls 'reason' here is more like intuitive thinking that deals with form and quality, and 'intellect' refers to abstract reasoning. Goethe's method of participation for gaining knowledge involved listening and observing in a concentrated way through the senses with an open mind and heart. This two-way communication utilizes imagination creatively in perception. This method applies to Nature, and if nature is an expression of the (living) cosmic creative principle, then it becomes possible to know nature by participating in its principle.

Goethe held an elevated view of the human being: '*Because human beings are at the pinnacle of nature, we in turn see ourselves as a completed nature, which must in itself likewise produce another pinnacle. Toward that end, we ascend by permeating ourselves thoroughly with perfections and virtues; we summon discernment, order, harmony, and meaning, and finally we elevate ourselves to the production of a work of art'.* This 'pinnacle' of the 'anthropos' (human being) is culture in the form of art, science, the humanities and religion.

'Renaissance Man' was supposedly able to comprehend the complete range of culture; this seems impossible today where it is hard enough for specialists to keep abreast of developments in their own field. Yet there is a desire to uncover connections and find meaningful relationships between the parts that form the whole, so that the whole can be 'seen' as greater than the sum of its parts. It may be that artificial intelligence could relate all departments of knowledge (in all their detail as information) to each other, but if this was humanly comprehensible it would raise the question of its anthropocentric meaningfulness, raising questions of valuation, levels of being and 'living' and 'dead' knowledge distinctions. But could digital technology represent a further pinnacle above anthropos, an 'emergence' demoting the human?

Since all fields of knowledge meet in the knower, a speculative attempt at a meaningful general synthesis will recognize that separate *fields of knowledge* may apply to *different levels* of organization. For example, at the scientific level the quantum gravity field, as the structure of time and space, will function as a foundational support for nature, which in turn will support sentient beings. A timeline is also useful in seeking coherence within fragmentation. In *Let Me Explain*, Teilhard de Chardin explains: '*We have in the first place realized that every constituent of the world (whether being or a phenomenon) has of necessity emerged from that which preceded it. . . . Finally, we have gradually come to understand that no elemental thread in the universe is wholly independent in its growth of its neighbouring threads. Each forms part of a sheaf; and the sheaf in turn, represents a higher order of thread in a still larger sheaf – and so on indefinitely. This is the organic whole of which today we find ourselves to be a part, without being able to escape from it'.*

Religion, Art and Science

On the timeline religion and art make an early appearance. Science as a later development in modern times creates a gulf between itself and religion, yet it is not without a prior tradition. This 'gulf' can be bridged by the participatory approach pioneered by Goethe. His method utilized art, which relies on *imagination* and *intuition*, with *feeling* in judgment, along with a moral dimension and reverence for life. To the extent that art is a higher development of nature, it is possible to interpret 'dumb' nature to itself. Goethe was also a renowned novelist, poet and dramatist. In this respect he seemed to be a well-rounded person, unifying in himself the contrasting worlds of the humanities and science. In fact his major dramatic work, 'Faust', which occupied him for much of his life, deals with the interaction between the spiritual and the earthly world. For him nature manifests cosmic creativity, and sentience mediates between nature, man and spirit.

The implication in Michael Polanyi's four levels of natural organization is that each level requires its own specific *faculty for knowing*. These levels are i*norganic, vegetative, sentient,* and *responsible human personhood*. Following this scheme, intellectual analysis, mathematics, and empirical experiment are suited to knowledge of the *inorganic* world. However the *organic* or *vegetative* world requires an additional corresponding participative and living approach. This is the level of living biology. The *sentient* level has traditionally been called 'the world of the soul'. This is the world of culture where knowledge can be attained by self-immersion in the 'other' in order to know from inside. This involves empathy or knowledge as living experience. Then the world of responsible *personhood* is a relational world of the spirit where ethics and morality feature. Here a form of tacit knowledge and intuitive thinking are important in informing responsible and ethical conduct in personal relationships and situations. Given evolutionary development, our knowledge will be limited according to the cognitive faculties available at our stage of development.

Looking to the modern science of microbiology, we learn about the principle of congregation and emergence, according to which living cells combine to form greater wholes, which in turn form networks of organs, and through an evolutionary process produce the human body. Each emergent step produces a new category. The human 'organism' is a whole and from the 'centre' of this whole we have our viewpoint upon the world. While this 'whole' is greater than the sum of its parts, it may yet conceivably be part of a greater evolving whole. Microbiology, like quantum physics, raises fundamental questions about the nature of reality, but each category and level is like a reality in itself. Relationships and *entanglement* have produced a mysterious whole remarkably like the speculative organic cosmos assembled by Alfred North Whitehead in his book, *Process and Reality*.

Yet from a spiritual perspective, knowledge is either transmitted through tradition or is 'intellectual' in the sense of reaching from the highest intuitive faculty in man to the 'realm of intelligence'. Such means of knowing implies intuitive merging or identification of subject with 'object', so that when put into thought and words, such 'experience' becomes *transmitted knowledge*. If then transmitted knowledge is *brought to life* within the soul, it can potentially become personal knowledge. Polanyi regards personal knowledge as the mean between subjective and objective – a form of participatory knowing that affirms personal involvement in

Carlo Rovelli

Ananda Coomaraswamy

knowledge, where the distinction between fact and value breaks down so that ideals such as truth and beauty and goodness have equal value (as intangibles to what is tangible). And since knowledge involves belief and affirmation it carries with it responsibility to act according to the knowledge. Attainment of wisdom (wholesome meaning), must also involve supplementing knowledge with faith, hope, and love, (to include all cognitive possibilities) and avoiding: 'What reason weaves, by passion is undone'.

In conclusion, a synthesis of anthropocentric knowledge is obtained by relating each cognitive faculty to its relevant field of knowledge. So with the four interacting levels: (1) inorganic (body), (2) vegetative (life), (3) sentient (soul), (4) personhood (spirit), it is the 'I' (principle of the self) as coordinating 'centre' which penetrates and integrates each level and field of knowledge. A meaningful synthesis is like an echo from the ecosystem of knowledge. The ideal of human wisdom is not omniscience, but a value-based understanding of knowledge for the sake of orientation and action – of finding relevant relationships within the hierarchy of levels of being. Transcendental wisdom would involve grounding the divine within the self; connecting as human spirit with spirit of the cosmos, as intangible presence.

Knowledge, Wisdom and Love

Ananda Coomaraswamy expresses a traditional view that knowledge is of things in their intelligible aspect of being that things have in the mind of the knower, and wisdom takes knowledge for granted and is the criterion of value. Also religions accord to the *mode of knowing* of the believer and are essentially all variations of the *First Philosophy* (whose sequence is from transcendental to universal to particular). A profane view has no place for the divine, so in spite of whatever Man is, he will be shaped or perceived according to the mode of the knower.

The learned apostle Paul thought that if a person had all knowledge and faith but lacked love then he would be nothing. Indeed, rationality takes us so far, yet not far enough to grasp *being*, on which its existence depends. The course of a human life illustrates the 'anthropos' as a process in time and space with appearance, development, flourishing, decline, and disappearance. St Paul takes account of a wider context than a single lifetime; and that is the stumbling point upon which attitudes divide between the physical and metaphysical. Perhaps to lack love is to miss the whole point of being. For according to tradition, love is the very substance of being (of God): an intangible quality or principle as cause of action. Language breaks down when confronted with qualities of being (metaphysics). The reality is not the word and the word should not be mistaken for the reality but be seen as a pointer, for the point is not knowledge of being as subject to object, but being as experience.

The Singularity Drive

I chose to write a short science fiction story rather than argue my ideas through scientific or philosophical discourse because fiction has a unique power to engage and inspire. While formal arguments are essential for advancing knowledge, they often remain inaccessible to a broader audience, particularly younger generations. Fiction, when crafted effectively, serves as a bridge between complex ideas and the public imagination. It allows abstract concepts to take on tangible forms, sparking curiosity and deeper inquiry. History offers numerous examples of fiction influencing scientific thought, such as Miguel Alcubierre's development of a theoretical warp drive after watching Star Trek. By embedding profound questions within a compelling story, I hope not only to entertain but also to awaken a sense of wonder.

DR. ALAN XUEREB

The Endeavor drifted through the void, its artificial gravity a soft, steady pull beneath the crew's boots. At its heart, a singularity pulsed within a containment chamber — a black hole smaller than an atom yet massive enough to anchor the ship's reality. They called it Athena.

Dr. Malik, the ship's physicist, stood before the containment field, his eyes fixed on the event horizon shimmering in higher-dimensional flux. 'Amazing, isn't it?' he murmured as Commander Rhea joined him.

'It's terrifying', Rhea replied. 'We've trapped a black hole inside a dimension we can't even perceive. You sure it's stable?'

Malik tapped his console. 'As stable as it can be. Athena exists primarily in a bulk dimension — one of the eleven theorized by string theory. Gravity's the only thing leaking into our universe. Everything else stays locked in hers'.

Rhea frowned. 'And if it doesn't?'

Malik hesitated, his voice lowering. 'If she breaches into our four-dimensional space, the energy release would — well, let's just say this part of the galaxy wouldn't look the same'.

As if on cue, the containment alarms blared. Malik's console flashed red as data cascaded across the screen.

'Mass fluctuations!' Malik shouted. 'The gravitational leakage is spiking — something's destabilizing the dimensional barrier!'

Rhea's stomach turned as the artificial gravity flickered, pulling the crew upward for a moment before slamming them back down. 'What's causing it?'

'Could be a resonance with another brane universe', Malik said, frantically adjusting the ship's systems. 'The bulk dimension isn't empty — there could be other singularities out there, interacting with Athena'.

A pulse of energy rippled through the ship. For a moment, the stars outside the viewport warped, bending impossibly before snapping back into place. The crew hung silent as the alarms ceased.

'Status?' Rhea demanded.

Malik exhaled shakily. 'The containment field held, but Athena's dimensional signature shifted'.

'What does that mean?'

Malik turned to her, his expression grim. 'We're no longer tethered to the same spacetime coordinates. We've… slipped deeper into the bulk dimension. This isn't the universe we left'.

Rhea stared out at the unfamiliar starscape. The ship floated in a strange, translucent void where space seemed to ripple like water.

'Can we get back?' she asked.

Malik shrugged. 'If we survive long enough to figure out where we are, maybe'.

Rhea sighed and turned away. 'At least gravity's

Spaceship Endeavor

holding'.

Malik chuckled weakly. 'For now. Just don't let her get hungry'.

In the days that followed, the crew came to a chilling realization: the deeper into the bulk dimension they travelled, the more warped their reality became. Time stretched and twisted, the ship's systems strained under unknown forces, and Athena's quiet hum grew louder, as if the singularity was singing to something — or someone — out there in the hidden dimensions.

The Singularity Drive: Part II

The Endeavor floated in the eerie stillness of the bulk dimension, its surroundings rippling like an endless, liquid mirage. Weeks had passed since the ship slipped out of its universe, carried by the instability of Athena's containment field. Supplies were dwindling, the crew's morale fraying.

Commander Rhea stood on the bridge, staring at the strange, distorted stars outside the viewport. Behind her, Dr. Malik entered with a datapad, looking worn but determined.

'I think I've got a way to get us home', Malik announced.

Rhea turned, eyebrows raised. 'You've been saying that since we got here'.

'This time, it's different', Malik said, thrusting the datapad into her hands. On it was a schematic of an Alcubierre White warp drive — a theoretical device capable of bending spacetime itself.

'A warp bubble', Rhea murmured, reading over the notes. 'But how would we power it?'

Malik pointed at the singularity in the ship's core. 'Athena. She's already manipulating spacetime through the bulk dimension. If we can harness her gravitational output, we can create the negative energy density needed for the drive. Instead of slipping aimlessly through this dimension, we'll punch through spacetime back to our own'.

Rhea frowned. 'And the risks?'

Malik hesitated. 'The containment field will be stretched to its limits. If it collapses mid-jump…'

'The ship and crew will be torn apart', Rhea finished grimly. 'Or worse, we'll end up in an even stranger universe'.

Despite the odds, Rhea called the crew to action. Engineers scrambled to retrofit the ship's systems, connecting Athena's containment chamber to the warp drive. Malik oversaw the calculations, adjusting for the unpredictable distortions of the bulk dimension.

When the preparations were complete, the Endeavor's warp coils glowed faintly, their sleek surfaces humming with untapped power.

'This is it', Malik said, standing beside Rhea on the bridge. 'The drive will create a bubble of compressed spacetime around the ship, propelled by Athena's gravitational manipulation. If it works, we'll fold space and emerge near Sol'.

'And if it doesn't?' Rhea asked.

Malik gave her a wry smile. 'Then we'll be the first humans to explore places no one can imagine'.

Testing Alcubierre's warp drive

'Comforting', Rhea muttered. 'Alright, fire it up'.

The warp drive activated with a blinding flash. Space folded in on itself, compressing before the ship, expanding behind it. The Endeavor shot forward, riding a wave of distorted spacetime.

The viewscreen flickered with incomprehensible images: bursts of light, shapes that defied Euclidean geometry, and glimpses of other branes drifting through the bulk dimension. Rhea gripped her chair, watching in awe as reality itself seemed to ripple.

'Containment holding', Malik reported, though his voice was tight with tension.

Suddenly, the ship shuddered violently. Alarms blared.

'What's happening?' Rhea demanded.

'Athena's mass output is spiking!' Malik shouted. 'She's interacting with another dimensional object — something massive!'

The viewscreen showed a colossal shadow passing through the rippling void, a structure impossibly vast and alien.

'Is that…a ship?' Rhea whispered.

Before Malik could answer, the warp drive surged, tearing the Endeavor away from the shadow. The ship reemerged into familiar space, the stars of the Milky Way glittering around them.

'We made it', Malik said, slumping in relief.

Rhea exhaled, staring out at the serene cosmos. 'Get a log started. I want everything we saw in that dimension recorded'.

Malik nodded, but his thoughts lingered on the alien structure they'd seen — a silent reminder that humanity's grasp of the universe was still woefully incomplete.

As the crew celebrated their return, Athena hummed softly in her containment field. She had carried them

home, but in her silence, she held the memory of that vast shadow — a harbinger of mysteries yet to be uncovered.

Part III – The Time Loop

The story began decades before the Endeavor ever launched, in a small, cluttered laboratory hidden deep within the mountains. It was there that Professor Ronald Mallett, the controversial physicist, stood before his crowning achievement: a rotating ring laser designed to manipulate spacetime itself.

Mallett's theory, drawn from Einstein's general relativity, proposed that a rapidly rotating ring of light could create a frame - dragging effect, twisting spacetime into a loop. It wouldn't allow for physical time travel, but information — light pulses encoded with data — could theoretically travel back to the past.

For years, the scientific community dismissed him as a dreamer. But on this day, Mallett stood on the precipice of proving them wrong.

'Dr. Mallett', his assistant called, interrupting his reverie. 'The system is ready for activation'.

Mallett adjusted his glasses, his hands trembling slightly as he initiated the experiment. The ring laser spun faster and faster, creating a faint hum as spacetime began to distort within its confines. On the nearby monitor, a single data stream awaited transmission: the blueprint for the Endeavor, the Singularity Drive, and Athena herself.

'Are you sure about this?' his assistant asked.

Mallett nodded. 'The data came to us from the future, and we've verified its authenticity. If we don't send it back, the Endeavor and its discoveries will never exist. It's a paradox, yes, but one we're part of now'.

As the laser reached full power, the lab's instruments recorded faint ripples in spacetime. Mallett tapped a command into his terminal, and the data stream was converted into a series of encoded light pulses. The pulses entered the ring laser, disappearing into the loop of twisted spacetime.

For a moment, nothing happened. Then, the monitor lit up with confirmation: the signal had been received — 40 years earlier.

'It worked', Mallett whispered, sinking into a chair.

'But who sent it to us in the first place?' the assistant asked, staring at the monitor. Mallett smiled faintly. 'If our understanding of time loops is correct, the crew of the Endeavor sent it back after their mission. Information is the only thing that can escape time's grip. It's a closed loop — one we've just completed'.

40 Years Earlier

A young engineer named Dr. Esha Patel stood in another lab, poring over an impossibly detailed schematic that had appeared as a series of light pulses in an early prototype of Mallett's laser.

'This is… advanced beyond anything we've ever seen', Patel said to her team. The designs described a containment system for a micro black hole, an Alcubierre White warp drive, and the blueprint for a ship capable of exploring dimensions beyond their own.

'Where did it come from?' one of the engineers asked.

Patel hesitated. 'The message says it's from the future. From a mission called the Endeavor. And if these designs are accurate, they're the key to reaching a level of technology humanity can barely imagine'.

Back in the Future

As the Endeavor floated among the stars, Commander Rhea and Dr. Malik stood in the ship's central chamber, staring at Athena's shimmering containment field.

'You think it's true?' Rhea asked. 'That the designs for all of this came from us?'

Malik nodded. 'It has to be. Athena's containment, the warp drive—they're technologies built on discoveries we haven't even made yet. The only way they could exist is if we sent the knowledge back'.

'But why us?' Rhea wondered.

Malik looked at the glowing singularity. 'Maybe it's not about why. Maybe it's about ensuring the loop stays intact. Without us, humanity would never know what's out here'.

As the Endeavor sailed onward, its crew unaware of the vast shadows awaiting them in the bulk dimension, one truth remained clear: their journey was not just about exploration but about ensuring that knowledge transcended the barriers of time itself. Theirs was a mission written into spacetime — a tale that began in the future, unfolded in the present, and had always been destined to return to the past.

Turning Point

Clouds he would look at,
as if suddenly falling on him.
But more often the land around
overcome by the sky, ebbed to rest
in his slow perception,
as night fell.

Birds emerged from the darkness,
their yellow eyes shining, faint little lights,
into his wide-open glance
as into a long-guessed secret,
one they could sense.

And darkened trees returned his gaze,
rustling their leaves to convey
lost ancient transfers…
For looking, you see, has a limit.
And the more one looks at the world,
it wants to be looked at with caution -

Should not a heart practice
upon all the images trapped within you,
even if they're still unknown
when you look inward to find them
to trace them into your soul?

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

A Contribution

I believe that the place where an animal dies is a sacred one. There is a need to bring ritual into the conventional slaughter plants and use it as a means to shape people's behaviour. It would help prevent people from becoming numbed, callous, or cruel. The ritual could be something very simple, such as a moment of silence. In addition to developing better designs and making equipment to ensure the humane treatment of all animals, that would be my contribution.

Temple Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures: my life with autism*

I never had much time for talk of 'soul',
A notion I thought contentless, absurd.
I never used, just mentioned it, that word,
Or let it play a null place-holder role,

Unless we take the *via negativa*
That lets us venture it was what they lacked,
Those who, like me, had personhood subtract
Whatever 'soul' meant to the soul-believer.

Be clear: I seek no self-exemption clause;
I look within and find no grounds to think
Myself affined to soul-possessors Inc
Or joined in their humanitarian cause.

Yet, that much understood, again be clear:
We soul-less ones may lack what count for you
Good souls as human kindness yet can do
As much good by the thoughtful lights that we're

CHRIS **NORRIS**

Likewise in full possession of, if not –
I dare say – better able to apply
Since thinking straight and unaffected by
Those feeling-fits that faze the 'normal' lot.

I won't say, as some like to think, that I've
A 'special', rare or intimate rapport
With those non-human animals. Far more,
It's sentience plus reason made me strive

To soothe their terrors, keep from them the plain,
Unblinking knowledge of what lay ahead
In that last moment. They'd exchange the dread,
The smell of death and screams of fear and pain

For merciful unknowing – just as we
Arm's-length devourers might indeed have wished
For our good selves had evolution dished
It out to us, the slug those beasts foresee

Just as the trigger's squeezed. Don't get me wrong:
I like it when the interviewers speak
Of my 'humanity' (odd, that), my streak
Of 'unexpected' empathy, or 'strong

And altogether laudable' concern
To use my ingenuity and skill
In finding ways for abattoirs to kill
Their daily batch, yet have the beasts not learn

What's coming. Nice, those tributes, but a touch
Misplaced, I'm always quick to tell them, since
They seem on the one hand out to convince
Their readers that 'autistic' pretty much

Equates with 'self-preoccupied', or 'self-
Absorbed', while on the other all too keen
To crown me, Temple Grandin, as the Queen
Of creature welfare, place me on the shelf

With good St. Francis, and so knock for six
The idea that those way out on the scale,
Like me, must let some miracle prevail
Over their native bent if they're to fix

Things for the better. Just flat wrong, I say!
Like anyone, I reason from my own
Experience to whatever can be known
Of other people's in the usual way,

That is, by simply thinking how it feels
For me, a sentient creature, when such stuff
Turns up, then figuring – easily enough –
How it must be for them. No vague appeals

Temple Grandin

Egyptian artwork

To empathy required, no talk of deep
Cross-species kinship or the ties of kind,
In the wide sense, that some believe to bind
All living things (the case of wolf and sheep

Or suchlike pairs seems never to invade
Their blissful dream). Analogy's the thing,
The ground of every valid reasoning
Where weal and woe are vividly conveyed

Across the species-lines, then felt to bear
An onward impetus from is to ought,
Then pass from sentience to that which thought,
If rational, requires we humans share

With any animal that manifests,
Like those I studied, symptoms of unease
Or fear and trembling when it hears or sees
What's happening up ahead. If it attests

To anything, my case, it's how you mid-
Range types might learn a bit from us at this
'Autistic' end where, without doubt, we miss
Some nuances the other-enders bid

We take to heart yet where we have a claim,
Us (as they think) heart-bypassers, to get
Things right by thinking practically and let
Those anguished feelings not deflect our aim

From its intended consequence. The 'case
Of Temple Grandin' might then serve to tell
The wrangling ethicists how they'd do well
To drop their in-house *contretemps* and face

The Bentham reckoning: don't ask 'Can they talk?',
Or 'Can they reason?', but, more simply, 'Can
They suffer?', those dumb beasts whom the beast 'man'
Has deemed his to subdue, enslave, or chalk

Up ready for mass-slaughter by divine
Or evolutionary right. At least
Give this some thought: how keep the title 'beast'
From veering back and forth across the line

We humans draw to tell ourselves it's fine
That we should bond and hobnob as we feast
On them, while they're thought lucky if released
From terror's grip by that device of mine

To ease them through it. Me, I have no dog
In any race except the one that goes
To all whose creature-reasoning helps close
The species-gap by kindly analogue.

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A Young Girl Sleeping

A young girl sleeping has a dream
Of unicorns that ford a stream
To castles where princesses lie,
And princes pine and wizards scheme.

Romance casts on such things its beam,
And it was long held in esteem
But science dawned, the dream's become
Nothing but a nostalgic theme,

A world that dreams alone unlock.
A castle rises from a rock
While far below the Rhine is calm;
Here there is nothing that can shock.

The girl awaits her lover's kiss,
For courtly lovers promise bliss
And their poems always charm:
How I prefer that world to this!

Edward Greenwood