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The *Wednesday*

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Editorial

Overcoming The Human

I have been engaged in the last few months with a reading group on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Reading the text slowly allowed me to ask questions about the validity of its main themes: ideas like the death of God, overcoming the human, the eternal return, and the will to power. These ideas mutually support each other. They also helped raise Nietzsche to a new, or higher, level, than he ever thought possible before. But are they convincing or are they just metaphorical statements, poetic images or sudden visions and insights? Nietzsche rarely argues in a rigorous philosophical way, but his interpreters try to prove these ideas and make them intelligible.

Recently, Douglas Shepardson gave a presentation to our Wednesday meeting, relating the idea of eternal return to the early Christian fathers, Origen in particular. There was a strong opposition to the idea when presented, on logical and scientific grounds. Nietzsche himself tried to present a scientific hypothesis to support his idea, but then gave up such justification, and left it as a thought experiment to show how strong is the character of whoever thinks it. Deleuze regarded the eternal return a transformative, and hence as a return with a new significance. The thought goes like this: what if your life and actions were repeated for eternity, would you affirm your responsibility? Would you wish for such repetition? I think this is the best way to take it, because it offers a test for actions similar to Kant's formulation of the Categorical Imperative. But it may be difficult to defend it beyond that.

Similarly, the idea that the human being should be overcome is very attractive if it means a call to transform oneself, and overcome what has been achieved so far. I take it as the creative drive to go beyond the present state of life, thought, and art. But that is not what Nietzsche meant by it. He meant it in a stronger sense, the sense of developing a higher level of humanity beyond what we have known so far. Nietzsche calls it the Superman. The Superman for him is not an ordinary hero. The Superman is beyond humanity as we known it. Nietzsche attacked Carlyle's book *On Heroes, Hero-worship & the Heroic in History*, in his *Twilight of the Idols*, because the hero in Carlyle's sense is a person who excels in a particular field. Nietzsche is more radical. He sees humanity as a stage of a long development, biologically and historically, and that humanity as we know it and define it is just an accident of evolution. He also emphasises that consciousness is not a privilege of the human but an accident, or social necessity of the human. A different trajectory of humanity could be imagined. He took on himself to call for such a higher humanity, a humanity that he calls the meaning of the earth.

It is this last point that attracted my attention when reading Edward Bulwer's novel *The Coming Race* (1871). Bulwer was a popular writer in the nineteenth century and was credited with many remarkable statements, such as 'the word is mightier than the sword', and also known for an opening sentence of one of his novels that influenced generation of writers: 'It was a dark and stormy night…'. But the *Coming Race* is a sustained criticism of its time. It envisioned an alternative to Victorian life and philosophy. Bulwer imagined that there was a race that was pushed, through a climate catastrophe, below the earth. While there, they developed a source of energy that empowered everything in their society, including the individuals themselves, known as Vril. They also modified the human form by having wings and flying as a means of transport. They had created a new language and a new ethics of work and life. However, they had the idea that their society was strong and should not be mixed with people from the overground. They considered humans living overground as weak. The narrator in the novel was worried, or so it seems, that this will be the coming race that would one day wipe out the human race as we know it and replace it with a Virl society.

I was told that this idea was picked up by David Bowie in his song 'Oh! You Pretty Things'. Here is the lyric: 'Look out at your children/ See their faces in golden rays/ Don't kid yourself, they belong to you/ They're the start of the coming race/ The Earth is a bitch, we've finished our news/ Homo Sapiens have outgrown their use/ All the strangers came today/ And it looks as though they're here to stay'.

Perhaps, there is support for the idea of *The Coming Race* from the new developments in AI and the future of such technological and scientific advancement. Nietzsche as a naturalist wished class humans as animals. This is a far cry from the religious conception of the human being made in the image of the Divine. However, I do not think that technological advancement will wipe out the human, and I favour the religious idea of privileging humanity. I believe the idea of the human is still with us, and we embody that idea, and will do so for the future.

The Editor

Dipping a Toe into Process Philosophy

Process Philosophy gives a different conception of reality to that of the traditional idea of substance. It sees reality as a series of dynamically related actual occurrences, unlike the static, individuated entities of substance. Relations in processes are internal, while they are external in the atomistic view. The following article discusses both conceptions.

PETER STIBRANY

Heraclitus and Parmenides had different ways of talking about the unity of the nature. Heraclitus reckoned the world was logos manifested in flow and opposites; Parmenides that it was Being. I take as source material *Early Greek Philosophy* by Jonathan Barnes, Penguin Classics.

Parmenides:
'One story, one road, now
Is left: that it is. And on this there are signs aplenty that, being, it is ungenerated and indestructible,
whole, of one kind and unwavering and complete, nor was it ever, nor will it be, since now it is, all together,
one, continuous'. (p.82)

'Nor is it divided, since it all alike is –
Neither more here (which would bar it from cohering)
Nor less; but it is all full of what is'.

Of Heraclitus's view, Barnes quotes Hippolytus:
'Listening not to me but to the account (logos), it is wise to agree that all things are one', Heraclitus says. He rebukes everyone for not knowing this and not agreeing with it, thus: 'They do not comprehend how, in differing, it agrees with itself – a back-turning harmony, like that of a bow and a lyre'.

It strikes me that Parmenides offers a credible non-mathematical description of an Einsteinian Block Universe, and Heraclitus of quantum mechanics (the logos being a stand-in for the universal wave equation that manifests in paradoxical observations). We are convinced we have been driven to those theories by our testing of nature, but maybe it is our own minds we have been testing using nature as our measurement tool.

Heraclitus and Parmenides both go on to 'carve nature at the joints', as Plato put it, to explain it to those people who do not understand its essential unity. But they both argue that believing in division is already to misunderstand the world: Heraclitus because the world is flux which, when carved, creates paradoxes; and Parmenides, because the world just 'is'. Evidently, not everyone agrees. For example, Simon Blackburn says 'objectivism assumes that all the joints are given ahead of time, objectively, once and for all'. The best candidate today for a universally accepted way of carving nature is the substance paradigm, which posits that we are in a world of objects and substances.

The Substance Paradigm

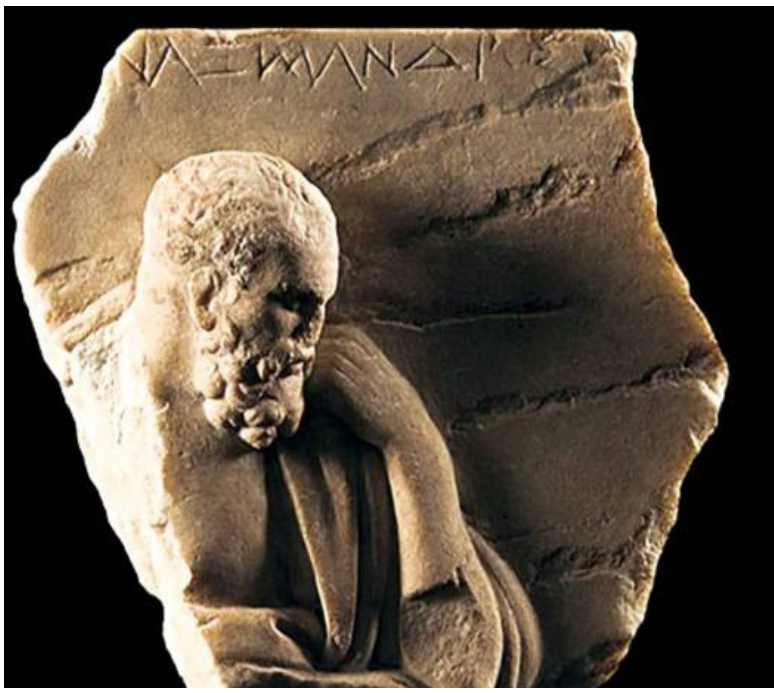
Children develop very early in life a sense of object permanence, the essence of the substance paradigm. When, as adults, we open our eyes, we cannot help but see ourselves surrounded by substances and objects made from substances.

But for this model to work, we need to understand three factors:

- How to define object and substance boundaries
- How objects and substances interact
- How the characteristics of objects and substances change

Philosophers have for a long time known that definitions, causality, and change are not straightforward, and have debated how to understand them.

Heraclitus



Parmenides

Object Boundaries

Defining the boundary of a chair can be easy. I pick it up, move it to where I want to sit, and sit on it. The chair is easily separable both from its context and from me. So that is the easy case.

Here is a more difficult case: I breathe air into my lungs and then exhale. At what point does the air become my breath? What about the air molecules that stay inside me? At what point are they me? As I breathe out, at what point do the carbon dioxide and water molecules coming from my blood stop being me, and start being 'air'? The more I breathe in a confined space, the more the air in that space become full of what used to be me, and I fill with what used to be it.

It seems that sometimes object boundaries are easy to see, and sometimes they appear quite arbitrary. The 'joints' are not obvious in all situations.

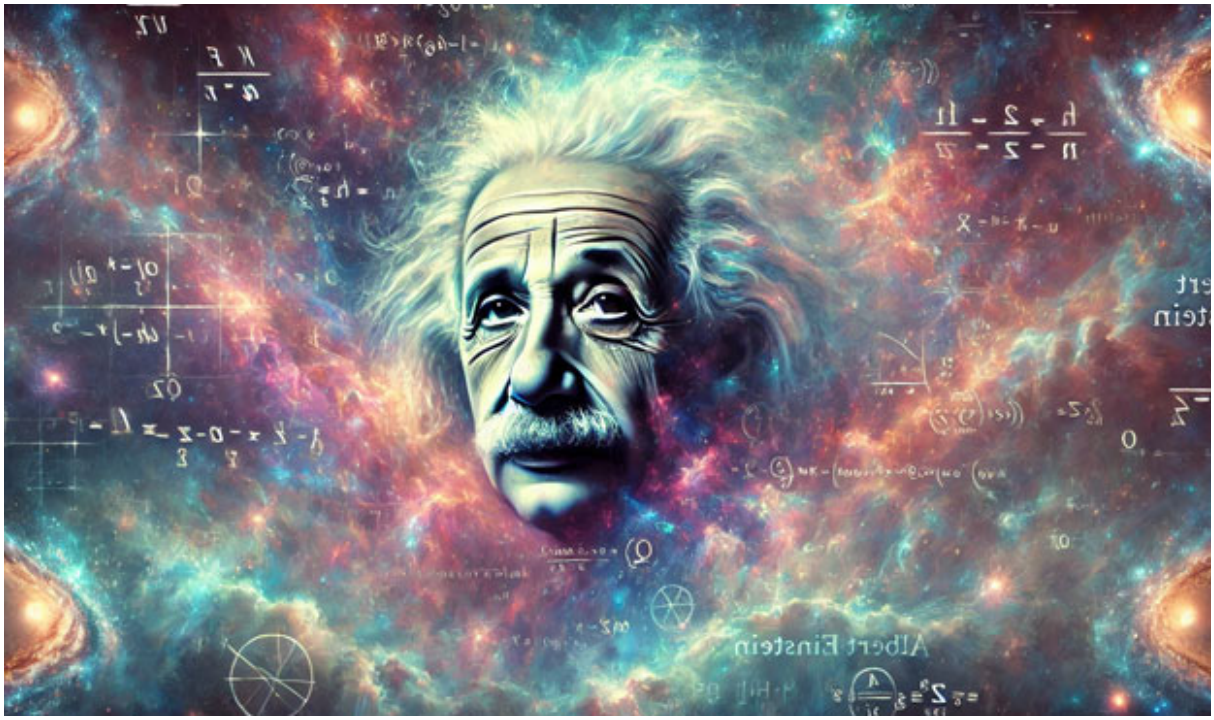
Object Interactions

The substance paradigm as expressed in speech allows solitary, unadorned, unverbed nouns. A chair can be inside or outside a house and still be the same chair. This idea of separability of entities makes it easy for us to extrapolate to a simple extremum that 'things' can exist outside of any context. It allows us to ignore the interconnectedness of things and the situational nature of entities and their characteristics. 'Things' in this case include people and the general idea of 'self-sufficiency'.

To reflect the interconnectedness of nature, we have the concept of causality - the idea that one thing causes something to happen in or to another thing. In the substance paradigm, relations happen at the boundaries. Billiard balls collide. Chairs are supported by floors. Electric fields can permeate objects but remain distinct from them. Cause-and-effect relations are in that sense 'external'.

But at least some philosophers see issues with causality. Famously, David Hume pointed out he could see event A and see event B happening immediately afterward but could not see the causal relationship between the two. This inspired Kant to posit that causal relations were inherent in the way we see the world, rather than something we see in the world. Implicitly, then, he leaves open the possibility that some intelligences could see the world differently, that nature may have different 'joints' to carve.

We find causal relations an easy way to understand events. But the substance paradigm does not force or even invite us to see connections beyond the simple and immediate. A standard substance-paradigm admonition reminding us that 'things' connect to other 'things' is: 'No man is an island'. But note its appeal to our intuitive sense that an



Einstein thinking the Block Universe

island is a stand-alone, self-sufficient entity, which it is not.

Understanding nature as a causal interaction of objects and substances leads to the problem of complexity.

System Complexity

We can frame most of our explanations about how the world works in the substance paradigm, but only if we put in the effort. And sadly, we have a bias against putting in effort. Take, for example, how long it has taken for us generally to accept the idea of ecosystems. It is hard enough to take care of a single plant, but plants in nature coexist with other plants, animals, fungi, soil structures, micronutrients, water, weather and so on, all the way through to the gardener who is also in the garden ecosystem. The more we look, the more interconnections we find; for example, plants under attack from insects send signalling chemicals that causes neighbouring plants to secrete anti-insect chemicals.

If we add in the biological dynamism of genetic coevolution of plants and animals and situational gene expression, the substance paradigm is stretched so thin it disappears entirely.

Moving to questions of our self-awareness and to theological questions, it used to be straightforward to carve nature away from spirit. But the scientific revolution has added weight to questions that put that separation under scrutiny. Is spirit a substance mixed into other substances? Is it a property of substances? Is it insubstantial entirely, in which case how does it relate to substances? The substance paradigm looks again to lack the power to answer these questions.

Perception

The substance paradigm invites a perceiver / perceived distinction. It is easy to think of the perceiver as one ‘thing’ and what is being perceived as another ‘thing’. For example, a rock is a different thing from me, in that I cannot control it with my mind the way I can control my arm. So, how is it that I am are aware of the rock?

Neuroscientists answer this question by saying that we live in self-generated hallucinations triggered by our senses. Through evolution, these hallucinations have become accurate enough to facilitate our survival and reproduction. But this

David Hume

Kant

explanation merely reformulates the problem as a question of how we, if we are a 'thing', become aware of our hallucinations.

Then there is the related question of how we come to think of things outside of ourselves. Philosophers have come to accept the idea of 'intentionality', other-directed thought, which names but does not solve the problem.

Change

In the substance paradigm, we understand change as a connected series of piecewise constant situations. In the Ship of Theseus, changing planks proceeds slowly and in discrete steps, so we find it puzzling to know at which step it stops being the Ship of Theseus. But what about flames or waves? They do not last long enough for us to know them individually and give them names. There is a difference of timeframe, the speed of change, between the ship and the flame, but what's the philosophical difference?

Understanding change in the substance paradigm is an ancient puzzle:

- Heraclitus: A river can change and yet still be a 'river' as far as we are concerned. 'River' is a static concept describing a dynamic object – how do you know it is the same river?
- Parmenides: A thing cannot be what it is not, so change is not possible.
- Aristotle: Everything has the potential to be something else, so it only appears to change – the change is simply a manifestation of what was always there.
- Zeno on motion: At any instant, an arrow occupies space without moving, and yet it appears in different places at different times, this shows motion is an illusion.

Some early Greeks attempted to solve the problem of change by positing the existence of unchanging atoms or 'uncuttables' moving in the void. Philosophically, this approach solves the problem of 'change', because in their model atoms do not change, only their arrangement changes. However, the atomist approach ignores the question of how to understand motion and the void, and ignores the question of how to understand causality.

But the reality of nature has proved to be different. Lise Meitner and Otto Frisch published in 1939 a paper in which they coined the term 'fission' that named how atoms do change. Modern physics went much further and discovered that causality, motion, and void are disturbingly complex phenomena that push well past the boundaries of the substance paradigm.

Most people today succeed by ignoring these

difficulties of the substance paradigm. It is just philosophers that ponder the gaps.

The Process Paradigm

The word 'process' is frequently used to mean the act or method of proceeding, or a series of actions or occurrences, as in 'industrial process' or 'the process of decomposition', or even a statement of events or narrative. On the other hand, process philosophy attempts a different way to look at the world, describing it as dynamic. It posits that transient occasions of change are fundamental.

To recap, in substance paradigm, we find fundamentals by slicing up objects until we get to atoms. In the substance paradigm, a chair is an object, a separate entity we can imagine on its own, outside of a context. Plato would even say there is a perfect form of 'chair' that real chairs participate in. Our sense of object permanence makes it easy to understand that chairs can be repositioned, stacked, sat on, etc. without affecting their essential chairness. They can even take the form of a 'broken chair with a leg missing'.

Now think of a chair as a process, rather than an object. Instead of focusing on how the chair is defined, think of how that chair was made, what it is made from and how those materials came to be, how it arrived where it is, how it participates in the life of people, how it breaks or decays and so on. The macroscopic 'chair process' involves forming, sustaining, and decomposing; it is immersed in other processes and is not static. Its boundaries are as fluid as those of waves crashing on the beach.

Two Traditions of Process Philosophy

The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (IEP) identifies two traditions in process philosophy, what I think of as:

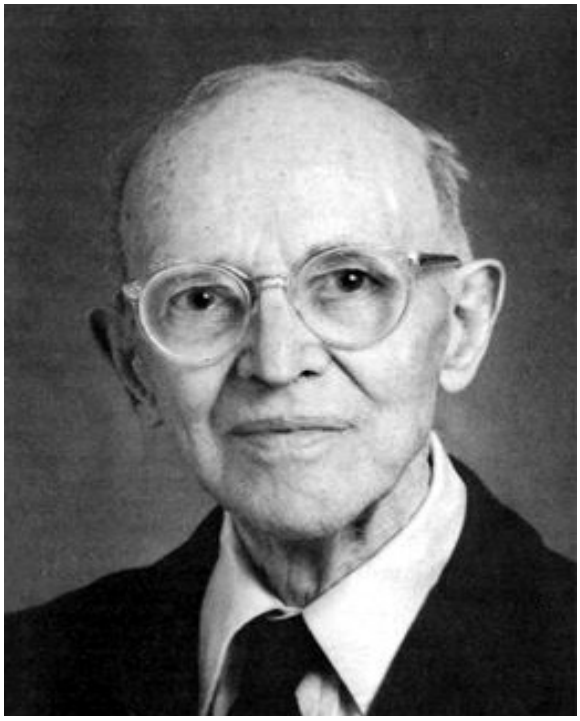
- A naturalist tradition, which includes Heraclitus, many Taoist and Buddhist traditions, the American pragmatistssuch as Peirce, James, and Dewey and Continental philosophers such as Hegel, Leibniz, Bergson, Berdyaev, Nietzsche, and Teilhard de Chardin, among its thinkers
- A tradition founded on the thinking of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. The IEP characterises theirs as 'a conceptual bridge to facilitate discussions between religion, philosophy, and science'.

Whitehead was a mathematician deeply immersed in modern physics. He well understood the issues of 'atomism', for example that there may not be a fact of the matter that a particle is located anywhere until a measurement is made.

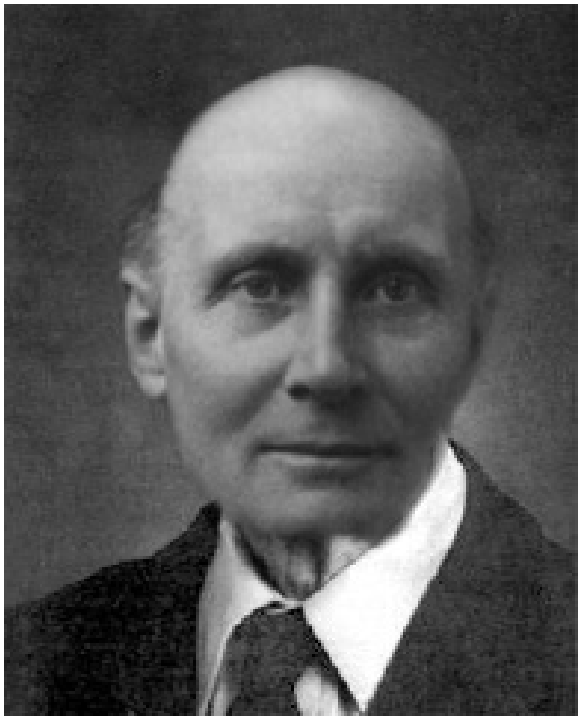
Instead of cutting the world into atoms as in the substance paradigm, Whitehead cut the world into 'actual occurrences'. *"Process philosophy speculates that these momentary events, called "actual occasions" or "actual entities", are essentially self-determining, experiential, and internally related to each other'.* (IEP).

We saw that the mortar that holds 'things' together in the substance paradigm are 'external' causal relations. To bring 'actual occurrences' together in process philosophical thought, Whitehead allows 'internal relations': '*The primary vehicle for internal relatedness is Whitehead's notion of prehension. Prehension is the experiential activity of an actual occasion by which characteristics of one occasion come to be present in another. Thus, one occasion may prehend certain qualities of an occasion in its past (for example, shade of red or a certain proposition). By means of prehension, a past occasion comes to be constitutively present in the contemporary occasion and contributes to its intrinsic character. All actualities prehend. This is not a voluntary or a necessarily conscious activity'.* (IEP entry on Process Philosophy)

From the way I understand the concepts, prehension dissolves the perceiver / perceived separation problem. It does that by first, reconceptualising both *perceiver* and *what is perceived* to be *actual occurrence* rather than static objects, substances, or situations; and second, positing that actual occurrence means *participation with it*, or *relating internally to it*. Prehension means I do not perceive an object so much as I become part of its event.



Hartshorne



Whitehead

Clearly, this strand of process philosophy is not easy on the imagination. For example, *'Bergson argued that the process-character of being is precisely out of our cognitive reach, at least in so far as we try to conceptualize what we experience. As long as we understand conscious experience as a subject-object relation ... we merely follow the theoretical habits in which we have been conditioned by the substance-metaphysical tradition'*. (SEP)

Nevertheless, understanding the world fundamentally as process rather than substance offers practical benefits we should not ignore. For example, in the process philosophical paradigm, it seems obvious that life exists in highly dynamic ecosystems, and that all interventions have consequences that echo throughout the system.

The Biases of Process Thinking

In the process or flow paradigm everything is connected to everything else. It is therefore hard to set boundaries, to decide what relations can be ignored without undermining our understanding – the 'joints' are not obvious. This, combined with our bias to avoid complexity, leads some people toward the simple extremum idea that 'all is one', inviting a religious impulse and mystical language. For example, some people will simplify and express ecology in quasi-religious or even animistic terms - for example, 'Mother Earth', 'We must give to the land, so the land gives to us', and so on.

This push to unite everything is captured in the IEP list of the notable characteristics of the Whitehead-Hartshorne variant of process philosophy, its:

- method of metaphysical speculation,
- event (rather than substance) ontology,
- assertion of panpsychism or pan-experientialism,
- description of 'prehension' in place of perception, and
- panentheistic doctrine of God.

The main benefit of the process paradigm is that invites us to recognise the complexity of nature and relationships in a way the substance paradigm does not. I believe it also offers a way to understand some of the deep conundrums in philosophy, to do with perception and the self. But I find it esoteric and difficult to understand.

In practical fields such as physics and biology, being strange or hard to understand is acceptable if it offers practical solutions to understood and relevant problems. These are the objective tests of whether the thinking is valid. But in a field whose reasoning is untestable in the world, and whose very objective is understanding rather than practical utility, obscurity seems a flaw.

Resonance

Walk past the broken plaster, fallen frame,
where damp has traced the wall in silver lines,
towards stairways turning, nameless all the same.

No voice calls out to you, yet step within.
The spiral stair lifts past the known and said,
through narrow rooms where dust veils everything.

Do not strain sight across what lies ahead.
Climb and attend the echoes as they drift,
each step replying where the stair has led.

Light splits on edges, opening each rift,
dust turns and alters in the passing light.
Each landing offers more than one small shift.

Thus meaning gathers, not by grasp or lift,
but by consent to echo, pause, and tone,
where knowing rests and lets itself be gift.

Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws

Beyond the Cosmic Horizon

DR. ALAN XUEREB

A recent article in Popular Mechanics reports that Michael Guillén has proposed that heaven may have a physical location - approximately 273 billion trillion miles from Earth. The suggestion extrapolates from Edwin Hubble's law of cosmic expansion and identifies the limit of the observable universe - the cosmic horizon - with a possible threshold between the physical and the divine. Where light can no longer reach us within the 13.8-billion-year lifespan of the cosmos, Guillén speculates, perhaps another order of reality begins.

Predictably, many cosmologists resist the claim. The cosmic horizon is not a physical wall. It is an epistemic limit generated by light-travel time in an expanding spacetime manifold. It marks the boundary of causal accessibility, not the edge of existence. To interpret it as the vestibule of paradise risks committing a category mistake: conflating the limits of observation with the limits of being.

Yet the proposal is philosophically illuminating, even if physically implausible. It exposes a persistent impulse in the human imagination: we spatialise transcendence. Medieval cosmology placed heaven above the firmament. Modern cosmology, armed with redshift data and background radiation maps, projects it beyond the cosmic microwave background. The coordinates have changed; the instinct has not.

The more fundamental question, however, is whether 'where?' is the correct interrogative at all. Here the well-known anecdote (possibly a legend) attributed to Augustine of Hippo offers a striking parable. Walking along the seashore, Augustine encounters a child attempting to pour the entire sea into a small hole in the sand with a shell. When Augustine remarks upon the impossibility of the task, the child replies that it is no more impossible than for the human mind to comprehend the infinite God. The story is not an attack on reason. Augustine was one of its great defenders. Rather, it dramatizes disproportion: the finite container cannot exhaust the infinite content. Translated into contemporary philosophical language, the anecdote concerns dimensional mismatch. A lower-order structure cannot encompass a higher-order reality without distortion. The problem is not one of insufficient effort but of structural limitation.

Modern theoretical physics provides a suggestive analogy. Consider the geometric proposals often associated with the acronym 'TARDIS', inspired by the fictional time machine in Doctor Who – 'bigger on the inside'. These models explore spacetimes in which interior volumes can be dramatically larger than their external boundary would seem to permit. Through non-trivial topology or curvature, a region can possess an internal structure that far exceeds what its outer surface area implies.

If such geometries are even conceptually coherent, they offer a powerful metaphor for Augustine's sea. In a TARDIS-like structure, the 'tiny hole' could indeed contain a vast interior, far larger than its entrance suggests. The shell would not be pouring the sea into a smaller container in the same dimensional register; rather, the container would open into a higher-dimensional or differently curved manifold. What appears spatially insufficient in three dimensions might be entirely adequate in four or more.

Applied analogically to theology, this reframes the issue. Perhaps the difficulty in conceiving divine infinity lies not in divine magnitude but in our dimensional constraints. The sea does not fail to fit because it is too large; it fails to fit because the hole is defined within a limited geometry. If reality includes dimensions or modes of being inaccessible to our current spatiotemporal intuition, then transcendence need not imply distance. It may imply depth - ontological depth.

This is where Guillén's proposal becomes philosophically instructive. By identifying heaven with the cosmic horizon, he translates transcendence into remoteness. But remoteness is still quantitative. It presupposes membership within the same metric manifold. A galaxy 200 billion light-years away is still part of the same ontological inventory as the Milky Way; it is simply farther.

Classical theism, however, speaks of transcendence in qualitative, not quantitative, terms. God is not one object among others at the far end of the universe. Nor is heaven merely a remote province of cosmic real estate. The tradition speaks instead of participation in a higher mode of being - one that does not compete for spatial coordinates within the same framework. The distinction is crucial. Distance preserves ontological parity; dimensionality disrupts it.

The cosmic horizon, as described by modern cosmology, is an epistemic boundary generated by causal structure. It is a limit on what signals can reach us, not a metaphysical threshold. To treat it as the boundary of the divine risks mistaking a feature of our observational situation for a feature of ultimate reality. In philosophical terms, it confuses an epistemic limit with an ontological one.

Yet it would be premature to conclude that science has nothing to contribute to theological reflection. On the contrary, contemporary physics complicates our intuitions about space, time, and dimensionality in ways that may render certain theological claims more intelligible - not by proving them, but by loosening the grip of naïve spatial assumptions.

Higher-dimensional models, curved manifolds, and non-

Cosmic expansion

trivial topologies all undermine the idea that reality must conform to common-sense Euclidean geometry. If our universe can be embedded within a higher-dimensional bulk, as some speculative frameworks suggest, then the notion of a reality 'beyond' ours need not imply astronomical mileage. It may imply orthogonality to our spatial axes.

Under such an analogy, heaven would not lie beyond the last observable galaxy. It would be 'adjacent' in a way not capturable by ordinary coordinates. The sea would not be poured into a smaller hole; rather, the hole would open into a deeper manifold where the apparent contradiction dissolves.

This does not establish the existence of heaven. Philosophy must be careful not to smuggle metaphysical conclusions into mathematical metaphors. But it does clarify the conceptual terrain. If heaven exists, it is unlikely to begin at a calculable number of miles. More plausibly - if one remains within the logic of classical metaphysics - it would represent either a transformed mode of creaturely existence or participation in a reality not exhaustible by spacetime predicates.

The broader cultural significance of Guillén's suggestion lies in what it reveals about our intellectual moment. We are tempted to translate every metaphysical question into the idiom of physics. The expansion of the universe becomes a new ladder to transcendence. The cosmic microwave background replaces the crystalline spheres. Yet the risk is perennial: we mistake the grammar of measurement for the grammar of being.

Augustine's child remains on the shore, shell in hand. The lesson is not that inquiry is futile, nor that science is presumptuous. It is that the sea cannot be reduced to the dimensions of the hole. If there are orders of reality that exceed our spatiotemporal framework, then the proper response is not the abandonment of reason but the refinement of categories.

The horizon recedes as we approach it. That is a feature of both cosmology and metaphysics. Perhaps transcendence does not lie 273 billion trillion miles away. Perhaps it lies in recognizing that every coordinate system we devise is itself situated within a broader, possibly multi-layered architecture of being - an architecture in which the infinite is not farther, but deeper.

In that sense, the boundary between science and faith is not a line drawn in space, but a threshold of understanding. It is the moment we recognise that some questions demand not greater distance, but additional dimensions. If God is extradimensional, then heaven, too, is best understood not as a place elsewhere, but as a reality beyond our familiar dimensions.

Belief in the causal nexus is superstition

The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies outside space and time. (It is certainly not the solution of any problems of natural science that is required).

It is all one to me whether or not the typical western scientist understands or appreciates my work, since he will not in any case understand the spirit in which I write. ***(Wittgenstein)***

I

Well, Ludwig, you've a gathering of the best
And brightest lined up ready with applause
For your idea that any talk of 'cause'
In physics can't survive the simplest test

Of scientific warrant, like the rest
Of those mere abstract quiddities like 'laws
Of nature', 'forces', and whatever draws
The charge that Newton famously addressed

To quaint scholastic types who'd still invest
Their faith in what the well-trained mind abhors:
That old proclivity to clutch at straws
And conjure suchlike phantoms in their quest

For speculative insights that transgressed
The ground-rules of experiment so flaws
In theory went without the needful pause
When observation made them manifest.

CHRIS **NORRIS**

Wittgenstein in Cambridge

II

‘Hypotheses no fingo’, Newton wrote,
And Locke before him, both intent to chase
All talk of causes out and so embrace,
Like you, a science anxious to devote

Itself to keeping science well afloat
In turbulent times but also, just in case
This sparked controversy, to set its face
Against all notions that might rock the boat,

Such as – here shades of Galileo, note! –
The kind of explanation that would base
Itself on causal powers, or choose to place
Excessive faith in causes that demote

God’s sovereign power, remove what underwrote
That tale of mortal sin redeemed by grace
Of divine intervention, and make space
For science as religion’s antidote.

Newton

III

They’re still around, the sceptics who reject,
Like you, all causal talk but whose ad hoc
And, frankly, unconvincing ploys to block
Its burgeoning self-evidence as checked

Against the record lead one to suspect
That they, like you, have failed to take due stock
Of just how far things have moved on since Locke
Whose sceptic views in this regard reflect

Such gaps in knowledge as would disaffect
The best-trained mind from managing to clock
Up positive results. Else these might knock
The sceptic off his perch, or bring the sect

Of nay-sayers, like you, to redirect
Their thinking, make terms quickly with the shock,
And see how such advances may so rock
Their sceptical beliefs that they elect

To seek out causes, see how things connect
At deeper levels, and no longer mock,
As you do here, the causal-realist flock
For explanations used to good effect.

Locke

IV

Yet it goes deeper, takes in issues far
Removed, you'd think, from any that arose
In prickly dealings on your part with those,
The science hegemons, who set the bar

Of group-allegiance high enough to mar
Your prospects in their bailiwick, expose
What they deemed your shortcomings, and foreclose
Whatever portals Cambridge left ajar.

But then, think how peripheral they are,
Those issues, when compared with all that goes
To make it clear just why you'd so oppose
Causation figuring in the repertoire

Of working notions reckoned on a par
With 'thought', 'mind', 'feeling', and – who knows? –
'Spirit' or 'soul', so strongly the wind blows
From each new science theme-park or bazaar.

Each instance seems to leave a psychic scar,
An unhealed wound that your self-image owes
To soul's refusal of what flesh bestows
On every god's reluctant avatar.

A Fish Imagination

I'm that image on your retina
A tropical fish in a goldfish bowl
I'm not as I seem though I seem as I am
As I move my image constantly changes
Like a world in space
How I appear is decidedly relative
Different to different observers
But I am that retinal image
That twinkling shape
That swims in your mind
That technicolour, illuminated shadow
An appearance, a sight, a construction
A tropical fish in an endless abyss
Yet just a fish in a goldfish bowl
An illusory sight minus body and soul
Merely a fish in a goldfish bowl

William Bishop

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To receive it regularly, please write to the editor: rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk