Nick Berry

know fear, know courage™

Essays

On Truth, capital ‘T’

It is a curiosity of the current age, at least in what calls itself the developed world, which consists in The West and its acolytes, that those who might identify as the most educated, intelligent, refined, discerning, aware, thoughtful, considerate, judicious, knowledgeable and otherwise developed tend to be those who most deeply believe in and mostly fervently spread the Word of the New Religions: Coronaism, Wokeism, Transism, Climatism, Whateverism. By religion, I mean those belief systems that are powered by doctrine, and which prioritise doctrine over Truth. The cruder the belief system, the more draconian the doctrine, and the harsher the punishments meted out on those who question its precepts, let alone try to gainsay them. Think radical Islam. Compared to Coronaism, Roman Catholicism is a global beacon of inclusiveness and flexibility, defined by doubt.

As G.K. Chesterton observed, when people stop believing in that thing sold to us for millennia as ‘God’, they do not stop believing in God; they start believing in anything. To Douglas Murray, when the G-word was rooted out of the developed world, it left what he termed a “God-shaped hole”. That is a shame, as we humans are born with a need for the transcendental – the God-shaped – whether the need for love, the need for meaning, or another need. And these are needs as opposed to desires or aspirations, which are today presented as synonymous; sold to us as synonymous. They are not. The need for the transcendental is on a level with food and water. If we do not fill that need, we will die and do die, even if we keep breathing for another 60 years. And we do fill that need, all of us, some How and with some Thing. Some of us fill it with the G-word, others with worship of the God of Consumerism, or of Celebrity, sporting or otherwise.

Some of us fill the hole by following one or several of the attractively packaged Buy-One-Get-Three-Free New Religions.

Nowhere is the God-shaped hole larger or deeper than in those who have utterly and finally and intellectually and rationally and socially and scientifically and peer-reviewedly rejected the G-word, and nowhere can or do the New Religions pour in faster to fill the hole. Nature abhors a vacuum, and we are, all of us, by nature, creatures needing to embrace the transcendental. We are born with the need to believe in something greater than ourselves, because we are born sensing that some things cannot be understood on any other level but belief. Things like love, but the list is long. It begins with consciousness and works outwards from there.

This innate need runs in the opposite direction to existentialism, which underpins and has precipitated the rush to the New Religions. Existentialism asserts that Existence (*that we are*) precedes Essence (*what we are*). In other words, we are born (the biological fact of existence) and then get values poured into us by society; or, preferably, by the disciples of the post-modernist New Religions, spun from the same thread as the existentialist web. In their terms, there is not The Truth, only Their Truth. If, like Plato and Thomas Aquinas, among others, we come to the natural conclusion (because that conclusion comes from our nature) that Essence (*what we are*) precedes Existence (*that we are*), we are *de facto* closed to post-modernist post-programming. At least, we are until we are intellectually refined enough to embrace its denial of Truth.

We are born with an instinct to love. We are born with an instinct to not lie or kill or cheat or steal. We do not get those things programmed into us, even by our mothers. The evidence being all those people who have hung on to their instincts – you may call them moral instincts – in spite of their mothers making every effort to teach them the opposite; or, as existentialism would have it, to define their Essence as the opposite. Singer-songwriter Jewel is one contemporary example of the primacy of Essence, and its refusal to give up its seat to Existence. The values we get born with are, by the definition of the word, innate. We do not get those values

from the holy books. The holy books get them from us. And as far as I can work out from the bits of anthropology I have rubbed up against, there has never been any social grouping on earth, ever, that thought it a good idea to lie or kill or cheat or steal. Eating other people is fine in some places. Having multiple wives is fine in others; but nowhere is it fine to lie or kill or cheat or steal, even in aboriginal societies that barely have a concept of ownership, if at all. The only societal variations are the nature and extent of the punishments for transgressing such innate Laws, and the intricacy and diligence with which those punishments are visited on offenders.

If we do not believe in the G-word, we believe in anything that fills that hole within us. I find myself reflecting on why today's New Religions of The West and its international acolytes are barely known by name in the developing world, let alone followed. Why might that be? Could it be because – or even distantly related to 'because' – a majority of the people who make up what we patronisingly refer to as the developing world (patronisingly on a level that stretches the boundaries of the word to breaking point) still believe in some version of that thing sold to us for millennia as God? Because if they do, they believe in a power that trumps all other powers, even the power of the Educated and Sophisticated; even the power of Governments and the Media, and even, God forbid, the power of The Science.
Why and how did that happen? How did the uneducated, unrefined, unsophisticated, unenlightened masses of the Rest of the World develop such tenacious antibodies against the New Religions? Where does their immunity come from, if immunity it is? My guess is because the old religions, in all their guises, had a belief in certain principles they called Truths and they all had a vision for the future of humanity, which they did their best (which does not always come out that way) to live and make live. What vision do the New Religions have, other than destruction of the old? What alternative civilisations do they propose to build? Above all, the Big Five old religions and

their adherents believed, and still do, in that objective thing called Truth. They believe that there is, out there in the universe, a state of existence, of consciousness (which defines the existence we call life), that cannot be challenged. The prophets and followers of the new religions deny the existence of Truth, capital T, because they are built on Lies, capital L. They define themselves by lies, they live by and promulgate lies, and they know – or at least they sense – that if they allowed that thing called Truth to so much as ring the doorbell, it would destroy them.

The point of the new religions is to deny Truth. I have many times been exposed to one of their over-educated disciples asserting that there is no such thing as Truth. That all those things we used to sneak a look at under the blanket of truth are, in certain fact (oh, so certain), lived experience; that all perception is contingent and conditioned and contextualised and spatialised and incommensurablised, and self-reflectivised and whatever other words they suck from the bodies of post-modernism and its offspring, which were born dead and go about their business as zombies. To which people I say: “There is a thing called objective Truth that can never be subjective, at least not in the human experience.” I offer to demonstrate the truth of Truth to them. It can be done quickly and decisively, and at modest cost. For some reason, best known to their lived experiences, no one has yet taken me up on my offer to demonstrate the Truth that boiling water scalds human skin; a test of the concept of Truth that is easy to conduct and whose results are conclusive. When they refuse my offer, I ask them instead to explain the nature of the lived experience of having a saucepan of boiling water poured over one’s head. I ask them if they believe in the truth of biological death, or whether their blind faith has rendered them immune from that, as they are apparently immune from the effects of boiling water on human skin.

The human need for the transcendental, for the G-word and its relatives, is the need for a space within us in which the unexplainable can operate, and in which it makes enough sense for us to feel that we have filled that need.

I choose the word ‘unexplainable’ rather than ‘inexplicable’. Although both words imply that which cannot be explained, the one called inexplicable is defined by an absence of internal logic. The inexplicable cannot be explained because it cannot exist, because that existence cannot be demonstrated by logic, which is the only way available to us to explain the existence of the intangible. Unexplainable implies the presence of an internal logic that cannot be explained. It cannot be explained because it cannot be explained. To work at all, it has to be believed; it requires that which is called faith. And it needs to be believed because – unlike the inexplicable – it does exist. It cannot not exist. We know that because we experience its internal logic. The internal logic of ‘love’ is that we all, if we are lucky, experience it, yet none of us will be able to explain it. It is incapable of explanation, but boy does it exist. If it did not, there would be no point to life – any of it – and we could not make love; we could only fuck. The inexplicable does not possess that internal logic.

It is inexplicable to me, for example, that so many people spend so much time watching TV news programmes in the blind faith that this will bring them into the presence of Truth. That is a noble quest, the integrity of which is reinforced by an unbroken pattern of behaviour dating back to Lowell Thomas’ first regular TV news broadcasts on NBC, which began in 1940. Easy to understand why such a show was considered necessary and desirable at the time. But the path to Truth is not, never has been, and never can be, via the TV news programmes. This is because a quest for Truth expressed in that manner has no internal logic. I now invite you to bombard me with metaphorical rotten lettuce as I say it has not only no internal logic for me, but no internal logic at all. Not for me and not for anyone who approaches it through the portal of logic. I will try to use logic to make that assertion sound less arrogant and preposterous than it may.

Why would you go looking for Truth from a source that is, by its nature, corrupt; if not deliberately and knowingly corrupt (many news media today are, and know it),

and even if it sincerely aims and believes itself to be the opposite of corrupt?

By their nature, the best of what remains today of the best of what could be called the heritage news media do not, have not and never have been capable of reporting The Truth. They do get, have got, and have been capable of coming within its orbit, but that is not the same thing as pulling into the station and unloading your baggage. At their best, the collected news media aim to disseminate fact. At their best, the collected news media cannot do this because the facts they disseminate are subjective. Fact, capital F, like Truth, capital T, is objective. That objectivity is locked into the definition of both words.

This is the fallacious contemporary elision of opinion and truth encouraged by the news media, and which sustains the new religions. The fallacious assumption that opinion and truth are, or can be, the same thing. The posture that Shakespeare expressed in *King Lear* (I.ii.104) as "the excellent foppery of the world"; or at least of the developed world. Like nature's cycle of biological death, decay and regeneration, Truth exists beyond opinion. I don't care whether you refuse to believe that your body will one day not be here, or have another opinion, no matter how sincere your belief, nor how offensive my not caring may be to you. That process of decay is an inevitability; an example of what the word Truth was invented to reflect. And will reflect, for as long as the cycle of nature manifests itself in that manner.

Inevitability is a prickly word, and its definition, or our understanding of it, cannot be taken as inevitable. Historians are right when they say that nothing is inevitable, because the inevitability to which they refer is historical, and history is socio-political. It is written and passed down differently in every individual socio-political context; always has been and always will be. That is in the nature of socio-political context. Nothing is inevitable but the fact that all social groupings will reach their own understanding of what they call history. That will always be contingent, relative, subjective.

Things of Truth can be called inevitable – and are – because they exist in another dimension: the transcendental. This in turn exists, for now, somewhere among the nine (or eleven) dimensions of the universe that physics has so far identified, out of a possible infinite number. In contrast, the news media and that which we call history live in two dimensions; three, if you happen to be on the ground while the reports are being written and the history made; 'written' and 'made' being the operative words. Those things we call History and Reality are constructs – things we humans construct for our own socio-political reasons – such as the thing that gets called gender-fluidity: the anti-truth that asserts that the thing we have always called a woman can have a penis; that appendage we have always taken to define a man, or did, until a handful of years ago.

Media news does not exist in the same dimension as Truth or quantum physics, which is, so far, the closest humanity has come to Einstein's 'God equation'; the thing he spent the rest of his life searching for after proving that time is curved, thus enabling space travel and intercontinental missiles. Quantum physics is the closest we have ever come to scientifically proving the existence of that thing packaged and sold to us for millennia as God. Ironically, although it is the closest physics has so far got to Einstein's God equation, Einstein resisted the emergence of that branch of physics because he could not accept that perfect order could be built on perfect chaos; or that a chaos of infinite possibility could resolve itself into a couple of hundred recurring patterns. But the universe loves and lives off opposites and paradoxes (ask the bumble bee), so it need be no surprise if that is how things turn out to be, assuming they ever do. Another pretend paradox: How can a black hole exist if it has no limit, if the only thing most of us understand as a hole is defined by its limit? Or is that apparent paradox a reflection of the limits of language? Will we come to abandon our general understanding of 'hole' and reassign its conceptual limits to the unlimits of black holes? But that level of questioning is above my pay grade.

The last church choir I sang with before leaving England for Germany was the motley (but vocally competent) collection that gathered to sing a weekly office of Evensong at the church of St Giles in Oxford. Like all mediaeval St Giles' churches, it was sited outside the former city walls; in this case, at the confluence of the Woodstock and Banbury roads, were you to take either as your route into the city. St Giles is the patron saint of beggars and assorted misfits, which those appointed to guard the city gates had a duty to exclude. Hence St Giles' churches having a tendency to crop up at the edges of archaeological interest. True to its patron, that particular St Giles' church was well peopled by beggars and assorted misfits. I felt at home there.

My immediate neighbour in the choir stalls into which we processed and sat, stood, sat, stood, sat, stood, and processed out of again was a theoretical physicist. Not theoretically a physicist, but an actual physicist whose trade was in the theory(-ies) of physics. As with every such church choir in England, there was a weekly battle to see whether the service would end or we would be in the pub first. While he and I shared a post-Evensong beer one Sunday, within minutes of divesting ourselves of our robes for another week, he sketched out the curvature of time for me and introduced the nine dimensions that his discipline has so far identified. These, he explained, were necessary to explain how it is that one object is not just capable of being in two places at the same time, but has no option but to be in two places at the same time. If it were not, the 'quantum' thing could not happen, and it can. But, as he said on parting, there may as well be 200 dimensions out there, or a million. How should he know? That is the universe in which Truth operates. I have yet to meet a serious physicist, and I have met four in my life, who has any problem with the notion of Truth; or of God, come to that. Compared with what keeps them occupied on paid time, the intangible nature of Truth (or God) is a banal curiosity.

The facts reported by the collected news media are not Truth and cannot – not 'do not' – move in the same universe. The facts reported by the collected news media are

determined by the editor (or editrix) on the basis of editorial policy. This policy is in turn written by and influenced by… Whatever, whomever. Neither the policy nor the editorial decisions based on or inspired by that policy can be objective Fact, capital F.

At its very best – the best it ever got according to the consensus of those who move in that world – the information reported by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) news service was regarded across much of the planet as the closest thing to Fact that the global news media could achieve, or would ever achieve. The first BBC news broadcast was made on 14 November 1922, less than one month after the foundation of the British Broadcasting Company, as it was called then. At the time, it was a private company. This organism was dissolved on 31 December 1926 and replaced by the non-commercial, Crown-chartered British Broadcasting Corporation, which has, ever since, lived off its public grant in the form of the licence fee. Its non-commercial status was the cornerstone of its credibility as a news source.

During the frantic collapse of Soviet communism, Mikhail Gorbachev relied on the BBC World Service News to keep him updated on the tsunami of events he had earthquaked into life. But even facts reported by the BBC World Service News, in the best of good faith and in the greatest dedication to its guiding principles of reporting The Truth, are later shown to admit wider interpretation. Today's socio-political facts become tomorrow's socio-political fictions. One day, the entire world believes it is flat and that you can sail off the edge, as it has believed for millennia. Five minutes later, in historical terms, it knows that the world is round and that we (and the oceans and every other thing that is not rooted in the ground or nailed to it by stone and concrete and steel and wood) are held onto the surface by something called gravity. What might the next breakthrough revise in that picture? Physics has already given us nine dimensions, out of a possible infinite number. Which other of today's facts will it later rewrite?

Today's news media facts cannot ever be The Truth, because the things we call facts in the context of news

media are reflections of relentlessly shifting socio-political plates. That body of information the media sells us as fact is of this world, as we experience it, and that experience evolves second by second, minute by minute, hour by hour… Fact, capital F is a synonym for Truth, capital T, and Truth (like the G-word) is not of this world. It is transcendent. The internal universe in which we experience the transcendent goes by the name transcendental. Not hippie stuff; human stuff. All of humanity human stuff.

The word transcendental is derived from the Latin verb *transcendere*, meaning to surmount, climb over, rise above. And that is what we do. We surmount, climb over, rise above the logic that tells us we cannot believe in what we cannot see. We know that we have no option but to believe. We have no option but to develop and acquire a vocabulary of belief to express such things because we experience the Truth of many things we cannot see, and never will; the wind, for example. Even if we add coloured smoke to wind tunnels, it is not the wind we are seeing but the action of the wind on the coloured smoke. It is the same evidence for the existence of the invisible wind that we see in the trees on a windy day.

Those intangible, invisible things, which we cannot see and never will, work in us at a deeper level than that on which we experience those things we can see. Run a quick test on yourself. Think of the most beautiful and desirable visible, tangible thing you can. For me, it may be my handmade, steel-framed racing bicycle or one of my handmade, wooden-framed guitars. Where would I place that tangible thing in relation to the experience of riding that bike or listening to pleasing music made on that guitar? Or making pleasing music on that guitar? Those experiences are intangible. I cannot prove that they exist. I only know that, for me, they do exist. I have faith – unprovable belief – that they exist because I have no option. For me, they do. In my experience – perception, consciousness – they always have done and always will. As in the beginning, so at the end. In my every waking hour and when I sleep. Omnipresent (always there), omniscient (all-knowing) and, for me, omnipotent (all powerful).

If this is starting to sound religious, it is meant to. That is what faith means; acceptance of the illogical, unexplainable, because you have no logical option but to accept it. You have faith in Some Thing, as I do, as everyone does, and I hope for you that it is faith in a Good Thing, in the sense that it is good for you and for everyone your life touches.

If you do happen to believe in that thing sold to us for millennia as God, good luck to you. And bless you for that belief. On balance, it has done and is doing exponentially less damage to society and to the planet in the last few thousand years than the new religions have done in the last five (time of writing, September 2022). At its best, belief in that thing sold to us for millennia as God has been responsible for the greatest good things humanity has ever devised, from the art and music and architecture and rituals that point us to the transcendent, to the societies in which we go about our daily lives. The bad things it has done are as nothing in proportion. If we think civilisation, however we define or experience that word, is a good thing, everything we have ever collectively referred to as civilisation has been built on that thing sold to us for millennia as God, in all its guises: good, bad, and indifferent.

Ricky Gervais, one of the winners of the media lottery called Fame, of whom you may have heard, once shared a conversation with his chosen sidekick, Karl Pilkington. Karl was, in his turn, turned into a modest winner of the media lottery called Fame through his curated presentation to us by Ricky as infinitely stupid. If you listen to what he says, you may find Karl as stupid as a child.

In this particular conversation, over-educated Ricky was trying to explain to under-educated Karl the nature of infinity. Ricky used the Infinite Monkey model to expound his understanding of infinity. To be accurate, Ricky stated that this model *shows* (his word) the nature of infinity. Period. The proposition is that an infinite number of monkeys using an infinite number of typewriters – or even one monkey using one typewriter for infinity – would one day type the complete

works of Shakespeare. “Wouldn’t happen. Wouldn’t happen. I think you know it wouldn’t happen but you’re saying it would to annoy me”, said Karl. That is, infinity in those terms, cannot exist. Ricky pissed himself laughing at this and encouraged us to do the same. Karl, bless him and all who believe as he believes, as a child believes, was wrong, but not for the reason Ricky postured. Ricky, curse him and all who play his game of sophistry, was right. But in being right, he did not prove his incontestable concept of infinity. He disproved it.

However infinitesimally tiny the probability, there is still that probability that those infinite monkeys using that infinite number of typewriters, or that one monkey using that one typewriter for infinity, would, in some future millennium, millennia from now, type the complete works of Shakespeare. And not, as Karl offered as an unmerited compromise to Ricky’s pose, just “get a chapter done and you’d go, ‘right, well done’.”

If that is not the case – if it is not possible, nor even allowed to be a possibility – that the Infinite Monkey would one day type the complete works of Shakespeare, how did Shakespeare manage it? And, yes, I know he didn’t have a typewriter, but he would have used one had it been an option. What are the chances, call it the mathematical probability, that the being we are in the habit of referring to as ‘Shakespeare’ would or could ever have written those works, at the precise moment in recorded history that he did? All of them, “from start to finish”, as Karl put it, and not just one chapter. Which fact, that he or someone did, is, in the history of humanity, as likely as the Infinite Monkey model.

How many billions of humans have emerged from and returned to stardust since what we call *homo sapiens* made its debut, 300,000 years ago, give or take the odd 50? *Homo sapiens*: ‘wise man’, or less ambitiously ‘thinking man’ or, even less ambitiously, ‘conscious man’. And woman, of course, so double the number you first thought of. And of all those billons x 2, how many chose to amuse themselves by writing poems and plays? And of those who did, how many were so amused by their endeavours that they decided to try to make

a living at it? And of those who did, how many succeeded in making a living at it? And of those who did succeed, how many were any good? Being a good playwright and being a commercially successful playwright are not intrinsically related. And of those who were any good, how many were very good? And of those who were very good, how many were outstandingly good? And of those who were outstandingly good, how many were called Shakespeare? And of those who were called Shakespeare, how many lived at that precise moment in human history? Shall we talk about infinite monkeys now?

Shakespeare – or, if you play that sort of game, whoever it was that did write his works (it wasn't Francis Bacon) – was the Infinite Monkey, as was Johann Sebastian Bach. The rarest of rare artists, who shifted the crafts they practised into a new dimension. Quantum artists. It took them all of human history, in its trillion-trillions of possible and actual iterations, second by second, minute by minute, to achieve what they did. Me, I'm doing well if I can boil an egg to my own satisfaction, let alone yours. You cannot believe in Shakespeare if you cannot believe that one monkey, working for infinity, could one day type his complete works. Because he, Shakespeare, did: an Infinite Monkey, working for infinity, or may as well have been. And we will have to wait another infinity for the next Shakespeare, as those of the relevant faiths will need to wait another infinity for the second coming of the Son of God, who doesn't show up too often.

Chaos theory proves the seeming paradox. Before chaos theory, the world of mathematics believed that, beyond a certain number of decimal places, you could ignore the fraction. Not could, had to. You had to, otherwise you would spend your mathematical life messing around in a world of microscopic fractions so minuscule that they meant and could mean nothing. Fractions compared to whose size the average virus resembles a planet. Fractions so small as to render meaningless anything they may possibly be said to represent. Like trying to calculate the risk of death by house fire of one person in one house in one street in one city in one country on one continent, if the total global availability of fire

were a single damp match, which match was not even to be found on the same continent. Chaos theory, the path to which came through attempting to model the weather using equations that obeyed the old assumptions relating to feasible numbers of decimal places, demonstrates that not only do the tiniest of tiny fractions matter, but that the tiniest of tiny fractions are decisive. Those quark-sized fractions exponentially extended physicists' understanding of the nature and potential of the universe: how seeming impossibilities are not only possible but banal. A mundane fact of life, on a level with biological decay. That is, chaos theory explains not just that the Infinite Monkey may one day write the Complete Works of Shakespeare, but that he already has. Where does that leave Gervais' certain assertion of the nature of infinity?

The holiest of the temples of Ancient Greece was the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Apollo was god of music, harmony, light, healing and oracles, enabling that deity to cover a good proportion of the contemporary lived experience, and he was commensurately revered. The original temple was erected in honour of Apollo's slaying of the Python; the mystical beast that guarded access to the Oracle. That temple went through various iterations over the years. The last vestiges of the version posterity allowed to be preserved indicate that three injunctions were presented as an opening gambit to those who went there seeking the wisdom of the Oracle:

γνῶθι σεαυτόν (know thyself)
μηδέν άγαν (nothing in excess)
Ἐγγύα πάρα δ'ἄτη (certainty brings ruin)

There were 147 other Delphic maxims (making an orderly total of 150), which have served ever since as a beginner's guide to Living a Good Life. Or would, or could, if anyone felt like consulting them. They read today like a hyper-aphoristic version of the holy books, which in turn raises questions as to the heritage of those revered volumes. But any of the Top 3 that made it onto the column which stood in the forecourt of

the temple, by way of welcome, would provide a useful pointer today, as they have for the last 2,600 years or so to those who pondered and imbibed them.

In this age of knowing everything, thanks to the wonders of the interweb, the third of the Top 3 is resonant: “certainty brings ruin.” For all his certainty, and anyone else’s, mine included; for all his smug self-satisfaction, laughing at what he curated for public consumption as Karl Pilkington’s infinite stupidity, Ricky Gervais missed the Truth that Karl was groping for, and touched. The Truth, if Ricky wants it, is that the nature of infinity may be more accurately imagined as the nature of Truth: limitless and measurable, beyond understanding and understandable, nowhere and everywhere. We know that Truth exists because we all experience it, all the time. Even if only in the act of having boiling water poured over our heads or committing the body of a loved one to the earth. Knowing that the flesh that manifested the soul you love, the flesh you could once hold against your own, that you could kiss, embrace, make coffee for; that flesh will decay, and will inevitably – yes, inevitably, that is the Truth – return to the stardust from whence it came.

The Great Mystery of Truth, or the G-word, if you prefer: unknowable and knowable, limitless and measurable, invisible and visible, as Einstein conceived the universe. Forever, in any direction, within any of the nine dimensions already identified and any of the next nine, out of a possible infinite number. Which is how it can be, simultaneously, everywhere and nowhere, eternal and never. And, as Karl Pilkington might have expressed it, Truth doesn’t rely for its definition on the need to type the complete works of Shakespeare, in whichever order, from beginning to end, or just a chapter.

Nick Berry

know fear, know courage™

Phone: +45 81 98 73 17

Email: words@nickberry.net