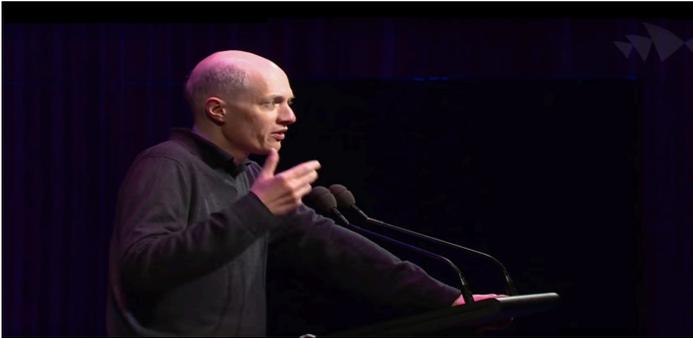


Good But Not Religious (GBNR)

MARCH 2021 - A monthly update on Keith Martin's work as a nonreligious chaplain and educator online

LETTING GO OF MEANING (and embracing meaning)



At the University of Guelph a year ago, Keith offered a series of Good But Not Religious Monthly Get-togethers with TED-like talks on the following:

Jan: Letting Go of God (and embracing goodness)

Feb: Letting Go of an Afterlife (and embracing this life)

Mar: Letting Go of Meaning (and embracing meaning)

For the March event, which had to be canceled because of COVID-19, he was going to play excerpts from 2 talks by Alain de Botton, a British philosopher, author, and founder of The School of Life.

One of the losses Keith experienced in giving up his belief in God as a supernatural Being was a loss of belief in Meaning with a capital "M." If God exists there is cosmic meaning to the universe and to our lives, and if the God of the Bible exists then death is not the end and we live on. But without God and therefore a basis for believing in life after death, it is still possible for life to have meaning (with a small "m"). When apologists or defenders of any theist faith say that life and relationships are meaningless if not eternal, Keith would simply ask them, "Are you married? Unless you are a Mormon and believe that marriage is eternal, your marriage will end when you die, especially when you both die. Does that mean it is meaningless? I know from experience marriage can be very meaningful. Just not eternal."

Here are excerpts from Alain's talk on "What Is the Meaning of Life?":

We should start by saying that there is no meaning in life outside of that which we can find by ourselves as a species. There isn't any kind of objective meaning

written in the stars, in a holy book or in sequences of DNA.

Meaning is to be found in three activities in particular: communication, understanding and service. Let's look at communication first. We are, by nature, isolated creatures and it appears that some of our most meaningful moments are to do with instances of connection: with a lover, for example, when we reveal our intimate physical and psychological selves, or when we form friendships where substantial truths about our respective lives can be shared. Or on a journey to a new country, when we strike up a conversation with a stranger and feel a thrilling sense of victory over linguistic and cultural barriers. Or when we are touched by books, songs, and films that put their fingers on emotions that are deeply our own but that we had never witnessed externalized so clearly or beautifully before.

Then there's the meaning that emerges via understanding. This is about the pleasure that can be felt whenever we correct confusion and puzzlement about ourselves or the world. We might be scientific researchers, or economists, poets or patients in psychotherapy; the pleasure of our activities stems from a common ability to map and make sense of what was once painfully unfamiliar and strange.

Thirdly, there's service. One of the most meaningful things we can do is to serve other people, to try to improve their lives, either by alleviating sources of suffering or else by generating new sources of pleasure. So we might be working as cardiac surgeons and aware every day of the meaning of our jobs . . . Or else our service might be to friends or our own families, or perhaps the earth itself. We're often told to think of ourselves as inherently selfish. But some of the most meaningful moments come when we transcend our egos and put ourselves at the service of others – or the planet. One should add that in order for service to feel meaningful, it has to be in synch with our native, sincere interests. Not everyone will find medicine or social work, ballet or graphic design meaningful. It's a case of knowing enough about ourselves to find our particular path to service.

www.GoodButNotReligious.ca

Resources for Being and Doing Good