

# *Reflections*

*I: On Being*

*Juhan Puhm*

# *Reflections I ~ On Being*

I was piping a funeral, sitting in the back pew of a Roman Catholic church. To pass the time of the Mass I thought I would ponder the Christian symbols. At first I thought this is a cult of death. Then everything became very simple and clear.

The cross is like a stop sign, an X in the road, an obstacle we are blind to see past. The cross or X symbolically separates our life here from the beyond. Our assurance of an existence after death is nil, and we have no provable knowledge or understanding of any realm beyond death. We are completely in the dark as concerning an afterlife.

While the body may perish, we cannot conceive of the end of our very real being. If the end of our body also signifies the annihilation of our conscious being, we won't be around to complain about it. We hope for existence beyond death, but the cross or X separates ourselves completely from perceiving the beyond while we are still alive here.

Once I fell asleep on the sofa. But this was no ordinary sleep. It was a sleep that when I awoke, I felt like I had completely ceased to be for a while. Complete non-existence, no observation in real time of not being, not even the sense of nothing, like when a computer is turned off. No observation, no memory, no being, no thought. Complete ceasing to know even that one has ceased to exist, or ever did exist. Even the emptiness and void ceased to exist, not even nothing. Only when I awoke did I feel the very realness of the blankness of this experience which stays with me.

I imagine that this is what happens when we cease to be and pass away. In one sense why should it be any other way? Why should our sense of being continue when the body turns off? Our end then would be to completely cease to be in every way, all knowledge of self turned off, gone.

But there is no way we can accept this complete annihilation. There is no way we can imagine ourselves not existing. Our sense of being is our strongest sense for every waking moment we exist. The body is one thing, but the mind is something else entirely.

There is the tangible universe we can touch and measure and put in a jar. Our body is part of the tangible universe. It has weight and heat and movement. But then there is the intangible universe, whose existence is as real as the physical universe. Thoughts and ideas have no weight, take up no space and can't be put into a jar. The intangible universe exists side by side and is as completely real as the tangible universe. There are the two realities then, the corporeal and the incorporeal.

We enter into the idea of soul and spirit, and our very real immaterial existence beyond the physical. It is no wonder that some philosophies or religions would call the physical world we live in a complete illusion or delusion. Here the belief is that the physical world doesn't exist at all.

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Here there is only the intangible mind that has no physical form. The idea of a physical world then is a falsehood, especially when trying to express that there is only the spirit and mind as a truth. The belief is that only the mind, spirit or sense of being exists, and that is all. If only the mind exists, a good question is where does the illusion of the physical world come from? If only the immaterial mind exists, the idea of the physical world can only come from the mind, which makes us ask what is wrong with the mind that it needs to create something that is not real?

We don't need to go as far as denying the physical universe. It is part of our daily existence. We spend our lives keeping ourselves alive in the physical sense. We eat and sleep and are driven relentlessly by the prime driving force that completely controls our mind. Of course, life has only one prime directive which continually deceives our mind. The prime directive makes us think we are making the choices. The prime directive floods our system with chemicals. The prime directive's only goal is to perpetuate life and it doesn't matter what deception it needs in order to do so. The mind has morality, but the prime directive will have none of that. For the prime directive the ends justify the means.

We are humans and humans are animals. Our urges, desires, violence are powerful and worse than any other animal. There is only the mind to attempt to tame and control our animal nature. If we completely obey the natural animal and allow it wreak havoc, the society of the mind will punish us for our base primal misdeeds. We are individually expected to tame the prime directive out of fear of punishment.

The brain, where we suppose our mind to reside, belongs to the physical world and is also part of our body, which is under the control of the prime directive. It is a little difficult for the immaterial mind to tame the body when the seat of reason resides in the physical brain.

The ease with which our mind is able to be taken over by our body is a good argument to show the mind is actually in our physical brain. Who or what really runs the show then if it isn't our mind? It is obviously both our mind and body, though the body I would say always has the upper hand. The mind is easily taken over by the body. The body and the taken over mind are a potent mix, just ask Shakespeare.

So where are we? We have a physical body that also contains and influences the mind. Yet thoughts and ideas aren't physical at all. They are immaterial and intangible, obviously exist, and are part of the fabric of our reality. We can extend the idea of the immaterial mind to a belief of the spirit and soul, all completely incorporeal.

As an aside, it can make sense that mind, spirit and soul really exist electromagnetically. If we believe the electromagnetic to be part of the physical world, then on that premise we could make an argument that the intangible doesn't exist at all, and that everything in one way or another is really physical, including thoughts.

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It is a hard call. I am going to stick with the duality of the tangible and intangible, even though the idea that consciousness is really part of the electromagnetic seems very plausible for many reasons. Death then would be the same as shutting down a computer and we cease to be. All our electromagnetic functions would cease. It is interesting that within ourselves, within our nervous system we generate electric impulses. Our body is a wired with billions of wires or nerve fibers, all within or connected to a central processing system which is the brain. We all operate electrically!

We look at nature and see plants and animals and the wonderful complexity of all life. If we look, we can see with absolute amazement the beauty of everything around us, the stunning world we live in. Yet beneath everything we see, both animate and inanimate, is the electromagnetic world. The electromagnetic is the true natural world. All natural processes, colours, things held together, pretty much everything is electromagnetic, excepting of course gravity and the nuclear forces, and thoughts if they are truly immaterial.

It is always interesting overhearing people who are on a walk together. The words, the ideas, the thought processes all seem incredibly similar from one person to the next. Our sense of self is so strong that we all think we are unique. Actually we are all pretty much the same, with the same thought processes. We are carbon based physical entities, all with the same operating system running on a carbon based central processing system. We like to think we have free will but how much free will do we really have?

Space it would seem is so vast that to cover only a small portion of it would exceed the lifetime of a single operating organism. No worries. While moving across any vast expanse of space belongs to the realm of science fiction, there is no need to transport a living organism. All one needs to do is send out its code and the code of the entire ecosystem in RNA and DNA. Where the seed lands and takes root the whole ecosystem is transplanted and through time evolves in complexity according to the blueprint. Along the way we end up with incredibly complex carbon based entities, with incredibly complex carbon based central processing units, who ponder their very own existence, what they are made up from, where they came from and where they are going. It almost seems safe to say that our evolution here is nowhere yet complete.

It is practically impossible to imagine all this happening just by chance. One can only think that this is the fantastic handiwork of a Grand Designer at the far edges of the universe who has set out to fill the universe with life. A Grand Designer whose work is nothing short of a miracle by our limited understanding. But humans have always believed in a god, no matter how much they have abused that belief for their own power and gain. How does one even begin trying to understand the universe or even God with our limited understanding? Is the Grand Designer actually God, or is there even a greater creative force. We create god and gods in our own image. We probably don't even have the understanding to even come close to forming a true image.

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It is ridiculous to imagine that we are the only creatures who have consciousness on the planet. It is hard to imagine even an ant not to have consciousness. They certainly have community and self preservation. How truly different are we really from other mammals? We aren't at all. We all need sustenance and creature comforts. It is easy to say consciousness must evolve as well. And finally, if consciousness is actually electromagnetic, then the whole entire universe, animate and inanimate must all be conscious!

Obviously we live in a violent universe and our intelligence makes us the most violent creatures on the planet. In body we are still animals, and our mind is still at the mercy of our bodies. Our body and mind perpetuate the most violent and reprehensible deeds imaginable. But the mind also has the desire for beauty, and understanding the universe and immortality. Self perpetuation, which for humans easily extends to thoughts of immortality, is obviously one of the main coded directives for all evolution. This violent moment we are living in right now hopefully is just a momentary stage of evolution, that we can look dimly back on in a hundred thousand years or so.

There is a syllogism I came up with years ago. One of our main goals is to try to understand the universe and our place in it. At the same time, we are part of that very universe. Put the two together and what we have is, that we are really just the universe trying to understand itself! This has interesting implications for the universe, God even and creation. It would imply that even the universe doesn't understand its own creation. It would also imply that our lofty purpose here is to try and make sense of everything, which is pretty much one of humankind's driving forces anyways!

So in quiet peaceful moments the mind can transcend the control of the body. The mind can aspire to the contemplation of existence and being, and seeking the divine. The body at the slightest offense however sends the mind into a tailspin. Hopefully though, with a peaceable life one may enjoy both the pleasures of the body and of the mind.

Whether it is necessary to go to the extreme and mortify the flesh is another thing completely. Actually, it seems ludicrous to think that that can be at all beneficial. Without the body there is no mind, so what is the point beating down the body and denying its desires? Best is an enlightened mind and satisfied body, the two existing in harmony. Of course, if the desires of the body or mind are hurtful to others and the world around, then something has to be done, either by the individual or society.

There are those who basically exist only by their bodily urges, whose minds are devoid of any guiding principal, restraint or intelligence. These are the Neanderthals who roam the earth perpetuating violence, obeying a ruthless prime directive which cares for nothing but its own immediate satisfaction, regardless of the damage and cost to others and society as a whole. The quicker society removes, meaning exterminates, from the gene pool this cancer the better. We don't try to rehabilitate a rotten apple in the bushel. We throw it away to rot and try to clean or isolate all the apples it has been in contact with. By not doing so, eventually every apple

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around the rotten one will rot as well, and perpetuate the putrefaction through generations of society.

Society of the mind continues to evolve now with greater openness, acceptance and toleration than ever before. It is hoped that the fragile rights and values that are upheld further and further, entrench in the minds and education of all. Laws are the mind saying to the body that certain prime directive behaviours are hurtful and not beneficial to the common good. And if one as an individual won't take responsibility, keeping them in check, then there are punishments in place as deterrents. If one offends the human rights of another, then they should lose exactly those rights themselves. It is a waste of society's time and energy to even contemplate rehabilitating one whose abuse spreads such wide scale destruction. Let the rotting apple return to the ground and perish.

We believe in an existence after death that leaves the body behind to rot and turn into compost. Actually it would be preferable if this was the way the body was dealt with after death! Why is this so foreign an idea right across the world? What is the purpose of expending so much energy to burn the shell of the body, or fill it with toxic preserving chemicals, buried well below the fecund soil in a box, where eventually it will poison the ground water and contribute nothing back to nature? Kind of stupid really. Are we really that out of touch with our place here and what we are made of? Worms, fungi and bacteria exist for a reason, and composting the human body would be the best way to return it to the earth.

For years I thought that when I die I would like to be submerged in the swamp on Great Duck Island off the south shore of Manitoulin Island. Then I thought that that would be too complicated and went back to the idea of cremation, but I am going to change my mind back here and now.

Lay your body to rest among the reeds  
Let flesh turn to peat  
Your mouth will root the rustling cattail  
Redwing blackbird alight your dark eyes to see

We are good at spreading poison across the earth, even when returning the dead whence they came. We even spend time fabricating enemies that we can poison. The most inexplicable example is that of the beautiful lowly dandelion. When did dandelions become weeds that needed to be sprayed with toxic chemicals that kill not only dandelions but other living things as well? Who first decreed this edible, useful and beautiful flower an enemy? Probably some mindless, unaware chemical company executives looking for a new profit source, as well as a means of getting rid of a number of other chemicals they no longer could dispose of by spreading them thinly upon the earth. And who are the blind, uneducated automatons who go out onto their lawns with their chemicals, pathetically doing what they are told and what their neighbor is doing, without any self reflection or critical faculties of independent thought or evaluation. Their minds are about as blank and narrow as the single

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type of grass they have poisoned their lawn into and themselves, when they die of cancer caused by the chemicals.

But we transgress. Let us return to our first topic. We live and we die and we try to understand death. Our sense of our immaterial, intangible existence is so strong that we can't for a moment even imagine the end of our existence or annihilation. We see the body die, but we also know the mind and thought to be immaterial and intangible (that is, if it isn't actually an electromagnetic emanation that belongs to the physical world). If the mind, soul and spirit do transcend and exist beyond the physical then there is every reason to think that they go forward when the body dies.

But, there is no proof of this. None have ever come back in spirit to say, "Hey, let me tell you all about the afterlife...it's like this". And it isn't for lack of humans on this side trying to contact the spirits of the beyond. We will believe what we want and create whatever stories we need. The optimum word is belief, as we can show nothing by proof in the real world. Everything about the beyond is only by belief that it is so.

This belief can become so strong that it distorts reality. Not only the reality of the individual, but when it becomes entrenched in society, the reality of all society. It is at this point that unbelievers and heretics and so called threats to god start being burned at the stake, if they differ in the "truth" of the reality imposed and thrust upon them by the rest of deluded and intolerant society. It obviously doesn't take much to fabricate and impose a belief system to lead the docile and uneducated masses. And so we have individuals and finally brainwashed society imposing their belief forcefully upon the rest of human kind, enforced by dire consequences for those who choose not to agree.

It seems necessary for humans to create beliefs that deal with the very real problem that we have no knowledge of the beyond, and that no one has ever returned from the dead. The only other option is living with the very real fear of annihilation, of ceasing to be, of utter nothingness. This is not an acceptable or tenable way to live. It is hard to live a purposeful life if in the end it is all for nothing.

It is not possible to accept that we are just expendable, indistinct humans, only a small part of a long process of perpetuating life. And that when our usefulness in perpetuating life is done, we are completely expendable, both body and mind; that we have fulfilled our purpose, deceived by the elaborate chemical machinations of the prime directive. But there must be more; eternity and god and immortality and the great beyond for each individual. We take the greatest possible comfort knowing the end here is not the end, but the beginning of a new existence elsewhere.

The body lies still at death, a hard reminder of the X at the crossroads that nobody has seen beyond, and nobody has returned from. The body lies on this side of the X, and we hope

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against all hope that the spirit still exists and continues on in the spirit realm beyond the X. All we have is a vague, thin and shallow hope that there is more beyond this existence.

This is exactly where Christianity comes in and is so powerful. We know that no human has died and returned from the dead to give us hope of our continued existence beyond the crossroads, beyond the X. For our sanity and higher purpose it is necessary to cross over this bridge. If there is at least one who has died and lived again, and has come back to tell us of the afterlife, we could have peace. If there is just one, then we don't even need to believe. It would be enough, and we could know for certain that we simply do not completely perish. In the end actually there is still no knowing. There is only ever belief, no matter how certain we might think we are.

Somewhere in history, events, ideas, beliefs and need conspired, and whether all in the Christian scriptures really came to pass or not, it doesn't matter. It is enough that it is written down that certain events occurred, and the meaning and interpretation of these events.

We continue with Christianity, the Christ and the idea of the Christ. Christianity presents us with one they believe to be both human and divine, and who in the body died on a cross, but whose spirit continued on. The cross here is quite a powerful symbol for the crossroads or X that separates this world from the world after death. For the Christian, not only did Christ die in the physical body here in this world, but he moved beyond the cross, in spirit, into the realm of the beyond, and then came back to tell us about life beyond death. If one human, who is also said to be God, was able to live on past death, then all by believing can do so as well. This is all that is needed, all the proof required for every believing individual to be certain of everlasting immortality. It is all written down and is the "true" reality of a large percentage of humanity. For many, this is truly knowing, and gives the needed hope for this life, and the life beyond.

This belief and hope in that which cannot be seen and known, is called faith. There is faith then in one who lived and died and lived again, and by that faith all believers hope to do the same and enter into an everlasting consciousness of being.

Of course there are certain conditions, the least of which is believing that what has been written down is the "truth". These conditions also include living an upright and spiritual life and doing good. Without doubt this puts the spirit above the body, as of course the body will die one day, but the spirit will live forever. Regardless, the higher calling of the spirit of good is better for humankind overall than just a base adherence to the desires of the body. In this way the idea of the mind and spirit is a greater good, and if evolution is towards an enlightenment of the mind, then this would be a step in the right direction.

There are always two sides of a coin. One thousand years ago the monarchy and aristocracy were just the ones who were the biggest thugs, who were able to lord it over all others. But on the other side of the coin, by order and hierarchy, civilization is built up and laws are created.

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The subjugation of the masses must obviously be preferable to an uncivilized, barbaric and violent anarchy. The abuses of state or religion are obviously legion. Yet everything we have which is good is precisely because civilization chooses to focus on the enlightenment of the mind as opposed to the base needs of the body. Civilization actually subjugates the body and educates the mind. Acts of violence are not tolerated and punished. Inventions and discoveries of the mind that are beneficial to our being are praised and rewarded.

Maybe it has taken civilization a long time to get it right, but it seems to continue to get it right. Certain parts of the world are living with the highest form of civilization humankind has ever known; peace, freedom, tolerance, health and education. Maybe one day we will be able to focus more and more resources into figuring how we operate biologically and what we are doing floating around on a rock in the literal middle of nowhere.

There is connected to Christianity the whole unfortunate idea of sin. What exactly is this sin? This sin must be precisely the sin of the prime directive, that which in the body is allowed to completely take over the mind. As Christ died in body, he really showed that the body must die in the war it has against the spirit. This complete death and mortification of the body is a little extreme, as we have already pointed out above, but Christianity feels it is necessary to their doctrine.

It would seem with Christianity there is very little balance between body and mind. The body is seen to be corrupt and only the mind or spirit is worth saving and nurturing. This kind of misses the point that the body is necessary for the perpetuation of life. It is the body which contains the mind, and at least in this life, without the body there is no mind! Obviously without pleasing the desires of the body we will all eventually die out! If we continue mortifying the body, both body and mind become ill. Mortifying the body under the guise of good is actually an evil. It would seem that in the extreme, Christianity wars against the body and the prime directive completely, curtailing the two to a very strict set of moral rules.

Any deviation from these moral rules of course is a mortal sin, punishable in the extreme by the pain of hell and eternal damnation. There is not a lot of leeway here. Somehow, while we started with the comfort and peace of one who transcended death for all, we have ended with a whole set of damning rules and parameters that do nothing but instill fear and agony. How did this happen? Our joy has turned to fear, and a battle for what is considered acceptable for the enlightenment of our mind, is waged against us. With Christianity, or any other religion for that matter, what is considered acceptable for the mind is incredibly limited, discriminatory and harmful for those that do not concur and agree, in other words, those who see things in a different way.

This black and white war against the body and prime directive is not healthy or sustainable any more, though it has brought us a long way in the process of civilization. With every doctrine against the body, Christianity tightens the noose around its own neck. Churches around the world are closing due to lack of attendance. There is no compromise possible with

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Christian doctrine, or the doctrine of most religions. People are walking away from fear based, outdated religions in droves. A tolerant, open secular life where we are free to make our own spiritual choices now prevails.

Once the laws of society upheld Christian morals, but now Christianity is understood to be patriarchal, discriminatory, intolerant and abusive. The denial of the body among its own ranks has bred pestilence in the very body it has tried to mortify. Charges of abuse against the clergy are endless. This is completely understandable. It is not possible to repress the body without becoming sick in both body and mind.

In this life, the seat of the mind and spirit, intangible or not, seems to be in the physical brain which is in the physical body. How much better is it to enjoy the physical pleasures of the body that are given to us (even by the Christian God which according to Christianity created us), balanced with the mind and spirit, even to the seeking of the divine. To mortify the vessel the spirit is contained in also destroys the spirit at the same time, and that makes no sense. To deny either the body or the spirit is to disrespect both and will only lead to sickness.

In the end we can see everything pile up on the cross, X or stop sign. Ships and cars and buildings, everything there is. We can imagine a large painting of this image. Nothing that is physical can pass beyond this physical realm into the realm of the spirit beyond death. We leave this life with even less than what we came to it, with absolutely nothing, not even our dead body. We own nothing. Everything we have will be left behind including our bodies. There is in the end only the hope that we don't annihilate, and that the spirit, soul, mind or being continues onwards after death. None of our wealth in this life will accompany us. It will all be left behind for others, who will also one day have to leave it behind.

What then is wealth in this life? There are only two types of wealth. The first is to have a healthy body and mind for the entire time we are here in the body. The second is to have time to pursue our dreams. The only real wealth then is health and time. Dreams live in the spirit, yet physical possessions rob us of our time and freedom. We live in an ever freer world, but find ourselves enslaved by our possessions and robbed of our time.

So finally, in the end what is important is a fine balance of mind and body, health and time, and though I didn't talk about it, friends and family to get us through, and finally a hope of the beyond at day's end, whatever that beyond may be.

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