THE FREEDOM TO BE TOMORROW WHAT WE ARE NOT TODAY

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I
A BEGINNING

THE THEME OF THE CONFERENCE FOR WHICH this piece was originally written in 2016 was, "Religion—Where Next?" It seems to be an important question to ask because, at least in Europe and North America, the state of our formal religious traditions appears ever more parlous and, at least in denominational terms, perhaps terminal.

But was this, in fact, precisely the right question to pose? I asked this because over the twenty-two years of my ministry with a small liberal religious community in Cambridge it has struck me more and more that a better question to ask might be "Religion—Where Right Now?" To begin to get at what I mean I'd like to start with a little cautionary tale.

Many years ago I was in a denominational meeting where we returned to the perennial question about how we might deal with the fact that our community's inherited, basically liberal Christian and Radical Enlightenment religious ideas and stories seemed not to be connecting meaningfully with most people in our own day and age. The conversation finally centred upon the word "worship", especially as it was found in the phrase to be found on many of our church noticeboards: "Such and Such Church meets for worship at 10.30am." The general feeling in the meeting was that the word "worship" either meant nothing at all to most people or, if they did know what it meant, it actively put them off from attending. What was needed, so the claim was made, was a brand new word and someone came up with "MetaK", explaining that it was made up of two elements, "Meta" (meaning "after", "higher", "above" or "beyond") and the letter "K" which stood for

knowledge. But although appreciative of the attempt, and certainly the felt need for new ways to talk about the divine and the sacred, I and others pointed out that no one would know what on earth the word "MetaK" meant and so it would be utterly pointless to start painting it on our noticeboards. Ultimately, we were sure that it would be more off-putting than the word it sought to replace. I mean, think about it, can you imagine what you would think if you came across this phrase on a church noticeboard: "Such and Such Church meets for MetaK at 10.30am"?! However, pressing valiantly on with the idea, someone replied that perhaps it might intrigue people to persuade them to ask us what it meant and so someone else enquired what was it that we should tell them?" The reply came that "We should tell people it was something like worship." I rest my case and simply note that the word "MetaK" was not painted on our noticeboards.

I imagine, however, that, like me, many of you will feel some sympathy and affinity with the proposer of the word "MetaK" because we are all acutely aware that our inherited religious traditions are full of words and practices — such as "worship" and "church"— which simply no longer meaningfully and/or positively connect with many people—including, of course, ourselves.

This is, at least in part, why we are so tempted to ask, and try to answer, the question "Religion — Where Next?" and all the evidence we come across strongly suggests that it's not going anywhere if it simply and slavishly hangs onto old words, concepts and practices and also refuses to countenance the introduction of any new expressions of religion.

But, surely, is it not also true that neither is religion going to go anywhere if it too swiftly and thoughtlessly tries to impose,

ahead of time, wholly new words and practices that have gained absolutely no collective meaning or cultural currency? Such an approach would, surely, only hasten its current demise.

Given this bind how do I think we might be able properly to claim the freedom to be tomorrow what we are not today and so succeed in moving on in our religious language and practices so that, eventually, we might make a religion appropriate for the future? Well, I'm going to suggest something that might, at first sight, seem to be holding things back, namely, that we need, firstly, to claim the freedom religiously to be what we are today, but be what we are today in an appropriate way. As Jesus wisely said, "Do not worry about tomorrow; it will have enough worries of its own. There is no need to add to the troubles each day brings" (Matt. 6:34). So, in this piece at least, I'd like to remain with today's troubles.

Connected with this thought, I'm sure you all know the old joke about the tourist asking a local for directions to some particular place in town. The local replies, "Well, if I were you, I wouldn't start from here". There is, of course, great wisdom in this joke because it helps us see that the only place we can ever start from is the place where we are, right here and now, and that this is so whether we like this fact or not.

But, the objection often goes, such an approach cannot possibly work because the religion we have access to here and now is too heavy a yoke, one impossibly weighed down by its faulty, problematic and reactionary language and practices. However, I don't think this objection is, necessarily, correct and on this point, I'm very much with the great twentieth-century German philosopher of hope, Ernst Bloch (1885-1977), who could speak to us of "the still undischarged future" that was to be found "in the past"

(Ernst Bloch: "Principle of Hope", MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1995, 1:200).

Picking up on this idea, in his recent book, "Hope without Optimism", Terry Eagleton feels that, in consequence, we should strive "to keep the past unfinished, refusing to accept its appearance of closure as the final word, springing it open once again by rewriting its apparent fatality under the sign of freedom" (Terry Eagleton: "Hope without Optimism", Yale UP, New Haven 2015, p. 32).

To my mind, liberal religious people (whether rooted in the Christian and Radical Enlightenment traditions or not) most effectively gather together "under the sign of freedom" whenever they are able consistently to employ what the contemporary Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo has called "il pensiero debole"—"weak thought", a philosophy found implicitly in the Christian tradition in the writings of St Paul — "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (1 Cor. 1:25).

Vattimo's work helps us see that we might best overcome our inherited religious traditions, not by overcoming them in a strong way, in a single, revolutionary moment by forcibly replacing one word, concept or practice with another (such as in the example of "MetaK") but, instead, by employing weaker, more subtle and creative ways which consciously surpass and reinterpret our inherited religious traditions. Vattimo borrows two German words from Heidegger to point to the difference in approaches. The hard, forcible way of overcoming he calls überwindung, whilst the gentle way he calls, verwindung (meaning to "go beyond" but in a transformative, incorporating, rather than destructive, way).

The action of water gives us an obvious physical analogy to verwindung and which the Tao Te Ching expresses beautifully:

> "Nothing in the world is soft and weak as water. But when attacking the hard and strong, nothing can conquer so easily. Weak overcomes strong, soft overcomes hard"
>
> (Tao Te Ching, Ch. 78, trans, Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo, Hackett, Indianapolis 1993).

This is why in my own ministry in Cambridge — despite the odd personal wobble and moment of doubt (and who does not have them?) — I continue to be an advocate of remaining clear that we are a community that is slowly but consciously emerging from, and seeking to reform and reinterpret the language and practices of the liberal Christian and Radical Enlightenment tradition, and to do it in ways which help us continue to claim the freedom to be tomorrow what we are not today.

In passing, although I think this is a very important point, there are also good, liberal and progressive politico-theological reasons why, in claiming this freedom, we are not tempted to make an absolute break with the Christian tradition because, as the British philosopher, Peter Thompson, recently noted, it is clear "that religion as both debate and way of life has not crumbled in the face of an apparently inexorable rationalist, scientific, modernising Enlightenment and globalisation of the market economy" and, contrary to most liberal expectations, religion has "retain[ed] a potency and strength which remains far in excess of its ability to explain" (Thompson's introduction to Ernst Bloch's "Atheism in Christianity", Verso Press 2009, p. ix). Surely, we need to have

continued access to — or at least a living understanding of — this potency and strength if we are going to have a genuine chance of helping to direct religion in liberal and progressive directions rather than illiberal and very regressive ones.

Anyway, Vattimo feels, as do I, that if we can find ways to keep the past present and consciously to engage with it in a dialectical conversational way through a process of "verwindung", carried out with the patience of water upon stone then, in time, we stand a real chance of truly escaping many of our old and, to my mind, highly damaging religious thoughts and practices and so able to move into a genuinely new liberal and progressive religious way of being in the world.

We can begin better to appreciate something of what is meant by this kind of approach by considering the point Karl Marx made in his oft-quoted eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach:

> "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it."

However, Vattimo (and his colleague Santiago Zabala) have come to feel, and I agree with them, that, today, Marx's eleventh thesis needs to be rewritten thus:

> "The philosophers have only described the world in various ways; the moment now has arrived to interpret it"
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> (Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala: in "Hermeneutic Communism — From Heidegger to Marx", Columbia University Press, New York 2011, p. 5).

Related to this observation, in an interview from 2002, Vattimo notes that:

> "In a strong theory of weakness, the philosopher's role would not derive from the world 'as it is,' but from the world viewed as the product of a history of interpretation throughout the history of human cultures. This philosophical effort would focus on interpretation as a process of weakening, a process in which the weight of objective structures is reduced."

Indeed, most of us know only too well that our inherited religious traditions and their strong objective structures (such as, for example, the idea of a supernatural, supreme being or the various institutions of an organised, hierarchical church) desperately need to be overcome. Despite this, however, Vattimo is, as am I, in agreement with Heidegger when he said, "Overcoming is worthy only when we think about incorporation" (Martin Heidegger: "Overcoming Metaphysics" in the "End of Philosophy", trans J. Stambaugh, Harpur and Row, New York 1973, p. 91).

The point I'm trying to tease out here is that the religion we have in the here and now on our own bend of the river (whatever and wherever it is) need never be allowed to be taken simply, "as it is" but can always be taken, as Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) noted, as being "fluid, labile and suspended" (quoted in Terry Eagleton: "Hope without Optimism", Yale UP, New Haven 2015, p. 32). In other words, we need to begin to see that our inherited religion is something always capable of being radically, yet gently, reinterpreted and surpassed so that it can continue to gift us things intensely valuable and meaningful, things both new and old. As

Jesus is once reported as having said "every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings out of their treasury what is new and what is old" (Matthew 13:52).

Today, I want to suggest that, by a process of verwindung and using weak thought, there can always be found in our past traditions still undischarged futures which can be released. This is because our past traditions are not what we usually think they are, i.e completely done and dusted, instead, they're always unfinished and radically open. This, in turn, means, as Eagleton notes, we need to become aware that "the meaning of past events lies ultimately in the guardianship of the present" (Terry Eagleton: "Hope without Optimism", Yale UP, New Haven 2015, p. 32).

This feeling has, for a long time now, made me ask how we might become ourselves modern equivalents of scribes of the kingdom of heaven? That is to say, people who are truly able to affect the guardianship of the present and, through the use of weak thought and verwindung, are truly able to claim the freedom to be tomorrow what we are not today.

The first thing to observe in answering this question is that scribes are made not born. They are only slowly formed in community through a long, self-conscious, disciplined educational practice and it seems to me that, therefore, one of the most pressing things required of contemporary liberal religion in the here and now is not to be seduced into trying to make some putative religion of the future right at this moment of time but of making and shaping contemporary liberal religious subjects who, like Jesus, are highly skilled at being able to bring out of their treasury what is new and what is old. They will be the ones who are then able to build a liberal religion genuinely suitable for the future.

In an attempt to create such liberal religious subjects, in my own ministry in Cambridge, I have consistently tried to encourage people to become the kind of "Free Spirits" promoted by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and to combine this with becoming what the twentieth-century poet Charles Olson (1910-1970) called "Archeologists of Morning." Additionally, I have long believed, that this can help people become what the philosopher Paul Wienpahl (1916-1980) called men and women without a position, i.e. people truly free to live creatively and compassionately in the ever-moving, intra-active world in which all of us live, move, and have our being.

In part 2 of this essay I'll look at how Nietzsche thought Free Spirits are made and then, in sections 3 and 4, I'll turn my attention to Olson's Archaeologists of Morning and Wienpahl's men and women without a position.

II
BECOMING FREE SPIRITS

¶ IN HIS SERIES OF NEW PREFACES WRITTEN IN 1886 for his older books, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) outlined how he thought a "Free Spirit" was made by undertaking a therapeutic journey that unfolded in four phases. [I gratefully acknowledge that I owe a great deal of what follows to the account of this journey found in Gordon Bearn's book "Waking to Wonder" (SUNY Press, New York 1997).]

Nietzsche thought the therapeutic journey started with "the hearth health" of our old inherited, supernatural religious and metaphysical traditions; that is to say, the kind of comforting ways and beliefs we learnt as children — either figuratively or literally — beside the family hearth, the brick or stone-lined fireplace which, once-upon-a-time, was used for both warmth and cooking. These inherited traditions, even though they once grounded and secured for us the things we thought were of the highest value, today often "fetter us the fastest", keeping us bound to old ways and beliefs which are simply no longer working for us in the modern world. For most people today, perhaps the most visible example of this fettering is seen at Christmas time when people who never set foot inside a church during the rest of the year suddenly find themselves almost uncontrollably yearning to attend carol and/or midnight mass services.

Anyway, it is the recognition of the loss of our "hearth health" — whenever and however it comes — that brings on the second phase of the therapeutic journey, one in which we enter a time of profound sickness, the dreadful sickness of nihilism in which there is "the hateful assault on everything that had seemed so

comforting." It's a time when nothing counts any longer, when everything seems utterly meaningless and there is left only anomie and emptiness. In this sickness, we find ourselves living the kind of life Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) thought most people lived, namely, one of "quiet desperation". As many of us are acutely aware, our own age as a whole is dangerously and deeply mired, both passively and actively, in varieties of this nihilistic mood. However, because going through this sickness helps begin to loosen the fetters that once bound us, it is not a sickness to be feared because it plays an important role in helping us enter into the third phase of the therapeutic journey, namely, a period of freeing and transformative convalescence which itself has two phases—one cool, one warm.

The cool phase of convalescence is one of detachment in which we find we are once again able to look upon the world and all the things it contains, no longer nihilistically, but in a detached, scholarly fashion as if from a great and chilly height. As Bearn puts it:

> "Everything is small. Everything is flat. Nothing matters. This is the mood equally of a scientist sure ours is a world of valueless facts and [also] of those literary characters who float through a world from which they have been estranged and which they look on with a species of tender contempt"
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> (Gordon Bearn: "Waking to Wonder", SUNY Press, New York 1997, p. 8).

The warm phase of convalescence is begun when we recognise that if our convalescence is truly to continue then we must find ways to return from the chilly heights and somehow come back to earth "where the sun warms." Here is how Nietzsche beautifully put this change in attitude and, indeed. altitude, in his 1886 preface to "Human, All-Too Human" (1879):

> "A step further in convalescence: and the free spirit again draws near to life—slowly, to be sure, almost reluctantly, almost mistrustfully. It again grows warmer around him, yellower, as it were; feeling and feeling for others acquire depth, warm breezes of all kinds blow across him. It seems to him as if his eyes are only now open to what is close at hand. He is astonished and sits silent: where had he been? These close and closest things: how changed they seemed! what bloom and magic they have acquired! He looks back gratefully—grateful to his wandering, to his hardness and self-alienation, to his viewing of far distances and bird-like flights in cold heights. What a good thing he had not always stayed "at home," stayed "under his own roof" like a delicate apathetic loafer! He had been beside himself: no doubt of that. Only now does he see himself—and what surprises he experiences as he does so! What unprecedented shudders! What happiness even in the weariness, the old sickness, the relapses of the convalescent! How he loves to sit sadly still, to spin out patience, to lie in the sun! Who understands as he does the happiness that comes in winter, the spots of sunlight on the wall! They are the most grateful animals in the world, also the most modest, these convalescents and lizards again half turned towards life:—

> there are some among them who allow no day to pass without hanging a little song of praise on the hem of its departing robe. And, speaking seriously, it is a radical cure for all pessimism (the well-known disease of old idealists and falsehood-mongers) to become ill after the manner of these free spirits, to remain ill a good while, and then grow well (I mean "better") for a still longer period. It is wisdom, practical wisdom, to prescribe even health for oneself for a long time only in small doses"
>
> (Friedrich Nietzsche: "Human, All-Too Human" trans. R. J. Hollingdale, CUP 1996, pp. 8-9).

But, you might object, is not this warmth, this bloom and magic of things close and closest to us, merely an indication of a return by another route to the old hearth heath? Not at all, because you cannot ever fully forget the experience of the transformative sickness of nihilism; neither can you fully forget the chilly, detached perspective of the world seen during the first period of your convalescence. You are by now a significantly changed and still changing creature.

Naturally, these moments of warmth are, at first, short-lived and your mood of chilly but tender contempt will, from time to time, most assuredly return. It is also the case that, like malaria or lyme disease, the hateful sickness of nihilism may also return now and then, perhaps laying you low for weeks, if not for months, on end. Yet, for all that, you begin to notice that the occasional moments of warm sunlight come and stay more frequently than they used to.

On your best days, as Bearn observes, you are now able to live "as neighbour to precisely the things that the metaphysical tradition only found valuable as indicators of another metaphysical world" (Gordon Bearn: "Waking to Wonder", SUNY Press, New York 1997, p. 32) and you begin to see, as Heidegger saw, that "When we live in the firsthand world around us, everything comes at us loaded with meaning, all over the place and all the time. Everything is within the world [of meaningfulness]: the world holds forth" (cited in "What, after all, was Heidegger about?", Thomas Sheehan, 2014 p. 8). This, in turn, reveals to us a startling and hopeful truth beautifully summed up by Thomas Sheehan, that "there is nowhere else for a human being to live except in meaning" (ibid. p. 8).

In this warm convalescent phase, a person begins ever more fully to understand that we don't need another supernatural, metaphysical world to underwrite and give meaning to our life in this world; all that is required is that we see this world differently and have the courage to remain with the close and closest things, things that, astonishingly, are now acquiring for us such bloom and magic.

For Nietzsche, all this gives us the hope of eventually entering into the "great health" which is the fourth and final phase of the therapeutic journey, one in which a person is able, at least ideally, to live completely and fully in these moments of natural warmth throughout the remainder of their life. As Bearn says, "This spirit freed from the tradition that seeks metaphysical comforts is surprised by a new happiness and a new love for all that is delicate. The great health is a life attuned to what is near." And, as Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, and which Nietzsche quoted on the title page of the first edition of "The Gay Science": "To the poet, to

the philosopher, to the saint, all things are friendly and sacred, all events profitable, all days holy, all men [sic] divine" (Emerson: "History").

My own hope has long been that the more and more we come to understand ourselves as pilgrim, convalescent Free Spirits, the better able we are to become what the twentieth-century poet Charles Olson (1910-1970) called "Archaeologists of Morning"—now remember, that's "morning" as in "morning and afternoon" rather than "mourning" in the sense of expressing sorrow when someone dies.

III
BECOMING ARCHAEOLOGISTS OF MORNING

¶ IN A SHORT ESSAY, "PRESENT IS PROLOGUE" (1952), (in "Collected Prose" eds. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander, University of California Press, Berkley 1997, p. 205-207) the poet Charles Olson (1910-1970) suggested that we need to come to see that the past is for us not quite what we usually think it is. To the extent that we have access to the past, the past is, in fact, something present to us and it is this "past-as-present" that is the prologue of our unfolding, creative life. To borrow a term from Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), one that Olson doesn't use, it is to think of this "past-as-present" as being for us a kind of "perpetual morning". To help us better to understand this idea let's firstly hear Thoreau's own words about in what he thought it consists:

> "All memorable events, I should say, transpire in morning time and in a morning atmosphere. The Vedas say, 'All intelligences awake with the morning.' Poetry and art, and the fairest and most memorable of the actions of men, date from such an hour. All poets and heroes, like Memnon, are the children of Aurora, and emit their music at sunrise. To him whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun, the day is a perpetual morning. It matters not what the clocks say or the attitudes and labors of men. Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me. Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep"
>
> ("Walden", Chapter 2, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For").

With Thoreau's metaphor in mind let's return to Olson. For Olson, the past is available to us in only two living ways and it's important to realise that both ways are available to us only in the present, in this perpetual morning. Keeping in mind Olson's image of the archaeologist, on this perpetual morning, it is into the soil of the "past-as-present" that he is encouraging us to do our digging.

None of this is, of course, to deny that something we have traditionally called the past and/or history has a meaningful reality, but it is to acknowledge the existential truth that for each of us, everything we call, identify and have available to us as "the past", as "history", is something which we are always-already carrying with us right now, in the present on this perpetual morning. So, as I have just indicated, Olson suggests that the past is available to us in two living ways.

He calls the first available past "our own" history and he notes that "the work of each of us is to find out the true lineament of ourselves by facing up to the primal features of these founders who lie buried in us". The point he is making here is that his dead parents and, by extension, all the past people, things ideas and events that are our founders—those things which have made us who were are—all these are only available to us in the perpetual morning of the here and now, buried in the soil of our own present personal and cultural memories. It is into this present ground, earth or perpetual morning into which we, as archaeologists of morning, are to dig.

The second available past is, according to Olson, not "our own". It is a somewhat allusive "past" for which Olson thinks we in the West (unlike those in the East) don't yet have a vocabulary. He "invokes it" firstly by saying it is "the mythological", but he

immediately says that this is "too soft" a way of putting it. He then suggests the following: "What I mean is that foundling which lies as surely in the phenomenological 'raging apart' as these queer parents rage in us".

I take Olson here to be gesturing towards the powerful natural, animating and "raging" fluxes and flows of matter/energy in constant motion that are buried within, and simultaneously revealed, in every aspect of our being. Like a foundling child, we have been gifted these fluxes and flows from who knows what parent and by and through them every living and non-living thing is constantly being made and unmade in the perpetual morning of the present.

I think it's important to point out here that we should hear Olson use the word "raging" in the sense that a storm rages and not in the sense that an angry or disappointed man or woman might rage. Olson's "raging apart" is a natural phenomenon that is manifest in, for example, the seed becoming a flower or a tree, in the caterpillar becoming a butterfly or, like Olsen, in the poet's desire to make a poem, poeisis. It is a reminder that matter/energy is always affective in and of itself and so never requires an external prime, unmoved mover, such as the god of theism, to get things going. But why are we to dig into the soil in and of this perpetual morning? Well, Olson tells us that the work of the morning "is methodology: how to use oneself, and on what"—in other words, he is suggesting that it is only by digging in the soil that is this perpetual morning that we can genuinely come, not only to be the kinds of beings we might most fully be, but also to understand what it means to be that kind of being. This, Olson the poet tells us, is his "profession" and it is why he proclaims himself "an archaeologist of morning."

Olson thought archaeologists of morning were the type of people always getting on with it, digging deep into the present soil of ourselves and the world, now, in this instant, with no drag and ourselves as the only reader and mover of the instant, freed from all restrictive theories and creeds. Olson felt that the "work and dogmas" of such a free, morning way of being-in-the-world were three-fold. Although, as free spirits, we might not be overly fond of the word "dogma" it's important to understand that Olson is using it to express how strongly he thinks we need to hold to them—they might, perhaps, better be described not as dogmas but as necessary "know-how".

The first work and dogma (necessary know-how) is "How by form, to get the content instant". By this Olson means he wants us to create things where the form they take perfectly, and immediately, expresses the content; where our poetry, music, acts of social justice and worship, are the fullest possible expressions of ourselves and not merely inauthentic, arty or moralistic clothing.

The second work and dogma (necessary know-how) is "what any of us are by the work on ourself, how to make ourselves fit instruments for use (how we augment the given—what used to be called our fate)". Here, I take it that Olson is tapping into a sacred energy that helps us not to succumb to despair and inaction in the face of deeply challenging, contingent events. Olson sees clearly that we can always augment that which we are given.

The third work and dogma (necessary know-how) is to assert that "there is no such thing as duality either of the body and the soul or of the world and I, that the fact in the human universe is the discharge of the many (the multiple) by the one (yrself [sic] done right, whatever you are, in whatever job)." Olson goes on to say that this helps us see that "all hierarchies, like dualities, are dead

ducks." Here, I take it that he is tapping into a second sacred energy that is able to challenge our dangerous tendency to hubris which always threatens to make us believe we are individual, independent creatures wholly in control of our existence and unfolding life.

But let us be clear, like all free-spirited archaeologists of morning (or, indeed, archaeologists of any kind), we can never be absolutely sure beforehand precisely what, if anything, we are going to bring to light that is both old and new from the soil into which we must dig. All we can, and need be assured of is that, to paraphrase a well-known hymn, in the perpetual morning there is always-already more light and truth that can break forth from the past, light and truth that is both old and new.

IV
BECOMING MEN & WOMEN WITHOUT A POSITION

¶ SO, TO CONCLUDE, WHAT DO I THINK IS THE result of becoming a free spirit who is also an archaeologist of morning?

Well, I have found that for me at least, it has meant that I have been able to become what the (alas) little known twentieth-century American philosopher Paul Wienpahl (1916-1980) called a "man [or woman] without a position." Before unfolding in a little more detail what I think this means, let's hear Wienpahl's own allusive words on the matter:

> "As I see it, the point is not to identify reality with anything except itself. (Tautologies are, after all, true.) If you wish to persist by asking what reality is; that is, what is really, the answer is that it is what you experience it to be. Reality is as you see, hear, feel, taste and smell it, and as you live it. And it is a multifarious thing. To see this is to be a man without a position. To get out of the mind and into the world, to get beyond language and to the things is to cease to be an idealist or a pragmatist, or an existentialist, or a Christian. I am a man without a position. I do not have the philosophic position that there are no positions or theories or standpoints. (There obviously are.) I am not a sceptic or an agnostic or an atheist. I am simply a man without a position, and this should open the door to detachment" ("An Unorthodox Lecture", 1956).

With Wienpahl's words in mind let's now imagine ourselves in the perpetual morning as a free-spirit-archaeologist-of-morning about to begin to dig into the soil of the past-as-present.

The first thing to observe, as I noted earlier, is that of necessity one simply cannot know exactly what one is going to find as one begins to dig nor, indeed, if on this or that particular day of digging one will find or notice anything of interest at all. One must simply start to dig and see what emerges from the soil and, in what this process will fully consist, can never be fully worked out beforehand. To be sure one can bring certain pre-existing ideas, perspectives, methods and tools to the initial breaking of the ground but they are there simply to help us to begin to dig which, in turn, may well reveal something that requires new ideas, methods, perspectives and tools if it is to be excavated and interpreted as well and as fully as is possible. The actual experience of being right there with the close and closest things as one actually digs into reality is what drives everything here. As one proceeds one must use all one's senses because reality is always as you see, hear, feel, taste and smell it, and as you live it, and these senses are there to help provide as many perspectives as is possible to uncover and interpret what is truly there, even as one must remain acutely aware that full scope always eludes our grasp, that there is no finality of vision, that we have perceived nothing completely, and that tomorrow, like a new walk, a new dig is always a new dig.

As Wienpahl says, the point is not to identify reality with anything except itself. However, we need to remain fully aware that reality is a multifarious thing and it is to see this, truly to see this, that is to be a man or a woman without a position. The free-spirit-archaeologist-of-morning-without-a-position is always seeking to get out of the mind and into the world, to get beyond language and

to the things. And, when one is doing this well, one ceases to be an idealist, a pragmatist, an existentialist, a Christian, a sceptic, an agnostic, or an atheist. Instead, one becomes a man or a woman without a position, someone who is not bringing to bear upon reality a ready-made, fixed blueprint but someone who, through a process of disciplined attentiveness to, and mindfulness of, things, is able to get the content of themselves instant, with no drag and so able to remain as fully open as is possible to what is actually intra-actively emerging as one digs into the soil of the past-as-present on this perpetual morning. This is the kind of detachment which, as a man without a position, Wienpahl sought.

This task done well is precisely what guarantees our freedom to be tomorrow what we are not today. To return to part one of this three-part piece/podcast, the free-spirit-archaeologist-of-morning-without-a-position is someone who, in the light of the perpetual morning, can see clearly that the past is not something which is finished and which fixes us and holds us back, something completely done and dusted, instead, they can see that within the past there are always-already undischarged energies and futures that can be released to the present and which can help us live better, fuller and more creative lives than we did before. Freer lives . . .

But there is one more thing to say at this point. The phrase "a man [or woman] without a position" is easily misunderstood by many people. It is often taken to mean that such a person is without direction and, therefore, incapable of getting anything done or saying anything substantive or truly meaningful. However, we need to be aware that there is a real difference between being someone without a position and being someone without a direction.

It's important to see that to live in the world without a fixed position is, in fact, a prerequisite of being able truly to follow the

direction of reality as it is actually unfolding and then of being able truly to augment the given. To switch, briefly, to a surfing metaphor, it is only the man or woman without a position who is able to surf the crest of the ever-moving unfolding wave of reality. In one sense we may say that the surfer has chosen to adopt a certain kind of position on this or that particular surfboard but, in the sense Wienpahl and I are using it, their metastable position on this or that surfboard is one that allows them better to approach, and live as fully as is possible in, the position of no-position. In other words, the surfboard is acting as their "door to detachment" which allows them to have a direction that genuinely accords with the reality of the wave's actual unfolding which, of course, includes the unfolding life of this surfer intra-acting with the unfolding of the wave. Again this is to claim the freedom to augment the given. Like surfers, the man or woman without a position is able to surf the constantly unfolding crest of the perpetual morning.

This is what Wienpahl means when he talks of getting out of the mind and into the world, to get beyond language and to the things.

Now, like many of you, I am neither a surfer nor a (conventional) archaeologist, but I am a photographer or, at least, I aspire to be a photographer. In the age of the smartphone almost everyone is now a photographer so let me place before you another way of understanding what it is to be a man or a woman without a position that might connect with more people more readily.

I always try to pick up my camera and go out into the world without a ready-made, fully worked-out blueprint, theory or plan about how, when or where to take a photograph. In this sense, what the surfboard is to the surfer, the camera is to me the photographer. In doing this I'm attempting to keep myself open to

whatever whooshes-up or shines before me, whether that is in the form of an obvious "subject", "view", or a simple passing play of sunlight and shadow. When something does whoosh-up or shines before me, I stop and take a photograph. To do this I must, of course, temporarily "take a position." Not only by standing still in this or that place but also by taking a position with regard to the camera settings I am going to use, the f-stop, the shutter speed, film speed and whether to shoot in black and white or colour. Now, were I never to take this or that position with regard to all these things, I would never be able to take any photo (good or bad). However, it is vitally important that, having taken a photograph, I never become wholly wedded to this or that particular position, subject, view, passing play of sunlight and shadow or this or that set of settings—instead, I must move on, intra-actively, on the crest of the unfolding world, to attain another perspective and so allow something else to whoosh-up or shine before me which calls me to shoot, click!

It is in this sense that I understand what it is to become a man or a woman "without a position"—a free-spirit-archaeologist-of-morning who is truly able to approach, see, reveal, and appropriately interpret the close and closest things by entering fully into the constant dance of life. It has long struck me that taken together all the foregoing offers the world an example of what, in his famous essay called "Walking", Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) called the "newer testament—the Gospel according to this moment". It's the only gospel I know of that helps us truly to claim the freedom to be tomorrow what we are not today and, because of this, in my work as a rather unconventional minister of religion, it is the only gospel that I am able to live by and proclaim with a

genuinely clean heart and full belief (pathos). In this spirit of freedom, I commend it to you for further thought and reflection.

A FINAL CAVEAT

I publish this with one important caveat which borrows some words of Herbert Fingarette in his book 'The Self in Transformation' (Basic Books, New York 1963, p.1).
I want to make it clear that this essay is an outcome rather than a realised objective and, as such, it simply forms an intellectual footprint and not a blueprint. If it helps you personally to find your place on the intellectual map and the existential position in which you point, all well and good. If not, so be it, I wish you well in your own place and in following your own direction of travel.

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Other stuff . . .

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http://andrewjbrown.blogspot.com

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