

What Lies between the Religious and the Secular?: Education beyond the Human

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The current age is characterised by many as secular, and a source of such a characterisation can be found in the Nietzschean claim that thoughts about there being some ultimate reality have to be jettisoned, and human existence and the world need to be embraced as they are. That claim is renewed by some secular thinkers who insist that education has to be reconceived in ways congenial to the new age. It is argued that central to their logic is the dichotomy between the religious and the secular or the otherworldly and the earthly, and that this dichotomy is simplistic as well as problematic. As an alternative to the 'two worlds' view, the 'two aspects' view is suggested, with an interpretation of reality that the noumenon—the non-human—has to be taken in the negative sense. Against secularising the domain of education, it is indicated that there still remains a place for education to occupy between the two poles of religiousness and secularity.

INTRODUCTION

In his *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor distinguishes three different senses of secularity. The first sense is found in a situation in which the political organisation and other public practices are 'emptied of God, or of any reference to ultimate reality' (Taylor, 2007, p. 2). The second sense is in 'the falling off of religious belief and practice, in people turning from God, no longer going to Church' (p. 2). Secularity in the third sense focuses on the condition of belief and consists in a society in which 'belief in God is understood to be one option among others' (p. 3). Though sharply distinguished, the three senses are closely interwoven strands of the phenomenon, and all seem to be meaningfully applicable to varying degrees to the current historical epoch of the West. Many societies separate Church and State, and the number of people going to Church is decreasing in the midst of the contemporary world's noticeable march towards disenchantment.

As one of the main public spheres of human activities, education is certainly the space in which the phenomenon of secularisation can be easily recognised. But education is also the area in which an awareness of a new

historical environment is likely to develop into some normative claims, and thus where impassioned rhetoric for a corresponding change is promptly espoused. Education is widely considered preparation for (the good) life, and therefore it seems that some change in terms of, say, an ambience of the school, vocabulary, the curriculum, and so forth is necessary when there appears to be considerable agreement that the historical situation in which pupils manage their lives has changed in some radical sense. A conception of human flourishing or wellbeing that education aims to promote is historically situated and thus dependent upon our basic feel for the social and cultural milieu in which we find ourselves.

Leaving aside for the moment what shape education in the secular age might take, it now seems that educational demands for secularisation are almost irresistible unless we nostalgically hanker to go back to pre-modern, archaic societies. But in this article I will attempt to suggest that there still remains a distinct and more refined place for education to occupy between the two poles of religiousness and secularity. For this, I will explore some ways in which secularisation of education has been urged by some dominant discourses in philosophy of education, and examine whether the notion of ‘reality’, if not that of ‘religiousness’, has been sufficiently carefully treated in such discourses. The thesis that I wish to develop is that reality should be taken as a ‘negative’ concept, and that the notion of reality so understood nicely dispels some notorious misgivings about it: any explicit embracement of the notion of reality leads to an uncomfortable emphasis on the otherworldly—hence, the two worlds view. I will argue that taken as most central to education, the notion of reality can retrieve an important non-human dimension and exalted sense to education.

THE ECLIPSE OF REALITY IN PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION

It might not be the case that there is a single agent responsible for the phenomenon of secularisation. But, I will begin the discussion with Nietzsche, whose immensely influential claim ‘God is dead’ seems pivotal to the phenomenon. ‘God’s death’ is an inclusive metaphor, but it refers, amongst others, to the disintegration of faith in the Divine, the supersensible. Nietzsche’s main examples of the otherworldly are the Platonic realm of ideas and the Christian Heaven, which he takes as the abhorrent origin of a false sense of the meaninglessness of our earthly life. Abhorrent because they appeal to something that transcends the limits of human finitude and thus remain nihilistic. The Nietzschean epoch was opened up by repelling the illusionary creation of metaphysical and religious dreamers. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra speaks:

I entreat you, my brothers, *remain true to the earth* and do not believe those who hold out supernatural hopes for you. They are poisoners, whether they know it or not.

They are despisers of life, dying ones and poisoned themselves; the earth is sick of them—let them leave it, then!

Once the sin against God was the greatest sin; but God died, and with that these sinners died, too. Now the worst sin is the sin against the earth, to regard the innards of the inscrutable more highly than the meaning of the earth (Nietzsche, 2003, p. 8).

The epoch still continues in forms specific to contemporary culture. It seems to me that postmodernism, or some particular kind of pragmatism congenial to it, shares much of Nietzsche's antipathy towards some ultimate reality. For thinkers like Richard Rorty, for example, we finally got 'out from under the thrall of Plato and Kant'¹ with the growing recognition that truth is no longer anchored to otherworldly reality, but is linguistically conditioned. And 'since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths' (Rorty, 1989, p. 21). This means that 'the urge to represent reality' is to be replaced with 'the urge to come to free agreement with our fellow human beings' (Rorty, 2001, p. 111). Replacement, not just elimination. Hence, we shouldn't be afraid of being totally directionless. The philosophical stance of this kind immediately carries some direct consequences for education. So, Rorty argues that 'we need to see education not as helping us to get in touch with something non-human called Truth or Reality, but rather in touch with our potentialities' (Rorty, 2012, p. 430). Education is then a communal enterprise of searching for the widest possible inter-subjective agreement in which every individual is involved and thus grows; this is one important sense of realising human potentialities. The direction of growth would be unpredictable and fuzzy as we wean ourselves from any independent reality, but Rorty argues that here lies the proper sense of sublimity that education in this age rightly pursues.

The eclipse of reality occurs also in the modern philosophy of education as early as when Richard Peters and Paul Hirst lay the foundations of the discipline. When Peters in *Ethics and Education* proposes 'forms of knowledge' as worthwhile curriculum activities, he speaks of 'explorations of . . . different facets of [*human*] experience' (Peters, 1966, p. 164, italics added), not of explorations of reality. Likewise, it is by casting the notion of reality out of the Greek metaphysical tripartite relationship between the mind, knowledge, and reality that Hirst intends to modernise liberal education. On his view, what underlies the relationship is the questionable outworn idea that the human mind develops by 'corresponding to objective reality', 'what is quite external to it' (Hirst, 1965, p. 116). So for him as for Peters, 'knowledge is no longer seen as the understanding of reality but merely as the understanding of experience' (p. 116).

Perhaps this detachment from the notion of reality has paved the way for the views of John White, some features of whose characterisation of education I wish to examine in detail. For White, as for many other educational thinkers, education is for the good life. But he believes that this should not be taken as a cliché. Indeed, what disturbs him most is the fact that those who work for the school and education in Britain do not properly address the question of the good life, of personal flourishing at this very critical stage in the nation's history. On his view, 'the most striking thing about our present national community is its overwhelming unreligiousness' (White,

1995, pp. 2–3). White takes the meaning of unreligiousness largely in the second sense of the term in Taylor’s analysis. So, he adduces some concrete evidence that ‘[i]n 1990 the proportion of active church members in the UK population was 15 per cent’, along with his own extrapolation that ‘on present trends active church membership in the UK should be approaching zero some half way through [21st] century’ (p. 3).

White’s point is not ambiguous. He argues that ‘it is essential to be as clear as we can about what it is to lead a flourishing life’ (p. 3) for the majority of the citizens who live in a ‘secular’ universe. That is, there should be ‘an alternative picture of personal flourishing suitable for a non-religious society’ (p. 3). Attempts which locate ethical values within anything like a religious source are flatly spurned from the outset:

I find it hard to attach sense to the notion of a source of value located in the universe, whether this is a religious source or a quasi-religious one . . . What would it mean to say that the source of personal flourishing is found in Reality, natural or supernatural? It would mean that to understand what flourishing is, we would have to leave our ordinary human world and go back to the source in question—to interrogate nature, including human nature, or to find out God’s will or the nature of the form of the good. But supposing we could do any of these things, how could any discovery about what is the case reveal anything to do with what is good or valuable, for example, to do with human flourishing? We come back to the seemingly impassable gulf between statements about the natural or supernatural world and ethical values. There may be some way of bridging the gulf, but I do not know what it is . . . There is no need to appeal to a deeper basis in the ultimate nature of things—and neither, as I say, is it clear what any such appeal would mean. Collectively we are not given ethical direction by forces outside ourselves, whether these are natural or transcendental: we have worked this out over millennia from our own resources (White, 1995, pp. 7–9).

He goes on to conclude that:

I would advocate an absolute embargo on the use of the terms ‘spirituality’ or ‘spiritual development’ in all official documents on education, all conferences on education, all in-service courses for teachers, all inaugural lectures. The words simply get in the way of thinking (White, 1995, p. 16).

And the same logic is also apparent in his earlier writing:

Plato, Christian or Kantian views of man, for instance, hold that our embodied selves—which bring with them desires and the satisfaction of desire—are not our real or essential selves. What we fundamentally are are members of the world of Platonic forms, or immortal souls, or Kantian things-in-themselves. The well-being of entities like this

cannot consist in desire-satisfaction, but must be defined in other-worldly terms—as having to do with the contemplation of other-worldly reality, for instance, or communion with God, or membership of a community of noumenal rational beings. Metaphysical theories may thus lie behind desire-independent views; in which case the latter's acceptability rests on the acceptability of the metaphysics (White, 1990, p. 33).

Notice that the restrained inhospitality that Peters and Hirst have towards the notion of reality in their educational analyses is now radicalised. Indeed, White's strong tone of distaste for the concept in relation to education and human flourishing is clearly audible here. There were times when human life was thought of as part of God's creation and its meaningfulness was accordingly secured with the notion of divine intentions. But what we now need to pursue, argues White, is 'a purely secular notion of life's meaningfulness' (White, 2009, p. 2), and our task is 'to fill out this notion of intelligibility in the secular context' (p. 3). He goes on to say that '[e]thical values, including values associated with personal well-being are . . . through and through a product of our human world' (1995, p. 8), and that the intelligibility is to be gained from within this world; 'The flourishing life must be a meaningful one. It is not so in any *deep* sense' (2009, p. 3). On White's account, secularisation of education, above all, means to dislodge divine intelligibility (thus, unintelligibility from human perspectives), or anything non-human from our consideration of education.

In whatever way White wants to define his philosophical stance,² it seems to me that there are clear resonances in White's secular vision of education with postmodernism. To be sure, postmodernism is multifarious. There could be a variety of ways to capture its features. But as presented by David Cooper, one of its striking themes is the hostility to a modern concern for 'depth', to 'the philosophical traditions that postulated something *below* or *behind* our linguistic and other practices by way of *grounding* these' (Cooper, 2003, p. 209). Just as Rorty's truth as a property of sentences is human-authored, there is nothing beyond the human in White's sense of goodness and meaningfulness.

But this, perhaps White is here inclined to point out, does not mean that the secular education now being portrayed is completely flattened, bereft of any sense of thickness. Indeed, striving for an alternative notion of personal wellbeing, White is very quick to dismiss two pervasive ways of conceiving of it. The first one is the so-called economically-driven notion of personal wellbeing in which 'an increase in people's well-being' is equated with 'an increase in their ability to consume goods and services' (White, 1990, p. 31). The second one is the picture drawn by the early utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, according to which the good life amounts to a 'happy', 'pleasurable' life in several senses of the terms. To White, both ways are unsatisfying because they are 'too simplistic . . . flattened-out, uni-dimensional' (p. 31). By contrast to simple, straightforward analyses of personal wellbeing, White wants his own notion of personal wellbeing to be a more solid, sophisticated one.

What is of the most importance for this, as I read his account, is the existence of some underlying structure that unifies our manifold activities and experiences, without which they remain helplessly atomic. White's language designating this structure has undergone some changes, as his understanding of personal wellbeing has its own history of development. He once appealed to 'a settled value-hierarchy or the hierarchical structuring of one's desires', and sometimes to 'a social and cosmic framework within which to make sense of our existence'. And recently, while working on the secular sense of meaningfulness, he favours such an expression as 'the nesting of one's reasons for action'. He claims that '[t]he specifics of one's day-to-day activities are intelligible only against the background of more and more inclusive reasons, culminating finally in one's most pervasive worthwhile goals and attachments' (White, 2009, p. 4). (Of course, I should immediately add that 'meaningfulness' and 'personal wellbeing' are not taken by him to be the same. On White's account, the former is a necessary, not a sufficient, condition of the latter because a well organised, therefore, meaningful life does not necessarily result in success in one's activities and relationship.)

The central task of education constructed in this way consists in inducting pupils into the framework of wellbeing. In White's words, '[p]arents, teachers and policy-makers need to be at home with a notion of well-being rooted wholly in our human world and broad enough in scope to help children to maintain their bearings in both the social world and a world beyond the social' (White, 1995, p. 15). By 'a world beyond the social', White means a natural or cosmic framework; human beings are part of a larger framework of living nature—'the world of animals, plants, rocks, seas, clouds, planets, stars' (p. 9). With regard to personal wellbeing, he thus talks not merely about the economy, family, national and global communities that one is socially connected to, but also about 'delight in the beauty of the natural world' (p. 10) and 'a sense of wonder at [the world's] very existence' (p. 10). As well as providing pupils with guidance towards the 'widest horizons of our being' (p. 19) in this sense, the school should also be the place in which opportunities for pupils to develop their own nesting of reasons are on offer. So, pupils should be acquainted with some array of worthwhile activities suitable to their temperament, that is, 'with a number of options which will suit the sort of people they are in process of becoming' (White, 2009, p. 9).

It needs to be stressed that the senses of delight and wonder White here sees as integral to personal wellbeing are thoroughly secular ones. Indeed, White himself warns us that the sense of wonder he refers to is not be conflated with any religious emotion, which implies 'some object of reverence, some spiritual entity infusing or beyond the natural world' (White, 1995, p. 10). Thus, he speaks of wonder, not of awe, and even when he touches upon the latter in any positive way, its original sense is seriously attenuated by the secular consciousness. White says, '[a] secular reader of Wordsworth's poetry, for instance, can in imagination experience nature as if it were animated—as if it were a source . . . of value. For many non-religious people this imaginative type of awe is an important element in

their flourishing' (pp. 10–11). Hence, awe becomes merely imaginative or fanciful, experienced 'only in an *as if* way' (p. 11).

TWO WORLDS VIEW AND TWO ASPECTS VIEW

Thus far, I have attempted to sketch some post-Nietzschean secular perspectives on the meaning of human life and education. Limited as the sketch is, I believe that it has made clear that although they are not the identical voices in every aspect, they all include the aspiration to rehabilitate the domain of the ordinary, immanent, and human. The aspiration to secularise the abode of human beings is the aspiration to do away totally with the emotional as well as the intellectual commitments to some ultimate reality. What has also become explicit is the subtlety involved in such perspectives. They still have some values to appeal to, and there we encounter celebrations of sublimity and meaningfulness which are said to be waiting to be achieved by us. So, it looks as if our being released from reality does not naturally lead to nihilism, aggressive instrumentalism, or anything harmful. And yet I have to say that there are some central lines in their stories which raise serious doubts. It seems to me that there is something unconvincing about their convenient manner of forgoing the notion of reality, of effacing what is beyond the human, in their aspiration to endorse the earthly. For White, such a manner is considered sufficiently justifiable because he, as we have seen, takes the supposed gulf between the other-worldly and the earthly to be impassable, unbridgeable. In a similar vein, Rorty seems willing to approve such a gulf because it is not some independent reality, but other sentences or descriptions that function as the point of reference for truth in his particular sense. But it is precisely their assumption of the 'gulf' that appears to me so problematic and questionable. I am not entirely happy with the term itself, but even if there is something to be called a gulf, I believe that there could also be some way of bridging it. Thus, my suspicions are that the Rortyan sublime might be arbitrary or frivolous, and that White's secular framework might fail to disclose some deepest dimension of our being and thus could not rightly be called the 'widest horizons of our being'. In tackling these issues, I would like to turn to Martin Heidegger who seems to me to hold some extremely helpful insights in this regard.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger brings out a seminal distinction—the ontological difference between being and entities (or beings). Being is defined as 'that which determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities are already understood' (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 25–26). Heidegger goes on to elaborate, '[w]hat in advance *determines* a being as a being, the constitution of being which first *makes possible* a being *as* the being that it is, is what in a certain sense is *earlier* than a being and is *a priori*' (Heidegger, 1997, p. 26). Thus, being is not itself entities; it refers to some transcendental horizon or condition for entities to become intelligible to us, and this is what Heidegger means by 'ontological'. So, Heidegger's ontology in this regard might sound very much like Kantian

transcendental idealism. Just as for Kant time, space, and categories as *a priori* conditions are required for there being human experience at all, for Heidegger any sort of human dealings with entities presupposes an understanding of being. It seems to me that Thomas Kuhn's notion of paradigm as the scientists' disciplinary matrix is a very useful conceptual tool to help us to have a feel for what Heidegger means by the seemingly abstract concept 'being'. The same phenomenon, say, 'heavy bodies pass through a determinate distance faster than lighter bodies do' could be differently interpreted depending on the paradigms to which scientists belong. Paradigms here function as a transcendental horizon in which certain facts or aspects of the phenomenon become accessible to scientists. This sense of transcendental, however, is not the strictly Kantian sense, although an understanding of being is to be distinguished from the plainly empirical, namely what is met within that understanding.³ As we meet different scientific paradigms throughout history, an understanding of being is historically situated, dependent upon human practices.

But there is another sense of transcendental to be found in early Heidegger, which I think is exactly the Kantian sense of the term. When working on the idea of an understanding of being, Heidegger's main concern lies in disclosing its temporal structure. He claims that '[t]ime must be brought to light . . . as the horizon for all understanding of being' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 39). That is, Heidegger perceives a deeper horizon; being is set within the horizon of time and is exhibited in its temporal character. Surely, Heidegger's way of doing this, albeit greatly inspired by Kant, is not the same as Kant's. Limited largely to a conceptual understanding of the occurrent entities (at least in his first *Critique*), Kant is only able to discover time as a sequential flow of nows. But Heidegger's concern is much broader, ranging from a scientific understanding through a pre-scientific, everyday understanding to an understanding of the world as the most fundamental background in which all human dealings with other people and entities take place. And from this follow at least two other forms or modes of temporality, i.e. 'temporality of circumspection' and 'primordial temporality', neither of which is sequential (see Heidegger, 1962, pp. 370–418). No matter how many other modes of temporality Heidegger comes up with, the important thing is that temporality itself is taken as the transcendental condition or constraint for human existence in the sense that human beings cannot in principle bracket it. This sense of transcendental is not vulnerable to varying historical contexts of human living; rather it enables historical changes as far as they are premised on the possibility of human existence or experience. This is the very characteristic of the Kantian *a priori*.

It seems that as long as Heidegger takes temporality built into human beings to be transcendental in this second sense, he must also accept the existence of that which is independent of human perspectives, not yet determined by temporality. Such a thing cannot be directly approached or intelligible by human beings since what human beings are allowed to entertain are understandings of being, and entities discovered through them. Things that remain inaccessible to human beings in this way are

named 'the Real' by Heidegger.⁴ So, he says, '[t]he Real is essentially accessible only as entities within-the-world' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 246). The Real strongly invokes Kant's 'thing in itself', and it, one might worry, is doomed to the so-called two worlds view, according to which human perspectives are thought to obscure the true nature of the in-itself and therefore appearance or phenomenon grasped by human beings are substantially different from the thing in itself. In Kant's case, this disjunctive, dualistic picture might indeed be elicited by (at least) two striking features of his way of expressing the noumenon-phenomenon pair. First, for Kant, phenomena are subjective mental representations, and as such, they are hardly so actual or real as the original object of representation, namely the thing in itself. Second, this denigration of phenomena is furthermore reinforced by Kant's assuming and contrasting two different modes of intuition, namely 'derivative, sensible, human intuition' (*intuitus derivativus*) and 'original, non-sensible, divine intuition' (*intuitus originarius*) (Kant, 1956, p. 90). Whereas the former first needs objects to interact with, the latter grasps its object immediately without being affected by it. That is, the divine intuition creates the intuitable thing as such, letting the thing become what it is. And therefore it is infinite. On Kant's account, human beings never possess this special mode of infinite, absolute intuition, which is to be enjoyed only by God.

It is by rejecting both of these two features that Heidegger prevents the Real from being identical with the thing in itself, and distances himself from the two worlds view. As a non-representational thinker, he argues, 'appearance is also appearance of something—as Kant puts it: *the thing itself*. However, in order to eliminate right away the grossest misunderstanding, we must say that appearances are not mere illusions, nor are they some kind of free floating emissions from things. Rather appearances are objects themselves, or things' (Heidegger, 1997, pp. 67–68). This implies that by entities Heidegger means something actual and substantial. Also, he does not accept Kant's presupposition of an absolute intuition, insisting that '[a]long with the assumption of an absolute intuition, which first produces things . . . the concept of a thing-in-itself also dies away. But things do not thereby vanish into phantoms and images . . . [O]ne denies the *philosophical* legitimacy and usefulness of such an assumption, which not only does not contribute to our enlightenment but also confuses us, as it becomes clear in Kant' (pp. 68–69, italics added). What this signifies is not that Heidegger disallows the noumenon-phenomenon pair itself, but that he is determined to approve the noumenon only in its 'negative' sense. The Real *per se* cannot be disclosed by human beings for whom anything intelligible is disclosed as temporal. Approving the positive concept of the noumenon requires the additional 'theological' assumption that there exists God as a supersensible entity capable of absolute intuition or of knowing the Real *per se*. Heidegger's point is that such an assumption is not postulated, at least, philosophically.

Thus, there is no strong sense of otherworldly aspiration in Heidegger's ontology. His strategy is precisely the opposite. He shows great respect both to the finite, human way of disclosing entities, and to what become

accessible to us by it. Insofar as there no longer holds the otherworldly, nihilistic contrast between divine intuition and human intuition, between God and human beings, this world and human experience within it can retrieve their own values. It is indeed so to such an extent that it can be claimed that human knowledge of entities pertains to the Real, despite its incapability of revealing the Real as it is. This is a subtle and at the same time very important point:

[We cannot say] that before Newton there were no such entities as have been uncovered and pointed out by [Newton's] laws. Through Newton the laws became true; and with them, entities became accessible in themselves to Dasein. Once entities have been uncovered, they show themselves precisely as entities which beforehand already were (Heidegger, 1962, p. 269).

The expressions 'entities became accessible in themselves to Dasein', 'as entities which beforehand already were' should not be read in the way that the distinction between the Real and entities are catastrophically blurred. Rather, instead, those entities temporally determined by Newton's laws bear upon what already were, not yet temporalised by any human beings including Newton.

What this line of thought ultimately offers to us is, in Han-Pile's words, 'the two aspects view'. The central idea is that the Real and entities are 'the same things, considered either within a transcendental framework or without it' (Han-Pile, 2005, p. 98). The two aspects view, I argue, has many philosophical merits. To name a few, it, first and foremost, corrects the two worlds view. From at least a philosophical point of view, we do not have to be committed to the existence of an ontotheological God that allegedly stands outside history and human experience, and thus become nihilistic. And in this regard, I certainly acknowledge, there is considerable weight to the criticisms of assuming some ultimate reality made by those secular perspectives discussed in the previous section. By holding on to the negative concept of the noumenon, however, it also defeats any hasty rejection of what lies beyond the human, or any attempt to absolutise human finitude, which is characteristic of such secular discourses in philosophy and education. The two aspects view inclines us towards the world in which we find ourselves, without emptying the world of any sense of the ineffable, so that we do not fall into anthropocentrism. Thus, it is not correct to say of our dwelling place that it is a thoroughly human world. It is true that there is only 'one' world, but it makes perfect sense to see it as twofold. What we can safely occupy is its one side. There always remains the other unoccupiable side, whose being independent of us is nonetheless not irrelevant to us in that it is something pre-existing, non-human, and never artificial, to which human beings are called upon to be tuned in order to have meaningful, intelligible experiences. But there is no one way of being tuned because an understanding of being, as argued, is historically situated. Multiple meanings inhere in things, and we are permitted to enjoy them without falling victim to relativism.

EDUCATION AND 'BEYOND THE HUMAN'

The dichotomy between the religious and the secular is not meaningless. And we often see the same sort of dichotomy set up between transcendence and immanence. However it is expressed, the dichotomy is certainly too simplistic, incomplete to unfold all the possibilities open to us. Then, any philosophical or educational discourse built upon it, too, is necessarily fatally flawed. Such terms as 'otherworldly' and 'impassable gulf' are conveniently employed by many secular thinkers to ridicule the religious belief in another world, or afterlife as ordinarily conceived. In doing so, however, they betray their inability to perceive how crude the dichotomy itself is. By sticking to the dichotomy, they fail to see this world as it is. They might think that it is by discarding the religious, transcendence side from the dichotomy that they eschew falsifying descriptions of the world and human existence. But the remaining secular, immanence side is only able to scratch the surface of our being. What is lost here is the sense that things are not simply generated by us, that their properties and meanings are not arbitrarily or even merely inter-subjectively attributed to them. Any assertion of truth, sublimity, and meaningfulness, devoid of such sense, is misleading. The two aspects view fully recognises both the epistemological import that we do not create the meanings of things, but rather are asked to discern the meanings which are already there, and the ethical import that goodness or any other human virtues can be found in our being in sync with the way things are.

Any viewpoint on human existence or education which downplays or denies these considerations, I would argue, expresses an impoverishing humanism. I also think that the voices of such humanism can be heard to varying degrees in the views of those secular thinkers previously examined. Indeed, Taylor claims that 'the coming of modern secularity . . . has been coterminous with the rise of a society in which for the first time in history a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely available option' (Taylor, 2007, p. 18). What he means by a self-sufficient or exclusive humanism is 'a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing' (p. 18). Taylor here has in mind Bentham, Mill, and some others, whose conception of the good life, as we have seen, is also impugned by White. But *pace* White, it appears to me that his secular picture of personal wellbeing and a meaningful life clearly inclines to the kind of humanism Taylor refers to. In particular, the consistent emphasis on some unifying structure or the nesting of one's reasons for action seems to sit comfortably with a central strand of instrumentalism and wilful motives. Such an immanent frame in which everything nested within it is subject to human estimation threatens to efface any non-human, unintelligible dimension.

Intelligibility and unintelligibility have to be said together. Immanence and transcendence have to be uttered at the same time. Doing exactly this is 'poetic' in later Heidegger's sense as far as I can understand the term. The poetic sits between the religious and the secular. It is not to see everything as entirely human. We can still speak of gods, if not of God. The

Nietzschean earth, stripped of the inscrutable, is surely such a bleak portrait of the world. We, dwellers in the world, are still offered intimations of the mysterious, if not of the religious. There is a sacred, holy dimension to the world that is sinking in this secular age, yet cannot be completely forgotten. It cannot be forgotten because the negative sense of the noumenon is not merely an abstract philosophical postulate. It is all around us when we experience the brute otherness of things, namely nature standing in complete independence of human concerns. At things' very existence, at their sheer presence, we have senses of wonder, awe, and even anxiety. But none of them is merely imaginative. They are truly existential in the sense that they are constitutive of our authentic being.

There still are thinkers who seek to resist the coming of a completely secular age by way of endorsing a notion of the non-human reality. Cooper (2002, 2009), for example, embraces the existence of 'reality as it *anyway* is, independently of human perspective'. He wants to defend 'a doctrine of mystery' by rejecting both 'raw, hubristic humanism' which asserts that there is no 'beyond' for human beings to answer to, and 'a two-levels, disjunctive picture of mystery' according to which a human world is like a mere dream. Hence, the doctrine is that 'the world is not simply a human world, unthinkable in isolation from us, but at the same time a realization of, a coming forth of, something to which we can strive to answer and measure up' (2009, p. 58). This implies a certain notion of the good life; 'there is a *beyond the human*, something which could serve to give measure to our lives' (p. 54), and the good life is the life that is consonant with it. In a similar spirit, Michael Bonnett (2004) appeals to some ultimate, primordial reality. The expression favoured by him is 'nature as the self-arising'. The sense of 'self-arising' is drawn from our basic experience of nature that is '*epistemologically mysterious* in the sense that it has aspects that lie always beyond us, withdrawn—still (and perhaps, never) to be revealed or discovered (p. 62). For him, too, the good life is the life in which some kind of harmony with, or some fitting response to, independent reality is found. To say 'some' at this point might sound deplorably prevaricative. And yet, Bonnett rightly argues that one cannot provide an 'objective definitive list, applicable to all, of what the fitting responses would be in varying circumstances' (p. 166).

Education is preparation for life. The meaning of this phrase might be interpreted at varying levels. Taken at the most fundamental level, it, I believe, means that the central business of education is to cultivate a certain attitude towards ourselves and things around us. Appealing to attitude, not to knowledge, skills, competencies, or anything modish, might be considered hackneyed and unattractive. But it is one meaningful way to make sense of education. I, of course, do not mean that this way of speaking is applicable only to the perspective developed in this article. Surely, some sort of attitude is encouraged and being formed under the strong influence of secularism. And yet, it is an attitude of caring and being receptive, not self-assuring or self-deceptive that I have been at pains to indicate; that is what we are seriously in danger of losing in this secular age. I find the contrast between the two attitudes very perceptively expressed in the fol-

lowing passage. It is only with the full acknowledgement of the ‘beyond the human’ that education can begin to undertake its exalted task of cultivating an attitude of ‘waiting upon’:

Waiting is a human activity, of course; but Heidegger wants to show that it has a deeper significance and involves a reference beyond the merely human, the subjective. Normally, when we wait we wait *for* something which interests us or which can provide us with what we want. When we wait in this human way, waiting involves our desires, goals, and needs. But waiting need not be so definitely colored by our nature. There is a sense in which we can wait without knowing for what we wait. We may wait, in this sense, without waiting for anything; for anything, that is, which could be grasped and expressed in subjective human terms. In this sense we simply wait; and in this sense waiting may come to have a reference beyond man. The difference between these two kinds of waiting may be expressed by saying that when we wait in a merely human way we wait *for*, whereas in the deeper sense of waiting we wait *upon*. The different prepositions are intended to refer in the case of ‘for’ to subjective human expectations of some sort, but in the case of ‘upon’ to what is, if given, a gift. As Heidegger says: ‘In waiting [upon] we leave open what we are waiting for.’ This is to say that man’s true nature may relate directly to what transcends him, however difficult it may be to state this in ordinary terms (Anderson in Heidegger, 1966, pp. 22–23).⁵

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NOTES

1. This remark is from the transcript of Rorty’s debate with Jürgen Habermas and Leszek Kolakowski on relativism, which is published as a book *Debating the State of Philosophy* (Nižnik and Sanders, 1996).
2. White’s inaugural lecture ‘Education and Personal Well-Being in a Secular Universe’ ends with a passing remark on postmodernism which appears to suggest that White does not want to designate himself a postmodernist:
Philosophy of education has an irreplaceable role in illuminating the place of a non-religious, non-relative—and, as far as I can make sense of this fashionable term non-post-modernist cosmic framework in the education of our children (White, 1995, p. 19).
3. The plainly empirical in this sense is called ‘the ontic’ in Heidegger’s ontology.

4. The following argument I shall be making about 'the Real', 'two worlds view', and 'two aspects view' is heavily indebted to Béatrice Han-Pile's excellent essay, 'Early Heidegger's Appropriation of Kant' (Han-Pile, 2005).
5. This passage is from John Anderson's introduction attached to Heidegger's book *Discourse on Thinking* (Heidegger, 1966).

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