

3rd March 2022

Balance

“Those will survive whose functions happen to be most nearly in equilibrium.”

Herbert Spencer, The Principles of Biology (1864)

The car ferry from Islay to Jura carries eight cars. I've travelled on it when I was the only car, when there were a few vehicles, and when it's been full. You take instruction from the ferryman where to position your car. If yours is the only car, you're in the middle. Two or three cars, and you're in a line. Four, it's two abreast. A full load, it's one, two, two, two and one at the back. It's a matter of balance. Get it wrong, and there's the danger of the ferry having a nasty crash when it comes into the jetty.

The Greek playwright, Euripides, wrote in the 5th century BC, said:

The best and safest thing is to keep a balance in your life, acknowledge the great powers around us and in us. If you can ... live that way, you are really wise.

It's not just little car ferries that need to be in balance so that they avoid nasty crashes. Our lives need to be in balance too. Equilibrium matters!

I like the centre of Euripides "balance" argument: the great powers *around us* and *in us*. The supreme example of that in the Christian tradition is surely Christ himself. Fully human, and fully divine; the "Son of Man" and the "Son of God". Here was God incarnate, experiencing all that humanity contains: anger, insight, tearfulness, joy, frustration, tenderness, hope, patience, fear, love, exasperation, acceptance, loneliness, yearning, pain, distress, peace. It doesn't take much searching of the Gospels to find each of these human traits being experienced by Jesus. And yet, here was the Son of God, fully divine. Was this, therefore, not a life truly in balance, the power within, and the power around, the human and the godly fully in balance in one being? If we are to aspire to be Christ-like, we have surely to begin by seeking such a balance. We must never lose our humanity. The power within matters, to balance the power around. If we are "so heavenly minded we are of no earthly use", then we become less than human. The power of humanity *and* an understanding of the mystery of God. Now, that's some combination! Equilibrium matters!

A life in balance is truly wise, said Euripides. I reckon such wisdom might well have come from Euripides being on the Jura ferry a few times.

A prayer for today

*God, my ferryman, help me take guidance from you
so that I am properly balanced for our journey together. Amen*