Week 4

1. **Mind without Gods**

Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* I 62-69: In praise of Epicurus

When human life lay before the eyes, despicable, crushed
to the earth beneath the burden of religion,
which reared its head in the regions of the sky
looming over mortals, hideous to behold,
it was a man from Greece who first dared to raise his eyes
and dared first to confront it.
No talk of gods, no thunderbolts, no threatening murmur
of the heavens held him back – indeed it spurred on
the fierce strength of his spirit all the more, made him long
to break through the narrow confines of nature's gateways.
And thus the vital strength of his soul prevailed and he journeyed
far beyond the flaming walls of this world
he visited the immeasurable whole in mind and spirit,
and returning victorious he brings us the truth about what can come to be
what cannot, the final limits of possibility for each single thing,
the structure by which its end lies deep within it.
And now religion lies thrown at our feet
to be trampled in turn, while our victory exalts us to the heavens.

Epicurus on the Soul [LS 14A]

After that, we must grasp – referring to the sensations and bodily experiences (for this provides the most reliable testimony) – that the soul is a body made of fine particles scattered throughout the whole complex [of the body], most similar to breath with an admixture of heat, and sometimes it is more like the one, sometimes more like the other. But in the fineness of its particles, this part is very different even from these, but is rather in sympathy with this and with the rest of the bodily complex. The powers of the soul reveal all this, the feelings, spontaneous movements, thoughts – and all the things which when we lose them, we die. Now we must bear in mind that the soul is the main cause of sensation; nevertheless, it would not have acquired this role unless in some way it was contained within the rest of the bodily complex. The rest of the bodily complex having prepared the way for the soul to cause the sensation, itself participates in this change of state that befalls it, though it doesn't participate in everything that the soul possesses.

That is why when the soul is removed, the rest of the body has no sensation. It does not have that power within itself, but made that possible for something else that came into being with it. That thing (the soul) thanks to a physical movement, creates a perception

event, as its power to perceive is activated, and distributes it, as I said, to itself and to the relevant parts of the body through confluence and sympathy. Thus when the soul is present in it, whatever other part of the body you remove, the body will never be without sensation. But whatever part of the soul is lost when the containing body dissolves either wholly or in part, if the soul itself persists, it will have perception. But if the rest of the body persists in whole or in part, it has no perception when that part of it is absent which is the mass of atoms directed towards the nature of the soul.

And in fact when the whole bodily complex is dissolved the soul is scattered and no longer has the same powers and no longer moves, so it can have no perception. For it is impossible to conceive it perceiving otherwise than in this physical structure and employing just these movements, when the things that contain it and surround it are no longer the same as those in which it currently exists and enjoys this mobility. We can go further, consider this: 'without body' in the most common use of the term refers to what is self-evidently so; and there is no self-evident understanding of 'without body' other than 'a void'. But the void cannot act or experience - it simply allows the possibility of motion to the bodies that pass through it. Thus, those who say the soul is 'without body' talk nonsense. If it were like that, it would be able to do nothing and to experience nothing. But we clearly observe both these phenomena in the context of the soul.

Epicurus on Pleasure, Pain and the Meaning of life [LS 21B]

We must reason that some pleasures are natural and some are empty. Of the natural, some are necessary, and some simply natural. Of the necessary, some are necessary for happiness, some for the well-being of the body, and some for simply staying alive. A steadfast gaze on these things knows that every choice and flight comes down to the health of the body and the peace of the soul, since this is the goal of living a blessed life. It is for this reason that we do all we do, that we may feel no pain and no fear. And when once this happens to us, the whole storm within our soul is calmed, and the animal does not need to move to satisfy some need or to seek any other thing to fulfil the good of soul and body.

For we experience the need for pleasure when we are in pain from the absence of that pleasure. But when we are not in pain, we no longer need the pleasure. And that is why we say that pleasure is the beginning and end of living in bliss. For we recognise this as the primary innate good, and this is our starting point for every positive choice and avoidance, and we use it as a reference point, judging every good by the measure of the quality of experience.

And since this is the first good, implanted in us, for that same reason we do not choose every pleasure, but at times we let many pleasures go, when a greater amount of difficulty follows from them. And we think that many pains are preferable to pleasures,

when a greater pleasure follows on for us, after we have endured a long period of such pains.

So every pleasure by nature has its own specific good, but that does not mean that every one should be chosen. In the same way too every pain has its own evil, but that does not mean that every one should always be avoided. It is by measuring them against each other, and by observing the benefits and disadvantages that one should judge all these things. For at certain times we treat the good as bad and conversely the bad as good.

And we regard self-sufficiency as a great good, not that we should entirely devote ourselves to simple living, but so that if we happen not to have a great deal, we can get by with little, honestly believing that fine living is enjoyed more sweetly by those who are least dependent on it, and that everything that is natural is easy to obtain, but what is empty is hard to obtain. Simple broths bring as much pleasure as a lavish lifestyle when all pain due to necessity is removed. A barley loaf and water bring the utmost pleasure when they are offered to someone who needs them. Getting used to a simple rather than lavish lifestyle makes us healthier, and makes a person resilient in the face of life's needs, makes us better fitted to abundance when, after a while, we come upon it again, and makes us unafraid in the face of chance.

So when we say that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of libertines that consist in indulgence, as some ignorant or ill-informed critics believe, but being without pain in the body, and without distress in the soul. Drinking and continual partying or indulgence in boys, women - or of fish and everything else that a luxurious table provides – none of these produces a pleasant life. Rather it is sober reasoning that tracks down the causes of every choice and avoidance, and drives into the open the opinions through which most turmoil seizes souls. Of all these, the principle and highest good is practical wisdom. And this is why practical wisdom is more noble than philosophy. From this flow all the other virtues, for she teaches that it is not possible to have a pleasant life unless one lives wisely and nobly and justly – and nor is it possible to live wisely and nobly and justly unless pleasantly. The virtues are cognate with a pleasurable life and the pleasurable life cannot be separated from them.

2. Sextus Empiricus on Scepticism

Scepticism is a capacity for arraying objects of appearance and objects of the mind in opposition in any way whatever, and by it because of the balance of forces in the things and the arguments, we come first to suspension of judgment and then to peace of mind. When we say 'capacity' we don't mean any technical term, we simply mean being able to do something. [Outlines of Pyrrhonism I, IV]

We still assert that the goal of the sceptic is peace of mind in their beliefs and a moderation of suffering where this is unavoidable. They begin to do philosophy, so as

to bring a verdict on appearances and to establish which are true and which are false, so as to find peace of mind, they stumble upon a contradiction that is equally weighted on both sides, and as they withhold their judgment, coincidentally there follows a peace in their opinions. For anyone who believes something is good or bad in its nature will continually be upset; for when those things that seem good to him are not present, he believes he is being punished with things that are naturally bad, and chases after what he believes to be good. And once he has acquired them, he falls into still deeper turmoil because he is irrationally and immoderately elated, and in fear that this will change, he does whatever he can so as not to lose those things that seem good to him. But to anyone who avoids defining what is naturally good or bad, strains themselves neither in flight nor in pursuit; thus they have peace of mind. [Outlines of Pyrrhonism I, 12]

3. Freud on Dreams (Traumdeutung, Chapter 1)

In the following pages I will demonstrate that there is a psychological technique that allows us to interpret dreams, and that by applying this process, every dream presents itself as a meaningful psychic structure, that can be found a place in the sequence of the waking activity of the soul at an identifiable point. Further, I shall attempt to reveal the mechanisms which underpin the strangeness of dreams and the difficulty of interpreting them. From the implications of that I will draw a conclusion about the nature of the psychic forces whose reinforcing or oppositional actions produce the dream...

...The scientific understanding of dreams has not progressed very far, despite the efforts of several thousand years. This is generally widely admitted by authors, so there seems no point in adducing specific authorities...

The first text that deals with dreams as an object of psychology seems to be Aristotle's *On dreams and their interpretation*. Aristotle explains that dreams are by nature due to lower spiritual powers (Gk daimon), rather than gods, which does actually reveal a profound truth, if translated correctly. He recognises some of the features of the dream-world, for instance, when a small stimulus occurs during sleep, a dream will transform it into something big: "a person believes they are going through fire and becoming hot, when an insignificant warming is merely happening in one of the limbs"), and concludes from this behaviour, that dreams can reveal to a doctor the first symptoms of a change in the body that went unnoticed during the day...

The ancients before Aristotle, as is well known, did not consider dreams to be the produce of the dreaming soul, but to be implanted from the realm of the divine. And the two traditions that find present in every age in the evaluation of dreams were already in force with them. They distinguished valid and significant dreams, sent to the sleeper to

warn them or to inform them of the future, from pointless, deceptive or meaningless ones, whose intention was to lead them astray or bring them to destruction.

This prescientific interpretation of dreams by the ancients was of course in complete accord with their whole worldview, which tended to project as a reality in the external world that which only had reality in the life of the soul. Moreover, they were influenced by the main impression the leftover memory of the dream left on the waking consciousness in the morning, because in that memory, the dream presented itself as something alien, stemming immediately from another world, in comparison with the other mental contents.

We would by the way be mistaken in believing that the teaching about the supernatural origin of dreams has no adherents in our own day; quite apart from all the pious confessional and mystical authors – who have every right to occupy the remnants of the once sprawling region of the supernatural, as long as they are not convinced by scientific explanations – we also find intelligent men, with a flair for all that is exotic attempt to ground their religious belief in the existence and agency of spiritual forces precisely on the inexplicability of the manifestations in dreams (Haffner).

The value placed on the dreamworld from the point of view of many philosophical schools (for instance, the Schelling school) is a clear echo of the unquestioned belief in antiquity that dreams were divine, and the discussion about the divinatory, future-predicting power of dreams is not finished either, because the attempts to provide a psychological explanation are insufficient to master the mass of material, however clearly the sympathies of anyone who has adopted a scientific mindset might incline to reject any such claim.

4. Kant: the moral law gives us a window into transcendence

Duty! Sublime and mighty name that embraces nothing charming or insinuating but requires submission, and yet does not seek to move the will by threatening anything that would arouse natural aversion or terror in the mind but only holds forth a law that of itself finds entry into the mind and yet gains reluctant reverence (though not always obedience) a law before which all inclinations are dumb, even though they secretly work against it; what origin is there worthy of you, and where is to be found the root of your noble descent which proudly rejects all kinship with the inclinations, descent from which is the indispensable condition of that worth which human beings alone can give themselves?

It can be nothing less than what elevates a human being above himself (as a part of the sensible world and with it the empirically determinable existence of human beings in time and the whole of all ends (which is alone suitable to such unconditional practical laws as the moral). It is nothing other than *personality* that is freedom and independence from the mechanisms of the whole of nature, regarded nevertheless as

also a capacity of a being subject to special laws – namely pure practical laws given by his own reason, so that a person as belonging to the sensible world is subject to his own personality insofar as he also belongs to the intelligible world; for, it is then not to be wondered at that a human being, as belong to both worlds, must regard his own nature in reference to his second and highest vocation with reverence, and its laws with the highest respect…

This is how the genuine moral incentive of pure practical reason is constituted; it is nothing other than the pure moral law itself insofar as it lets us discover the sublimity of our own supersensible existence and of the dependence, connected with it, on their pathologically affected nature.

5. **Mystical Experience of an Atheist**

(From Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography*, Ch.6)

One day, Gilbert Murray came to Newnham to read part of his translation of The Hippolytus, then unpublished. Alys and I went to hear him, and I was profoundly stirred by the beauty of the poetry.

When we came home, we found Mrs Whitehead undergoing an unusually severe bout of pain. She seemed cut off from everyone and everything by walls of agony, and the sense of the solitude of each human soul suddenly overwhelmed me.

Ever since my marriage, my emotional life had been calm and superficial. I had forgotten all the deeper issues, and had been content with flippant cleverness. Suddenly the ground seemed to give way beneath me, and I found myself in quite another region. Within five minutes I went through some such reflections as the following:

The loneliness of the human soul is unendurable; nothing can penetrate it except the highest intensity of the sort of love that religious teachers have preached; whatever does not spring from this motive is harmful, or at best useless; it follows that war is wrong, that a public school education is abominable, that the use of force is to be deprecated, and that in human relations one should penetrate to the core of loneliness in each person and speak to that.

The Whitehead's youngest boy, aged three, was in the room. I had previously taken no notice of him, nor he of me. He had to be prevented from troubling his mother in the middle of her paroxysms of pain. I took his hand and led him away. He came willingly, and felt at home with me. From that day to his death in the War in 1918, we were close friends. At the end of those five minutes, I had become a completely different person.

For a time, a sort of mystic illumination possessed me. I felt that I knew the inmost thoughts of everybody that I met in the street, and though this was, no doubt, a delusion, I did in actual fact find myself in far closer touch than previously with all my

friends, and many of my acquaintances. Having been an Imperialist, I became during those five minutes a pro-Boer and a Pacifist. Having for years cared only for exactness and analysis, I found myself filled with semi-mystical feelings about beauty, with an intense inter est in children, and with a desire almost as profound as that of the Buddha to find some philosophy which should make human life endurable.

A strange excitement possessed me, containing intense pain but also some element of triumph through the fact that I could dominate pain, and make it, as I thought, a gateway to wisdom. The mystic insight which I then imagined myself to possess has largely faded, and the habit of analysis has reasserted itself. But something of what I thought I saw in that moment has remained always with me, causing my attitude during the first war, my interest in children, my indifference to minor misfortunes, and a certain emotional tone in all my human relations.

Week 5

Kant/Wordsworth extract (separate pdf)

Karl Rahner – Knowing God and Philosophical anthropology

(Rendered From Karl Rahner's Foundations of Faith)

We have been talking about a 'transcendental' knowledge or experience of God. To an extent this is only ever *a posteriori* knowledge, in the sense that the transcendental experience of their own freedom as subjects only occurs for humans in an encounter with the world – and above all the world of fellow humans.

Here scholastic theology is correct when it [resists theoretical arguments from Being] and insists that humans only ever have an *a posteriori* knowledge of God from the world – and such knowledge is not simply superseded by the revelation of the word. For the revelation itself in its turn has to work with human concepts [drawn from the world].

So we have to label our transcendental knowledge or experience *a posteriori* to this extent: every transcendental experience is only ever mediated through a specific encounter with particular realities in our world. This is equally true of our knowledge of God. So to that extent we have the right – and the duty – to say that there is only *a posteriori* knowledge of God from and through an encounter with the world – the world, of course, to which we ourselves belong.

Yet this experience of God is still *transcendental*. This is because the primal sense of dependence of humans on the utter mystery (this is what the foundational experience of God consists in) is ever present in the inner awareness of humans as conscious selves.

There is also that conceptual, articulated knowledge, which is what we usually think of when we talk about knowledge of God or proofs of the existence of God. We have to acknowledge that sort of knowledge to some extent is a reflection on this transcendental sense of dependency of the human on the mystery. Nevertheless, such [reflective] knowledge is not itself that primal, foundational mode of the transcendental experience of the mystery.

Thinking about thinking belongs necessarily to the nature of human knowledge. Thinking about a particular object within an infinite (and seemingly empty) space of pure thought – a consciousness of thinking about oneself. One has to get used to *noticing* that when it comes to thinking and freedom, one is always dealing with much more than the particular subject of words and concepts, through which one represents oneself as a particular source of action in the present moment. If you cannot hold on to this bipolarity of knowledge and freedom… and reconcile it in a unity, then it will basically be impossible for you to know what we are talking about when we say: our *talk* of God is the *process of reflection* which points to our more fundamental, unarticulated and unreflected knowledge of God.

We always come back to ourselves. Conscious selves like us have intrinsic, transcendent parameters, within which the real world presents itself to us in a quite definite way, and within which we endure and fashion our world. This holds for our knowledge of God as well. In this sense it is not the sort of knowledge that is its own source; but nor is it simply a mystical process in our personal inner life. From that point of view it does not yet have the quality of a personal revelation of God.

However, it would be misleading to speak of the *a posteriori* character of the experience of God while overlooking the transcendental dimension to it. If we were to conceive of this experience of God as if it were everyday *a posteriori* knowledge, whose object comes entirely from without, and meets an impartial power of apprehension.

To call the knowledge of God *a posteriori* does not mean looking out on the world via such an impartial power of apprehension, and then thinking either that you have directly (or indirectly) discovered God among the other realities that present themselves to us as objects, or can prove God exists from them.

We are dependent on God. This primal experience is always there, and it must not be confused with the process of reflection on the transcendental sense of dependence on the mystery. That process, though necessary, reduces it to an object. The fact of this experience does not change the *a posteriori* nature of knowledge of God, but neither can we afford to misunderstand the way in which it is *a posteriori*, as if God could be simply taught to us like any [other] object of our external knowledge.

We are always actualising *this* knowledge of God precisely when we're thinking and dealing with just about everything apart from God. This experience, unarticulated but

continually present, is the abiding foundation from which grows that articulated knowledge of God which we bring about in overt religious practice and philosophical reflection.

Here it is not a matter of our discovering God, in the same way that we discover a certain object in our this-worldly experience, rather, in this explicitly religious action towards God in prayer and in metaphysical reflection, we are simply bringing to our attention explicitly what already know of our own accord, without saying anything, from the foundation of our personal self-realisation.

Thus, we are aware of our freedom as conscious selves, of our transcendence, and the boundless openness of the mind, even at the very point where we do not articulate them. In fact even at the point where a conceptual articulation of this primal awareness, objectifying it, expressing it in sentences, might completely fail or at best turn out imperfect and tattered. Perhaps even where one refuses to engage with such an attempt to articulate it at all.

Whenever knowledge of God is expressed in religion or metaphysics, what this means is only ever understandable and genuinely comprehensible, when all the words we use for this are pointers to the unarticulated experience: that experience of our sense of dependence that directs us to the mystery beyond words.

The nature of the mind is directed to the transcendent, nevertheless in its objective, world-bound condition, alongside its status as object, it offers the possibility of escaping from its proper selfhood, a selfhood overwhelmed in freedom. In the same way, human beings are capable of concealing from themselves their transcendental sense of dependence on the absolute mystery called God, and of thus repressing the deepest truth about themselves.

The individual realities that we normally deal with in our lives, are always clearly understood, perspicuous and manageable, because we can demarcate them from other individual realities. That is not how it is with knowledge of God.

Because God is something quite different from individual realities that appear in the realm of our experience or which can be deduced from it. And because the recognition of God has a quite distinctive, unique characteristic, and is not simply one instance of knowledge in general, it is very easy to fail to notice God.

The concept “God” is not a way of seizing hold of God, a way for humans to master the mystery, but a way of allowing oneself *to be seized* by an ever-present and ever-elusive mystery. This mystery remains a mystery, even when it opens itself to humanity and in this very way grounds human beings as conscious selves.

It is from this ground that the so called ‘concept of God’ may then arise, the express talk of God, the word, and what we mean by it and try to reflect on in our speech. And for

sure, the human being cannot refuse to make an effort that this reflective concept demands. Nevertheless, all the metaphysical language saying what God is, if it is to remain true, must continually return to its source. It must continually return to the transcendental experience of the sense of dependence that points to the utter mystery. It must continually return to the existential practice of freely accepting this dependence. That acceptance takes place in the unconditional obedience to conscience, an accepting and trusting letting go, that allows the fact that we are not in control of our own existence to hold sway in prayer and in peaceful silence…

Wittgenstein on Transcendence (Tractatus 6.4312 ff)

There is nothing that can guarantee the immortality of the human soul in time – meaning its continued existence even after death – but in fact supposing it true doesn't at all achieve what one wants it to. Does that fact that I continue to live solve a riddle? Isn't this eternal life just as mysterious as the present one? The solution to the riddle of life in space and time lies outside space and time. (We're not trying to solve scientific problems here).

How the world happens to be is a matter of complete indifference to what is higher. God does not reveal Godself *in* the world.

The 'facts' all belong to the task, not the solution.

It's not *how* the world is that is the mystical – it is *that* it is.

Beholding the world *sub specie aeternitate* is beholding it as a (bounded) whole. The feeling of the world as bounded whole is the mystical.

If you cannot articulate the answer to a question, then you cannot articulate the question itself either. *The Riddle* does not exist. If a question can be put at all, then it *can* also be answered.

Scepticism is *not* beyond refutation, but it is clearly nonsense when it raises doubts where no questions can be asked. For we can only doubt where there is a question; and we can only question where there is an answer, and there can only be an answer where something *can be stated*.

We feel that even when all the possible scientific questions have been answered, our problems about life remain untouched. Of course, then there are no further questions left; and that is exactly the answer.

We find the solution to the problem of life in the disappearance of this problem. (Isn't that the reason why, when people have suddenly found the meaning of life become clear to them, are then unable to say what that meaning consisted of?

Yet there is what cannot be expressed. It shows itself. It is the mystical.

The proper method in philosophy would really be to say nothing other than what it was possible to say – that is propositions of science – and therefore something that has nothing to do with philosophy – and then whenever someone else tried to say something Metaphysical, to demonstrate to them, that there were certain signs in their propositions that they had given no meaning to. The other person would find this approach unsatisfactory – they wouldn't feel that we were teaching them philosophy – but that would, strictly, be the only correct one.

My propositions elucidate in that whoever understands me ultimately recognises that they are meaningless, once they have climbed up by them, beyond them (they have to throw the ladder away, as it were, once they have climbed up). They have to overcome these propositions, then they see the world aright.

The things we cannot speak of, there we must fall silent.

Emmanuel Levinas The extra-ordinary in our Responsibility for Others

My being as subject is the everyday movement beyond the ordinary that is my responsibility for other human beings, for that which is not in my control (for another person is not like physical objects, under my control). As a result, bound up with this responsibility is an undoing: there is something that is undone in the transcendental subjectivity, when it moves into concrete action, when it is in actualisation. Something happens in which the spontaneity of the subject finds itself shattered.

Our guide in our research, where we are looking for ways of teasing out non-positive concepts, is human relations, ethical relations – wrongly called 'ethical' if 'ethical' like 'ethos' is simply habit or second nature. Beyond their global aspect which only sociology can deal with, human relations are structured according to a pattern other than that of 'being'. They signify that which is 'other than being'.

What we call 'God' can have no meaning other than one that starts from these other relations. It is only out of these relations that God can 'manifest' Godself. But let me emphasise this, that thinking about God from the starting point of ethics isn't just a fashionable line of thinking. On the contrary, this is about highlighting human relations as that extra-ordinary, by which we mean a non-spatial 'beyond' – and nothing to do with thinking of a God as a cause of the world, who as such would still be part of it. But you will recognise that this attempt to think otherwise than in terms of 'being', is indeed thinkable. The whole of structuralist thought, in contrast, is a struggle against the idea that there can be other models for thinking than that of 'being'.