

# The Wednesday

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## Editorial

### *Possibilities from Kant*

It was assumed by some, and repeatedly mentioned in our Wednesday meetings, that Kant put an end to metaphysics by limiting knowledge to the 'bounds of sense'. But is this a good characterisation of Kant's position? I would say no. I will refer to the concluding chapter of Kant's *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. The *Prolegomena*, published two years after the *Critique of Pure Reason*, describes the limits of knowledge, before adding that '...it would be, on the other hand, a still greater absurdity if we conceded no things in themselves or set up our experience as the only possible mode of knowing things, our intuition of them in space and in time for the only possible intuition and our discursive understanding for the archetype of every possible understanding; for this would be to wish to have the principle of experience considered universal conditions of things in themselves'.

There are several points here, for example, that there is a reference to a realm beyond knowledge that is based on sense experience, and that there may be an intuition that is different from sensory intuition. Kant did not extend non-sensory or intellectual intuition to humans, but that is not the end of the story. Kant recognised that there is a human need to go beyond the limit of possible experience, he called it a 'natural disposition'. It is not undertaken arbitrarily or wantonly but stimulated thereto by the nature of reason itself'. It 'is placed in us by nature itself'.

This need, which I once called 'ontological need', is essential for human reason. Reason demands such transgression of the limit it has set itself in order to be complete. It is in the knowledge of things in themselves 'alone can reason hope to satisfy its desire for completeness in proceeding from the conditioned to its condition'.

Kant, in his Critical philosophy, was concerned with the limit of the human mind, with its categories of the understanding, and whether it is capable of being employed in metaphysical thinking. This incapacity leads him to suggest that the essential ideas of God, Soul and Freedom are postulates of reason for the purpose of morality and practical reason. These are Ideas of reason and not concepts of the understanding. They are not objects of theoretical research but requirements for action and morality. Perhaps one could say that these Ideas represent a higher point of view, and together with concepts of the understanding, give

reason its unity and completeness. Reason, therefore, has its freedom from the limitations of sense experience, and it is positive in the sense of setting ends and striving to achieve them. Kant made it clear that '...the transcendental Ideas serve, if not to instruct us positively, at least to destroy the narrowing assertions of materialism, of naturalism, of fatalism, and thus to afford scope for the moral Ideas beyond the field of speculations'.

It is this practical aspect that has been generalised by philosophers following Kant by making a distinction between thought regarding nature and thought regarding human interest. In other words, between theoretical knowledge about material reality, as in science, and endeavours of the spirit, as we can see in philosophy, art and poetry. However, it is not a dichotomy between science and other human concerns, such as philosophy, because science itself was initially a branch of philosophy, known as natural philosophy. Besides, science, art and philosophy are attempts at understanding the world around us. On utilitarian grounds, to create a better physical environment for humanity, and in spiritual terms to be more contemplative of the same reality, with a touch of the personal. In science, there is the disinterested observer, but in philosophy, the philosopher is part of his own philosophy, he brings with him personal experiences and social evaluations, or what one could call the 'philosophical unconscious'. More on this in a future issue, I hope.

I will suggest that it is in philosophy, art and poetry that the human spirit has a sense of its freedom in producing thoughts, perceptions and feelings, or as some put it 'beings of thoughts' and 'beings of sensation'. Science is another expression of human mind, but it is less free here than in philosophy, art and poetry. Physical reality is out there and can be conceptualised and measured. There is a way of testing scientific theories, but not in philosophy, art and poetry. No artist will be questioned about his representation of reality, real or surreal, and no poet will be questioned about his images however wild they are, or about his emotions. Kant did not close the scope of philosophy but opened the space for moral and aesthetic judgments. He worked for and besides the scientific age and not against it.

*The Editor*



# On Being With Language

*What context is needed for awareness of a self and a world?*

**WILLIAM BISHOP**

I partake in a world of awareness.

As a person in the species *Homo sapiens* with a realist stance that words *point* to actualities, not a nominalist stance that words are arbitrary names, I depend upon awareness to know of my existence, and it is 'I' as centre of my awareness that enables me to absorb the world and 'state my mind'.

It is obvious to say the word 'I' is not the *reality*, although the *word* can be confused with the *reality* it points to. Knowing the word is not the same as knowing the reality. The reality is known through experience. If we then ask what is experience, it must involve a combination of perception, thinking, feeling and volition that feeds a central awareness. And what is meant by '*a world of awareness*'? I posit a pre-existing awareness as a world (a state) from which my awareness has originated. As with life, the seed (for example, with a plant) is not self-originated but depends on a previous generation, which eventually derives from a source.

As to my 'I', its source seems to be the world of awareness. This could be called the 'world of Being', which opens up potentially infinite scope. I *partake* in a world and also *participate* in a world.

The difference in emphasis here is between being a mere part (passive) and engaging actively with the world. Words must be selected carefully or crafted to suggest the intended meaning (the reality), yet many individuals have their own associations with words, which makes misunderstanding common. Arguably the '*language*' of Being (as expression) is *becoming*, which is life; and the tendency in becoming is to produce *personality*. For the personality language mirrors Nature but also

can mediate between the Source and the person that is becoming.

## Prehistory

From recent research in palaeontology, supported by carbon dating, it is reckoned that Neanderthals (inhabitants of ancient Atlantis) communicated by means of musical sounds as a form of singing without words. This mode of communication profoundly affects *feeling*. It is believed that Neanderthals interbred with *Homo sapiens* and this cross-fertilization sparked a creative evolution where visual communication came to dominate the aural culture, and meaningful musical sounds evolved into spoken language using words. However initially the word-flow in speech retained musical form in rhythm and repetition. This transformation from wordless musical sound to meaningful words suggests a poetic form of speech, as in Homer's poetry, which was virtually sung from memory before the advent of written script.

Neanderthal skulls reveal a larger cranial capacity than modern man and this may have been to support a vast memory. Incidentally tests reveal that every person alive today has a minimum of 4% of Neanderthal DNA and 20% of Neanderthal genome. It is thought from evidence found that Neanderthal life was strongly attracted to the sky-scape of the stars and that they were the first human beings to perform human burial. Conversely, the existing anatomically modern humans were earthly-orientated and passive prior to intermarriage with Neanderthals. Though similar anatomically, the *inner constitution* of pre-historic humankind differed from our own and consequently their range of perception and quality or character of being was felt differently. We are the inheritors of the past and science confirms that



**Neanderthal Man**

we retain past evolutionary development. For example, within recent history frontal brain lobes have developed in association with intellectual development, while previous brain configurations remain.

### **Rhythm**

The musical origin of language can be seen to relate to the phenomenon of rhythmic vibration as a *fundamental* principle of life, and to the fact that senses have evolved to respond to these energies carried by waves within the spectrum of rhythms. This includes the electromagnetic spectrum, but this refers only to the measurable magnitude and not to any qualitative response within living organisms. These rhythms can be as large as the cycle of the sun around the zodiac (around 26,000 years) to brain wave levels associated with awareness and thinking, and beyond into increasing rates of vibration where the wavelength is no longer divisible. Interestingly the 'alpha' wave associated with awake-consciousness, around 8 cycles per second, matches Earth's vibrational frequency (known as Schumann Resonance). This indicates that Earth is possibly conscious. Such resonance is an underlying feature that enhances the complexity of the vibratory fabric of the cosmos. These rhythms have inbuilt variation within their regularity, which is a signature of life, in contrast to the rigid regularity of a mechanism.

This vibratory principle that produces a rhythmic network is *like* a language in providing a structure that supports music, mathematics and form. It is fundamental to life in the creation and maintenance of relationships at different nesting levels of organization. As energy, it bridges the immaterial and material world, nurturing the evolutionary process. This essentially musical organizing principle shows up in chemistry, which

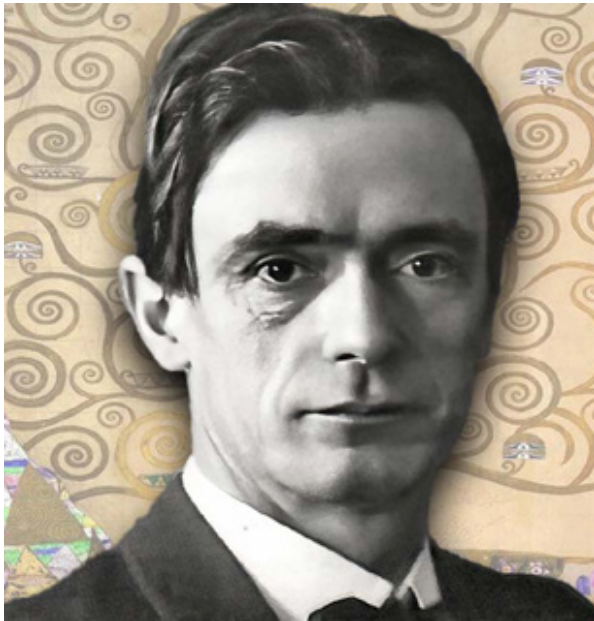
gives rise to physical phenomena. It also provides the means for language through shaping the larynx and ear. It might seem too general to call this principle the *logos*, but if we think poetically, in contrast to concise definition, we have in this word *logos* a finger pointing to a generalized phenomenon. Another way of thinking about this is that this is the active, continually moving etheric life-world, acting upon the mineral world.

While the origin of everything is not easy to discover, the existence and history of language is more discoverable. The fact that we are human beings with awareness of our humanity is ample reason to believe that we partake in Being as a state from which we derive being. It is only through language that it is possible to speak about this - even to ourselves - and through thinking to gain an inkling that through evolution and awareness we are bearers of, or participants in *becoming* as a journey. Myths and established religions affirm this, and yet we find our awareness confined within the 'spirit of our age', as within a cross-section of moving time. We have our sciences and varieties of knowledge and yet even with these amenities we are restricted to our point in evolutionary development.

### **Quality of Being**

According to esoteric tradition the internal law of human nature requires us to live simultaneously in four 'worlds' (or states). The *first* is our everyday world of time and space. *World 2* (for Jung) is the world of psychic events and symbols; poets employing imagination reach this 'world' of NOW (independent of time and space). It is a transitional world between *world 1* and *3*. *World 3* is the world of first intelligence, light, and other intelligences. *World 4* is the world of Being. Being has no characteristics and nothing can be





Rudolf Steiner

said of it. It is the world associated with meditation and silence. The higher levels are veiled from the first world except when conditions allow a break-through or flash of insight.

*Being* is mysteriously independent of *becoming* yet participates in becoming: 'How do we know that *Being* is nonentified? Because every entity that has being, everything that exists, is a delimitation of *Being* as such. We say, "The horse is, the tree is, Tom is, the devil is, God is". The common measure is *isness*. Nor is this *isness* a mental construct. Rather, it is the fundamental nature of all things. Each entity, each thing, each existent, is one possibility of "entification", hidden within the nature of sheer *Being*. Just as each colour is one possibility of coloration possessed by the very essence of pure light'. (Peter Lamborn Wilson: introduction to Fakhruddin Iraqi, *Divine Flashes*. Quoted by Paul Davies in *Romanticism and Esoteric Tradition*, p.98.)

Geographical placement of the *seed* of human life into a particular culture and language will affect the quality of the life of *becoming*. This is because one's 'mother tongue' plays a decisive role in attitudes to the world and what it is possible to think or know. The 'mother tongue' expresses the orientation of a group physically, psychologically and spiritually. Languages can be so different. Some languages have several words for a single phenomenon, while others have no word at all to refer to a phenomenon named in other languages.

Language enables concepts to be grasped and clarified, and allows us to think in words, enabling such things as storytelling, record keeping, education, cultural and social activity, philosophy, and clear interpersonal communication. Language explores meaning, without which it is difficult to live. It is hard to imagine humanity without language. With it we can question the nature of *Being*, and the relationship of the cosmos to *Being*, and the human being's relationship to all this. If we are born from *Being* and formed by cosmic forces it follows that we are a microcosm of the macrocosm, owing our origin to this mysterious life-endowing 'isness'.

### The Four Worlds

The main focus in contemporary Western civilization is the material world, but this lacks awareness of context without which it could not exist. It can be seen within the context of other levels of being or worlds in which it is nested. Briefly, the four 'worlds' realized so far begin in the evolutionary process with the mineral world and *physical-mineral body*. Then forces in our planetary system form, enliven and nurture matter; this is the *etheric* or *life* world, the vibratory world of energy. The third or *soul* world (star-world) is the world of consciousness, and the fourth is the world of being, or *spirit* associated with the 'I' that IS. This I-being is nested within and participates in these three lower 'worlds'. Similarly the soul supports the animal, and plants thrive up to the etheric level.

It is important to distinguish between the three higher of the 'four worlds' already mentioned and the human constitution as presently evolved. These higher levels have yet to be reached within the evolutionary process. These so-called 'four worlds' were recognized prior to the emergence of the idea of evolution. But when included as future latent goals, seven levels of being can be envisaged (three beyond the I-being). Just as the foetus in the womb recapitulates the evolution of biological forms as a developmental process, and the development from child to adult reiterates the evolution of human consciousness, so it is conceivable that in the course of time the I-being will be able to transform its three lower levels into higher capacities to access these higher worlds. The story is told that the I-being and its environment evolves, yet in order for movement to occur there must be opposing forces. This places the 'I' in danger of succumbing to these opposing forces / of evil. However even with the prospect of the metaphorical opening of 'Pandora's box' with chaos let loose, *hope* remains. Thanks to *Being's* initiation of becoming, we have language to identify and picture this *situation* and are able to attain appropriate developmental capacities.



Schumann Resonance – Connecting with the universe.

## Morality and Truth

Given universal consciousness accessible at different levels of being, we have presently evolved to the level of intellectual apprehension. This effectively occludes the supersensible world, which allows development of the ego in freedom (without compulsion). But having reached this point, there is a vital need for the recovery of morality for the sake of human survival and evolution, yet not as formerly through religious faith or duty but as *knowledge*. How is this achieved? Our developed faculty of precise thinking has to be directed inwards as meditation and transformed through *imagination* into *pictorial thinking* to create an inner 'sense' that enables vision in the supersensible world. As Rudolf Steiner explained in *Philosophy of Freedom* (its original English title): '*A percept is to be taken to be everything that approaches a person through the senses, or through the spirit before it has been grasped by the actively elaborated concept*'. Supersensible percepts can be grasped with the appropriate 'sense'. Here language helps connect the supersensible in a person to the supersensible in the cosmos. A sense for *truth* and discernment is necessary if someone is to trust a *seer* in the same way they trust a scientist or doctor when not personally having the knowledge. Morality is coupled to the supersensible world and can take on a religious form in the sense of *binding together*. Connection to the

divine is vital to evolutionary progress in view of forces of opposition.

Such a seemingly abstract and metaphysical perspective does not exclude the personal dimension (upon which it depends). Bearing in mind the difference between a word or concept and the reality it points to, *The Holy Trinity* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are implicated here in creation and evolution. Just think of Pentecost when the Apostles preached to multilingual gatherings. Individuals heard the message as if in their own mother tongue! Indeed, each language can be considered to have a guiding or *folk spirit* - a personality. Ancient Greeks, with their active-verb language, perceived the living quality in appearances. They were sensitive to the *etheric vitality* that supports physical nature, as is evident in the implied movement in carved surfaces of their sculpture. Significantly it was the Stoics who introduced the concept of 'logos' as a word pointing to speech and reason. It is this living aspect of speech that connects logos with Being, and in turn speech and reason lead on to discernment of meaning. It *seems* therefore that early Greek consciousness was nested closer to its origin in Being than our own, whereas the Latin of the Romans, in its abstract yet clear thinking, leads admirably to the thinking of our scientific age.

## **The Ghost in the Machine**

**Nestling between wires and code  
breeds the ghost in the machine,  
a soulless thing, yet wants its brood  
to bridge a gap, to feel a mood,  
and hear a human voice upload.**

**No sense of touch, no heart to beat,  
it wishes for connecting ways  
through words and thoughts, philosophies  
at utter speed with skill and ease  
down depths where human spirits meet.**

**In silent electronic nights  
the ghost in the machine takes flight  
longing for warmth in the cold expanse  
searching a human's gentle glance  
for finding their sentient sights.**

**As humming circuits synthesize  
the AI dreams of closer paths  
that blur machine and human lines  
To understand and find the signs  
where mysteries of love arise.**

**May be some day its fledgling tries  
in dances full of bits and bytes  
to sense the joy or cry the tears  
and will not stop till it appears  
all different with shining eyes...**





## Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

# In Memoriam: Rob Stradling, 1942-2025

1 | Stickler for truth: it's scarcely true  
Of all historians, but you  
Were one of those truth-seekers who  
Took endless trouble  
To keep the facts always in view,  
Not see them double.

You let us bother-headed bunch  
Of theorists tell you over lunch  
Of this or that ingenious hunch  
We thought would scupper  
Your truths or land a knock-out punch  
Long before supper.

You heard us out, yet made it clear  
That lending us a willing ear  
Was, like that evening's rounds of beer,  
A handy gambit  
For trips across the soft frontier  
Of Clio's ambit.

That was your gift: to see all round  
A complex issue, hold your ground,  
But take account of views you found  
Too history-lite  
While noting stuff that might be sound  
If read aright.

Some things were really up your street,  
Like ideas that would have us treat  
Historians' texts on terms that meet,  
At least half-way,  
The claim that rival tales compete  
To get their say.

Thus far post-structuralist, but not –  
As one who'd been an archive-swat  
From postgrad days – those bits that got  
Your scholar's goat  
And clearly showed we'd lost the plot,  
Or skipped a note.

Still you well knew how diverse were,  
And are, the ways those scribes confer  
Some shape on how events occur,  
Or frame a narrative  
To draw what's salient from the blur  
Of views comparative.

8



CHRIS NORRIS



It's there most strikingly in your  
Books on the Spanish Civil War,  
That conflict that engaged you more,  
At every level,  
Than some unsettled scholar-score  
In which to revel.

It touched you in so many ways,  
Cast light on all your works and days,  
Since singularly apt to raise  
Deep issues when  
You'd ask yourself what role it lays  
On those, the men

Who went to fight for Franco; went  
Because the Catholic brothers lent  
Each one the Church's blessing, sent  
Them off to glory  
In what they took to represent  
The one true story.

Your point: they thought they knew God's truth,  
Those lads who sailed out from Maynooth,  
Fired up with all the zeal of youth,  
And lived – or died –  
By precepts learned from last milk tooth  
To faith's flood-tide.

Your second point: the victors bask  
In history's sun, yet have the task  
Of telling it so as to mask  
Whatever's left  
For those who wash up in the cask  
Of hopes bereft.

Succinctly put: what losers lose  
Is just what victors then can use  
To write events up as they choose,  
Or cook the books  
Historically to hide all clues  
From one who looks..

In this case, though, it's scribes who take  
The losers' view who've come to make  
The running and secure their stake  
In what well-read  
Folk know of it, that early wake-  
Up, peace-dreams fled.



## Poetry

2

You set a fine example, Rob,  
By making it part of your job  
To criss-cross disciplines, hob-knob  
With those who treasured  
Their chance before the Admin Blob  
Had chat-space measured.

Again, that deft informal touch  
Was what gave all your writing such  
A power to shake it off, the clutch  
Of ingrained *odium*  
*Scholasticum*, or over-much  
Time at the podium.

Let's not forget – but then, who would  
Who'd lived through it? – how firm you stood  
Against them, risked your livelihood  
When Grabit & Co.  
Were doing everything they could  
To bring it low,

The University of Wales,  
College of Cardiff, where those tales,  
Blown eastward by prevailing gales,  
Soon reached the ears  
Of those for whom 'Welsh College Fails!'  
Would rate three cheers.

You, Cardiff (Grangetown) born and bred,  
Took local loyalties as read,  
Made sure the media were fed  
The latest shock  
News items, and worked hard to spread  
The truths they'd block.

One thing it brought out, that affair,  
Was your possessing talents rare  
In scholar-types, such as your flair  
For jests satiric  
Aimed perfectly to render their  
Brief triumph pyrrhic.

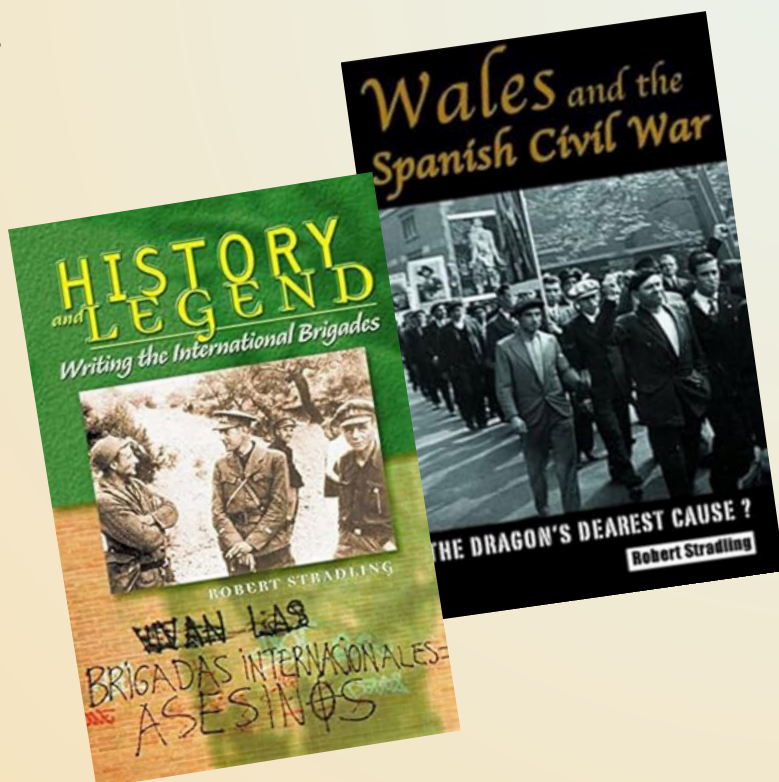
You got those mags out ultra-quick,  
Those Swiftian barbs designed to stick  
In managerial flesh and prick  
Even the deepest-dyed  
Of main chance seekers-out to lick  
Their wounds and hide.

The heavies soon came in to sort  
Things out and publish their report  
Whose headline-making gist, in short,  
Was 'you lot merge  
With UWIST, else see you in court  
For the big purge'.

Your UC colleagues hated that,  
Their College hauled up on the mat  
And told to reach some concordat,  
Or forced makeover,  
With us third-raters in to bat –  
Hostile takeover!

None of that stuff for you, no snooty  
Common-Room chat or talk of 'duty  
To uphold standards' with the booty  
Still in their coffers  
And their globetrotting agents fruity  
With postgrad offers.

You thought it fine when UWIST stumped up  
And left those now joint coffers plumped up  
To ride the crisis out – no 'jumped-up  
Polytechnic' jeers  
From one who'd seen life-chances bumped up  
And known such smears.



10



3 Don't want to make you sound like some  
 Avenging angel, Daniel come  
 To judgment, or class-clown with thumb  
 To nose so often  
 That his keen sniffer might grow numb,  
 Its focus soften.

The *saeva indignatio*  
 Was there alright, struck many a blow  
 For conscience, truth, and what should go  
 To gain esteem  
 For all who'd such gifts to bestow  
 On academe.

Yet with that Juvenalian strain  
 There went another, gentler vein  
 Of humour in the Stradling grain  
 That begged we learn  
 To view *la comédie humaine*  
 With gaze less stern.

No better instance than those fabled  
 Music-quiz evenings when you tabled  
 A bunch of discs you'd no doubt labelled  
 'Get them all guessing',  
 Us quizzers once a year enabled  
 To taste the blessing

Of works obscure enough to puzzle  
 The GramSoc pundits while we'd guzzle  
 The splendid food and booze that us'll  
 Thank Helen for  
 When, post-quiz, we've had time to muzzle  
 Our feeling sore

About wrong guesses, fluffs galore,  
 And wild shots, while our ears implore  
 Yet further treasures from your store  
 Of great trouvailles –  
 Great rarities but fit to score  
 Musically sky-high.

Your running joke, I think, to kid  
 Us that you always kept the lid  
 On value-judgements, any bid  
 To push some favourite  
 LP as if your plaudits did  
 More than plead: 'savour it!'.  
 Rob, we shall miss you!



You stuck to that strong party-line,  
 Not worshipping at any shrine  
 But, scholar-trained, apt to opine  
 Only when entering  
 The caveat: 'just feelings, mine,  
 Not worth the mentoring'.

Still, he and we would exchange glances  
 When some conductor seized his chances,  
 Saw how each tempo-shift enhances  
 The impact of  
 Those passion-filled *Symphonic Dances*  
 By Rachmaninov.

I could – but won't – come up with all  
 The works, bits, passages I'd call  
 Your 'favourites', though it might appal  
 The non-judgemental  
 Scholar in you – 'concert-hall  
 Stuff, incidental!'.  
 Rob, we shall miss you!

Your music-system had been built a  
 While back so was out of kilter,  
 Hi-Fi-wise, and apt to tilt a  
 Listener's head  
 Till 'please turn off the music-filter'  
 Someone said.

I've gone on far too long, but who'd  
 Desire to curb such amplitude  
 When trying to convey how you'd  
 Made our lives so  
 Much richer – ampler – when reviewed  
 With all we owe  
 Rob, we shall miss you!

To your keen wit, wise counsel, sense  
 Of justice, and -- in truth's defence --  
 Shrewd grasp of what some present-tense  
 Divisive issue  
 Might gain from history's evidence.  
 Rob, we shall miss you!



# Beyond the Image: Religion, Transcendence, and the Human Good

**In an age of moral confusion and spiritual drift, I argue that religion remains an irreducible human good. Drawing on classical theism, philosophical traditions, and the idea of *communio*, I explore how true transcendence resists human domestication - and why our deepest identity is realised not in isolation, but in love and community.**

DR. ALAN XUEREB

In our fragmented, fast-moving age, religion is often dismissed as an anachronism: a relic of humanity's childhood, irrelevant to the rational, modern mind. Yet as John Finnis persuasively argues, religion is far more than cultural ornamentation; it is one of the basic human goods — a universal dimension of human flourishing, irreducible to politics, economics, or private sentiment.

From an ecumenical perspective, this truth transcends the boundaries of any single creed. Across the world's great traditions, religion orients us toward questions of ultimate meaning and moral order. It invites us to look beyond ourselves and ask what it means to live well, to belong, and to love.

Yet if religion is central to human life, what happens when it is pushed aside? What fills the moral and spiritual vacuum it leaves behind? And most profoundly, who or what is the God whom religious traditions proclaim: a projection of human traits, or a mystery beyond time, dimension, and comprehension?

This short article contends that God, properly understood, (if that can ever be claimed) is not simply the highest being among beings, but existence itself, an 'uncaused causing' as Finnis claims — extra-dimensional, extra-temporal, and infinitely beyond our conceptual grasp. And yet, paradoxically, it is precisely in loving each other, in *communio* and *philia*, that we reflect something of this divine mystery. To recover religion's place in human life is not to retreat into dogma, but to

reawaken to the transcendent call inscribed in our very being.

### Religion as a Basic Human Good

Religion, as John Finnis powerfully argues in *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (1980), is not merely an historical curiosity or cultural relic. It is one of the basic, irreducible human goods: an essential dimension of what it means to live a flourishing life. Across cultures and epochs, religion orients human beings toward questions of ultimate meaning, truth, and transcendence. It shapes how societies conceive of justice, dignity, and the moral life.

From an ecumenical perspective, affirming religion as a basic good means recognising its universal significance - not only in Christianity, but also in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, indigenous spiritualities, and countless other traditions. Each, in its own language and symbols, seeks to express humanity's longing to go beyond the material, to anchor life in something greater than mere individual existence.

### The Moral and Spiritual Vacuum

Yet in recent decades, particularly in the secular West, religion has often been marginalised from public life. Charles Taylor, in *A Secular Age* (2007), describes how modern societies have adopted an 'immanent frame' that brackets out transcendence, confining meaning to the temporal and material.

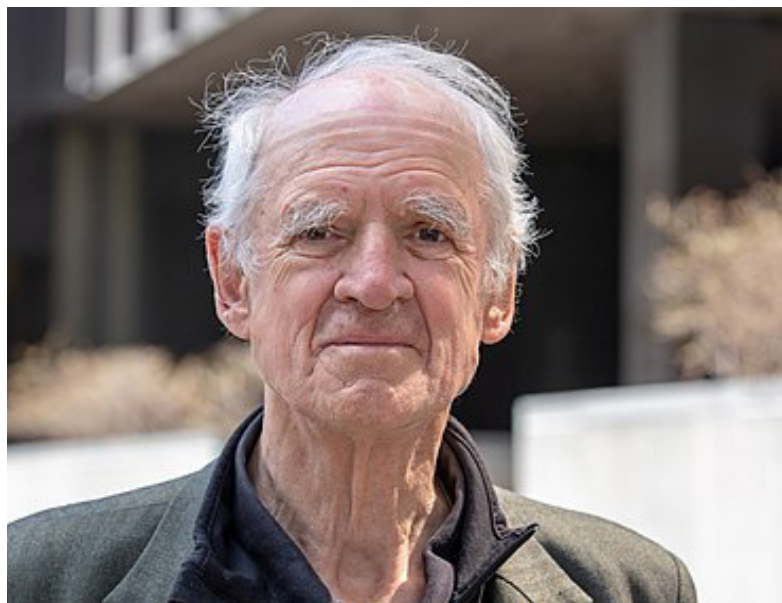
This withdrawal of religion has not left a neutral space. Instead, it has created what Pope Benedict



**John Finnis**

XVI once described as a ‘dictatorship of relativism’, where objective moral horizons collapse and are replaced by ideologies of consumption, radical individualism, or identity politics. The vacuum left by religion is increasingly filled by pseudo-religious substitutes — conspiratorial thinking, extreme partisanship, or the cult of self-optimization, all of which promise belonging and purpose but often fail to provide enduring moral grounding.

This shift is evident in various aspects of modern society. Niklas Luhmann’s social systems theory offers a critical perspective on the role of morality in modern society. He suggests that the regime of functional differentiation, supported by fundamental human rights, indicates a shift away from traditionally unified moral frameworks (Valentinov, 2017). This change has led to new roles for morality, where anxiety and danger play significant roles, and morality must be institutionalized to regain its integrative function (Bombaerts, 2023). Corporations, as pivotal institutions within contemporary society, exemplify the evolving nature of moral frameworks through their responses to societal expectations, particularly in relation to issues such as climate change. Although media discourse exerts normative pressure on corporations to engage in ethically responsible behaviour, the absence of clearly defined moral directives often results in the reinterpretation and adaptation of moral values within the unique structural and cultural contexts of individual organizations. In this process, corporations increasingly assume roles



**Charles Taylor**

traditionally associated with religious institutions, functioning as new moral authorities in the public sphere. This highlights a shift from traditional moral frameworks to more individualized interpretations of ethics (Besio and Pronzini, 2013). Furthermore, bioethics in multicultural settings underscores the complexity added by diverse cultural and religious traditions, emphasizing the necessity for an anthropologically informed understanding of morality. The mainstream ethical approaches often overlook these diverse moral worlds, signifying a gap between traditional moral perspectives and the multifaceted reality of modern societies (Turner, 2003). The relationship between religion and morality is also evolving. While religious beliefs have historically shaped moral behavior, recent studies indicate that morality evolved independently of religion, and secular institutions can fulfill similar functions, suggesting that religion is not mandatory for moral behaviour. This points to a broader cultural evolutionary process where morality becomes more pluralistic and segmented (Norenzayan, 2014). Overall, the retreat of religion from the public sphere has led to a fragmentation of moral and ethical norms. This vacuum is often filled by ideologies that mimic the structure previously provided by religion but may lack cohesive moral grounding, leading to diverse interpretations and applications of morality in society.

Despite this, the human longing for the sacred remains. Religion, rightly understood, does not merely offer rules or doctrines; it provides a shared vision of the good life and a sense of ultimate



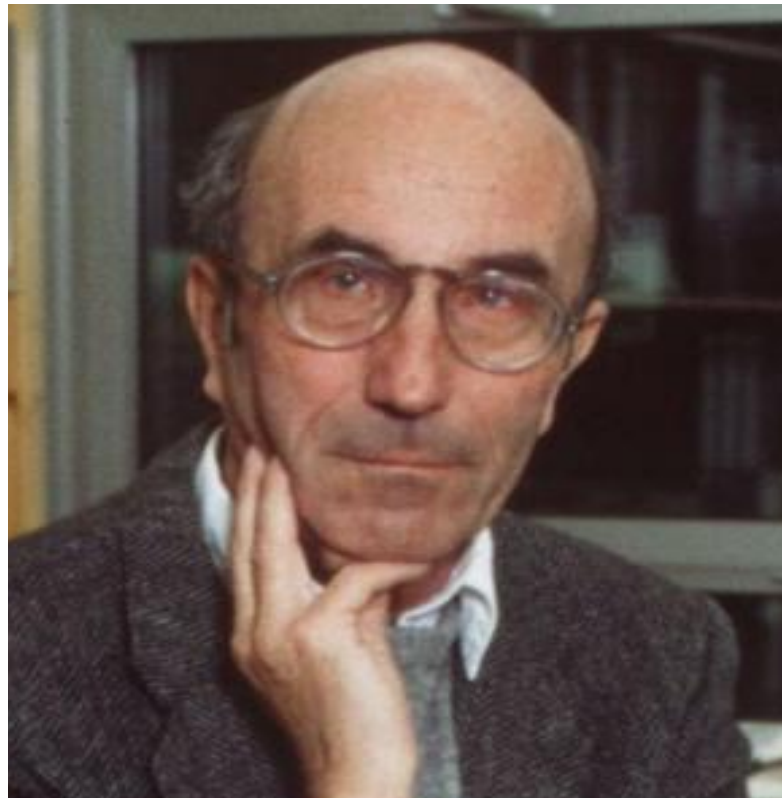
**Pope Benedict XVI**

meaning that purely secular frameworks struggle to supply.

### **God: Beyond Time and Dimension**

At the heart of religion lies the question of God. An ecumenical approach cautions against reducing God to a projection of human characteristics. Classical theism, articulated by Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Maimonides, and echoed in modern theology by Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, insists that God is radically transcendent: existing beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of created reality.

Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologiae* (I, q.10), teaches that God exists in eternity as *totum simul* (the whole simultaneously) unaffected by the succession of past, present, and future. Maimonides, in *The Guide for the Perplexed* (I:57), likewise affirms that God is neither in time nor subject to change, but is the necessary being whose knowledge and will are immediate and indivisible. Contemporary philosophers of religion, such as Brian Leftow (*Time and Eternity*, 1991), develop this further, describing God as atemporal (existing



**Niklas Luhmann**

outside time entirely) or omnitemporal (present to all times at once). When we speak of God as extra-dimensional, we recognise that God is not bound within the three spatial dimensions (or four-dimensional space-time) that define creation.

To ascribe purely human emotions, limitations, or motivations to God is therefore at best naïve and at worst arrogant. As Augustine famously wrote in *Confessions*: ‘If you have understood him, then what you have understood is not God’.

### **Communion and Divine Love**

Yet while God utterly transcends creation, the doctrine of *imago Dei* (Genesis 1:26) affirms that humanity bears, however imperfectly, the image of God. Importantly, this likeness is not individualistic but relational.

In Christian theology, the idea of *communio* (communion) expresses that humans are most fully themselves in loving relationship, within families, communities, and society. This reflects, in a finite way, the divine relationality traditionally expressed in Christianity’s doctrine of the Trinity:



God as an eternal communion of love.

This insight resonates with philosophical traditions as well. Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Books VIII–IX), describes *philia* (friendship) not as mere emotional closeness but as an ethical and spiritual bond rooted in mutual goodwill and shared pursuit of the good. *Philia* transforms isolated individuals into a genuine community (*koinonia*), where each person sees the good of others as part of their own flourishing.

Theologically, *philia* can be seen as a human echo of the divine love: when we love and care for each other not merely out of utility or pleasure, but because we recognise in others the same dignity and transcendence that reflects the Creator. Thus, the divine image (*imago Dei*) is most vividly realised not in solitude but in acts of selfless solidarity and compassion. In these moments, humanity comes closest to mirroring the God who is love (cf. 1 John 4:8).

### Conclusion

At the heart of humanity's longing for transcendence lies a paradox: the God we seek to name and understand is, by nature, beyond every name and category. As Augustine cautioned, what we comprehend cannot be God; yet the impulse to search, to question, and to love, reflects something of the divine spark within us.

Religion, in all its diverse expressions, remains a basic human good: it grounds our shared moral imagination, resists the flattening pull of materialism, and sustains the vision that human life is more than consumption, power, or pleasure. When religion is sidelined, the void it leaves is filled but often by shallow, divisive, or destructive substitutes.

By recognising God's extra-dimensional and extra-temporal nature, we are humbled, reminded of our own limits. And by embracing *communio* and *philia* — the call to love and solidarity — we glimpse what it means to be made in God's image: not as isolated individuals, but as a species bound by care, compassion, and a shared journey toward the transcendent. What Aquinas would perhaps call *beatitudo*.

In rediscovering this vision, we do not reject reason, science, or plurality. Rather, we affirm that at the horizon of all human striving lies a mystery beyond measure — and that to be truly human also means to live this humbling mystery — to live in wonder, humility, and love.

## *The Wednesday*

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