



Editor's note

This essay is the second movement in a single line of thought.

Part I traced why moral exhortation and system control repeatedly fail when they operate downstream of unexamined ontological assumptions — about hierarchy, time, and human position.

Part II does not propose solutions. It follows the consequences of that boundary: what orientation, responsibility, and action can still mean once mastery, guarantees, and external vantage points are abandoned.

Beyond Moralism & Control

Orientation, Time, and Human-Situated Navigation

(Part II)

After the Boundary

Part I established a boundary: moral exhortation and system control fail when they attempt to correct outcomes generated by unexamined ontology. There is no external vantage point beyond hierarchy, asymmetry, or time. Guarantees collapse. Mastery recedes.

What follows is not an alternative system or a higher frame.
It is what remains possible once illusion is withdrawn.

From Routes to Orientation

Consider an ordinary experience.

When a destination is entered into a navigation system, a route is calculated and an arrival time predicted. Movement is evaluated by efficiency. Deviations register as an error. Time becomes pressure.

Remove the destination, and only a map remains: *you are here*.

No route is prescribed. No arrival is promised. What appears instead is a field: alternatives, proximities, constraints. Movement, if it occurs, is exploratory rather than corrective.

This is not the absence of direction.
It is orientation without destination.

Routes presuppose arrival. Orientation accepts the situation.

Time as a Signal of Finitude

This shift requires a different relation to time.

Time is often treated as a carrier of meaning: as if duration pointed toward fulfilment, progress, or resolution. In that form, time becomes teleological. It promises arrival.

Detached from destination, time does something else.

The arrow of time does not communicate purpose. It signals finitude. What appears will pass. What stabilises will dissolve. This is not a message or a warning; it is a condition of appearing itself.

Time does not carry meaning toward an outcome. Detached from destination, it signals finitude through irreversibility. Time does not protect outcomes; it permits processes by delaying closure without securing meaning.

Orientation becomes possible precisely because time does not guarantee where things lead.

Mortality and the Return of Meaning

Here, a difficult tension must be held.

Humans know that they will die. They know that their time is limited and that this limitation is irreversible. This knowledge intensifies attention. It sharpens care. It makes indifference hard to sustain.

Meaning arises here — but not as destiny.

Mortality does not assign purpose. It exposes finitude. Meaning emerges as a human response to that exposure: local, temporary, and non-transferable. It gives weight to moments without grounding them.

When meaning is mistaken for destiny, time is reloaded with purpose and mastery returns through the back door.

We need meaning to live — but it cannot carry us.

Relation Without Reciprocity

Orientation also reshapes how relation is understood.

Human action unfolds through intention, interpretation, and care. Planetary and systemic processes respond through thresholds and constraints. These domains intersect, but they are not symmetrical.

Relationality here does not imply balance or mutual recognition. It implies exposure. Actions occur within fields that answer without regard for intention.

Responsibility remains human.
Limits do not.

To act relationally is not to expect reciprocity, but to remain responsive under dependency.

Hierarchy, Without Ontological Privilege

Once mastery is relinquished, hierarchy reappears stripped of illusion.

Hierarchy is not a structure to be escaped, nor a truth to be obeyed. It is a provisional human ordering that stabilises coordination under limited overview and temporal pressure. It enables action while narrowing perception.

There is no position “outside” hierarchy. Any sustained coordination generates patterns, expectations, and asymmetries. What matters is not their absence, but whether they are mistaken for the structure of reality itself.

Orientation does not abolish hierarchy.
It refuses to sanctify it.

Information Without Closure (and the Case of AI)

Orientation also changes what information is for.

In control-oriented systems, information exists to close decisions. Uncertainty is treated as a defect. Accumulation promises convergence.

Here, information functions differently. It opens perception without demanding closure. It sharpens attention rather than legitimising control.

This distinction becomes particularly visible with **artificial intelligence**.

AI does not think, understand, or decide. It does not occupy a non-human perspective. What it does is translate, recombine, and render visible patterns across multiple human framings of reality.

Used instrumentally, AI accelerates closure and intensifies control. Used relationally, it functions as a cartographic device: mapping differences in perception, emphasis, and interpretation without resolving them into a single truth.

AI does not deliver non-human knowledge.

It expands the field of orientation by holding multiple situated views at once.

Acting Without Arrival

Orientation does not suspend action. It removes its alibi.

Action is no longer justified by outcomes secured in advance, nor by narratives of progress or redemption. It proceeds without promise of arrival.

This is not indecision.

It is restraint without passivity.

Action persists not because success is assured, but because participation is unavoidable.

What Remains

Beyond moralism and control lies neither certainty nor escape.

What remains is a position:

- within time, not protected by it;
- within relation, not guaranteed by it;
- within hierarchy, not justified by it.

Orientation does not tell us where to go.

It tells us where we are.

We need meaning to live, but it cannot carry us.

Conceptual grounding

Written in dialogue with:

- **Th.C.W. Oudemans**, *Moeder Natuur*, incl. *Het casino van de natuur*
- **Martin Heidegger**, *The Question Concerning Technology*
- **Gregory Bateson**, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*
- **Donella Meadows**, *Leverage Points*

Link Substack:

[https://open.substack.com/pub/artmotivator/p/beyond-moralism-and-control-part?r=6grdon
&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&showWelcomeOnShare=true](https://open.substack.com/pub/artmotivator/p/beyond-moralism-and-control-part?r=6grdon&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&showWelcomeOnShare=true)