

THE WILL TO TRUTH

A volume of multigenre philosophy by
JOHN O'LOUGHLIN



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PREFACE

My main philosophical project of 1983 combines dialogues and essays with aphorisms and maxims in what I like to call a multigenre volume, the greater proportion of which is given to essays. However, nine dialogues is no mean undertaking, and they range from subjects as diverse, albeit interrelated, as the freeing of art from mundane attachments as it evolves from pagan to transcendental times; the distinction between Jews and Israelis; the development of awareness at the expense of feeling in art; the moral implications of sexual sublimation; the evolutionary struggle from gravity to curved space; the development of religion from the personal to the universal; the nature of petty-bourgeois art; the possibility of denominational progress in Western religion; and the apotheosis of the 'universal man'. Such, then, is the scope of the dialogues. The ensuing essays enlarge on many of the subjects already touched upon, as well as introduce a number of new ones, including the main distinction between Christianity and Transcendentalism; the psychology of swearers; the irrelevance of punishment to a transcendental society; architectural and sartorial relationships to gravity both upwards and downwards; understanding jazz in relation to other types of modern music; the distinction between philosophy and pseudo-philosophy; and the nature of ultimate music. Originally intended as a sort of sequel to the above, the concluding sections of the project move us from the phenomenal realm of dialogues and essays to what I like to think of as the noumenal realm of aphorisms and maxims, in which the will is at one with the truth it strives to convey through the most concise means and is if not Truth itself, then at any rate certainly truthful! Subjects treated here include the relation between sexuality and dress; the nature of the self; the significance of Israel; the role and nature of worship in popular religion; poetry verses philosophy; the evolution of the arts; the metaphysics of modern music; the psyche; God; ideology; and gender. Although *The Will to Truth* should not be taken for *the* Truth, it nonetheless signifies a significant stage on the road to my achievement of greater degrees of philosophical truth in due course, and is certainly more radical than anything preceding it in this field.

John O'Loughlin, London 1983 (Revised 2008)

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THE FREEING OF ART

DEREK: If, as you claim, art evolves from the mundane to the transcendent, from materialistic sculpture to impalpable holography, and does so via a number of intermediate stages ... like murals, paintings, and light art, it must have begun bound to the Diabolic Alpha and only gradually emancipated itself from that ... as it tended towards the Divine Omega. Thus the higher the development of art, the more free must it be from utilitarian concerns, which pertain to the mundane.

KENNETH: Oh absolutely! The lowest stages in the development of art were, by contrast, the most utilitarian, as in the case, for example, of ancient Greek sculpture.

DEREK: But how was this sculpture utilitarian?

KENNETH: Through its connection with pagan religion. The ancient Greeks, particularly the earliest ones, were given to idolatry, both completely and partly. By personifying their gods in sculptural form, they acquired a concrete reference-point for purposes of religious devotion. The simpler Greeks would have worshipped the statue *as the god*, which was pretty much the religious norm in pre-atomic times. Especially would this have been so in the earliest phases of Greek civilization, before statues acquired the lesser status of images of the gods, who dwelt elsewhere.

DEREK: Presumably on Mount Olympus?

KENNETH: Yes. But whether these statues, these sculptures, were worshipped directly as gods or indirectly as images, their function was strictly utilitarian, in accordance with the nature of art in its lowest stages of development. Besides worshipping gods, however, the ancient Greeks also worshipped heroes, who would sometimes become gods in the course of time, and they built additional statues personifying abstract virtues, such as Strength, Courage, and Fortitude. There was no free sculpture, as we understand it. They would have been deeply shocked by the concept of art-for-art's sake! Art had to be connected with a utilitarian purpose, even if one less exalted than the worship of natural phenomena. Incidentally, although the Renaissance attempted to revive certain Graeco-Roman values and to reaffirm the importance of beauty as a creative ideal, the resulting sculptures weren't used for purposes of worship, as their pagan prototypes had been, but stood as a kind of Renaissance art-for-art's sake in revolt against Gothic iconography. The men of the Renaissance honoured the form but not the spirit of Greek sculpture! They wanted to create a free sculpture.

DEREK: And succeeded admirably! However, as the utilitarian must precede the free, it is evident that art continued to be largely if not

exclusively utilitarian throughout the pre-atomic age, and even into the atomic age of Christian civilization.

KENNETH: That is so. Or if not directly then, at any rate, indirectly connected with utilitarian ends, as with the vase paintings of the Greeks, who naturally made use of their vases for carrying water and storing wine, to name but two uses. The concept of a free vase wouldn't have appealed to them. Yet vase painting definitely marked a development beyond sculpture which was closer to murals, since a combination of the two, in that two-dimensional figures were applied to a curvilinear form resembling, and doubtless deriving from, the human body, with particular reference to the female. It was left to the Romans, however, to develop murals and mosaics to any significant extent, thereby beautifying their walls and floors.

DEREK: Which could be described as the *raison d'être* of murals and mosaics.

KENNETH: Yes. Just as the Greeks had beautified their vases with figure paintings commemorating heroes and battles or, alternatively, referring to aspects of their religion, so the Romans adorned the walls of their dwellings with murals depicting much the same thing. Even explicitly erotic figures possessed a religious significance, insofar as paganism was nothing if not sensual and, hence, sexist. But a mural signifies a superior stage of aesthetic evolution to vase painting, because the figures are applied to a flat surface, namely a wall, rather than to a curved one, which stands closer to nature in imitation of the human form. There is something partly transcendental about a flat surface, even when it forms part of a utilitarian entity, like a wall.

DEREK: Doubtless one could argue that, considered separately from the overall function of a dwelling, a wall is less utilitarian than a vase, which may be subject to direct use.

KENNETH: I agree. And for that reason the mural was a stage before painting ... as the application of figures to a flat surface not directly connected with utilitarian ends, because forming the basis of an aesthetic entity hanging on the wall.

DEREK: And yet such an entity could be indirectly connected with utilitarian ends, couldn't it?

KENNETH: Yes, to the extent that its owner may look upon it as a means to beautifying his house, rather than as something which exists in its own right as a completely independent entity. It would then be like a kind of removable wallpaper, existing in a transitional realm between the mundane and the transcendent, the bound and the free.

DEREK: Though presumably this would only be so while its content appealed to the aesthetic sense by actually *being* beautiful or, at any rate,

partly beautiful, which is to say, until such time as art became either ugly or truthful, and thereby bedevilled aesthetic considerations.

KENNETH: Precisely! Though while art remains attached to canvas it can never become entirely free from aesthetic considerations, even when it aims, as some modern art does, at Truth, because the very medium in which it exists - the canvas, oils, et cetera - suggests a connection with the past, with past phases of painterly development, and is itself to a certain extent materialistic and naturalistic. A modern painting may intimate of Truth rather than approximate to the Beautiful in one degree or another, but, in hanging on a wall in someone's house, it won't be entirely free from utilitarian associations. It will be less free, in fact, than an identical or similar painting hanging in a public gallery, where it would be absurd to suggest that its presence there was intended to beautify the gallery.

DEREK: You are suggesting that one should bear in mind a distinction between the private and the public, between art in the home and art in the gallery.

KENNETH: Particularly with regard to modern art, which will approximate more to the free or transcendent than it would otherwise do ... if attached to the wall of a private dwelling. A truly free art, however, could not adopt canvas form but would be detached from walls, floors, et cetera, in a medium which transcends the utilitarian and thereby exists in its own right, in complete independence of its physical surroundings. Such an art to a certain extent already exists in the context of light art, which has no connection with the utilitarian use of artificial light but, quite the contrary, shines independently to the lighting necessary for the illumination of a public gallery at any given time of day. Indeed, such art is never better served than when displayed in conjunction with the utilitarian use of artificial light, its presence thereby being shown superfluous by any utilitarian criteria. And yet, important as this art may be in the gradual liberation of art from the mundane, it is still connected to its surroundings, if only to the extent that it hangs from the ceiling or is supported on a tripod or has an electric current flowing through it via an insulated wire that connects to the mains at some point in the gallery. The evolution of art is incomplete until the illusion of a totally free art is created through holographic techniques, which should project an impalpable image, or hologram, of a material entity into surrounding space, and thereby present to the viewer the arresting spectacle of its detached transcendence, the image, independent of floors, walls, wires, pedestals, et cetera, having no utilitarian associations whatsoever! Thus not, in its ultimate manifestation, a representational image, like a telephone, but a completely abstract one, such as would intimate of transcendent spirit.

DEREK: And this ultimate stage in the evolution of art would have to be public, like the preceding stage ... of light art?

KENNETH: Yes, and preferably within the context of a meditation centre, which is to say, as an ingredient in religious devotion - at any rate, certainly if abstract and thus unequivocally religious in character.

DEREK: But wouldn't that make it utilitarian, much as Greek sculpture was when housed in a temple?

KENNETH: No, because not an entity to be worshipped, either directly or indirectly, but simply to be contemplated, as an intimation of Truth. Both the pagans and, to a lesser extent, the Christians worshipped statues; but Transcendentalists would simply contemplate an appropriate hologram from time to time during the course of their meditation session, not as an alternative but in addition to meditation, kept mindful, by its presence, of the goal of evolution in transcendent spirit.

DEREK: So that which, as sculpture, began publicly in a religious context would, as holography, end publicly in such a context?

KENNETH: Yes, the distinction being one between the mundane and the transcendent, sensual public art and spiritual public art, which is nothing short of an antithesis between the bound and the free - the former approximating to Absolute Beauty, the latter intimating of Absolute Truth.

DEREK: Just as a similar antithesis presumably exists between vase painting and light art.

KENNETH: Yes, the vase being an opaque container illuminated externally by paint but intended, all the same, to hold sensual phenomena like wine or flour in a predominantly utilitarian context. By contrast, light art may be defined in terms of translucent containers, whether bulbs, tubes, or tubing, illuminated internally by artificial light - which, depending on the type of light art, can be regarded as symbolizing the spirit - and not intended for any utilitarian purpose. Quite a contrast, when you think about it!

DEREK: Indeed! And yet, despite its association with utilitarian purposes, vase painting was presumably a fine art during that pre-atomic epoch in time when it was especially fostered - as, for that matter, were murals.

KENNETH: And quite unlike modern vase paintings or murals, which correspond to a folk art. The distinction is more one of chronology in evolutionary time than quality of work, though the latter will still of course apply. I mean, the vase paintings and murals of the ancient Greeks and Romans respectively, being an integral part of evolutionary progress in the development of art from highly materialistic origins, were the work of the most aesthetically-gifted people of the time, whereas modern vase paintings and murals are the work of relatively

uncivilized people, i.e. the folk, and therefore devoid of chronological relevance in the overall evolution of art - the foremost developments of which having attained to the level of light art and, to a limited extent as yet, even gone on to that of holography. A typical modern mural, on the other hand, whether on the gable wall of a house or stretching along a public wall in some street, suggests a creative affinity with ancient-pagan and early-Christian times, and is more likely to be the work of someone whose creative disposition corresponds to the relatively primitive level of the ancients ... than of a civilized artist who has temporarily abandoned light art, or whatever, for murals....