

The Backward Step

NOWletter Notes 2014 to 2019



Alan Mann

Preface

A friend told me it sounds as though I'm producing what used to be known as a commonplace book, an old-fashioned description of a personal collection of ideas, quotes, notes, observations and experiences the writer has found to be important or interesting. I think that is a good description of this enterprise.

A fairly large proportion of the content is material I have contributed to our occasional newsletter, the NOWletter, and follows two previous compilations, the collection of my diary notes *Notebooks 1974 to 1998* and an earlier collection of NOWletter material *NOWletter Notes 1993 to 2014*. My observations on the people who have influenced me are not intended as a definitive summary of their work or teachings but simply as a record of their impact on my own enquiries. There is no reason for the order in which the various articles appear. The main content comprises my contributions to the NOWletter over the past six years, I have tried to keep repetition to a minimum.

For readers who are uncomfortable with references to God I have adopted a definition of the word that I think is acceptable to both the secular and the religiously inclined. It is *'The self-ordering principles of the universe'* and the author of this definition is David Bohm. I recently discovered another option when, in a You Tube talk, Adyashanti spoke of *the 'Greater Reality'*.

I sometimes offer another explanation of why I am doing this writing, I say our grandchildren may, at some time in the future, wonder what I thought important. I would like to know much more than I do about my grandparents. I know they were devout in a traditional churchgoing sense whereas I am spiritually inclined but unattached to any particular tradition. I think there is a natural reverence for being which lies at the heart of all religions. Sadly, the stories that arise around the founders and their followers give rise to myths which, in subsequent generations are mistaken for facts and lead to division, persecution, etc.

Thinking around the issue of justifying all this, it occurred to me that if something on the lines of this book had come into my hands when I set out on the enquiry I would have found in it an 'everyman' account of a fellow traveller, an encouraging parallel to the works of the recognised masters I read or listened to with great enthusiasm.

I started to put the contents of this book together in 2013 but found it hard to finish. This was due largely to the ongoing meetings and NOWletter contributions generating ever more relevant, interesting and sometimes completely new insights, thus making it difficult to close off. On 1 January 2019 I decided that enough is enough but, even so, I didn't stop until the November of that year.

On searching for misprints, etc., I noted that there is a degree of repetition which I decided to leave untouched, it is a result of the ongoing and overlapping nature of the meetings and the NOWletter contributions which gave rise to this book.

CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Transparency 5

The Perennial Philosophy 12

Awakening' and its consequences. 15

Gerotranscendence 21

Awen 24

Contemporary Philosophy 26

Samuel Alexander. 26

Heidegger. 27

Whitehead. 27

Jiddu Krishnamurti 29

David Bohm 30

Michael Polanyi 32

Ataraxia Today 34

Douglas Harding 37

Two-way Looking with Heidegger. 43

A Taxi Tale from Thomas Petruso 47

Heidegger 49

Donald Ingram Smith & Meher Baba 59

Me or We? 62

Death 65

Theology 67

Religion as Metaphor by David Tacey 67

Giles Fraser on Fry's God 75

Through Atheism to Anatheism by Dave Knowles 76

Beyond Literal Belief 79

Heart warming 81

The Poets 84

Wonder 90

Meditation 97

Capacitie and David Robert Loy 100

Phenomenology 113

The Awakened Person by David Loy	115
Notes on <i>Waking Up</i> by Sam Harris	125
Sam Harris on Douglas Harding	128
Krishnamurti and Me.	133
Neo Darwinism and Design	138
Neo Darwinism and Design 2	140
On Beauty and Evolution	142
On being drawn to some great thing	144
Why Traherne?	147
Ice-block Consciousness	157
Michael Pollan & Norman Swann	159
The Experiments	162
APPENDIX 1—My Spirit	164
APPENDIX 2 —Pointing Experiment	169
APPENDIX 3— The Consequences	172
Conclusion	174

Introduction

The underlying theme of this collection is summarised in a verse by Dogen.

Cease practice based
On intellectual understanding,
Pursuing words and
Following after speech.
Learn the backward
Step that turns
Your light inward
To illuminate within.
Body and mind of themselves
Will drop away
And your original face will be manifest.

In the light of my admiration for Dogen's succinct expression of the necessary action how can I justify this assembly of notes, quotations and commentary? Isn't this just such an exercise of the sort that Dogen condemns? The answer is yes, of course it is. However, it is a yes followed by a 'but'. Unless the ground which is referred to by these observations is travelled, the desired consequence, as recommended by Dogen, doesn't seem to come about. Or if it does make its appearance by some chance occurrence it tends to be dismissed as aberration rather than revelation. My interest in the backward step arose as a result of some spontaneous dropping away of body and mind on several occasions in early middle age. These 'openings' revealed that what I regarded as everyday consciousness was not the full story and a much broader and richer perspective was available. My view of myself, since earliest childhood, had become that of an entity embedded in a context of time and space and engaged in ongoing relationships with all manner of other entities and objects. The steps which are taken from this perspective on life are steps forward into becoming and knowing, becoming wiser and knowing more, and there is an almost irresistible drive to live in

explanation and to overlook direct experiencing. Re-integration of experience as the primary or at least equally important aspect of everyday being has been an interesting adventure.

The contents of this book are the gleanings of many years of enquiry starting from some unexpected and spontaneous realizations. It describes how I arrived at my present level of understanding and examples of people, who like Dogen, have pointed to this necessary shift in the direction of attention, an anthology of what I have found to be most clear, true, relevant and helpful to my exploration.

Sometime in my late forties I became intrigued by the representation of light in painting. I wondered how painters managed to capture transparency on canvas and I looked up the European masters. I even got out my old oil-paints and knocked up a picture of a wineglass on a piece of wood to see if I could work out what is involved. It has been sitting on a windowsill at our home in Greville Street ever since. I'm not sure exactly how it happened but my painting exercise led to an interest in perception. I sensed that my everyday perception was limited; that perhaps I live in a state of partial blindness and, if this is true, there must be a way of living free of the blinkers. I later discovered this sense of incompleteness to be the primary driver behind the perennial philosophy.

Many years later I was standing in front of the fire in our hut at Glen Davis looking back at the sink. There was a large beer glass standing empty on the draining board catching the light. I finally got the message—something here but empty and transparent—full of light.

This started an enquiry which included a lot of reading and meditation. Some of my meditation experiences resolved the puzzling questions I was exploring and resulted in some unusual experiences of the type described as impersonal consciousness, occasions when

the sense of separation between myself and 'other' evaporated. These experiences seemed to reveal the true state of affairs and convinced me that we have access to all necessary information of a spiritual or philosophical nature built in, as it were, and that in the light of such riches it would be absurd to seek external guides or gurus.

The epiphanies of oceanic non-separation were accompanied by a conviction that this is how things really are and that, because that is so, there is no need to sustain the experience, to strive to establish it as a permanent condition or attempt to retain it as an acquired skill.

In 1991 I was lucky to come across Douglas Harding who is the only person I have encountered in this field who was able to show rather than merely tell me about what I'd been seeking.

In proposing the backward step as the necessary action, I should explain that I understand it as a metaphor for a broadening of perception to include what we are looking out of, not simply what we are looking at, hence the *backward*. And whilst it is most readily applied to vision it is relevant to all aspects of perception, to what we apprehend. Right apprehension is what Traherne called it and it is the key to an understanding which emphasizes the experiential as opposed to the conceptual. I recently discovered there was something called theopoetics which I hadn't come across before and the definition below enlightened me as to why I have always found certain poems so helpful in handling the inexpressible.

Here is a Wikipedia definition:

Theopoetics suggests that instead of trying to develop a "scientific" theory of God, as Systematic Theology attempts, theologians should instead try to find God through poetic articulations of their lived ("embodied") experiences. It asks theologians to accept reality as a legitimate source of divine revelation and suggests that both the

divine and the real are mysterious—that is, irreducible to literalist dogmas or scientific proofs.

Historically, the backward step and its consequences were most frequently a subject of religious or spiritual expression, but it is increasingly encountered in strictly secular fields such as science and contemporary philosophy.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)



Transparency

Transparency (diaphaneity) is the form of manifestation (epiphany) of the spiritual. Gebser

I was introduced to Gebser by Dave Knowles who recommended *The Ever-Present Origin* as essential reading in one of our late '90s email exchanges.

I later met George Schloss, and I was delighted to find that George was well aware of the need for 'presentation' and 'verition' through an attentive 'waring'—words and phrases that Gebser coined to describe the necessary action and all relating to the backward step. More to the point, George realized how the experiential approach of Douglas Harding makes plain these somewhat cryptic Gebserian words.

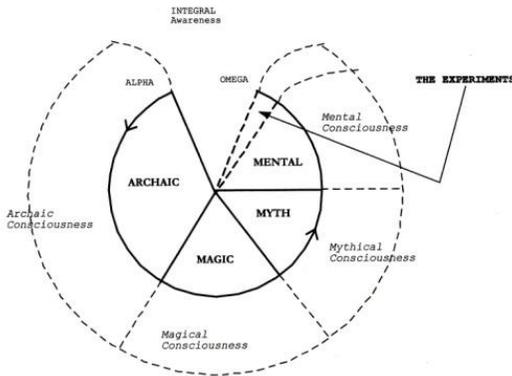
As I read the Gebser book I realised that my major interests: Traherne, Harding, Krishnamurti, Bohm, Dialogue and the NOWletter are all to do with what Gebser calls concretization of the spirit.

His thesis is encapsulated in the opening paragraph of the preface to his book *The Ever-Present Origin*:

Origin is ever-present. It is not a beginning, since all beginning is linked with time. And the present is not just the "now," today, the moment or a unit of time. It is ever-originating, an achievement of full integration and continuous renewal. Anyone able to "concretize," i.e., to realize and effect the reality of origin and the present in their entirety, supersedes "beginning" and "end" and the mere here and now.

He claims the crisis the world is experiencing is evidence of a transformative process which mankind undergoes when it reaches

some pivotal point of unfolding human consciousness. Gebser provides a schema which lays out the history of our awakening which he categorizes in five underlying structures: archaic, magic, mythical, mental and integral. We are at present in the process of, or on the threshold of, emergence from the mental to the integral. This is the foundation on which he builds the framework for an extensive analysis of our history and our present condition in key areas of human experience and endeavour. We are on the verge of the Integral, an aperspectival awareness which embraces the previous states and delivers us into an integrated understanding.



Dwg 6

Integral reality is the world's transparency, a perceiving of the world as truth: a mutual perceiving and imparting of truth of the world and of man and of all that it transluces. Gebser

George Schloss rounded off his extensive writing on the relevance of the Harding experiments with an unforgettable but enigmatic aphorism to describe the revelation of the experiments as *“Unfolding time in the service of enfolding space”*.

This can be interpreted in several ways but during a Harding meeting at Greville Street on 4th May 2013 and subsequent observation during a walk along the southern Sydney foreshores with friends, and then at a concert on Sunday 5th it opened up to me from an angle it hadn't presented previously.

I thought at our meeting, as we were discussing the self, why don't I just watch it. So, I set about trying to watch my self and of course there is nothing to watch, only the space in which everything including the sense of self arises. An interesting exercise and worth trying in all or any circumstances. Of course, I could not see myself any more than I can see my head, but the important thing is what is seen *through*. What I found myself seeing through was a pretty firmly established assumption of an ever-present observer.

But watch, nevertheless, what is there in this space between where I sense my self to be and the speaker or whatever is happening 'out there'. Watch that space and in watching, it seemed to be in some way substantial. It is, I thought, a substantial transparency in the way a crystal, or clear glass is substantial. It is solid but admits the light. And then followed an immediate reaction against such a notion, how absurd that this space and openness could be in any way substantial! And yet the sense of substantiality continued to pervade the openness. It is more felt than seen.

Lying awake the following night I suddenly recalled a verse of My Spirit in which Traherne seems to have been wrestling with the same question, I recalled his description as "*super substantial, rare...*" and of course there's Shakespeare's "*glassy essence*". At the time it happened that Garry Jackson was telling us about Tiruya, a happy synchronicity in that of course, but the situation I am trying to describe is always the case—here for the looking. In Hindu philosophy Tiruya is pure consciousness, the background that

underlies and transcends the three common states of consciousness of waking consciousness, dreaming, and dreamless sleep.

This is Traherne's attempt:

...O what a World art Thou! a World within!
All Things appear,
All Objects are
Alive in thee! Supersubstantial, Rare,
Abov them selvs, and nigh of Kin
To those pure Things we find
In his Great Mind
Who made the World! tho now Ecclyps'd by Sin.
There they are Usefull and Divine,
Exalted there they ought to Shine.

From 'My Spirit' See Appx. 1 for complete poem

Traherne deals with my problem by describing this sort of substantiality as super-substance and underlines that description by defining it as rare in the sense of it being fine as opposed to gross.

A few days later I listened to the Lawrence Krauss interviewed by Richard Fidler on the ABC in which he talked about his book *The Universe from Nothing*. I gather Krauss did a tour with Dawkins on their evangelical atheism campaign. The joke is on them however as the Christian mystics, not to mention Buddhists of various kinds, Sufis and Advaita Vedantists have been aware of 'nothing,' as the foundational stuff for centuries. Here's a couple of examples from my 17th century comrade, Thomas:

Till your spirit filleth the whole world, and the stars are your jewels;
till you are as familiar with the ways of God in all Ages as with your

walk and table: till you are intimately acquainted with that shady
nothing out of which the world was made: till you love men so as to
desire their happiness, with a thirst equal to the zeal of your own: till
you delight in God for being good to all: you never enjoy the world.
Traherne Cent: 1/30 and...

And from Traherne's poem 'My Spirit'

That Being Greatest which doth nothing seem!
Why, 'twas my all, I nothing did esteem
But that alone. A strange mysterious Sphere !
A deep Abyss That sees and is.

And if you were able to press these early nothing-finders they would
probably have agreed that the word *nothing* in the sense they
intended, and as science is now beginning to use it, is an acceptable
synonym for *God*.

And here is Emily Dickinson for good measure:

By homely gifts and hindered Words
The human heart is told
Of nothing
'Nothing' is the force
That renovates the World

From Poem 1563

To cap it all, I read only this afternoon that Nietzsche said somewhere
or other "I am a mystic and believe in nothing" followed by Brian Cox
claiming that in a cubic metre of what we regard as 'empty' space
there is more energy than the Sun outputs in 1,000 years or some
equally monstrous figure and that reminds me of similar comments
by David Bohm we covered in May 2006 NOWletter 116. I spoke to
Garry about this substantial nothingness after the meeting and he

said it reminded him of something Nisargadatta had said and I asked him if he could find it. He sent an email with the following quotations:

Questioner: What then is in the centre of consciousness?

Nisargadatta: That which cannot be given name and form, for it is without quality and beyond consciousness. You may say it is a point in consciousness, which is beyond consciousness. Like a hole in the paper is both in the paper and yet not of paper, so is the supreme state in the very centre of consciousness, and yet beyond consciousness. It is as if an opening in the mind through which the mind is flooded with light. The opening is not even the light. It is just an opening.

Questioner: An opening is just void, absence.

Nisargadatta: Quite so. From the mind's point of view, it is but an opening for the light of awareness to enter the mental space. By itself the light can only be compared to a *solid, dense, rocklike, homogeneous and changeless mass of pure awareness*, free from the mental patterns of name and shape.

Second extract:

Questioner: In my daily actions much goes by habit, automatically. I am aware of the general purpose, but not of each movement in detail. As my consciousness broadens and deepens, details tend to recede, leaving me free for the general trends. Does not the same happens to a jnani, but more so?

Nisargadatta: On the level of consciousness -- yes. In the supreme state, no. This state is entirely one and indivisible, *a single solid block of reality*. The only way of knowing it is to be it. The mind cannot

reach it. To perceive it does not need the senses; to know it, does not need the mind.

Cathy Lyons told me Karsfield talks about becoming transparent to divinity which also catches the spirit of the backward step.

“The only way of knowing it is to be it”. That strikes me as the key principle in this enquiry.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

The Perennial Philosophy

There are some very comprehensive definitions of what the perennial philosophy is about, I favour those which indicate that it is about whatever might be necessary to reconcile the absolute with the relative. In my case, interest in the subject arose from dissatisfaction: a feeling of incompleteness accompanied by a sense that completeness is possible and that the restoration of this completeness or perfection involves the conscious establishment of what is already the case.

Interest in the perennial philosophy involves an enquiry which attempts to explore the wholeness of life, with particular interest in that 'something missing' of which we become aware occasionally and which can become a vaguely apprehended background to daily life. It is a response to a sense of something far larger and more comprehensive than what is usually revealed by my everyday consciousness; an awareness of something vaguely sensed but not fully grasped which, if rightly apprehended, would deliver a deeper meaning and enjoyment of life.

There is a tendency to regard this as mystical, in the sense of other worldly or magical and inaccessible to everyday consciousness but, as the obstacles to revelation are transcended, it is revealed simply as our everyday existence made plain. The sense of this is captured in a sentence from an Emily Dickinson letter to a friend when she wrote, *'I was thinking to-day, as I noticed, that the supernatural was only the natural disclosed'*.

And Whitehead:

'If you would like to phrase it so, philosophy is mystical. For mysticism is direct insight into depths as yet unspoken. But the

purpose of philosophy is to rationalise mysticism: not by explaining it away, but by the introduction of novel verbal characterisations, rationally coordinated’.

The resolution of this sense of absence and the recovery of wholeness is what I’m calling, with acknowledgement to Dogen, *The Backward Step*.

The next section of the book is a collection of notes and quotations from various traditions and disciplines which help me explain what I’m getting at.

Contemporary Science. I included a science heading so that I could say something about David Bohm. I first came to know of him and his work through some of the Krishnamurti talks in which he participated. There was series of taped dialogues between Bohm and Krishnamurti in which David Bohm would regularly clarify some of the confusing and contradictory observations of Krishnamurti. It was clear that Bohm had a very clear grasp of what Krishnamurti was talking about and brought to their dialogue a depth of understanding beyond Krishnamurti’s ability to communicate.

It struck me that Bohm’s implicate order was a much more comprehensible and justifiable expression of what Krishnamurti referred to at times as the ‘other’. And, in relation to the theme of this book, the implicate order representing a step backwards from the explicate order of our everyday existence, back into our source.

Bohm, one of the leading scientists of his day and possibly of all time, did not allow his scientific achievements or the raised eyebrows of his peers to silence him on matters concerning the backward step. There is an interesting recorded interview of him by Renee Weber in which he describes the implicate order as the self-ordering principles of the universe. At one point, Weber then says ‘that is how some people would describe God’ which Bohm then acknowledges as quite likely

and which I have since adopted as my description of what I mean when I use the word God.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)



Awakening' and its consequences.

What does it mean, why does it matter and what difference does it make?

What I understand by 'Awakening' is the view that there is a readily perceived aspect of everyday consciousness which is normally completely overlooked. As in our dreaming sleep the mind creates an imagined reality, so in everyday consciousness my busy mind overlays direct perception of the 'actual'; its interpretations and explanations obscuring the actuality of the present occasion. This note is an attempt to explore what this overlooked aspect of life might be, by drawing on some selected helpers and to demonstrate it experientially. If I am successful, 'awakeness' will be apprehended not merely as a concept but in the act of awakeness itself.

Atheism

Sam Harris is a well-known figure, an active promoter of atheism, a neuro scientist and public commentator. He is the author of a book entitled *Waking Up--Spirituality without Religion*. I think his views are particularly relevant as they deal with awakeness from the perspective of someone who is free of the dogmatic accretions that become stuck to it when addressed by the various religious traditions which, by and large it must be acknowledged, are the only areas of enquiry that have until recent times taken awakening in this sense as a serious possibility. Harris also gets my approval for recognising the value of the Harding experiments as a simple and effective means of removing the obstacle to the 'doorway' of the awake state. (See the extract 'Waking up by Sam Harris' in this book).

Christianity.

There are several New Testament examples of Christ pointing out the importance of awakening, examples which are often assumed to be referring to some supernatural as opposed to an awakened state. Dave Knowles mentioned that David Oliphant, an Anglican minister he knows wrote to him saying, in relation to the Sam Harris book:

It interests me that God is associated with religion rather than spirituality, and I think this is because we associate religion with claims to authority. In my view Jesus began a spiritual movement, not a religion. It quickly became a religion, just as the focus of that religion became the 2nd person of the holy trinity in glory rather than a crucified carpenter. Liberating Christ from the church is very important. The next stage for Sam (Sam Harris) now is to move from meditation to prayer. This could be difficult because of the strong association of prayer with religion and with God. But he would find that if he did dare 'talk' to the nothingness the Spirit would respond, but only if his openness and vulnerability is something like that of the crucified Christ.

I found this a particularly interesting comment on the question of awakening as an endorsement of the Harris views on the subject, what I see as a truer type of Christianity and by a very intriguing observation on prayer as 'talking to the nothingness'. I shall have to follow up on that and maybe ask David Oliphant to tell us more about it. It reminded me of Traherne's "That greatest is which nothing seems."

The presumption is that our waking state is a form of sleep in the sense that it leaves out of account an important aspect of human being and that the neglected aspect is my connection with the wholeness of life. This connection, which occasionally re-establishes

itself, either spontaneously or because of deliberate attempts to restore it, seems to be the gateway to wonder. We would not choose to remain asleep in the usual way we use the word, why do we persist in the sleep of the supposedly awake state. Awakeness offers a richer experience of being, the revelation of our shared nature and transcendence of the conflict zone.

Buddhism.

I have chosen David Loy to represent Buddhism in this exercise for a number of reasons: He writes well and has the ability to express difficult concepts with clarity, he has an inclusive approach in that he maintains that no religious tradition has a monopoly on understanding, his latest book includes a chapter entitled '*How Does an Awakened Person Perceive the World?*' And finally, in that chapter, he draws on one of my favourites as an example of awakening. He says, "Curiously, the best description I know is not from a tradition that we normally think of as nondualist. It's in *Centuries of Meditations*, by a seventeenth-century English clergyman and poet named Thomas Traherne". He follows this with one of the Meditations from Traherne's *Centuries*.

I have selected some of David Loy's comments which illustrate what I am trying to explain in this note but in doing so I detract from their full impact which becomes clear when reading his complete article which is available online and in the May 2017 NOWletter.

Radiance. He points out that: ... 'mystics in many traditions have emphasized the world's *radiance*: things that we usually perceive as solid objects now *glow*. A distinction that we normally take for granted, between physical objects and the light that they reflect, no longer applies'. The difference between them is something that has been constructed: it is a product of our ways of thinking about the world, including the names that we assign to things. I overlook the

radiance when I see *that* as simply ‘a cup.’ I don’t really pay attention to it: it’s just something I use to drink my tea.

Time. Religions tend to be preoccupied with immortality, for example, helping us qualify for an eternity in heaven with God. Traherne describes a different type of ‘everlasting,’ which is not about surviving death and living forever into a never-ending future but experiencing here-and-now in a different way: dwelling in what is sometimes called *an eternal present*. His most wondrous line begins: “Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day...” and in another meditation “All time was Eternity, and a perpetual Sabbath.”

Emptiness. Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day, and something infinite behind everything appeared.

Traherne does not mention God, except at the very end when he refers to becoming a little child again so that he might enter the Kingdom of God. The only other place in this passage where he perhaps alludes to God, or to some other spiritual reality, is this ‘something infinite.’ And in discussing emptiness as considered by Traherne and Blake, Loy reminds us of another similarity with Buddhism by including a reference to the Heart Sutra “Although form is not other than emptiness, it’s also true that emptiness is not other than form.”

Transcendence. The spiritual path is usually taken to be about transcending this world not about fixing it. Loy again:

In contrast, Traherne does not allude to any other reality that transcends the magnificent world he describes. The implication of his account is that this is ultimate reality. It can still be understood as transcending the way we usually experience this world, but it is still this world.

Nonduality. Traherne's account builds upon itself, becoming more moving and profound, until it reaches a climax:

“The streets were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins and ruddy faces. The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the World was mine; and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it.” ...

What are we to make of this mine-ness? Is his experience solipsistic? Buddhism emphasizes that there is no self, but if the basic problem is a sense-of-separate-self confronting that which other than itself – inside vs. outside – there may be no difference at all between an experience of all-Self and the experience of no-self. What's important in both cases is that the delusive duality between self and other has been dispelled.

The Fall. Traherne's exalted depiction concludes with a sudden deflation. The experience he has just described to us has been lost, for he 'was corrupted, and made to learn the dirty devices of this world.' But there is hope: those devices he can 'unlearn, and become, as it were, a little child again that I may enter into the Kingdom of God.' The allusion is to Matthew 18, where Jesus says: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." This verse is normally understood to refer to where we might go after we die, but we do well to remember something else Jesus reputedly said: "Behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:21; more familiar to most of us is the King James version: "The kingdom of God is within you."). In the context of everything else that Traherne has just written, his desire to enter the Kingdom of God should surely be understood in the same way. The point is not to attain some otherworldly salvation, but to 'return' to the beautiful, luminous, blissful, eternal, nondual heavenly world he has so poetically depicted for us.

A personal note. I became interested in the question of what it means to be awake because of certain experiences in the 1980's. These were openings to a wider view, some were spontaneous, others because of extensive meditation and on a couple of occasions due to psychedelics, in my case Gold Top mushrooms. I find I have a similar background in this area to Sam Harris. Later, in 1991 to be exact, I was lucky enough to catch Douglas Harding when he came to Sydney who showed me that what I had experienced as extraordinary states of being were, in fact, extra ordinary, if only I stopped looking in the wrong way. I am referring, of course, to the Harding experiments which revealed that what I had stumbled on occasionally was in fact always the case and always accessible. Sam Harris also draws on these experiments to demonstrate the awakening he is describing. In my efforts to communicate my understanding I am frequently confronted with the 'So what? response. I never found it easy to answer this reaction as there seems to be an 'either you see it, or you don't' factor at play. So, some years ago I started to list the various consequences that I had experienced because of the experiments. Over quite a lengthy period this has developed into a list which takes up an A4 page. I include it as appendix 3 with a few additional explanatory notes. Appx.2 details the Pointing Finger experiment.

(See the www.headless.org site for a range of experiments, different experiments work for different personalities. Some find the Closed Eye experiment the most powerful. The Appendix 2 experiment opened the door for me. A door I thought closed but discovered to be ever open. It is important not to be underwhelmed by its apparent obviousness and simplicity).

Gerotranscendence

Notes on a paper by Lars Tornstam. I recently came across reference to what is now called gerotranscendence. It is the name given to some of the positive effects of aging and the word was coined about 25 years ago by Lars Tornstam (1943-2016) a Swedish Professor of Sociology at Uppsala University.

These effects, established by several surveys, reveal a number of developments in older people with an interesting correspondence to what is often regarded as the outcome of 'awakening' as defined by various spiritual disciplines.

Redefinition of the self. (Ego transparency is my label).

An increased awareness of the transpersonal.

A shift from a materialistic to a more spiritual alignment.

The elimination of fear of death.

Greater affinity with others.

A sense of connection with past generations.

Redefinition of time and space.

I find this list particularly interesting as I can vouch for some of these symptoms myself. I had assumed them to be the result of a lifelong interest in the 'perennial philosophy'. Perhaps it is simply the reward for reaching a ripe old age.

A few extracts:

Time. The definition of time is changed so that, for example, today and yesterday can be present at the same time. The borderline between now and then is transcended, and this may also include a return to and reconfiguration of childhood. Like the layers of an onion, all ages are available at the same time, but when returning to the inner layers, to childhood, things are observed that could not be

seen then, and reinterpretations are made of events and situations from childhood or other earlier periods in life.

Death. Transcendence of the life-death duality is also manifested by the fact that 68 percent of respondents 74–100 years of age agreed with the statement that ‘Today I feel that the border between life and death is less striking compared to when I was 50 years of age’ (Tornstam, 2003).

Mystery. The mystery dimension of life is accepted. The intellectual restriction that everything in life must be explained within traditional scientific boundaries is transcended. This is reminiscent of Chinen’s (1989) analysis of the changing attitudes toward science expressed by two outstanding scientists: Ludwig Wittgenstein and Alfred North Whitehead. Both softened their views on science from a rather rigid and self-assured stance in their younger years, to a more pragmatic attitude in mid-life, and finally to a transcendent outlook in old age. They then both evidenced a radical transcendence of the borderlines between scientific disciplines as well as an acceptance of non-scientific explanations.

Self. The individual experiences a new awareness of the fact that he or she is not the centre of the universe. The individual reaches a fundamental acceptance of the life lived. In this way, the ego-integrity described by Erikson is more of a reverse integration process within the same definition of the world as before, while the process of gerotranscendence implies more of a forward or outward direction, including a redefinition of reality.

In a section entitled ‘On average, gero- transcendence develops with age, and seems to be associated with increased life satisfaction’ Tornstam provides the following analysis.

A factor analysis brought together the following statements in a coherent dimension that I called Cosmic Transcendence, because it was related more than anything else to the above described dimension of the same name.

I feel connected with the entire universe.

I feel that I am a part of everything alive.

I can feel a strong presence of people who are elsewhere.

Sometimes I feel like I live in the past and present
simultaneously I feel a strong connection with earlier
generations.

The foregoing notes are intended to give readers a taste of what I found to be a fascinating subject and studies of which I was completely unaware. The link to the complete article and Tornstam's book below.

The paper: Maturing into Gerotranscendence Lars Tornstam,
Ph.D. Uppsala, Sweden

<http://www.atpweb.org/jtparchive/trps-43-11-02-166.pdf>

The book: Gerotranscendence: A Developmental Theory of
Positive Aging.

I was surprised to find Bertrand Russell had written that the best way to overcome one's fear of death "is to make your interests gradually wider and more impersonal, until bit by bit the walls of the ego recede, and your life becomes increasingly merged in the universal life." He goes on: An individual human existence should be like a river: small at first, narrowly contained within its banks, and rushing passionately past rocks and over waterfalls. Gradually, the river grows wider, the banks recede, the waters flow more quietly, and in the end, without any visible break, they become merged in the sea, and painlessly lose their individual being."

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Awen

This article, by Joanna Van Der Hoeven was reprinted with the author's permission in the December 2017 NOWletter.

In Druidry, we often hear the word, awen, being used, but what exactly is awen? Loosely translated from Welsh, it means flowing spirit, or flowing inspiration. Awake to our own energy and stretching out towards the energy of nature around us, we begin to see just what awen is. It is an opening of one's self, of one's spirit or soul, in order to truly and very deeply see. When we are open, we can receive that divine gift, inspiration that flows, whether it is from deity, nature, or whatever it is that you choose to focus on.

For awen to exist, there must be relationship. We cannot be inspired unless we are open, and we cannot be open unless we have established a relationship, whether that is with the thunder, the blackbird or a god. It is cyclical in nature; we open and give of ourselves and in doing so we receive, and vice versa. Letting go, releasing into that flow of awen allows it to flow ever more freely, and we find ourselves inspired not only in fits and bursts of enlightenment or inspiration, but all the time, carrying that essence of connection and wonder with us at all times. There is, of course, a line to be drawn, for we can't be off our heads in ecstatic relationship with everything all the time.

But just what is awen? It is an awareness, not just on a physical and mental level but on a soul deep level – an awareness of the entirety of existence, of life itself. It is seeing the threads that connect us all. It is the deep well of inspiration that we drink from, to nurture our souls and our world and to give back in joy, in reverence, in wild abandon and in solemn ceremony.

Many are familiar with the Welsh tale/myth of Cerridwen and her cauldron, the three drops of awen falling onto Gwion's finger and bringing his wisdom in the form of poetic inspiration, shape-shifting and prophecy. Some liken this story to a Bardic initiation, or the three grades of Bard, Ovate and Druid. In any case, drinking from the cauldron of the Goddess is to drink deeply of awen.

Many Druid rituals begin or end with singing or chanting the awen. When doing so, the word is stretched to three syllables, sounding like ah-oo-wen. It is a lovely sound, that opens up the heart and soul. Sung/chanted together, or in rounds, it simply flows, as its namesake determines. Our hearts literally can open if we let them when chanting or singing the awen.

Yet I am sure that the awen is different for each and every Druid. The connection, and the resulting expression of that connection, the Druid's own creativity, can be so vast and diverse. It is what is so delicious about it – we inhale the awen and exhale our own creativity in song, in dance, in books, in protest marches – the possibilities are endless, as is the awen itself.

<http://www.druidry.org/library/modern-druidry/awen-o>

(I came across this article in 2017 and I found it particularly interesting as a contemporary commentary on a traditional spirituality).

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Contemporary Philosophy

At the time of writing I am immersed in several writers dealing with contemporary philosophy, mainly continental. I only half understand what they are saying at best and have assumed this lack of comprehension to be due to my lack of formal philosophical training.

In parallel with my reading I have been wrestling with computer problems, mainly to do with the website, updating the pages, adding the NOWletter and so on. Whenever I'm faced by computer problems, I assume that something has gone wrong at my end. On two occasions recently, it turned out that the problem was with the server. In the shower this morning I had one of my flowing water flashes and thought my philosophical problems might lie elsewhere than in my lack of training.

Perhaps this lack of clarity might be another case of *their* problems rather than mine. The lack of clarity being an inevitable consequence of trying to encapsulate an actuality that lies beyond common or garden philosophical explanation. In other words, maybe they haven't found the backward step. The hair-splitting and reliance solely on reasoned argument seems designed to develop fields of specialized expertise inaccessible to common understanding and, consequently, a source of self-justifiable academic debate. There are however creditable exceptions:

Samuel Alexander.

Alexander's version of the necessary stance was to employ something he describes as an alert naivete and that the emergent awareness, the existence of emergent qualities thus described, is something to be noted, as some would say, under the compulsion of brute empirical fact, or, as I would prefer to say in less harsh terms, to be accepted

with the "natural piety" of the investigator. It admits no explanation.
From Space, Time & Deity

No explanation is ever adequate, but it can be experienced, and that is Harding's contribution which we'll come to later.

Heidegger.

For Heidegger, it is only by the step back that we can venture forward, and inversely, we must also continually step back from our venturing forth. If such a program of thought seems futile, this is only compounded by the Heideggerian "leap", which is spoken of as the leap into where we already are: "A curious, indeed unearthly thing that we must first leap onto the soil on which we really stand."
Robbins

Whitehead.

Whitehead has a helpful way of demonstrating the effect of taking the backward step:

'But there is an antithetical doctrine balancing this primary truth. Namely, our experience of the world involves the exhibition of the soul itself as one of the components within the world. Thus, there is a dual aspect to the relationship of an occasion of experience as one relatum and the experienced world as another relatum. The world is included within the occasion in one sense, and the occasion is included in the world in another sense. For example, I am in the room, and the room is an item in my present experience. But my present experience is what I now am'.

I think the closest we can come to the backward step in contemporary or relatively recent philosophy is phenomenology. There are so many variations of phenomenology that it is hard to provide a useful definition. Subscribers to these complex and often unintelligible definitions would no doubt find the headless answer absurdly simple in the same way that the headless seer would find in their complexity

evidence that they have not taken the backward step from knowing into seeing.

In relation to the simplicity and obviousness of the necessary phenomenological perspective Simon Critchley makes a very helpful and perceptive comment in his *Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*:

‘In my view, what we can still learn from phenomenology is that when it comes to our primary and most significant access to persons and things – what we might call our entire stock of tacit, background know-how about the social world – we do not require causal scientific explanations, or pseudo-scientific hypotheses in relation to obscure causes, but what I am tempted to call, thinking of Wittgenstein, clarificatory remarks. For example, ‘The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one’s eyes)’. Clarificatory remarks bring into view features of our everyday life that were hidden but self-evident and hidden because they were self-evident. They make these phenomena more perspicuous, change the aspect under which they are seen, and give to matters a new and surprising overview. In this sense, phenomenology is a reordering of what was tacitly known but went unnoticed; it permits us to relearn how to look at the world’.

I have spent many years dealing with the raised eyebrows of friends and acquaintances who thought the Harding story with its references to headlessness was a sign of simple-mindedness. A good example of this attitude was noted by Sam Harris in his book *Waking Up, A guide to spirituality without religion*, when he noted that Hoftstader in his book *The Mind’s Eye*, which included an essay by Douglas Harding, completely missed the point. Harris himself gives a very eloquent summary of the Harding contribution and its relevance to

understanding. The realization by contemporary thinkers and scientists in the two decades following Harding's death, Thomas Metzinger is another example, have helped to present 'headlessness' as a perfectly secular and scientific demonstration of the awakened perspective.

Jiddu Krishnamurti

I came across Krishnamurti as the result of a dream in which a group of us were playing a party game and writing down answers to questions. One of the questions required us to write the name of a well-known Indian guru. I'd had no dealings with Indian teachers at the time but must have recalled hearing the name, so I wrote Krishnamurti. I was coming to grips with Jung at the time and keeping a dream journal. An uncanny aspect of this dream was that, in the dream, there wasn't enough space on the line of the paper to write the full name and I had to put the final 'i' of Krishnamurti's name on the line below.

'No room for the 'I' is one way of looking at Krishnamurti's whole philosophy. I later discovered he was indeed a well-known Indian teacher but hardly a traditional guru. I was taking these dream signals seriously and some weeks later I read his book *'Freedom from the Known'*.

Subsequently, I spent many hours listening to Krishnamurti and found much to admire in his lifelong commitment to sharing his clarity and, as he put it, his aim of 'setting mankind unconditionally free'. However, he seemed to pay a price for his clarity in that he lost, or never acquired, the ability to relate at the personal level. An ironic aspect of someone who lectured endlessly on relationship, 'life is relationship' being one of his catch-cries.

Another of his oft-quoted aphorisms 'the first step is the last step' underlines my theme of the backward step. Krishnamurti was, in my

view, correct about the first step being the necessary action but he failed, on most occasions, to make it clear that a backward rather than a forward step is what is necessary. Perhaps we were supposed to pick up the intended direction from clues he dropped in his many talks and dialogues.

The most telling evidence of the fact that reversal was intended was his statement to an audience who seemed nonplussed by his advice when he said, "You want to go South whilst still heading North".

Coincidentally, there is a Harding experiment which perfectly demonstrates this action and consequent revelation.

Here is Krishnamurti speaking in a conversation reported by Terence Stamp:

"What you are...what you actually are, is being. Being is not the mind thinking. Thinking is a movement, a motion. Being is the silence that precedes the motion. You cannot see it; you cannot grasp it because you are it. The feeling that you are. The unadorned naked awareness that is always there, rarely heeded, is what you always have been, always will be. Cannot not be. You can't look for it, because it is what is looking. It is like space, you can't see it, but everything is in it. Everything is it. So, I say to you, 'be aware when you are unaware' let its presence warm you, fill you. Be present in the Presence." He smiles the serene smile".

David Bohm

A few selections with references or links to the various sources.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mst3fOl5vHo>

In An appendix to 'Special; Relativity' Bohm writes of the analogy between perception and the way relativity treats things. According to

relativity everything was related to the way you reacted with it. Also, according to quantum mechanics, the point about perception is that it is a dynamic process, we are constantly doing things and seeing what happens, everything must move, the eyeball must move to show light, in order to show a form, it's an active process. Now suppose we are looking at a circular object as we walk around it really looks like an ellipse, an artist draws it that way, with perspective, but we know by now that they are different appearances of the circle. We say really it is a circle which is solid we can say the ellipse is the appearance and the circle is the essence. But then science came along and said that that is really only an appearance too, the circle is made of atoms and it is mostly empty space, atoms moving there, and therefore the atoms are the essence. Later, they came along and said that these atoms are made of even smaller objects and they are also mainly empty space, so atoms too are appearances. The smaller objects were made of quarks and so on, then they said these are fields. They are looking for a theory of everything, but it keeps receding. This suggests to me that even my thoughts are fundamentally appearances, how things appear to the mind. By combining of many views of the object we come to understand the object. With the stereoscope, two views give three dimensions. By then binding many views of the object we get this notion of the circle, by combining it with the scientific view we get another view of it, as circle which is made of atoms, the more views we can get, that we can integrate and make coherent the deeper the understanding of the reality is. The essence would be the true being, that we never get hold of, every view is limited, it is like a mirror, looking this way, many, many mirrors each one giving a different view, a limited view, Theories don't give final true knowledge, they give a way of looking the very word *theoria* in Greek means theatre. A sort of theatre of the mind that gives insight into the thing. You can say that fundamentally science is involved in a perceptual exercise not primarily in getting knowledge, although

knowledge appears as a by-product. By understanding the thing, then our contact with it, providing it is coherent, shows that our understanding is correct. We must distinguish between correct appearances and incorrect appearances, or illusory, if an appearance is correct it is in some way related to reality, but it evidently is not the reality—the ellipse is an appearance to the eye though it's not an ellipse it is still correct.

Questioner: Are you suggesting that this is an inherent aspect of the thinking process?

Yes, that's correct, the whole perceptual process. Our thinking process should be called an extension of our perception when done rightly—not primarily the accumulation of knowledge which we put into various records. End of extract.

Bohm's concept of wholeness germinated from his boyhood vision on the hill near Wilkes-Barre. Lights from the town spreading out all over the sky which, in turn, is shining with the points of light the stars! You SEE this! It means you have contained the whole space in your small eyeball! You are seeing "structures covering immense stretches of space and time"! "A total order is contained, in some implicit sense, in each region of space and time." (Bohm's own words: p. 149 - *ibid*). <http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-dialog.htm>

Michael Polanyi

Michael Polanyi placed a strong emphasis on dialogue within an open community (a theme taken up later strongly by the physicist David Bohm). He recognized the strength by which we hold opinions and understandings and our resistance to changing them. Unlike many of his contemporaries he placed his thinking within an appreciation of God and of the power of worship - especially in his

later writing (see, for example, *Meaning*). In his earlier work (especially in *Personal Knowledge*) Polanyi seems to be preoccupied with 'setting forth ways to think about religious meaning as an articulate system or framework related to other articulate systems' (Mullins undated). Later Michael Polanyi attempted to extend his model to describe the nature of human knowledge found in art, myth and religion.

Bohm: The subtle mechanism of knowing the truth does not originate in the brain. David Bohm

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Ataraxia Today



Opening the Door to Ataraxia—Robust equanimity

There was an article in issue 127 of *Philosophy Now* by Maria Karvouni. It is entitled *The Ultimate Tranquiliser* and sub-titled *Introduction to an Epicurean state of mind*.

Maria tells us that ataraxia was defined by the Pyrrhonian sceptic Sextus Empiricus as a state of robust equanimity characterized by freedom from worry and, I find more recently, by the OED as a state of serene calmness. Another Greek angle on this arises from consideration of the word *persona* which is understood as the aspect of someone's character that is presented to or perceived by others. In Latin, literally a mask as used, for example, to represent the character played by an actor and a common prop in Greek plays, as illustrated by the Zeus mask above.'

The aspect which I present to others and which they perceive as my face, is my mask. I overlook the simple fact that whilst they see my mask I never see myself in that way. Nevertheless, I identify strongly

with that mask, I take their word for their view of what I am. I become strongly identified with my mask.

So, can I take it off?

If for a moment I can be an honest phenomenologist and, putting aside what is not revealed by my direct experience — if I pay attention to what I see where others see my mask, I find that it is not to be found. It is not 'on'— it never was, I am not wearing it at all. If I pay close attention to what is going on where others see my mask I find an aware space, open for whatever the occasion presents.

Could this be the doorway to ataraxia?

We had nothing planned for the August Greville Street meeting and decided to make 'nothing' the subject for the day.

We considered the wide-ranging nature of the word and its various applications, for example:

Traherne. Till we see our nothing we cannot understand the value of our Being (Select Meditations 4/66) and ...That Being greatest which doth nothing seem! (From 'My Spirit')

By homely gift and hindered Words The human heart is told Of Nothing— "Nothing" is the force That renovates the World— Emily Dickinson Poem 1563

Michael Talbot and David Bohm in Talbot's *The Holographic Universe*, Chapter 2: The Cosmos as Hologram, p.51

According to our current understanding of physics, every region of space is awash with different kinds of fields composed of waves of varying lengths. Each wave always has at least some energy. When physicists calculate the minimum amount of energy a wave can possess, they find that every cubic centimetre of empty space contains more energy than the total energy of all the matter in the known universe.

Space is not empty. It is full, a plenum as opposed to a vacuum, and is the ground for the existence of everything, including ourselves. The universe is not separate from this cosmic sea of energy, it is a ripple on its surface, a comparatively small "pattern of excitation" in the midst of an unimaginably vast ocean. "This excitation pattern is relatively autonomous and gives rise to approximately recurrent, stable and separable projections into a three-dimensional explicate order of manifestation," states Bohm.[12] In other words, despite its apparent materiality and enormous size, the universe does not exist in and of itself, but is the stepchild of something far vaster and more ineffable. More than that, it is not even a major production of this vaster something, but is only a passing shadow, a mere hiccup in the greater scheme of things. [12] Bohm, Wholeness, p.192

The Upanishads. "What is called Brahman, that is what this space outside a man is; and what that space outside a man is, that is what this space within a man is; and what that space within a man is, that is what this space within the heart is. That is the 'full'—inactive, undeveloping. Whoso knows this wins good fortune, full, inactive, undeveloping. Chandogya Upanishad III, xii, 7-9."

Krishnamurti — Discovering or uncovering 'the space between the thoughts'.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Douglas Harding

Sometime during the 1970s I read an article entitled *On Having No Head*. I later discovered that it was included in the collection of essays on consciousness in Hofstadter's *The Mind's Eye*. When I first read the article, I did not quite get the point that the author, Douglas Harding, was hoping I would see. On that occasion I failed to take the backward step he was proposing. And neither did Hofstadter who missed the point completely. Nevertheless, I intuited that here was something of significance and I even remembered the author's name which I rarely do.

In 1991 I was driving in Sydney listening to the radio. Phillip Adams, a well-known ABC radio presenter, was talking to someone he introduced as an English eccentric, a man who claimed to have no head. I realized that this must be the person who had written the article and in fact it turned out to be Douglas Harding. Sometime later Douglas joked about this description of himself and demonstrated the simple fact that it was his interviewer rather than himself who was the off-centre eccentric. So, here in Sydney was the author of that article and an opportunity to find out more. Margot and I attended an introductory talk by Douglas on the following Friday evening and I signed up for a two-day workshop that weekend.

In the course of the introductory talk on the Friday night Douglas asked us to join him in the pointing finger experiment. This was the first time I took the backward step as the result of a deliberate action as opposed to some form of spontaneous opening. I found myself plunged into what Traherne called *Capacitie*, the subject of this book and all the various references and quotations it contains.

We subsequently attended a number of gatherings of people interested in Douglas's work in the UK and on a couple of occasions

we visited Douglas and Catherine, Douglas's wife, at Nacton in Suffolk.

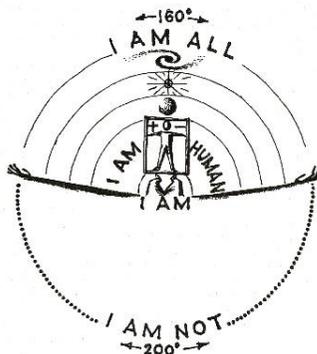
Here was someone who had discovered a way of showing us what we were looking for as opposed to telling us what was necessary or desirable. I thought Douglas was very courageous in describing the process or his teaching as Headlessness. It generates an immediate negative reaction in most people. "Are you trying to tell me that I can't see my own head?" is a common response. An understandable response but the real issue is whether you can see what is to be apprehended where you cannot see your own head; what do you see where others see your head?

We do not normally apprehend what occurs in this space because we tend to assume it is occupied by the head we cannot see, we filter what is actually seen 'what is' as experienced' through an imagined 'what is not', an assumption of what is the case.

Words, however elegantly phrased and finely tuned can't offer redemption of the underlying clarity but the experiments can. See Appendix 2.

The closest words have come in my experience are all gathered together in this collection and perhaps the most direct are in a sentence from Sam Blight who said:

You awaken when you realize that what you are looking for is what you are looking out of.



Traherne is most often quoted by the first half of one of his 'Centuries':

You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world...

This is demonstrated or revealed in the experiments but the second half of the quotation, which is also made plain in the experiments, is always omitted as it appears to be self-contradictory.

... and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so, because men are in it who are every one sole heirs as well as you. Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God, as misers do in gold, and Kings in sceptres, you never enjoy the world. Traherne Centuries 1/29

This clarity at centre, what I am looking out of, is true for all.

George Schloss made an original and valuable contribution to Harding studies. I met him only on one occasion, when we both attended a Headless Gathering at Salisbury in 2004. George, an American, had met Douglas as a result of writing for information after reading a reference in a book by Morris Berman called *Coming to our Senses*. I discovered that he shared both my admiration for Thomas Traherne, was aware of the relevance of Gebser's work, and the importance of exploring the consequences of the headless revelations.

After lifetimes of enquiry we had both stumbled on the work of Douglas Harding. I was as impressed as he was by the simplicity and effectiveness of the experiments which Harding designed to show rather than tell. I had found the revelation of the experiments to be undeniable, the experience is complete and convincing, but what

about the meaning? What is the significance in relation to our life stories and to history. I discovered that George had addressed these matters in essays and letters which he allowed me to include in my website and then to combine in two self-published paperback books *The Language of Silence, Volume I Essays*, and *Volume II Letters*.

Here is an extract from George's introduction to *Volume I of the Language of Silence*

..., I immediately ordered a copy of *On Having No Head* which, when it arrived, I couldn't wait to begin. Since it represents such an important turning-point in my life, I can still picture the scene perfectly. It was a late Sunday morning and I was sitting in my bathrobe on the couch holding the book in my left hand and with my right attempting the first experiment I ever consciously performed, in this case the pointing finger or, as I've come to think of it, the magic wand which, indeed, it is. A creature of habit like so many of us, the first time round I completely missed it. I assumed I was pointing to my face which, of course, on present evidence I was not. Returning to the text for directions, I tried it again and this time I got it and got it in spades. I recognized almost at once that a search that had begun a half-century before and had included a brief flirtation with Catholicism, a lengthy pilgrimage through India and a short stint in Japan along with innumerable books and not so innumerable peak experiences, had come to a close, that I was enveloped, literally immersed in something of a revelation. Like the prodigal son who might have asked "Was this why I wandered the world over in body, mind and spirit only to end up here in the presence of my Self?", I can also remember murmuring under my breath, and more in amazement than reverence, "O

my God!” Little did I know. Now in the sense that I’d finally found that what I’d been looking for had, in reality, been here all the time in the person of what I was looking out of, it might very well have signalled the end of the story. But, as I’ve written elsewhere regarding the “end of history”, rather than finding myself at an end, as with history itself I discovered I was also at a beginning and a beginning which, quite in accordance with two-way looking and our all-too-human need for name-calling, may very well come to be classified as the Headless era.

Douglas Harding talked of two sides to the necessary revelation, first the seeing, then the meaning. A series of experiments demonstrates the seeing side of this equation. The result of the experiments is the awakening or re-awakening to the fact of the clear, boundless, transparency of awareness as primary. It is so undeniable, certain, accessible and true that, for many, the reaction is “what more could possibly be required?” However, this reaction leaves aside or overlooks the meaning component and carries a risk of falling into voidism, that is, abiding in the capacity without affirming the content.

The problem of overlooking the obvious, my first nature, is cured by becoming aware of that to which both the finger of my hand and the ‘finger’ of history point. Taking history by the scruff of its neck, George shakes its meaning free thereby recovering its purpose and delivering—what for me has been the real fruit of the Harding experiments—the demystification of the supposedly mystical. George presents history as a call to wholeness, and the revelation of that wholeness in the simplicity of what Harding is not merely describing but actually revealing. So, all to the good but how does it work out in everyday life? For me, the marriage of seeing and meaning results in the transparency, made plain in the experiments, becoming an

increasingly natural aspect of my life in all circumstances. It is as though the experiments activate a process whereby first nature, obscured by fifty years of assiduous cultivation of second nature, gradually re-established its primacy.

In the context of the theme of this collection George provides the Heideggerian leap back into where we already are and, in Gebser's words, thereby effecting the reality of origin.

Origin is ever-present. It is not a beginning, since all beginning is linked with time. And the present is not just the "now," today, the moment or a unit of time. It is ever originating, an achievement of full integration and continuous renewal. Anyone able to "concretize," i.e., to realize and effect the reality of origin and the present in their entirety, supersedes "beginning" and "end" and the mere here and now.

Jean Gebser The Ever-Present Origin

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Two-way Looking with Heidegger.

If we are already in it, as an expression of Gegnet why don't we realize it? Heidegger puts it as "a restless to and fro between yes and no". A swinging movement of concealment and unconcealment. Different perspectives of the same "originary" movement, the "originary turning" that is Ereignis.

"If we can call Ereignis an event at all, it is the 'a priori event' of the opening up of the open." And it does not lie in distant space but lurks as an intimate obscurity at the heart of our own thought and experience.

The task is that of being mindful and moving closer to that which is closest to us, and because of this farthest, that is, be-ing in its truth. Thinking the truth of be-ing is the task of thinking, and thus of man, that as a "thinking being" is called to "in-dwell into releasement into that which regions."

Comment: The problem for Heidegger arises from his determination to represent what he has transcended by taking us beyond the representation of calculative thinking; to re-represent what he's just led us beyond. Leading us into his meditative alternative and then undoing his good work by trying to represent it—to re-present in words or concept the revelation. The equivalent mistake in headlessness is to see the revelation of the experiments, the first-person perspective, as an attribute of our third personhood. To think of first nature as an attribute of second nature, the 'I am enlightened' trap. On the other hand, we can see that he does leave the openness open at the end of the walk as described in his essay *Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking*.

This is the final exchange of the three walkers:

Scientist: Indeed, waiting is really almost a counter-movement to going toward.

Scholar: Not to say a counter-rest.

Teacher: Or simply rest. Yet has it been definitely decided that "Αγγιβασιή" means going toward".

Scholar: Translated literally it says "going near."

Teacher: Perhaps we could think of it also as: "moving-into-nearness."

Scientist: You mean that quite literally in the sense of "letting-oneself-into-nearness"?

Teacher: About that.

Scholar: Then this word might be the name, and perhaps the best, for what we have found.

Teacher: Which, in its nature, nevertheless, we are still seeking.

Scholar: "Αγγιβασιή": "moving-into-nearness." The word could rather, so it seems to me now, be the name for our walk today along this country path.

Teacher: Which guided us deep into the night.

Scientist: ... that gleams ever more splendidly...

Scholar: ... and overwhelms the stars ...

Teacher: because it nears their distances in the heavens...

Scientist: ... at least for the naive observer, although not for the exact scientist.

Teacher: Ever to the child in man, night neighbors the stars.

Scholar: She binds together without seam or edge or thread.

Scientist: She neighbors; because she works only with nearness.

Scholar: If she ever works rather than rests ...

Teacher: ...while wondering upon the depths of the height.

Scholar: Then wonder can open what is locked?

Scientist: By way of waiting ...

Teacher: ... if this is released.

Scholar: ...and human nature remains *appropriated* to that...

Teacher: ... from whence we are called.

Postscripts

Dave Knowles: Referring back to the use of the word source, by both Harding and Heidegger, we can add Gebser's 'Ever Present Origin'.

Christopher McLean: The Guide's poetic utterances at the beginning are a mode of being that is in touch with Being, in a less separated way. He keeps responding that way, and they don't get it, so he joins them in something that is more their style of discourse.

Graeme Wilkins: Why don't we watch the You Tube 'Heidegger in 12 Minutes' which we then did. The experience was marred by my inability to get it 'full screen' but the link is below if you want to try yourself.

My apologies for not including some of the other contributions which have slipped away since the meeting

This exercise has helped me to understand another Heidegger quotation, '*Making itself intelligible is suicide for philosophy*' which I thought an amusing self-deprecatory observation on his famously impenetrable prose but if truth is inaccessible to conceptual thought,

it makes sense and my favourite Heidegger quotation is the teacher's
'Ever to the child in man, night neighbors the stars'.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)



A Taxi Tale from Thomas Petruso

A Sufi parable tells of a woman, desperate for knowledge, who visited a nearby sage of great repute, begging to be shown the way to the Tree of Knowledge, promising her total devotion to the task. The sage gave her some instructions and wished her godspeed. Following the simple instructions, led her on a long journey, step-by-step, including many arduous challenges. After forty years and much tribulation, she arrived at a small house which, to her shock and amazement, she recognized as the very house from which she had started out. There in the courtyard she indeed saw what she instantly recognized as the Tree of Knowledge, under which sat the very same sage.

“I don’t understand. Why didn’t you just tell me, so long ago, that the Tree of Knowledge was in my own courtyard; I could have been spared these decades of seeking”, she cried.

Said the sage: “Because, for one thing, you wouldn’t have believed me, and for another, the Tree of Knowledge bears fruit only once every forty years and you needed to pass the time.” (adapted loosely from Idries Shah)

Asleep at the wheel of a parked night taxi,
Awakened by snowflakes against a black sky
A stranglehold question: Why is there anything?
Unfolds into: If there were nothing instead of anything,
Where would(n’t) that nothing be? One gasps for breath.
Forty years ensue.
Still wondering about that mystery void,
Striving to answer but not having a tongue
Sudden understanding dawns: when you arrive
At no-place, Mind is already being there,

Pre-existing, at home in the source of all.

Relief is short-lived.

A sage appears and asks: But what, then, is mind?

After throwing that question into the void,

Another comes back from Mind: Who wants to know?

Everything perceived, exactly as it is,

That's the who, Mind's mirror; where is the where? Here.

But that's not quite all.

While reflecting a dazzling array of trees

Washed in primavera's stark, pale luminance,

The Lover, sotto voce, lets it be known

That neither mirror nor its objects are other

Than entry to the loving Heart of It All.

Heidegger

Heidegger is an unlikely member of my team of guides but after struggling with his philosophical problems he seems to have taken a more literary course and wrote the very interesting piece called *Conversation on a Country Path* which I drew on for the Heidegger component of the Harding article above. What I find particularly interesting in his insistence on what he referred to as ‘waiting on’ as opposed to ‘waiting for’.

Shortly after circulating my recent note on Heidegger and Harding Chris Dent sent me a link to a book by Lex Hixon, *Coming Home: The Experience of Enlightenment In Sacred Traditions*, the opening chapter is entitled *Contemplative Thinking: The European and Asian Approaches of Heidegger and Krishnamurti*.

This is a much more comprehensive commentary than my piece on Heidegger and Harding but the author uses the same Heidegger work, *Conversation on a Country Path*, to demonstrate the distinction between calculative and contemplative thinking and what is involved in enabling the necessary shift from the former to the latter, finally drawing on examples from Krishnamurti's *Commentaries on Living* to show how Krishnamurti dealt with this question.

Hixon uses the metaphor of light as truth, as a guide to understanding the message of Heidegger's country path. He takes the stained-glass windows of a cathedral to illustrate how light is transformed by the shapes and colours into representative images and how we tend to become enamoured of the representations and forget about the light. Thus, we become immersed in the teachings of Mohammed, Moses, Jesus, Krishnamurti and all, not to mention the extras their followers paste in, and completely overlook what these seers have seen and ask us to see for ourselves, the light itself.

He concludes the chapter with a classic Krishnamurti story. A serious seeker comes to Krishnamurti and courageously admits, after listening to a series of Krishnamurti's talks, that his many years of meditation have been wasted and the wonderful shifts in consciousness he experienced from time to time have simply been projections of his own ideas about what is necessary.

Krishnamurti points out that it is not about reaching some imagined goal but of revealing what is already the case. Heidegger talks about this in terms of waiting, not waiting *for* but a non-willing waiting, a waiting *on*. Krishnamurti's version is choiceless awareness. In both cases it is something like alert non-doing and not knowing, an awakening into Heidegger's *gelassenheit*, Harding's '*aware space here*', Shakespeare's *glassy essence*, Traherne's *capacitie*, etc.

The devotee listens to this and then asks, 'so what should I do to achieve this?' Sadly, he is already back on the wrong track of calculative thinking.

<http://www.alpheus.org/tsclass/Contemplative-Thinking.pdf>
Lex Hixon, *Coming Home: The Experience of Enlightenment in Sacred Traditions* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1989),
1-24 Chapter One: Contemplative Thinking: The European
and Asian Approaches of Heidegger and Krishnamurti

Gegnet—That which regions.

Horizon as the space in which we represent the objects around us. The horizon before us is only the side facing us. The side facing us of an openness all around us involves three elements: objects, the horizon and that which lets the horizon be. That which lets the horizon be, the openness all around us, the region of all regions. This

is called Gegnet—the truth of Being. Gegnet is the essential movement that relates and determines the relation to Dasein. (Being in the world)

Comment: I prefer Being as the world. Both Heidegger and Harding use the word 'region' in similar if not exactly the same way. Heidegger to communicate the various manifestations of Being, Harding to reveal the different levels of Being.

It lets everything merge in its own resting. Where everything belonging there returns to that in which it rests.

Comment: Sounds like Sunyata.

Heidegger refers to that which regions, Gegnet, as 'source'. Harding calls it 'the aware space here', Traherne uses 'Capacitie', the openness that holds the 'fillings'.

Technology generates a fussiness about beings at the expense of any reflection on source. ...This is homelessness, since it is precisely this 'source' which in the deepest sense is man's home. Heidegger understood Being as 'source' which in its 'self-blossoming' is responsible for anything coming into the open where it can be encountered by human beings, but which itself remains 'forgotten' or concealed.

Gelassenheit (Waiting upon?)

This is a condition which is completely open to Being's governance. It involves turning away from man towards man's essence and could be expressed as surrender to Meditative thinking in which the traditional concept of thought as representing and, consequently, willing are let go, together with the notion of subjectivism: thinker, willer, self. This action, summarized as non-willing, allows Gelassenheit to wake up —it enables us to let ourselves in. Gelassenheit is THE relation to Gegnet.

Comment: More like an awakening as Being, an awakening to what we really are, as demonstrated in all the experiments.

Letting oneself be called forth and resolving to let this happen results in in-dwelling which Heidegger, in Being and Time, also refers to as 'existence'. Requiring in-standing, standing in care which we might call mindfulness.

Comment: The first-person perspective opens us to Gelassenheit, the experiments provide what Heidegger calls effective effort by, instead of a roundabout country wander, turns us around immediately to see what we really are. (Eckhart talks of Gelâzenheit involving a letting go of images of God and of self. Eckhart)

Heidegger: Thinking is no longer representing. Thinking becomes "coming into the nearness of distance".

Comment: I wonder why he doesn't say 'thinking is now awareness?'

This apparent passivity is a form of 'higher acting' letting us in to Gelassenheit.

An awaiting without expectation upon the as yet unknown. Waiting free of the task of weaning, of needing to arrive at a result of letting go. Not waiting for but waiting upon. Gelassenheit as "higher acting" is further determined in the dialogue as "waiting" [warten]. As Heidegger affirms, what can be done to glimpse Gelassenheit is to actually do nothing but "wait," "we are to do nothing but wait"

Uncertainty about all this is a good sign, it indicates the necessary openness.

The subject of our last meeting was 'Heidegger and Harding'. I'd realised there were a number of points in their respective philosophies at which they come surprisingly close to one another. I recently found the following Heidegger quotation which prompted

me to look more carefully at their meeting points: "*To live authentically is to live in the full awareness of the nothingness of one's self.*" I used Heidegger's *Conversation on a Country Path* to explain what I thought about the correspondence between the pair and as the opening to our usual dialogue.

Heidegger's *Conversation on a Country Path* is a parable in which three men, a scholar, a scientist and a teacher explore the possibility that truth may require a more comprehensive approach than is available through traditional philosophy. The choice of the path as metaphor reminds me of the many paths to realization, Zen, Advaita, Krishnamurti, the mystics of all traditions, etc., etc. Heidegger offers 'meditative' thinking as a necessary correction to the everyday 'calculative' thinking which, he reminds us, has become our dominant mode of being.

The three walkers, with the teacher as a wise prompt, arrive at various conclusions, which will be familiar to us as fairly typical of the perennial philosophy, and which can be demonstrated by the Harding experiments. The country path conversation explores the possibility of becoming free from our familiar technological habituation of thought, explanation and concept thus leading us into a more peaceful environment and finally to arrive home at where we truly belong. Somewhere else, Heidegger describes philosophy as inspired by *homesickness*, the urge to come back to where we truly belong. He talks about this destination as *Gelassenheit*, the essence of thinking, which provides different and a more radical insight into who we are.

Comment: This is an interesting parallel with Douglas Harding's insistence of finding out "what we really, really are", another way of understanding the perennial philosophy which assumes an incomplete apprehension of our true being, a habitual overlooking of first nature.

In explaining how I intended to present my case I reported that at a recent meeting of our men's group one of our members mentioned that at a recent concert he had suddenly felt that he was somehow absent and that the music was all there was. This brought to mind the Eliot quotation: "...or music heard so deeply / That it is not heard at all, / but you are the music/ While the music lasts"— and it was exactly such moments that set me off on my particular path of enquiry. Searching around for explanation of such experiences I stumbled on Ken Wilber's early writings from which I now quote the following:

In unity consciousness, in no-boundary awareness, the sense of self expands to totally include everything once thought to be not-self. One's sense of identity shifts to the entire universe, to all worlds, high or low, manifest or unmanifest, sacred or profane. And obviously this cannot occur as long as the primary boundary, which separates the self from the universe, is mistaken as real. But once the primary boundary is understood to be illusory, one's sense of self envelops the All—there is then no longer anything outside of oneself, and so nowhere to draw any sort of boundary. Thus, if we can at all begin to see through the primary boundary, the sense of unity consciousness will not be far from us.

From the foregoing it's too easy to jump to the erroneous conclusion that all we have to do to usher in unity consciousness is destroy the primary boundary. In a crude sense that is true, but the situation is actually much, much simpler than that. We really don't have to go to the trouble of trying to destroy the primary boundary, and for an extremely simple reason: the primary boundary doesn't exist.

It only seems to exist. We pretend it exists, we assume it exists, we behave in every way as if it exists. But it does not. And if we now go in search of the primary boundary, we will not find a trace of it, for ghosts leave no shadows. Right now, and I mean right while you're reading this, there is no real primary boundary, and so right now, there is no real barrier to unity consciousness.

In 1987 I bought a paperback copy of *Discourse on Thinking* which comprises three sections. The final section is *Conversation on a Country Path* (referred to previously) and the first two sections of the book provide commentary on the conversation. I'm not sure what prompted me to buy the book, four years before I met Douglas Harding, but I must have recognized correspondence between the Heidegger essay and the Harding article 'On Having No Head' I read about that time. That too, triggered an intuitive 'yes' but without a realisation of why such a strong affirmative response.

In preparing these notes I found an article on *Gelassenheit* by *Barbara delle Pezze* particularly helpful in unravelling Heidegger's meaning and I have extracted from her paper what I think are the main points and added my Comments on why they correspond with Harding and how the Harding experiments reveal the actuality of what is being pointed to by the trio on the walk. Extracts from the *delle Pezze* paper, sometimes mixed with my additions, are shown in italics from this point. I have inserted notes on direct parallels with Harding and marked these inserts as 'Comment'.

The most important area in which the Heidegger and Harding stories correspond is in their conviction that we have to go beyond conceptual representation into actual experience to understand our essential being; to make the shift which discloses first as well as second nature. At the meeting we tried the pointing finger experiment to see if we could at least see, if not agree, about what was looking. For those who sense there might be something in these

'simple instruments' but not convinced I suggest they try Sam Harris's version. Now to the Heidegger essay, there is deliberate uncertainty in the account of the walk and the contributions of the three participants are less important than the combined effect of their dialogue in breaking our traditional patterns of thought. The process of the exchange involves giving priority to the process above individual contributions, in much the same manner as Bohmian dialogue.

We can say that, as every moment of the dialogue, what we are looking for is already showing itself, and investigation itself is already an experience of it.

This reminded me of Sam Blight's rendering of this principle: 'We awaken when we realize that what we are looking for is what we are looking out of'.

Releasement

The necessary action involves what Heidegger calls releasement. Releasement requires the adoption of a stance of letting go of, releasement from, the familiar perspective of things and of calculative thing.

This releasement must be combined with an openness to the mystery, the mystery being whatever might be hidden from us by our habitual mindset. If we are able to do this, we are enabled to inhabit the world in a totally different way.

Comment: In the case of the experiments, releasement is a necessary condition to enable the perspective of boundlessness. If I insist on what I know, for example, giving priority to the knowledge I have about my head I will not admit what is actually SEEN. Awareness remains bound by and not released from second nature.

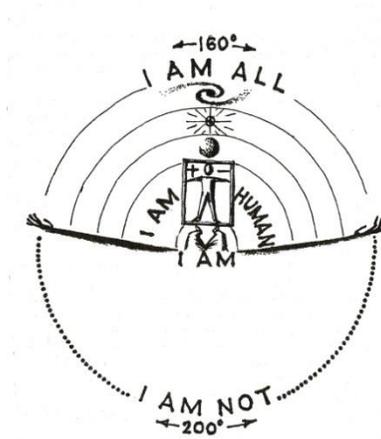
Meditative thinking

Man is quite capable of Meditative thinking but is also in flight from it, somehow, we manage to lose what needs to be re-awakened. This reawakening rarely happens spontaneously, it does not just happen by itself, it requires effort, but the sort of effort involved is more like the farmer waiting for the seed to come up and ripen. It keeps us focused on reality and is the essence of thinking. Without Meditative thinking we become uprooted from ourselves.

Dialogue

Unfolding meaning in the space between thoughts and participants. Receptiveness and bracketing creating the possibility of new paths, of something new arising. The swinging between the participants' input during in the Conversation walk creates the opportunity for Gelassenheit to come about.

Comment: A version of two-way looking and how similar this to Douglas's point that how we describe ourselves depends upon the level at which we choose to rest. The onion diagram.



Turning back to which, we belong, in so doing allowing to be our innermost being, to be Da-sein. In this relation, and just in this

relation, the human being can be fully himself. When we think in terms of representing, we belong to Gegnet, in that, as ‘thinking beings’, we remain in that horizon which is but the side of Gegnet that “is turned toward our representing. That-which-regions surrounds us and reveals itself to us as the horizon”.

Comment: How much simpler to see this as first and third person perspectives. When we remain identified with second nature, we are trapped in the unawareness of our first nature as, in Heideggerian terms, ‘that which regions.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Donald Ingram Smith & Meher Baba

This is the Wikipedia entry for Meher Baba:

25 February 1894 – 31 January 1969), born Merwan Sheriar Irani, was a spiritual master who said he was the Avatar, God in human form.

Merwan Sheriar Irani was born in 1894 in Pune, India to Irani Zoroastrian parents. At the age of 19, he began a seven-year spiritual transformation. During this time, he contacted five spiritual masters before beginning his own mission and gathering his own disciples in early 1922, at the age of 27. From 10 July 1925 to the end of his life, Meher Baba maintained silence, communicating by means of an alphabet board or by unique hand gestures. With his mandali (circle of disciples), he spent long periods in seclusion, during which time he often fasted. He also travelled widely, held public gatherings and engaged in works of charity with lepers, the poor and the mentally ill.

Donald Ingram Smith, (1912–2006) at one stage of his life, worked for the ABC and headed an interview programme called Scope. He interviewed most of the 'important' visitors to Australia and, long before I knew him personally Margot and I were regular listeners to his weekly programme. He told me he once interviewed Meher Baba on his arrival in Sydney—sometime, I think, in the early sixties. He wasn't aware that Meher Baba's vow of silence applied in all situations and that even when confronted with a microphone the sage would not falter in his commitment. So, how does the enterprising interviewer manage a situation like that? Donald explained that Meher Baba had an assistant to whom he could direct his questions and, for an initial period, the assistant would say what the sage

himself would have said had he been free to speak. However, even this arrangement was available for only a few minutes before the process fell into total silence. Somehow, Meher Baba indicated, presumably by sign language, that Donald was to continue with his questioning even though there would not be a verbal response. To his credit, Donald persisted and asked a couple of the questions with which he'd come prepared. He would ask the question, and then wait in the silence, all the while gazing into the luminous eyes of the visitor. After a while, the penny dropped. He realised that the question was being redirected to its source, the only place where it could be truly resolved. This silent dialogue continued for some time and Donald told me that he found it a very valuable lesson. I didn't ask him whether he put the interview to air.

Considering this in the light of our foregoing commentaries on Krishnamurti and the three scientists I think there is a lesson here for them. (This contribution to the NOWletter followed a dialogue about an occasion when we had watched a video record of Krishnamurti in dialogue with three scientists). Krishnamurti was keen to point out that no method would work, that it is not a matter of the egoic me knowing or doing things differently. However, he seems to have been oblivious to the fact that others, realising there is nothing that the individual can do from within the field, had found a 'way' by restoring their fundamental perspective—our field-free being.

My particular angle on this, and the language I find easiest to live with, is to consider the field in which Krishnamurti says I am entrapped to be my second nature, the accumulation of knowledge, what I know, and the lifelong development of my 'self', this is the fence that makes the field a field and the self a self. To flog this analogy to death—the trouble is that the field, or paddock, thinks it is the farm. The point of the search, the enquiry and the foregoing

dialogue of the three scientists with Krishnamurti is to disclose the farm, our first nature. What is already the case but obscured by deep identification with second nature.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

description of boundless capacity at centre as revealed by the headless experiments. However, I have been wondering whether the first person plural present tense is an equally accurate description of what the experiments are pointing to. In fact, there are a number of the experiments which focus on the collective or shared aspect of our capacity. Traherne's way of expressing this: *You never enjoy the world aright...etc., till you perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so, because men are in it who are every one sole heirs as well as you.*

This led me to consider whether the familiar target of spiritual teachings, that is the replacement of the assumed 'I' with an understanding of the I as process rather than entity, is missing something. Perhaps I have been softened up by my labours with the mountains and waters exercise, but it seems that the usual identification of myself as an independent, completely separate entity can be replaced by an equally concrete identification with my 'self as a particular and separate process.

I pondered the possibility of a solution to this difficulty and it seemed to me that the way out of the trap would be to consider the context in which whatever level of identification I happen to be holding arises. Thus, it could be said that the sense of I (1st person singular) arises in a context of the we (1st person plural), and the we in the context of the All (creation), which in turn arises from the inconceivable nothing for which there is no possible label. Apprehension of the total process offering a means of thwarting any intermediate level identification and thereby arriving at what I think Gebser means by his 'aperspectival'.

So, if identification is necessary at all it may be identification with the total process of being, a perspective which sees the All as the emanation of No-thing, the We as an emanation of the All and the me an emanation of the We.

Mary Adams talk concluded with consideration of where our evolving consciousness might be leading and what is the necessary action at the individual level. When confronted with this question I tend to respond with ideas about good works of one kind or another or of reducing my ecological footprint and so forth, but these are really secondary considerations. The first must be to understand what I am, to see what I really am. This comes across as a rather passive response to the problems that face us but the notion that to see clearly is the critical first step is a theme running through many philosophical, spiritual and religious traditions, one variation being 'love god and do what you will'.

That Being Greatest which doth nothing seem
Why, 'twas my all, I nothing did esteem
But that alone. A strange mysterious Sphere.
A deep Abyss
That sees and is.

Traherne

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Death

Driving to Glen Davis on 9th March 2014, on the road after the Capertee turn off. Bright sunshine, blue sky, sandstone cliffs and clouds. I was wondering about death; what dies? Is it simply death of the hyper-active ME? And suddenly there it was a flash of seeing, of release.



How could this type of seeing ever be represented let alone captured by words? The closest being perhaps John Wren-Lewis's attempt to describe his lived experience as 'the universe John Wren-Lewis', and death simply as cessation of the John Wren-Lewis.

My experience on the road to Glen Davis would be better described as the realization of Being and a momentary death of that deep identification as Alan, the separate self, this brief cessation resulting in a revelation of Being as 'bright sunshine, blue sky, sandstone cliffs and clouds'— an Alan-free awareness. Death as what is when the Alan-ing ceases. The question then arises as to whether the Alan-ing can stop before death of the body. It seems that this question cannot be resolved at the third person level, the perspective from which it appears to be meaningful and from which it can be put. It can only be

resolved from the perspective of its resolution, the level at which it is meaningless.

So, is this level accessible, isn't this the headless perspective? Possibly, but there is a danger that the experiments do not result in a complete shift of perspective. In breaking the spell of the belief that I am what I look like they reveal the boundless space here and thus let go the me, the self-image or sense of self through which the world is filtered.

But if I now think the experiments have freed ME, well clearly, I've missed the point. I have merely replaced the old me, my former self-image with this newly acquired notion that I am 'aware space here', I have taken only half a step backward and not completed the process.

Is it possible for the aware space here to be me-free? And is that death—the perspective of eternity?

I came upon the following quote in March 2019. I had made a note of it without recording the source. It is by Antony Dimasio.

Anna what dies is the ending of me/Me no more-
nothing/The ending of me is also/The ending of time/The
ending of time opens the door to eternity/Is it possible to
enter eternity/Mistaken identify hides us from death/Seeing
our nothing is what/Vanquishes death/Because what we
thought of As our ending Is also our beginning What '
survives' what goes on? / This/ Which is simply what is free
of interpretation and my explanations/This body and it's
memories no more/This particular manifestation ends/But
that of which it is an expression is unchanged/Perspective
and identification/Perspective observer Identification
participant ---we get them mixed up.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Theology

Religion as Metaphor by David Tacey

In the first flush of enthusiasm on seeing what the Harding experiments revealed I said to Douglas "This method is just what the church needs to re-vitalise itself". Douglas replied that he thought the clergy the least likely to get the point. In his book *The Trial of the Man Who Said He Was God* he quotes Carl Jung to the effect that the church is the custodian of a mystery it no longer understands. David Tacey makes plain the reason for this forgetting; we mistake metaphors for the truths they represent, and then tie ourselves in knots trying to validate our representations as facts.

There are reviews for this book on the Amazon page at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Religion-Metaphor-Beyond-Literal-Belief/dp/1412856108> .

This is not another review, just a summary of the points I thought particularly interesting.

The book opens with a personal introduction by the author describing his churchgoing family and how he went along with commitment to traditional Christian teaching until his early teens when he began to question the simple faith in which he had been reared. His sister pointed out to him that religion was mythological and to her, as to most others, that meant it must be false. He did not feel this was right at the time but was unsure about how to respond. The book explains what he came to understand as the necessary response, which is largely to undermine this assumption of falsity and to present the case for recovering a respect for myth and metaphor. This reminded me of my own rejection of Christianity as a teenager and how I engaged in atheistic argument with the enthusiasm of a would-be Richard Dawkins whenever an opportunity arose. I imagine the

problem of taking the metaphors literally applies to most if not all traditions, the examples used in this argument are mainly Christian examples which make it particularly relevant to my interests and experience.

David Tracey explains that for him "... Jesus existed as a historical figure, but most of the representations of his life and ministry are mythological. He writes, ' I do not believe that the recognition of the mythical dimension leads to atheism, scepticism, and nihilism. In fact, I think quite the opposite; the acceptance of myth leads to a deepening of faith and a profound appreciation of what the biblical writers were trying to express". And later he quotes Keats:

Jesus was so great a man that though he transmitted no writing of his own to posterity, we have his mind and his sayings and his greatness handed to us by others. It is to be lamented that the history of Jesus was written and revised by men interested in the pious frauds of religion. Yet through all this I see his splendour.

On page 30 he includes this quotation from Alvin Kuhn:

... religious myths are fables of events which, as events, never happened. The aim was never at any time to deceive anybody. It was never imagined that anybody would ever 'believe' them. Nevertheless, the myth was designed to tell truth of the last importance. Its instrument was fancy, but its purpose was not falsehood but sublime truth. Outwardly it was not true, but at the same time it portrayed full truth. It was not true for its 'characters', but it was true for all mankind. It was only a myth, but it was a myth of something. It used a false story to relate a true one. While it had never happened, it is the type of all things that have happened and will happen.

David Tacey is, amongst other things, a Jung scholar so the use of Douglas's quotation at the beginning of my notes is doubly appropriate, and on page 74 there is an interesting comment on Atman which is also relevant to our recent discussions of Advaita. He writes:

"Jung used the idea of the Atman as a model for his concept of the Self, as supraordinate entity in the psyche that extends into the nether reaches of the soul, beyond the confines of ego consciousness. Jung has been criticised by theologians for 'divinising' the self, thus producing what they claim is a religion of narcissism and the deification of the ego. This is strongly evident in the Vatican's recent attack on Jung's work. But Jung is not thinking along Western lines in his concept of the Self, and the theological criticism he has received is ignorant of his Eastern sources, where Atman is not the same as ego. The Atman is the 'place' in the soul where time and eternity meet."

I was very pleased to see this as this particular 'place' is exactly what is made plain and directly apprehended in the Harding experiments.

Chapter 6 is entitled *Waking Up* in which Jesus is identified as a spiritual master rather than as a messiah or redeemer and the 'waking up' is awakening to an overlooked universal interiority rather than some remote possibility and to which we are pointed in Luke 17:20.

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, the kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

I think I have to qualify the word observation by replacing it with what I believe is intended, that is 'outward observation'. Tacey continues on p113:

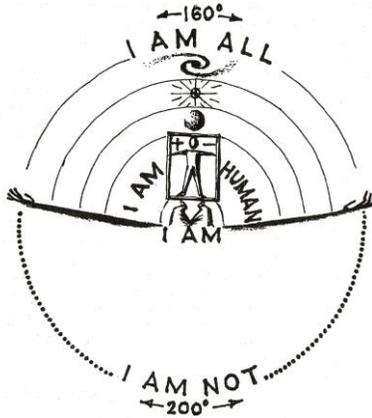
The experience of the kingdom, the new self, or Christ is an awakening to another authority in the personality that was present but not discerned. The mystery of the new self is that it was already present, that the ego in its sleep, was unable to register it. The ego cannot see it, which I assume is the real meaning of the miracles in which Jesus enables the blind to *see*.

"It is often claimed that the "seeing" of the kingdom is what brings the possibility of eternal life to followers of Jesus. I can only assume this means that when one enters into the region of the new self, one participates in its life beyond time and space. The ego exists in time, and disappears, we assume, at the point of death. If we die as ego there is perhaps nothing left, no trace or essence remaining. But if we have made landfall in the kingdom, we have an afterlife in the sense that our existence has impacted on the eternal and cannot be fully erased. The new self has its roots in archetypal reality, and although it incarnates in this world it has dominion beyond it. The new self is a luminal reality that acts as a bridge between eternity and time and can only be described by paradox and riddles".

It is helpful to consider the experiments in this context and even more so in the turn-around comments that follow.

p124. "In initiation, something is revealed to the ego that has not been imagined before. Metanoia can also mean 'to turn

around', to face what has not yet been seen, what has not been considered.



(The drawing and this note are my inserts. The diagram shows, at the rear of the outstretched arms that which is normally overlooked and left out of our everyday account— the eternal).

"The moralistic interpretation of Metanoia is an aberration in the history of religion. What Jesus is calling for is a transformation of the person, and induction into the spirit. He is saying: 'see things from the perspective of the soul and respect its need for spirit'. His call is not for good behaviour, but rebirth. Where Christianity went wrong was in reading rebirth as an act of the ego: it called on the ego to transcend itself. This is not possible, which is why Christianity has not lived up to the promise of Jesus.

Chapter 9 is headed-- Resurrection: Ascending to Where? On page 171 David Tacey says: "Joseph Campbell has the gift of plain speaking and puts the resurrection conundrum in simple terms. If, he says, the meaning of the resurrection is to be found in literal terms we are forced to reject it, as it does not make sense".

This is followed by the following Joseph Campbell quotations:

A metaphor is an image that suggests something else. For example, Jesus ascended to heaven. The denotation would seem to be that somebody ascended to the sky. That's literally what is being said. But if that were really the meaning of the message, then we have to throw it away, because there would have been no such place for Jesus literally to go. We know that Jesus could not have ascended to heaven because there is no physical heaven anywhere in the universe. Even ascending at the speed of light, Jesus would still be in the galaxy. Astronomy and physics are simply eliminated that as a literal, physical impossibility.

... If you read 'Jesus ascended into heaven' in terms of its metaphoric connotation, you see that he has gone inward—not into outer space but into inward space to the place from which all being comes, into the consciousness that is the source of all things, the kingdom of heaven within. The images are outward, but their reflection is inward. It is a metaphor of returning to the source, alpha and omega, of leaving the fixation on the body behind and going to the body, your dynamic source.

Tacey refers on page 83 to the resurrection story about the appearance of Jesus to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and followed by his subsequent dis-appearance 'when their eyes were opened'. This as a metaphor for, in my view, the revelation of what could be spoken of as opening our awareness to 'God with us'. He says on page 183 that the Emmaus parable acts as the prototype of awakening. 'We are walking on the path of life and do not recognise God is at our side as we journey along. We have the assistance of scripture, but it alone does not open our eyes. The scriptures are

inspired narratives, but do not always transform us. Something more is needed; in order to bring out Metanoia or rebirth a tradition has to be converted from external message to internal realisation'.

And on P184, ...Once this deeper dimension is understood, the need for a literal reading of the narrative falls away, and we are left with the truth.

My only complaint is in Tacey's interpretation of Matthew 18.3

Verily I say unto you, except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. The author interprets this to mean that unless a child-like understanding is applied whereas I think it is a matter of restoring our child-like seeing.

Speaking of the value of and need for myth for which he provides some very helpful references he says on page 229:

The task of interpretation is to update the mysteries by relating them to contemporary life, thus maintaining the link between eternity and time present and past. But of crucial importance is that the return to myth cannot be return to supernaturalism. It can only involve a rediscovery of the spiritual as an unseen dimension of the natural.

I think that point about it being a matter of the natural rather than super-natural is a critical point. A matter of the natural made plain.

I copied this paragraph from his concluding comments:

"Heretical or not, we are moving into a new understanding of religion. ... We can no longer afford to take the gospels literally, as this freezes their meaning in time and prevents us from seeing the coming of the kingdom as a personal event. The gospels speak to us about our present condition and not merely to the ancient past. The metaphorical approach

ensures that the personal dimension is not siphoned off into historical positivism. Theologian Karl Rhaner said, 'the future Christian will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all'. The best way to ensure that people become mystics is to learn the language of metaphor and symbol, because they will then see that the symbols point to themselves, to the interior of their lives. p237.

On p243 he mentions Jung's reference to the requirement for a limitless range and unfathomable depth of vision and goes on to say:

"Perhaps we might ask where this 'limitless range and depth of vision' are to come from. I cannot see such a range or vision on the current religious horizon, but it is unfolding in contemporary science, philosophy and psychology. The idea that the interior self is an eye destined to behold the light has been kept from us, withheld from knowledge. We have to win this back, claim it as our own, and if guides are not available in the religious institutions, we have to search for them in new areas, including the mystical traditions of East and West".

I started this note with a quotation by Douglas Harding and I think it's fitting to conclude with the suggestion that the best place to start to address the challenge of that final paragraph would be to adopt Harding's science of the first person as the most practical way of dissolving the imagined but powerful chasm between the spiritual and the scientific, the natural and the so-called supernatural, the physical and metaphysical.

It would be wrong to think of all Christians as locked into a dream of literal interpretation but certainly the majority seem to be dedicated to the belief in the stories as fact rather than metaphor. I go back to

my Anglican friend of the 17th century who, aware of this state of affairs, said:

Once more we will distinguish of Christians. There are Christians that place and desire all their happiness in another life, and there is another sort of Christians that desire happiness in this. ...Whether the first sort be Christians indeed, look you to that. They have much to say for themselves.

Traherne—Centuries 4/9

I thought it an excellent book but wondered why, in addition to the metaphors of the stories and parables, the author had not considered Christianity itself as a meta-metaphor pointing to the demise of the transcendent God and its resurrection as immanence.

Giles Fraser on Fry's God

The following extract is the concluding paragraph of an article in the Guardian in which Fraser deals with Stephen Fry's rather fierce denial of God. It is entitled *I don't believe in the God that Stephen Fry doesn't believe in either*.

...The other problem with Fry's argument is philosophical. Simply put, there is no such thing as the God he imagines. It is the flying teapot orbiting a distant planet about which nothing can be said. Such a God doesn't exist. Nilch. Nada. It's a nonsense. Indeed, as no less an authority than Thomas Aquinas rightly insists, existence itself is a questionable predicate to use of God. For God is the story of human dreams and fears. God is the shape we try to make of our lives. God is the name of the respect we owe the planet. God is the poetry of our lives. Of course, this is real. Frighteningly real. Real enough to live and die for even. But this is not the same as saying that God is a command and control astronaut responsible for some wicked hunger game experiment on planet earth. Such a being does

not exist. And for the precisely the reasons Fry expounds, thank God for that.

Read the complete article and many others of interest at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/02/stephen-fry-god-christianity-evil-maniac>

Through Atheism to Anatheism by Dave Knowles

By 2014 I was beginning to feel like openly admitting being an atheist, even though I still inclined towards various transpersonal ideas, could not give up on spirituality completely and found Dawkins a little strident for my taste and unable to consider anything beyond scientific rationality. I collected a number of atheist works and read them with interest, particularly Christopher Hitchens' compendium of writings in *The Portable Atheist*. It was in this state I encountered while browsing in Dymocks a book called *50 Great Myths about Atheism* by two philosophers, Russell Blackford (Australian) & Udo Schüklenk (Canadian). The comments on the back intrigued me, particularly one by Peter Singer that read, "With humour, wisdom, and sound philosophy, Blackford and Schüklenk dismantle 50 important myths about atheism. In doing so, they have done atheists and religious believers a great service, for putting aside the myths enables us to see where real differences remain."

I was also intrigued by some of the myths selected by the authors like: Myth 8, No Atheist Believes in Anything Supernatural and Myth 24, If There is no God We are Soulless Creatures

As I started to read it at home I promoted the book to my men's group (most of them being religious believers) saying, "If you want to enjoy some clear philosophical writing that will really invigorate your

brain, this book will supply it.” I added, “I am also looking forward to the final historical review of Part 9 - The Rise of Modern Atheism. I will hopefully be finding a way to reconcile my interests in Advaita Vedanta and in a Universal Consciousness with my nominal state of Atheism and my (academic?) interests in religion.”

When I had finished reading I agreed wholeheartedly with Peter Singer’s comment on the cover.

My review was well received by the men’s group with one member ordering the book immediately and an intriguing reply coming in from another (an ordained priest): “Have you caught up with Anatheism yet? There is an excellent book by that title by Richard Kearney. Well worth a look.” Not having heard of anatheism before, I resorted to Amazon finding its subtitle of *Returning to God after God*, mentions of “sacred secularity”, Merleau-Ponty, epiphanies, and James Joyce, all of which piqued my interest enormously, so I purchased the book and started reading.

So, what did I find?

Well initially the talk of wagers of faith and of hospitality to the (sacred) stranger left me a little adrift although I could see Kearney’s logic of wanting to find a third option to dogmatic theism and militant atheism (“the polar opposites of certainty that have maimed so many minds”). Kearney talks more about “the Wager”, delineating five main movements in the anatheist wager: imagination, humour, commitment, discernment, and hospitality. I read this with interest but without deep connection to the ideas. However, when Kearney, in his fourth chapter, “In the Flesh,” “deals with a sacramental experience of the everyday as adumbrated by contemporary philosophers like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Julia Kristeva,” he really grabbed my attention! I have long been fascinated by Phenomenology but also frustrated by my inability to fully grasp the epoché, its main instrument. (See my other writings on this subject

and also earlier in this thread.) Kearney seemed to focus, through Merleau-Ponty, on those transpersonal aspects of phenomenology that had so appealed to me in my initial exposure and also through the admired writings on consciousness of Francisco Varela, who had introduced Merleau-Ponty to me.

When Kearney, in his fifth chapter, “In the Text,” applies “sacramental poetics” to an anatheist reading of three novelists—Joyce, Proust, and Woolf—“who retrieved sacred epiphanies at the heart of the ordinary universe” he struck another strong chord with me. I am a James Joyce enthusiast and have long found his work a rich source of the epiphanies that so appeal to me (Again - see my other writings on this subject and also earlier in this thread.)

His chapter on the hermeneutics of political action, covering controversies on the role of theism and atheism in matters of war and peace, democracy and violence, compassion and intolerance was readable as was his final chapter on three exemplary modern figures who, in his view, “refigure our understanding of faith by encountering the sacred at the heart of the secular world of action and suffering”: Dorothy Day, Jean Vanier, and Mahatma Gandhi.

But what spoke more resonantly was to be found in Kearney’s conclusion (“Welcoming Strange Gods”). Like, “The wise person, as Socrates taught, is one who seeks truth precisely because he “knows he does not know”; a teaching that, we noted, finds its anatheist equivalent in the famous *docta ignorantia* of Nicholas of Cusa. And, “Anatheism is not atheism then, but it does agree with enlightened atheism that the God of theodicy is dead”. To return again to the specifically Western context, anatheism embraces the Enlightenment critique of the triumphal deity who rules over his creatures and metes out punishment and plaudits. It concurs ... with the demythification of religion carried out by Nietzsche, Freud, and the postwar advocates

of religionless faith. And ... it endorses the spirit of the phenomenological epoché—the provisional suspension of inherited confessions and assumptions—not to enter some positivistic value-free zone but to attend more faithfully to the sacred “things themselves” in the midst of life. For, as phenomenologists remind us, what we leave outside the brackets of suspension we can gain back again a hundredfold after we return.”

The last paragraph of Kearney’s Epilogue has this, “... and wonder at the very strangeness of it all”. Indeed, it is perhaps fitting to end with wonder. For this the shared founding experience of the spiritual, the philosophic, and the poetic—the spiritual epiphany of welcoming, the philosophical *thaumazein* (“the wonder at what is”) of questioning, the poetic shudder of imagining ...”

Which leaves me to accept all my intimations of awakening as my way of perceiving the world, delighting in in it, and maybe finding something sacred in it.

Dave Knowles

Beyond Literal Belief



Salvator Mundi by Leonardo da Vinci

I think the crystal ball in the left hand is a version of my attempts to portray substantial absence or meaning-full emptiness. I don't know what Leonardo intended by this symbol, but I choose to think he also made the connection between the words of Jesus and the transparency of Christ.

The following verses from the New Testament catch the sense of a life lived more fully and then propose that perfection in the sense of completeness is close-by and already the case.

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. John 10:10 (KJV)

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Matthew 4:17 (KJV)

Repent: Metanoia change of consciousness

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: 21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. Luke 17:20-21 (KJV)

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect. Matthew 5:48(KJV)

There an interesting book by John Shelby Spong which offers a reading of the Gospel of John on the basis of Christ as a Jewish mystic rather than a divine messenger. *The Fourth Gospel: Tales of a Jewish Mystic*.

Heart warming

“My Heart was strangely warmed”. At a recent meeting, over dinner at a Lebanese restaurant, two non-churchgoers admitted to being unaccountably moved when, for whatever reason, they find themselves in a church. As one of the people concerned I decided to find an explanation. It is probably to do with my early conditioning at a Methodist school, devout and loving grandparents, endless readings from the bible, etc. That is mere explanation, it doesn't handle the experience which seems to be direct and beyond any words. Poems sometimes have the same effect, for example, the George Herbert poem 'Love bade me welcome'. And speaking of Methodism one of the regular participants at our monthly meetings told us of something John Wesley wrote about his heart being strangely warmed at a service he attended in 1738. Maybe the cause of the warming may not have been the same for him, but his words convey the feeling.

My view of the Church is that it has lost its soul. Or at least in much of its public manifestations. Douglas had a good way of describing this. He said "the church is the custodian of a mystery it no longer comprehends" or something on those lines. Traherne seems to have experienced something of this. He was both an Anglican clergyman and a seer of what gives rise to his religion and its religious activities. There is the explanatory side, the bible and its creation myth, the story of the historical Jesus etc., this extends to the rituals which uphold the myth, give it continuity, etc, and that is largely the function of what we see as 'the church'. I am not a churchgoer as I don't feel it reflects what I understand as its 'truth'. On the other hand, the voluntary work and services provided by religious organisations can be seen as an expression of the mystery and I feel a bit guilty about not participating at that level.

Here are a couple of quotations from 'The Existential Theology of Nikos Kazantzakis by Howard F. Dosser, which I think relevant:

The ever-present danger is that we should invest our myths with reality and thus become entrapped in them. Perhaps this is what we have allowed to occur with respect to Christianity.
Howard Dosser.

I said to the almond tree, 'Sister, speak to me of God. And the almond tree blossomed.'
Nikos Kazantzakis

Traherne was enmeshed in this tradition and a daily practitioner of it but in his case, it was an expression of something he experienced directly. His view of God was not of some omnipotent creator but of life in act. God being all Act / His name is NOW, his nature is for ever.../ Whose bosom is the glass in which we everlasting see... etc. And he was anxious to draw our attention to 'Heaven Now' and critical of Christians who seek it hereafter. Anyone reading his Centuries of Meditations could reasonably conclude that he was some sort of heretic. What comes through most strongly in Traherne is his conviction that love is at the heart of things.

So, the answer to my question is that for me the surroundings of church, temple, certain writings can press the love button as it were, one falls in love, *into* love. Perhaps that is what the ritual, the surroundings, the community of interest, the fellowship is designed to do. I recently read the Bishop Spong book, *The Fourth gospel: Tales of a Jewish Mystic*, here is version of Jesus as he probably was, stripped of the divine attributes added by subsequent generations, and as William Blake indicated in a reply to someone who asked him

what he thought of Christ, he replied "he is the only God Sir, and so am I and so are you". So, I see Atheism as another belief system and consider God to be a matter of experience and not of belief.

I once asked a leading Trahernian cleric, on a visit to Hereford some years ago, a question about Traherne. There is a benediction which turns up two or three times in every Anglican service *May the blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom we live and move and have our being, be with us now and ever more. Amen.* I asked him whether he understood "that in whom we live and move and have our being" to be the same as Traherne refers to as *Capacitie ...no brims nor borders such as in a bowl we see my essence was Capacitie.* (And that is what Traherne's lengthy poem "My Spirit" is all about). He said he would think it over, but I never received a reply.

I was mightily cheered recently when David Loy, a prominent Buddhist scholar, chose not a Buddhist but Traherne as an example of how an awakened person sees the world. I reported on that in NOWletter 196.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

The Poets

I include in this section a selection of the poems I have found most relevant in pointing to the backward step or underlining its necessity or desirability.

Traherne, an extract from his poem *The Anticipation*

From everlasting he these joys did Need,
And all these Joys proceed
From him Eternally.
From Everlasting His felicitie
Compleat and Perfect was:
Whose Bosom is the Glass,
Wherin we all Things Everlasting See.
His name is NOW, his Nature is forever.
None Can his Creatures from their Maker Sever.

In this verse Traherne emphasises what we are looking out of, our seeing, *His throne is neer 'tis just before our face*. Leaving us to resolve whether he means before as 'in front of' or before as in 'prior to; perhaps both.

Shakespeare provides a variation on the Trahernian theme in measure for measure when Isabella says:

...Merciful heaven,
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Splits the unwedgeable and gnarlèd oak
Than the soft myrtle; but man, proud man,

Dress'd in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd—
His glassy essence—like an angry ape
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As makes the angels weep; who, with our spleens,
Would all themselves laugh mortal.

Measure for Measure Act 2 Scene 2

Rilke captures the sense of a fundamental engagement with the world which is forfeited by my deep identification with self as entity.

What birds plunge through is not the intimate space
in which you see all forms intensified.
(Out in the Open, you would be denied
your self would disappear into that vastness.)
Space reaches from us and construes the world:
to know a tree, in its true element,
throw inner space around it, from that pure
abundance in you. Surround it with restraint.
It has no limits. Not till it is held
in your renouncing is it truly there.

This poem came into my life at a poetry weekend. There was an exercise in which we all selected a book of poems from a large collection provided. We then in turn opened our books at random and read the poem that appeared on the page. This Rilke poem happened to be my chance selection. What was particularly interesting was that I had turned up rather late for this particular session and reason was that I had been struck, whilst wandering through the nearby woods, that my attention was always engaged with the objects around me and never with the space that surrounded

them. I had decided to pay more attention to space in future and then received the reinforcement of Rainer Maria Rilke.

Rami Shapiro is an American rabbi and poet:

I am a window for the Light;
our boundaries shatter as the Whole hugs its parts
a lens through which You see Yourself as me,
and through which I see myself as You
There is only One Reality,
the Singular Source and Substance of all Diversity...
Blessed is the One who manifests as the Many

When I am free from ancestors,
free from traditions,
free from truths, free from words,
free from thoughts,
free from even the need to be free
there is God and there I am not,
Blessed is the One at the heart of my emptiness.

Judith Wright—'Reading Thomas Traherne'

Can I then lose myself,
and losing find one word
that, in the face of what you were,
needs to be said or heard?
--Or speak of what has come
to your sad race
that to your clear rejoicing
we turn with such a face?

With such a face, Traherne,
as might make dumb
any but you, the man who knew
how simply truth may come:
who saw the depth of darkness
shake, part and move,
and from death' s centre the light' s ladder
go up from love to Love.

I thank Alan Gould for pointing out, in his essay *The Poet of Sudden Cloudbreak*, Wright's perception of Traherne's distinction between lower case love and upper-case Love. The latter I see as a consequence of the backward step. In taking that step the I is absorbed in Love.

A loss of something ever felt I-
The first that I could recollect
Bereft I was-of what I knew not
Too young that any should suspect

A Mourner walked among the children
I notwithstanding went about
As one bemoaning a Dominion
Itself the only Prince cast out-

Elder, Today, a session wiser
And fainter, too, as Wiseness is-
I find myself still softly searching
For my Delinquent Palaces-

And a Suspicion, like a Finger
Touches my Forehead now and then

That I am looking oppositely
For the site of the Kingdom of Heaven-

Emily Dickinson— Poem 959

This poem not only points to the sense of ‘something missing’ as the incentive to find the ‘missing’, whatever that might be, but also provides a clue to its discovery by indicating the correct direction of attention.

In his essay “The missing all”: William Franke points to the apophatic elements of her poetry.

The words the happy say
Are paltry melody
But those the silent feel
Are beautiful—

Speaking of the apophatic traditions Franke says:

In such traditions, the encounter, incommunicable registers of experience, with the inexpressible is marked by a backing off from language (apo—“away from” phasis—“speech” or “assertion”). Of course, this backing off is itself then registered in language, language that in various ways unsays itself.

This appealed to me as another reference to a backward movement offering a redirection of the instinctive forward movement.

Misty rain on Mount Lu,
And waves surging on the river Che;
When you have not yet been there,
Many a regret surely you have;
But once there and homeward you wend,

How matter of fact things look!
Misty rain on Mount Lu,
And waves surging on the river Che.

Su Tung-Po

Back-lit by low sun,
a magpie flicks mulch aside,
brings death to a millipede,
life to a fledgling.
Nothing seems separate:
neither magpie, soil, millipede,
nor eucalypt leaves
that sweep the sky.
Such moments are antithetical
to ecstasy. Perhaps they represent
transcendence in a curious way,
by highlighting the oneness
of terrestrial history.
A myriad-formed presence,
not fully translatable
to sense,
draws me back
to animal unity.
It returns me
to the moment,
to all that any creature
ever has.

James Charlton

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Wonder

Whoever is devoid of the capacity to wonder, whoever remains unmoved, whoever cannot contemplate or know the deep shudder of the soul in enchantment, might just as well be dead for he has already had closed his eyes upon life. Albert Einstein

At a recent meeting I talked about Zen in an attempt to explain my interest in matters of the spirit and in philosophy generally. I remember saying I was working on another self-published book, letters to my grandchildren. Some days later I received an email from one of our group telling me he'd found another book involving letters to grandchildren. It was *The Sunrise of Wonder* by Michael Mayne. The title is taken from an insight G. K. Chesterton describes in his autobiography:

At the back of our brains, so to speak, there is a forgotten blaze or burst of astonishment at our own existence. The object of the artistic and spiritual life is to dig for this sunrise of wonder.

I wondered how I'm to handle this theme in words, as wonder is far more concerned with experience than explanation. I have already received polite indications that in offering other people's expressions of wonder I am not really saying what wonder means to me, to which I reply that I have selected the words that I would like to have formulated myself, words that most closely match my own feeling of 'wonder' and describe as far as it is possible to say what wonder is. Hence the poetic examples which follow.

As to activating my sense of wonder it is often the scientists who have the knack, demonstrated by their revelations of the mysteries of life, the universe and everything. To illustrate this aspect of wonder I selected video animations by Drew Berry and others. I am currently

besotted by animations which provide a visual expression of the extraordinary complexity, organisation and order of the miniscule biological factories that keep me ticking.

https://www.ted.com/talks/drew_berry_animations_of_unseeable_biology#t-520574 <https://www.dnalc.org/resources/3d/central-dogma.html> 3 minutes

https://www.ted.com/talks/david_bolinsky_animates_a_cell A 9 minute TED talk

(In this last example David Bolinsky says something I found hard to wrap my mind round. He is speaking of the difficulty of understanding principles if you are not trained in the subject concerned and, in the case of mathematics, he says you see an anthropic ideal and that life had to evolve from the numbers that describe the universe).

I wish I had the mathematics to grasp that. I sometimes think that my love of explanation is a barrier to the experiencing of wonder and that this need for explanation, plus habit, is what makes that wonder so elusive. As far as explanation is concerned it is the poets I turn to.

I spent the best part of 50 years trying to get to the bottom of that sense of something missing, of something at the heart of things that my everyday mind ignores. Here are some of the best expressions of how it strikes me.

Wordsworth:

...And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,

And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear, —both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

This oft-quoted extract from *Lines written above Tintern Abbey* is one of the best expressions I have come across that captures the individual sensing of the undivided. Traherne asks “are you not drawn to some great thing?”

Rilke, at the end of 8th elegy
And we: onlookers, always, everywhere,
always looking into, never out of, everything.
It fills us. We arrange it. It collapses.
We arrange it again, and collapse ourselves.

Who has turned us round like this, so that,
whatever we do, we always have the aspect
of one who leaves? Just as they
will turn, stop, linger, for one last time,
on the last hill, that shows them all their valley -,
so we live, and are always taking leave.

Rilke very clearly understood the open perspective, the uninterrupted view, including what I’m looking out of as well as simply what I’m

looking at. Other examples of this insight in his work are *What Birds Plunge Through Is Not The Intimate Space* and *The Poet's Death*.

Traherne

My interest in Zen led me to read a book by R. H. Blyth entitled *Zen in English literature and the Oriental Classics*. This book, after my digging into a range of Eastern traditions in both their ancient and modern manifestations, led me back to my own tradition through the work of Thomas Traherne (1634-1675). He is the most ecstatic of my guides and the Buddhist scholar David Loy, in a chapter entitled '*How does an Awakened Person Perceive the World*' chose Traherne as the best example he can find of such a person.

There are so many examples of Traherne in full flight that it is hard to pick the best example. One of the most widely quoted is:

From *Centuries of Meditations* 3/3—The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold: the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things: The Men! O what venerable and reverend creatures did the aged seem! Immortal Cherubims! And young men glittering and sparkling Angels, and maids strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty! Boys and girls tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels. . . . Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day. . . something infinite behind everything appeared which talked with my expectation and moved my desire . . . etc.

Chesterton and Wallace Stevens.

Michael Mayne says in his book, *The Sunrise of Wonder*, ...For, as Chesterton knew, 'we have forgotten who and what we are, and art makes us remember what we have forgotten'. To illustrate this point he relates the story of Wallace Stevens, on seeing a Picasso painting, and then writing poem which includes these lines on the man with the blue guitar:

They said, "You have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are."
The man replied, "Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar."
And they said then, "But play, you must,
A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,
A tune upon the blue guitar
Of things exactly as they are."

I read this as underlining the difference between what I think things are and how they really are.

John Wren-Lewis was fond of Chesterton, and to my surprise I find that Zizek is another Chesterton fan. John was always quoting these two verses from the *Ballad of the White Horse*.

"I tell you naught for your comfort,
Yea, naught for your desire,
Save that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher."

"Night shall be thrice night over you,
And heaven an iron cope.
Do you have joy without a cause,
Yea, faith without a hope?"

An example of his opinion that wonder is not dependent on favourable conditions. He related how, after waking in hospital after his near-death experience, he was filled with gratitude and wonder, notwithstanding the basic and rather unsavoury conditions.

I think Emily Dickinson is one of the most helpful of the poets. Poem 1129

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant --
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise

As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind --

This leads me to ask the question, to what extent meditation is relevant to wonder, and what sort of meditation might be relevant? A future project.

We have been talking about this quotation from Emerson's essay Nature:

"We return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, -- no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite spaces, all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God."

Coincidentally, Andrew Hilton sent the following to me yesterday. It is an extract from a talk by Rabbi Rami Schapiro which, in turn, draws on a letter written by Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe:

"When my father asked me to direct the newer hasidim, he said to me, 'The right way to direct a Jew is to see him or her as a reflection of the primeval thought of Adam Kadmon.'"

"What does this mean? Adam Kadmon is the state of pure transparency in which the light of God flows through you without distortion. This is the rung of being we call 'Child.' On this rung the love between God and creation is unconditional; there is nothing that one needs to do other than to be. Yet the Child longs to descend into the world of action and the rung of Servant where it can carry out the will of God.

"Now, you might think that the rung of Child and the rung of Servant are separate, the former being higher than the latter. But this would be an error. Hence my father challenged me to see the Child in the Servant, that is to see that the Light of God so clearly present on the rung of Child is no less present on the rung of Servant; that being and doing are not separate but part of a single reality.

This has relevance to the Iain McGilchrist work as laid out in his book *The Master and His Emissary*.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Meditation

Metzinger's Kitchen. (This is a modified and slightly expanded version of the talk notes from the Greville Street meeting on 1st July 2018).

Thomas Metzinger is a German philosopher and professor of theoretical philosophy at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, and from what I have understood from listening to his talks he is a very secular oriented scientist and an unlikely source of anything that could be regarded as supporting views that involve mystical interpretations. This note is inspired by remarks he made whilst discussing meditation in an interview with Michael Taft on Deconstructing Yourself Podcasts— "Consciousness, Spirituality and Intellectual Honesty".

At 55 minutes into the tape. Metzinger says:

I was in a hurry and washing dishes, extreme hurry, had to clean kitchen and had to get into that car and get out. And while I was mindlessly washing dishes and was nervous and anxious I thought 'Oh hell! you haven't even done your evening meditation yet'. How am I going to fit that in, there's no time for it?' The moment I had that thought I suddenly realised the whole room is already meditating, the cupboard, the shelves, etc., the room—was meditating. It sounds very mystical —it isn't — but imagine if the room was meditating all the time and I was ignoring it by practising mindfulness.

I was impressed by his cheerful expression of what, on the surface, seems to be an absurd claim and intrigued by my reaction. This was a sense that he was saying something fundamentally true, suddenly alert to an aspect of being which is not normally accessible to everyday consciousness and, perhaps, meaningful only at the level

disclosed by the meditative mind. I knew Metzinger had been influenced to some extent by two of my favourite philosophers, Krishnamurti and Harding, so I decided to dig a bit deeper.

We have recently been looking at the poetry of Emily Dickinson who is reported to have said or written on one occasion, in an 1863 *letter* “*I was thinking, today – as I noticed, that the “Supernatural,” was only the Natural, disclosed, going on to add, – Not “Revelation” – ’tis – that waits, But our unfurnished eyes –*”...

And more to the point, in this case, her poem 1563:

By homely gift and hindered Words
The human heart is told
Of Nothing—
“Nothing” is the force
That renovates the World—

Here she is pointing, in my interpretation, both to the homeliness of Metzinger’s kitchen experience and the impossibility of adequately representing such experiences in words. As to the ‘nothing’, understanding of that also requires the meditative insight and Traherne claims in one of his poems “That greatest is which nothing seems”.

And in answer to the frequently asked question of what is the point? I answer—restoration of our first nature by rescuing it from the grip of our second nature, freeing the NOW from the trap of time or, simply, waking up.

Gebser. Gebser's thesis is encapsulated in the opening paragraph of the preface to his book *The Ever- Present Origin*.

Origin is ever-present. It is not a beginning, since all beginning is linked with time. And the present is not just the "now," today, the moment or a unit of time. It is ever-originating, an achievement of full integration and continuous renewal. Anyone able to "concretize," i.e., to realize and effect the reality of origin and the present in their entirety, supersedes "beginning" and "end" and the mere here and now.

What he describes in his final paragraph of the opening chapter as follows:

“Our concern is with a new reality – a reality functioning and effectual integrally, in which intensity and action, the effective and the effect co-exist; one where origin, by virtue of "presentation," blossoms forth anew; and one in which the present is all encompassing and entire. Integral reality is the world's transparency, a perceiving of the world as truth: a mutual perceiving and imparting of truth of the world and of man and of all that transluces both.

He has two other interesting neologisms ‘verition’ which I understand as ‘making true’ and ‘waring’ being the necessary contemplative state of mind which reveals what he considers the aim and which he describes as the ‘aperspectival’.

T. S. Eliot

Time past and time future
Allow but a little consciousness.
To be conscious is not to be in time
But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
Be remembered; involved with past and future.
Only through time is time conquered.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Capacitie and David Robert Loy

Loy is an American scholar, author and authorized teacher in the Sanbo Zen lineage of Japanese Zen Buddhism. In his article *How Does an Awakened Person Perceive the World?* David Loy chose as his exemplar, not a Buddhist, but a 17th Century Anglican clergyman, Thomas Traherne. Traherne's writing, in general, deals with the question of what follows from, or what is the point of, meditation but his poem *My Spirit* is a particularly comprehensive encapsulation of his work. See Appendix 1.

Meditation, for me, involves becoming aware of aspects of reality I normally overlook. It seems to boil down to seeing clearly or apprehending life in a more comprehensive way than is customary. Bob Adamson's signature question of "What's wrong with right NOW" implies that there is an accessible level of being where everything is fine or at least 'as it is' compared with my customary state of mind where, in Traherne's words, *I am out of frame*. Meditation, in my experience, is a matter of coming to grips with this 'I' which seems to be the problem. Effective meditation, as demonstrated in some of the examples I have given, dilutes the ego to the point of non-interference and recontextualises time as the content of consciousness rather than the field in which consciousness arises.

Actualise! — But how? The hypothesis is that meditation, in the sense of surrendering to what is, provides a transformation of consciousness and an awakening to a wider perspective than normally prevails. Looking longer might be a useful alternative to sitting with eyes closed.

On 16th October 1976 I tried meditating on a green pottery vase. After 10 minutes – I was very aware of the effect of light reflected from

glaze and the depth of glaze. (I had started to meditate on the vase when I noticed the carpet colour seemed unusually golden) A sense of depth to the pot I hadn't felt before, an unusual vividness of experiencing and a cause of gladness. I had a strong feeling of affection for the pot and a sudden sense that this feeling was being reciprocated or, rather, common to us both. I was thinking "what sentimental rubbish" when a thought came into my head, as in a dream and as of a person talking – it said, "no it is not it is love". Once revealed, examples of similar experiences start to appear:

Delmore Schwartz

If you look long enough at anything
It will become extremely interesting;
If you look very long at anything
It will become rich, manifold, fascinating:
If you can look at anything for long enough,
You will rejoice in the miracle of love,
You will possess and be blessed by the marvellous blinding
radiance of love, you will be radiance.

Sylvia Plath

A certain minor light may still
Leap incandescent
Out Of kitchen table or chair
As if a celestial burning took
Possession Of the most obtuse Objects
now and then—
Thus hallowing an interval
Otherwise inconsequent
By bestowing largesse, honour,
One might say love.

Emily Dickinson—Poem 1592

The lassitudes of contemplation
Beget a force
They are the spirit's still vacation
That him refresh -
The dreams consolidate in action -
What mettle fair

John Wren-Lewis— From NOWletter 144.

I wrote to John to confirm my understanding of what he had told me about how he experienced the world after his wake-up experience. I said, as a result of your NDE you experience all manifestation as a vibrating energy be it coffee tables, books, visitors or whatever. Furthermore, this energized 'glow' of so-called objective reality is reciprocal, there is a two-way apprehension, a mutuality of seer and seen.

He replied saying I hadn't got it quite right and a further entry in my diary reads:

...You (John W-L) told me later that you would not have used the words vibrating energy to describe your experiencing of the world. You said it was a much more gentle business, rather as though the world around is saying 'Hello' in an atmosphere of love. You then asked me how I would describe my own experiencing of what I thought to be similar events in my life. I found it to be quite beyond me at the time you asked the question. I was amazed at your choice of the words 'the world around is saying Hello', yet I understood what you were saying and how appropriate a description that is.

Examples:

Traherne is one of many people who've attempted to express the level of our being which can be uncovered by meditation, whether or not meditation is the word used to describe the necessary process. There are endless examples of this possibility and I list a few here:

Heidegger. "Existence is the being of those beings who stand open to the openness in which they stand by standing".

Heidegger also stresses the importance of 'waiting', not waiting *for* but waiting *on*.

That quotation is hilariously Heideggerian, but it stands close examination.

Basho. "Sitting quietly, doing nothing, Spring comes, and the grass grows—by itself."

This is one of our family favourite sayings, it has been rolling around in my head for decades and seems to be a good match for the Metzinger kitchen revelation. Andy Puddicombe gives a ten-minute TED talk on our inability to do nothing.

Shakespeare.

Banished to the Forest of Arden Duke Senior holds forth:

Sweet are the uses of adversity; Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, Wears yet a precious jewel in his head; And this our life, exempt from public haunt, Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, Sermons in stones, and good in everything. (As You Like It/Act II)

Including, presumably, the pots and pans of Metzinger's kitchen.

Osho.

Meditation is not a result out of your efforts, meditation is a happening. When your efforts drop, suddenly meditation is there, the benediction of it, the blessedness of it, the glory of it. It is there like a presence, luminous, surrounding you and surrounding everything. It fills the whole earth and the whole sky.

Another version of 'It is always and already the case and only I am out of frame'.

Franz Kafka.

You do not need to leave your room. Remain sitting at your table and listen. Do not even listen, simply wait, be quiet, still and solitary. The world will freely offer itself to you to be unmasked, it has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet.

I'm not sure about rolling in ecstasy but the unmasking can be demonstrated.

Emily Dickinson. This is *Verse 4 of Poem 280*

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race,
Wrecked, solitary, here.

Virginia Woolf —From *To the Lighthouse*

Everything seemed right. Just now (but this cannot last, she thought, dissociating herself from the moment while they were all talking about boots) just now she had reached security; she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy which filled every nerve of her body fully and sweetly, not noisily, solemnly rather, for it

arose, she thought, looking at them all eating there, from husband and children and friends; all of which rising in this profound stillness (she was helping William Bankes to one very small piece more and peered into the depths of the earthenware pot) seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together. Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all round them. It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again to-night she had the feeling she had had once today already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that remains for ever after. This would remain. 'Yes,' she assured William Bankes, 'there is plenty for everybody.' 'Andrew,' she said, 'hold your plate lower, or I shall spill it.'

D. H. Lawrence—*Sons and Lovers*

This is similar to but not quite as compelling as the Virginia Wolf example.

Mrs. Morel leaned on the garden gate, looking out, and she lost herself a while. She did not know what she thought. Except for a slight feeling of sickness, and her consciousness in the child, her self melted out like scent into the shiny, pale air. After a time, the child too melted with her in the mixing-

pot of moonlight, and she rested with the hills and lilies and houses, all swum together in a kind of swoon.

The usual understanding of meditation conjures up images of watchful sitting with attention focused on the breath and careful attention to the arising and falling of sounds, thoughts, etc. The aim is usually to achieve increased levels of mindfulness, stress relief and general well-being. More ambitious aspirations might aim at the annihilation or suspension of ego and the rescue of 'Now' from imprisonment in time.

Seeking a definition of meditation and its etymology I found the expected roots, *Latin meditatus, past participle of meditari, to think or reflect upon, consider, design, purpose, intend, in form as if frequentative of mederi "to heal, to cure, to remedy...* I was very pleased to find the heal, cure, and remedy bit which supports my conviction that meditation is about restoring an aspect of ourselves, ever present and accessible but obscured by everyday consciousness, an awareness which is fully engaged in explanation at the expense of experience. Thus, meditation could be the cure for this sleep of explanation, the foundation of our awakening and the necessary mending Traherne refers to:

All things were well in their proper places, I alone was out of frame and had need to be mended. Centuries. 3/62

Iain McGilchrist

The Divided Brain and the making of the Modern World.

At our November Greville Street meeting Dave Knowles introduced a dialogue on a book by Iain McGilchrist *The Master and his Emissary*. Dave drew on his own right hemisphere stroke experience to give a

very personal account of the Iain McGilchrist book. I won't try to summarise Dave's talk but add a number of references below for follow-up. There are the notes I included in and two videos in which McGilchrist himself presents his case. Dave has authorised me to send a copy of his talk notes to anyone wishing to follow up on his story.

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbUHxC4wiWk> This is a 32 minute talk by McGilchrist which is also available in book form from Amazon as a Kindle download for \$1.89. Title: *The Divided Brain and the Search for Meaning*
2. <https://youtu.be/oXiHStLfjPO> This is a more extensive talk given at Schumacher College and entitled *Things Are Not What They Seem*. This is probably the best option if you haven't the time or inclination to read the book. There is a good review of the book by Mary Midgley at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/jan/02/1>
NOWletter 152 <https://www.capacity.org/now/Now152.pdf>

As an example of what I found so interesting about the book I have scanned two pages and inserted a number of comments in italics.

I have taken pages 450 and 451 of the book as an example of how the phenomenological insight or shift is so often revealed by poets and by contemporary philosophy, although the 'phenomenologists' themselves seem reluctant to accept the fruits of their discovery. The pages are copied from the final chapter which is entitled 'The Master Betrayed'. I found McGilchrist's comments in this concluding section of the book particularly interesting as they come very close to a prescription for resolving the problem which is not too far removed from the Harding experiments. 'Close but no cigar' as George Schloss would have said. Speaking of the need to overcome the dominance of the left-brain perspective McGilchrist says that it might be the very fact of extreme dependence on our left brain and the negative

consequences of that dependence that somehow institutes a return to a more balanced sharing of perspectives between left and right. We might say, in the context of headlessness, an awakening to my first-person perspective followed by an understanding of both first and third-person views.

I have inserted notes in italics to explain why I think what is being said is relevant to what Douglas Harding has to say on the subject.

Page 450

. ...Change however would require a willingness to accept being seen as naïve for not getting caught up in the dialectic of the clever ironies, on the one hand, or of scientific materialism on the other.

My comment. We proponents of the headless way are used to accusations of naivety.

Now, says Hegel, the oracles no longer speak to men, and the statues have become stone corpses' (there is much in that phrase alone), the remnants of the past, the glories of its art, history and culture, are like 'beautiful fruit broken off a tree; a kindly fate has passed those works on to us much as a girl might offer us such fruit. The tree, and the earth in which it grew, and the climate in which the fruit ripened, are no longer available to us except as a 'veiled remembrance', something we represent to ourselves by picturing it. Yet, Hegel says, the knowingness with which we have to recapture this is like the glint of self-awareness in the eye of the beautiful maiden who offers us the fruit; it is the same Nature that produced those fruit, but at a higher level', and it can add as well as take away.

The contrast is like that between the country folk at the fair which Wordsworth sees from Helvellyn, and Wordsworth's poem on the subject, which, though it lacks an unrecapturable quality of the 'self-unseeing' that is still available to its subject, is itself a great work at a

higher level of self-awareness, which the country folk could not achieve. Of what the ancients were happily unconscious, we are necessarily conscious, Hegel seems to say, but we see more: perhaps as the innocence of the adult, where it is achieved, is greater than the innocence of a child, though bought at the cost of much painful awareness.

My comment: 'Self unseeing' is a very good description of the headless or first-person view and probably as close as you get to a third person 'explanation' of first-person perception.

But such innocence is rare. Age has a chance of bringing it only if we are very lucky or very disciplined. Wordsworth's achievement, like that of Blake and Keats, is that he retains a degree of innocence despite his experience, an innocence which all three evidence in what one might call their vulnerability. Through it alone they are enabled to achieve an inspired quality which could be mistaken by the foolish, at times, for foolishness. The price of their achievement is that they must make themselves open, even to ridicule, rather than shelter behind a self-protective carapace of ironic knowingness and cynicism.

My comment: I can confirm that sort of ridicule is often the response to headlessness. Usually, I think, evidence of an inability or unwillingness to shift from concept to direct perception or inability to see the difference.

Excessive self-consciousness, like the mental world of schizophrenia, is a prison: its inbuilt reflexivity — the hall of mirrors — sends the mind ever back into itself. Breaking out of the prison presents a problem, since self-consciousness cannot be curbed by a conscious act of will, any more than we can succeed in trying *not* to think of little green apples. The apple of knowledge, once eaten, cannot become once more 'unbitten in the palm'. Nonetheless conscious reflection, the root of the problem, may itself provide the antidote to its own effects. Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Merleau-

Ponty, all of them critics of reflection, embodied in their writing a reflective attempt to surmount reflection. Holderlin's lines once again come to mind: 'Where there is danger, that which will save us also grows'.

My comment: McGilchrist has the sense that the solution lies in seeing the self for what it is, just another object for attention arising in awareness, and not as the centre itself. In Tim Park's 'Out of my Head' there is a reference to the question of whether the memorial in the park exists when there is nobody there to observe it. This strikes the left brain as silly, but it needs to be considered seriously as it points to the distinction between knowing and direct apprehension or experience.

... because philosophy does not answer our questions but shakes our belief that there are answers to be had: and in doing so it forces us to look beyond its own system to another way of understanding.

My comment: Another way, not just a better application of the usual way.

One of the reasons reading Heidegger is, at the same time, both a riveting and a painful experience is that he never ceases to struggle to transcend the Cartesian divisions which analytic language entails, in order to demonstrate that there is a path, a way through the forest, the travelling of which is in itself the goal of human thinking. Though we can emerge into a 'clearing', we cannot hope to reach the clear light of the Empyrean, which as Holderlin's devastating poem *Hyperions Schicksalslied* makes plain, is reserved only for the gods. Perhaps inevitably Heidegger's last writings are in the form of poems. Wittgenstein also saw the true process of philosophy as a way of transcending or healing the effects of philosophy in the philosophical mind: philosophy is itself a disease, as Karl Kraus said of

psychoanalysis, for which it purports to be the cure. Merleau-Ponty, more explicitly than either, held out the hope that we could learn to see things again by a process of *surréflexion*, hyper-reflection, which would help to redress the distorting effects of consciousness by making us conscious of them.

My comment: I think surréflexion is first person seeing, the aware space revealed by the experiments understood as foundational.

This idea had already occurred to the Romantics. At the end of his famous essay 'On the Puppet Theatre', Kleist offers the possibility that the crippling effects of self-consciousness may be transcended through a form of still further heightened consciousness, by which we might regain a form of innocence.

'Grace appears purest in that human form which has either no consciousness or an infinite one, that is, in a puppet or in a god.'

'Therefore', I said, somewhat bewildered, 'we would have to eat again from the Tree of Knowledge in order to return to the state of innocence?'

'Quite right', he answered. 'And that's the last chapter in the history of the world.'

My comment: Or try the experiments!

With that his essay closes. In this last phrase Kleist may be warning us, as Hölderlin does, that what we crave can be had only in another world, where there are gods. But his essay also confirms that we can move only onward, not back-ward, and that by doing so we might transcend our situation and, in this way, return to something lost. Perhaps the very emptiness of self-reflection, what Vico called 'the barbarism of reflection', may push us towards the necessary leap of faith that alone will allow us to escape. After all, even the emptying out of consciousness achieved by Zen is not a random gift but achieved by years of consciously embraced self-discipline.

My comment: No longer the case since the arrival of the experiments. And as Heidegger intuits it is in fact a backward step notwithstanding Holderlin's view above.

Reflection, self-reflection, *surréflexion*: what we are talking about clearly has something to do with the plane of vision that we adopt. Gombrich writes that the true miracle of the language of art is not that it enables the artist to create the illusion of reality. It is that under the hands of a great master the image becomes *translucent*'. I have used the language of transparency and translucency — of seeing through' — repeatedly: because as Gombrich says of the work of art, as Jean Paul says of metaphor, as Kerényi says of myth, and as Merleau-Ponty says of the body, our vision must not stop there at the bounds of the 'thing' - but neither must it be replaced by something else. It is the function of such translucent, or themselves, semi-transparent, beings to remain transparent rather than draw attention to themselves because in doing so they achieve their goal.

My comment: It would be enough to simply discover that the transparency he proposes is always the case and immediately available for the looking once the cataract of habit is removed.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Phenomenology

From Taylor Carman's 'Merleau-Ponty'.

Merleau-Ponty was first and foremost a phenomenologist. Alongside pragmatism, logical positivism, and structuralism, phenomenology was among the dominant philosophical movements of the first two thirds of the twentieth century. Its founder was Edmund Husserl, and besides Merleau-Ponty its leading figures were Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre.

What is phenomenology? Simply put, it is an attempt to describe the basic structures of human experience and understanding from a concrete first-person point of view, in contrast to the reflective, third-person perspective that characterises both scientific knowledge and received opinion. Phenomenology calls us to return, as Husserl put it, "to the things themselves." The "things" Husserl had in mind were not concrete external things (Dinge) but issues or matters (Sachen), the stuff—both form and content—of our experience and understanding as we live them, not as we have learned to conceive and describe them according to the categories of science and prejudices of common sense. Phenomenology is in this sense a descriptive rather than explanatory or deductive enterprise; it seeks to reveal the basic forms of experience and understanding as such, rather than construct hypotheses or draw inferences beyond their bounds.

[End-Note: Of course, the distinction between description and explanation is neither sharp nor exclusive, for some descriptions, precisely by describing as they do, also explain. The difference remains, however, since it is possible to describe without explaining.]

Carman, Taylor, 2008, Merleau-Ponty, Routledge , London and New York p. 14. Taylor Carman is an American

philosopher. He is Professor of Philosophy at Barnard College, Columbia University. Wikipedia

Here are a couple of extracts from the Tim Parks book 'Out of My Head'.

What I was not aware of – to arrive at my point – was Husserl. So that discovering him – Edmund Husserl, 1859–1938 – in the summer of 2016, I had to weigh very carefully the conclusions he reached about perception, consciousness and objects, with those of Manzotti, because for quite a while the two seem to travel the same road, then part company. Who is right?

But the key difference of course, is that while Husserl claims that experience is not the real world but a mental representation, Riccardo denies the subject/object divide and insists that your experience simply is the world.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

The Awakened Person by David Loy

(I have referred to David Loy's writing in recent NOWletters, in particular his book *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy*. I like his openness to all traditions, his exploration of what he called the nonduality of duality and nonduality and his insistence that no religious tradition has a monopoly on understanding. I recently came upon his article on awakening which is published here with his permission. It is included in his book *A New Buddhist Path: Enlightenment, Evolution, and Ethics in the Modern World*. In the following essay he draws on one of my favourites as an example of awakening. It is one of the best commentaries on Traherne I have come across as it deals directly with what Traherne himself thought most important rather than handling only matters of his life and times and the scholarship that brought him to light.

From David Loy's book on *Nonduality*.

How Does an Awakened Person Perceive the World? Obviously, that's an important question for nondualists including Advaitins and Buddhists. 'Waking up' – attaining *moksha* or nirvana, experiencing satori, realizing your true nature, etc. – is the ultimate goal for both, and we naturally want to know what difference that makes to one's perceptions. In what ways is the experience of someone who is Awake (the literal meaning of 'a Buddha') transformed?

Curiously, the best description I know is not from a tradition that we normally think of as nondualist. It's in *Centuries of Meditations*, by a seventeenth-century English clergyman and poet named Thomas Traherne. His book was not published until 1908 but has since become widely regarded as a mystical masterpiece – and for good reason. The fact that Traherne was a Christian cleric, and apparently unaware of Buddhism, Vedanta, Taoism, Sufism, and so forth, is

important because it reminds us yet again that no religious tradition has a monopoly on spiritual insight.

The passage below is one of the classic passages of world mysticism. It employs some old-fashioned language and requires some reflection in order to appreciate its deeper meaning. In particular, two words in the first sentence need some explaining. An outdated meaning of 'corn' is 'grain', which is why Traherne can say that the corn he saw was wheat. And 'orient' is used in its old meaning of 'iridescent' or 'lustrous', one of several references to the luminosity of the world he describes so wonderfully.

“The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold; the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things. The Men! O what venerable and reverend creatures did the aged seem! Immortal Cherubims! And young men glittering and sparkling Angels, and maids strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty! Boys and girls tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels. I knew not that they were born or should die. But all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places. Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day, and something infinite behind everything appeared; which talked with my expectation and moved my desire. The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven. The streets were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as

their sparkling eyes, fair skins and ruddy faces. The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the World was mine; and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it... So that with much ado I was corrupted and made to learn the dirty devices of this world. Which now I unlearn, and become, as it were, a little child again that I may enter into the Kingdom of God.”

I first read this description many years ago but reflecting on it from a nondualist perspective has unlocked treasures unappreciated earlier. I am eager to share it because it is so similar to basic Advaitic and Buddhist claims about the nature of reality, when we experience the world (including ourselves) as it really is. Here are the main aspects that stand out for me:

Light and ecstasy. The world that Traherne describes is incredibly *beautiful* and *blissful*. The trees ‘transported and ravished’ him, their unusual beauty made his heart leap ‘and almost mad with ecstasy.’ And he is specific about the nature of that loveliness, referring again and again to the luminosity of things: the corn is ‘orient,’ the young men ‘glittering,’ angels ‘sparkling,’ and playing children are ‘moving jewels.’

Mystics in many traditions have emphasized the world’s *radiance*: things that we usually perceive as solid objects now *glow*. A distinction that we normally take for granted, between physical objects and the light that they reflect, no longer applies. The difference between them is actually something that has been constructed: it is a product of our ways of thinking about the world, including the names that we assign to things. I overlook the radiance when I see *that* as simply ‘a cup.’ I don’t really pay attention to it: it’s just something I use to drink my tea. That is how we learn to *grasp* the world, yet that habitual way of perceiving can also be unlearned. When we see things as they are, without unconsciously

distinguishing between objects and the light they reflect, the visible world is no longer a collection of fixed, material, self-existing things but appears as a confluence of interacting, luminous *processes*. The cup on the table next to my computer is not just a piece of moulded baked clay that just happens to be there. Its being-there is an activity. And such processes are not self-sufficient: they *manifest* something, which Traherne later points to.

Time. Religions tend to be preoccupied with immortality – helping us qualify for an eternity in heaven with God, for example. Traherne describes a different type of ‘everlasting,’ which is not about surviving death and living forever into a never-ending future, but experiencing here-and-now in a different way: dwelling in what is sometimes called *an eternal present*. His most wondrous line begins: “Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day...” The ‘immortal’ wheat he sees was never sown and will never be reaped, having stood there ‘from everlasting to everlasting.’ In that regard Traherne doesn’t distinguish between wheat, stones, trees, or humans: not only are they all radiant, each abides eternally insofar as it manifests the Light of the Day. In another *Centuries of Meditations* passage, he declares: “All time was Eternity, and a perpetual Sabbath.”

Nondualist traditions such as Buddhism emphasize realizing the ‘deathless,’ and often mention ‘the unborn’ as well. What would it mean, to transcend life and death? Do such claims refer to an afterlife? Traherne’s account suggests a different perspective. It’s the nature of all living creatures that they are born at a certain time and sooner or later die at another time. Buddhism does not offer an escape from such impermanence. But if living beings, like all other things, are not self-existing – if they too are interdependent processes that *manifest* something – then perhaps they cannot die insofar as they were never really born in the first place.

Manifest what? According to the Buddhist tantric tradition, our minds have three inalienable and inseparable aspects: they are luminous, blissful, and 'empty' (*shunya*).

Emptiness. "Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day, *and something infinite behind everything appeared...*" Traherne does not mention God, except at the very end when he refers to becoming a little child again so that he might enter the Kingdom of God. The only other place in this passage where he perhaps alludes to God, or to some other spiritual reality, is this 'something infinite.' We are reminded of a better-known aphorism by William Blake: "*If the doors of perception were cleans'd, everything would be seen as it really is, infinite.*"

What is striking about this infinity for both Traherne and Blake is that it is not described as existing separately from perceived things. If things are really unborn – because they do not self-exist but are always just *manifesting* something else – then the infinity they manifest is not something experienced apart from the 'empty' things that manifest it. The *Heart Sutra* says it better: "Although form is not other than emptiness, it's also true that emptiness is not other than form."

Mahayana Buddhist teachings sometimes talk about 'the nonduality of emptiness (*shunyata*) and appearance.' The distinction between the conventional or relative 'lower' truth, and the ultimate or absolute 'higher truth,' is the difference between how things usually appear to us, and what they really are. But the term 'appearance' can be misleading insofar as it seems to imply that the world we normally perceive is nothing more than a dream-like illusion.

Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche clarifies the Mahayana understanding of the relationship between manifestations (which we usually misperceive as separate, self-existing things) and that-which-they manifest: "'Appearance' is a funny sort of word. It means some kind

of surface thing, but with something else called ‘reality’ that is behind it. ‘Presence’ is a much better word. Something is presenting by itself, whose essence is emptiness. What appears is the phenomenal world, but it is empty because it has no real substance (in “Empty Splendor,” Buddhadharma Fall 2013).

Presence is perhaps the best English word to describe what Traherne is pointing at. What we normally perceive as solid objects, is the luminous *presencing* of something infinite – something not-finite, un-bounded – which is manifesting in these ways. This ‘empty’ infinite has no name and form: it is literally nothing in itself, or, better, a *no-thing* that therefore can presence as anything.

Transcendence. Religious dogma often postulates a cosmological dualism: the duality between this created world and God in heaven is a common example, and the Buddhist distinction between samsara (this world of suffering) and nirvana (the Buddhist goal) is another. Salvation usually means escaping from this vale of tears by attaining access to the ‘higher’ reality. Such an orientation inevitably involves some devaluation of this ‘lower’ world and encourages us to turn away from its problems. The spiritual path is not about fixing this world but transcending it.

In contrast, Traherne does not allude to any other reality that transcends the magnificent world he describes. The implication of his account is that *this is* ultimate reality. It can still be understood as transcending the way we usually experience this world, but it is still *this world*. As Nagarjuna put it: “The *koti* [location] of samsara is the *koti* of nirvana.” The place that we usually experience as a realm of suffering is not other than what we seek, nirvana itself – when we see this place, right here, as it really is. Traherne makes the same point by referring to Eden and Heaven: The city he tells us about, which usually appears to us so commonplace and

unremarkable, now ‘seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven.’ There’s no need to aspire to anyplace else, for he doesn’t need anything more than what’s already here.

Nonduality. Traherne’s account builds upon itself, becoming more moving and profound, until it reaches a climax: “The streets were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins and ruddy faces. The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the World was mine; and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it.” What are we to make of this mine-ness? Is his experience solipsistic?

It depends on what we mean by solipsism. It is usually defined as the belief that the only reality is the self, yet that claim can be understood in different ways. To insist that *atman* (the true self) is *brahman* (the ground of the cosmos), as Vedanta does, is to assert that the self is the only reality – but we need to realize what the true self really is.

Buddhism emphasizes that there is no self, but if the basic problem is a sense-of-separate-self confronting that which other than itself – inside vs. outside – there may be no difference at all between an experience of all-Self and the experience of no-self. What’s important in both cases is that the delusive duality between self and other has been dispelled. Nisargardatta has made this point better than anyone else: “*When I look inside and see that I am nothing, that’s wisdom. When I look outside and see that I am everything, that’s love. Between these two my life turns.*”

The difference between these nondualist traditions and Traherne is that nondualists usually prefer to say that ‘the streets were *me*, the temple was *me*,’ etc. I am reminded of Zen master Dogen’s description of his own enlightenment experience: “I came to realize clearly that mind is nothing other than rivers and mountains and the

great wide earth, the sun and the moon and the stars.” It seems to me, however, that the difference between their accounts is less important than the similarities. Both have transcended the usual dualism between an alienated and anxious sense of self that is trapped within an external, objective world.

Yet Traherne says that he was ‘the only spectator and enjoyer of it.’ Doesn’t that still dualize between the seer and the seen? No: the mind that Dogen refers to still *sees itself* from a particular perspective, the *presencing* we call Dogen. It is the same with Traherne’s account: it is with him – or, better, *as him* – that the ‘empty,’ infinite Brahman/nondual mind awakens to its own true nature. For a while, anyway.

The Fall. Traherne’s exalted depiction concludes with a sudden deflation. The experience he has just described to us has been lost, for he ‘was corrupted, and made to learn the dirty devices of this world.’ But there is hope: those devices he can ‘unlearn, and become, as it were, a little child again that I may enter into the Kingdom of God.’ The allusion is to *Matthew* 18, where Jesus says: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” This verse is normally understood to refer to where we might go after we die, but we do well to remember something else Jesus reputedly said: “Behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:21; more familiar to most of us is the *King James* version: “The kingdom of God is within you.”). In the context of everything else that Traherne has just written, his desire to enter the Kingdom of God should surely be understood in the same way. The point is not to attain some otherworldly salvation, but to ‘return’ to the beautiful, luminous, blissful, eternal, nondual heavenly world he has so poetically depicted for us.

‘Return’ is in scare quotes because he has not really lost it. He cannot lose that world, because his experience was a glimpse into what it really is, whether we are aware of it or not. Having had a taste of it, Traherne knows what he has to do: to unlearn the ‘dirty devices of this world’ – the world, that is, as normally experienced by ‘corrupted’ people. It’s not obvious what he means by corruption and the world’s dirty devices. We may suppose that he is referring to immoral behaviour, and that dirty devices are the ways people deceive and abuse each other. Yet corruption here might also include the types of delusion that the nondualist traditions also emphasize. Delusions collude with cravings to reify the sense of a self that feels separate from the world it is ‘in.’ Then I am motivated to pursue my own supposed self-interest indifferent to the well-being of others. Grasping at things in (what we understand to be) the world, we lose our birthright: the world that Traherne so lovingly portrays. But we can always return to it, because it is always there. It becomes here whenever we open up to it.

It is important to notice also what Traherne does not mention. Everything he describes is visual: what about the other senses – such as the sound of the wind blowing through the trees, and the laughter of the children? Were they also ‘mine’? We wonder if he heard them nondually, like T. S. Eliot’s ‘music heard so deeply/ That it is not heard at all, but you are the music/ While the music lasts.’ And we don’t read anything about how Traherne’s bodily awareness may have changed.

The biggest lack in Traherne’s account is perhaps something that he would not consider a shortcoming – and that some nondualist teachers would also not emphasize. In Buddhist terms, the ‘higher truth’ that he describes so well is sundered from the conventional ‘lower truth’ that we are more familiar with. Traherne’s world has no problems: each luminous thing is a way that ‘empty infinity’ presences, including the children playing in the street... but do they

go to bed hungry at night? Although everything manifests eternity in the Light of the Day, in his day most of those particular manifestations died before their second birthday. Yes, the 'higher truth' is that they didn't really die because they had never been born; from the perspective of the lower truth, however, there is birth, and death... and suffering. Traherne's society was organized hierarchically, for the benefit of those at the top of the class pyramid. Patriarchy and slavery were the norm.

To dwell blissfully in the world that Traherne describes so well, while ignoring such problems, is 'clinging to emptiness.' It is important for us to experience the infinity he refers to, and not to rest there. We all start from an awareness of the 'lower truth:' the world as a collection of separate things, including *me*, anxious and insecure within it. We are eager to become enlightened and realize the true nature of the world, including ourselves: the empty infinity that presences as you and me and everything else. But it is just as important not to devalue those presences – in Buddhist terms, the forms whereby emptiness (*shunyata*) manifests. As William Blake also wrote, "Eternity is in love with the productions of time." Empty infinity is in love with its presencing! Because they aren't really separate from each other.

The spiritual challenge is to realize that these two truths are two sides of the same coin, and to live in the light of that realization.

David Loy

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Notes on *Waking Up* by Sam Harris

It is refreshing to read a book about enlightenment by a prominent atheist and one who has stood beside Dawkins, Hitchens and Kraus against the creationists and orthodox religion. However, unlike the rather shrill and evangelical tone of Dawkins and Hitchens his is a more balanced view. He has had extensive contact with Buddhist philosophy and method which has shown him that religious traditions include truths that are by and large dismissed by scientists and those committed by their belief system to a strictly secular approach.

The book is sub-titled *A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion*. Sam Harris is a neuroscientist and well qualified to comment on the questions around consciousness and his approach reminded me of a series of talks I gave to the Theosophical Society which I labelled 'Secular Mysticism' as a way of communicating my sense of a need to approach 'enlightenment' from the perspective of everyday consciousness rather than through the esoteric approaches of most spiritual traditions.

The book opens with an account of the writer's first experience of fasting and contemplation, a three- day exercise which he found to be utterly pointless and boring except that at the end of the programme he found that some of his fellow participants reported transformative experiences. How could the stripping away of customary comforts and activities possibly become a source of happiness? Later, as a result of experimenting with drugs he found himself dumped into this unfamiliar openness, a state he could only describe as unconditional love. I imagine this is what we have sometimes referred to as upper case as opposed to lower case love, it became the spur to his search for the reason we overlook this vital aspect of mind. He writes:

Page 5. The experience was not of love growing but of its being no longer obscured. Love was—as advertised by mystics and crackpots through the ages—a state of being. How had we not seen this before? And how could we overlook it ever again?

It would take me many years to put this experience into context. Until that moment, I had viewed organized religion as merely a monument to the ignorance and superstition of our ancestors. But I now knew that Jesus, the Buddha, Lao Tzu, and the other saints and sages of history had not all been epileptics, schizophrenics, or frauds. I still considered the world's religions to be mere intellectual ruins, maintained at enormous economic and social cost, but I now understood that important psychological truths could be found in the rubble.

He goes on to explain why spirituality must be distinguished from religion if we are to get to the bottom of what it is that gives rise to the various religious traditions which, though possibly well intentioned, nevertheless usually succeed in completely obscuring their source. The book is about enquiring into why we overlook this aspect of ourselves and how we can overcome our overlooking. Harris pays particular attention to the nature of 'self' and various spiritual and scientific perspectives. There is a matter-of-factness about his perspective that I have found to be the key to my understanding of what really matters:

Page 124. The ultimate wisdom of enlightenment, whatever it is, cannot be a matter of having fleeting experiences. The goal of meditation is to uncover a form of well-being that is inherent to the nature of our minds. It must, therefore, be available in the context of ordinary sights, sounds, sensations,

and even thoughts. Peak experiences are fine, but real freedom must be coincident with normal waking life.

I was delighted to find that Harris is aware of Douglas Harding. He devotes a section of the book, entitled *Having No Head*, to the experiments. He even takes the trouble to explain how badly off the mark was Hofstadter's critical dismissal of Harding's essay in *The Mind's I*, the book Hofstadter co-edited with Dennett. Another example of otherwise great minds entirely missing the point. I include his comments in a separate section of this book.

The Harris book looks at the associated areas which address the problem of awakening, meditation, gurus, drugs, etc., but the basic message is that although the deep identification with self as entity is the root of the difficulty, the cause of overlooking what is already the case, it is resolved in our everyday being and not in some transcendental, wonderland state of mind.

This highly recommended read concludes with this sentence:

Open your eyes and see.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

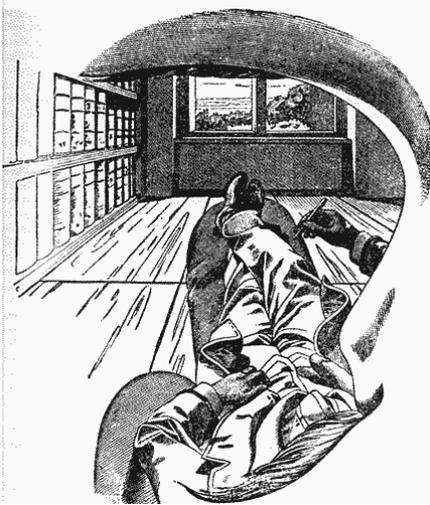
Sam Harris on Douglas Harding

This is the best explanation I have found of the Harding revelation, something that can not be reduced to words and concepts and has to be experienced rather than explained. Nevertheless, this effort by Sam Harris comes as close as saying can come to the necessary seeing. *A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion*. Pages 141 to 149.

Douglas Harding was a British architect who later in life became celebrated in New Age circles for having opened a novel doorway into the experience of selflessness. Raised among the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren, a highly repressive sect of fundamentalist Christians, Harding apparently expressed his doubts with a fervour sufficient to get himself excommunicated for apostasy. He later moved his family to India, where he spent years on a journey of self-discovery that culminated in an insight he described as the state of "having no head." I never met Harding, but after reading his books, I have little doubt that he was attempting to introduce his students to the same

understanding that is the basis of Dzogchen practice.

Harding was led to his insight after seeing a self-portrait of the Austrian physicist and philosopher Ernst Mach, who had the clever idea of drawing himself as he appeared from a first-person point of view: "I lie upon my sofa. If I close my right eye, the picture



represented in the accompanying cut is presented to my left eye. ('Cut' refers to picture in the book) In a frame formed by the ridge of my eyebrow, by my nose, and by my moustache, appears a part of my body, so far as visible with its environment."

Harding later wrote several books about his experience, including a very useful little volume titled *on Having No Head*. It is both amusing and instructive to note that his teachings were singled out for derision by the cognitive scientist Douglas Hofstadter (in collaboration with my friend Daniel Dennett), a man of wide learning and great intelligence who, it would appear, did not understand what Harding was talking about. Here is a portion of Harding's text that Hofstadter criticized:

Harris then includes the following description of Harding's initial experience as recorded in the book 'On Having No Head'.

What actually happened was something absurdly simple and unspectacular: I stopped thinking. A peculiar quiet, an odd kind of alert limpness or numbness, came over me. Reason and imagination and all mental chatter died down. For once, words really failed me. Past and future dropped away. I forgot who and what I was, my name, manhood, animal-hood, all that could be called mine. It was as if I had been born that instant, brand new, mindless, innocent of all memories. There existed only the Now, that present moment and what was clearly given in it. To look was enough. And what I found was khaki trouser legs terminating downwards in a pair of brown shoes, khaki sleeves terminating sideways in a pair of pink hands, and a khaki shirtfront terminating upwards in absolutely nothing whatsoever. Certainly not in a head.

It took me no time at all to notice that this nothing, this hole where a head should have been, was no ordinary vacancy, no mere nothing. On the contrary, it was very much occupied. It was a vast emptiness vastly filled, a nothing that found room for everything: room for

grass, trees, shadowy distant hills, and far above them snow-peaks like a row of angular clouds riding the blue sky. I had lost a head and gained a world. . . . Here it was, this superb scene, brightly shining in the clear air, alone and unsupported, mysteriously suspended in the void, and (and this was the real miracle, the wonder and delight) utterly free of "me," unstained by any observer. Its total presence was my total absence, body and soul. Lighter than air, clearer than glass, altogether released from myself. I was nowhere around. . . . There arose no questions, no reference beyond the experience itself but only peace and a quiet joy, and the sensation of having dropped an intolerable burden. . . . I had been blind to the one thing that is always present, and without which I am blind indeed to this marvellous substitute-for-a-head, this unbounded clarity, this luminous and absolutely pure void, which nevertheless is—rather than contains—all things. For, however carefully I attend, I fail to find here even so much as a blank screen on which these mountains and sun and sky are projected, or a clear mirror in which they are reflected, or a transparent lens or aperture through which they are viewed, still less a soul or a mind to which they are presented, or viewer (however shadowy) who is distinguishable from the view: Nothing whatever intervenes, not even that baffling and elusive obstacle called "distance": the huge blue sky, the pink-edged whiteness of the snows, the sparkling green of the grass—how can these be remote, when there's nothing to be remote from? The headless void refuses all definition and location: it is not round, or small, or big, or even here as distinct from there. End of extract.

Harding's assertion that he has no head must be read in the first-person sense; the man was not claiming to have been literally decapitated. From a first-person point of view, his emphasis on headlessness is a stroke of genius that offers an unusually clear

description of what it's like to glimpse the nonduality of consciousness.

Hofstadter's "reflections" on Harding's account as follows: "We have here been presented with a charmingly childish and solipsistic view of the human condition. It is something that, at an intellectual level, offends and appals us: can anyone sincerely entertain such notions without embarrassment? Yet to some primitive level in us it speaks clearly. That is the level at which we cannot accept the notion of our own death." Having expressed his pity for batty old Harding, Hofstadter proceeds to explain away his insights as a solipsistic denial of mortality—a perpetuation of the childish illusion that "I am a necessary ingredient of the universe." However, Harding's point was that "I" is not even an ingredient, necessary or otherwise, of his own mind. What Hofstadter fails to realize is that Harding's account contains a precise, empirical instruction: Look for whatever it is you are calling "I" without being distracted by even the subtlest undercurrent of thought—and notice what happens the moment you turn consciousness upon itself.

This illustrates a very common phenomenon in scientific and secular circles: 'We have a contemplative like Harding who, to the eye of anyone familiar with the experience of self-transcendence, has described it in a manner approaching perfect clarity; we also have a scholar like Hofstadter, a celebrated contributor to our modern understanding of the mind, who dismisses him as a child. Before rejecting Harding's account as merely silly, you should investigate this experience for yourself.

Look for Your Head

As you gaze at the world around you, take a moment to look for your head. This may seem like a bizarre instruction. You might think, "Of course, I can't see my head. What's so interesting about that?" Not so fast. Simply look at the world, or at other people, and attempt to turn

your attention in the direction of where you know your head to be. For instance, if you are having a conversation with another person, see if you can let your attention travel in the direction of the other person's gaze. He is looking at your face—and you, cannot see your face. The only face present, from your point of view, belongs to the other person.

Waking Up—A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion by Sam Harris

[Back to CONTENTS](#)



Krishnamurti and Me.

This is a letter to a trio of friends. It was the result of an email exchange between three of us who've had a long-time association with the Krishnamurti movement. It made me look hard at my relationship to the Krishnamurti teachings and why I have found them to be important.

Dear A and T, I don't know how fruitful this is going to be, but we have all spent the best part of a lifetime with Krishnamurti and seem to have come up with somewhat different interpretations of his message, we see different things at different times in some of his pronouncements. Not that we should necessarily expect a one size fits all outcome.

Since writing the following, T has updated me on our recent consideration of Krishnamurti's early years and the various influences, in particular the disturbing presence of the supernatural. This is also a response to that material.

I think the only way to make sense of his message is to ignore his personality and influences and actually test whether I can see what he is trying to show me. This response was prompted by your comment about having a body in the last message you sent which I lost, and your copy disappeared in your hacking disaster, it is turning into a report on my life with Krishnamurti. T's latest includes notes on Krishnamurti's claim to be the most recent manifestation of the World Teacher. I have always been mystified as to how anybody could make such a claim but reading the notes I had a flash of inspiration which I will reveal in the course of this ramble.

Your body comment brings to the fore the heretical aspect of my approach to Krishnamurti. I found what he would describe as a method, which demonstrated the truth of much he had to say. That of

course being my deep interest in the experiential approach of Douglas Harding. In your last message you pointed out that you have a body. I took that to be an unanswerable objection to the headless business. Harding wasn't trying to persuade me that I don't have a head, he was simply showing me what is possible if I stop screening perception through what I imagine into the occasion—to free the occasion from what I know about it. In one of those little white booklets, “Eight Conversations” was one of the titles, Krishnamurti talks about the ‘art of direct experience’, it is his way of getting around the prohibition of method by labelling it art, he describes this art as attention without motive. It is not too much of a stretch to say this is exactly what the Harding experiments deliver.

Strange that Krishnamurti didn't see that he and Harding were on the same page. You remember Alan Rowlands tried to persuade Krishnamurti of the relevance of the experiments to the teaching but Krishnamurti, for the usual reasons, dismissed it out of hand whilst Bohm, who was introduced to the experiment a short time later, got it in one. Yes, there is a body, nobody is questioning that. The question is about the nature of the ‘I’ which knows it has a body.

Starting with Krishnamurti's question “Is there a field which is uncontaminated by the known” I wonder how I can expect to respond effectively by offering a piece of knowledge.

He has just proposed the possibility of a knowledge-free answer.

This is comparable to the Zen koan business of only a non-conceptual response being acceptable, which I happen to think can be very tiresome and not really necessary, providing I understand the importance of shifting from my customary knowing into an experiencing mode. Krishnamurti's talk of the ‘art of direct experience’ offers a clue to what he might consider an acceptable

response. So, what is the experiential response? It must be prior to any verbalisation, any concepts. Your “I have a body” won’t do. There is the body and the sense of some entity or centre that is the me of the ‘my’.

However, that is all description. What is the nature of being, before that answer is formulated and expressed. I say there is no experience of body as a body but various sensations in different locations, appearances of shapes like, for example, what we label as legs and hands, thoughts and memories, sensations, etc., all of which provide the foundation of first the feeling of and then the description ‘I have a body’.

In spite of listening to him for years we continue to seek understanding of his message in terms of knowledge rather than deeper being. Somewhere he says, “Seeing is the only truth, there is nothing else”. (He might have said “The purpose of life is to see”. The two quotations are by Krishnamurti and Hui Neng and I can never remember which is which).

Whenever we become engaged in these exchanges you always remind me of the physical reality, of suffering and the mess the world is in, as if I was in denial about all that. I am not denying it, and neither was Krishnamurti. He was pointing to the possibility of seeing/being that in which what we label good, bad or whatever, all arises. And what is the point of that you may ask. Well not seeing ‘that’ has landed us in the mess you keep reminding me of.

Actually realising what is at the heart of things might offer some hope of a cure. He set out to set mankind unconditionally free. To make such a claim he must have been convinced that the means had been revealed to him. We are inclined to dismiss the nature of the revelation as traditional Indian mysticism or Theosophical indoctrination. I don’t agree. I think what gave rise to these ‘explanations’ was a genuine experience, an experience beyond

description and we tend to dismiss his enterprise as grandiose self-delusion rather than a description of an insight that cannot hope to convey the intensity of the revelation.

What if 'world teacher' is the essence of this insight and that Krishnamurti saw himself as an expression of it; identifying with its undividedness rather than his individual self. We remember his insistence that 'you are the world'. I see this view reflected in the Vernon paper from which I clip this quotation.

...That term. He also recorded his famous statement about the immense energy, the intelligence that had been using his body for 70 years and which would not return to another body for many hundreds of years. This notion of a human being touching the source of enlightenment and thus embodying something which some would label divine, is close to Steiner's principle of the Second Coming, which was not a physical reincarnation of Christ, but the potential in any one of us for mystical union with the Christ-principle.

So, I am giving Krishnamurti the benefit of the doubt and now offer a way of doing justice to his brave attempt to set me free.

As we've discussed, he suggested that there might be a field which is not necessarily empty of the known but free from its influence. In his words, 'uncontaminated by the known'. On other occasions he spoke of the need to realise the undivided and not remain entrapped by the individual sense of separate identity to the exclusion of the sense of the wholeness of life. I remember printing out copies of all the material Denis Fey pulled together to demonstrate this aspect of the teaching for a Springbrook gathering. I thought they'd be snapped up, but I brought all but a couple back home.

If I analyse my everyday mind I find an assumed reality based on the 'not-now', on my recollections of yesterday and my concerns about tomorrow, plus all the other non-present movements in imagination. This awareness of what is not actually present to the occasion overwhelms the actuality of the moment, relegating the immediacy of being to insignificance if not completely excluding it from present awareness. Gebser coined the word 'presentiation' in what I think was his personal attempt to deal with this issue, presentiation engaged as a means of arriving at what he describes as 'verition'—which I interpret as 'making true'.

For me, the question is whether this context of the 'not-present' is an inevitable consequence of human being. It seems so when first considered. In fact, it is taken as a definition of human life, as what I refer to as my 'self'.

This, in my opinion, is the Krishnamurti challenge. That is, to see off this assumption as a secondary development, not to deny it completely but to recognise it as second nature, and to awaken to the fact that it obscures first nature, essence, in his words 'what is'.

We are at the ACM Festival in Townsville as I write, and I've been trying to think of an analogy which would illustrate my case. I thought of the difference between the musical score and the music. Have we fallen in love with the notation and completely forgotten what it reveals?

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Neo Darwinism and Design

We have been exchanging views on this debate following our Emily Dickinson inspired dialogues and my recent reading of books by Michael Behe and Stephen Meyer which challenge the orthodox Darwinian explanation.

I am agnostic about both ends of the explanatory spectrum. I listened to Dennett again. He offers ‘design without intention’. I think that is another two bob each way position. I can acknowledge the drive to fill an environmental opportunity through natural selection. The opportunity will be ‘taken’ by whatever organism latches on to the advantage of relevant random variations. It is the blind chance aspect that I have difficulty with. (And the notion that given enough time anything and everything just happens). Does the environmental opportunity exert a ‘pull’ a sort of directive? Is what we understand by intelligence exemplified by and limited to the human version? I don’t know.

Thomas Nagel — It is perfectly possible that the truth is beyond our reach, in virtue of our intrinsic cognitive limitations, and not merely beyond our grasp in humanity’s present stage of intellectual development. But I believe that we cannot know this, and that it makes sense to go on seeking a systematic understanding of how we and other living things fit into the world. In this process, the ability to generate and reject false hypotheses plays an essential role. I have argued patiently against the prevailing form of naturalism, a reductive materialism that purports to capture life and mind through its neo-Darwinian extension. But to go back to my introductory remarks, I find this view antecedently unbelievable—a heroic triumph of ideological theory over common sense. The empirical evidence can be interpreted to accommodate different comprehensive theories, but

in this case the cost in conceptual and probabilistic contortions is prohibitive. I would be willing to bet that the present right-thinking consensus will come to seem laughable in a generation or two—though of course it may be replaced by a new consensus that is just as invalid. The human will to believe is inexhaustible. Thomas Nagel

David Bohm. For Bohm the Holy is a "being beyond what can be grasped in thought" and Bohm calls the Subtle Nonmanifest "holy" in the sense that it is whole. It is a Presence within cosmic energy.

The Bohm cosmic model also suggests that this "holiness" has existed since the foundation of the cosmos. It is present in the cyclical process of the universe. It is pure, active intelligence from which all that is manifest in the cosmos comes. It acts through an inwardness in consciousness. It enfolds information into the many levels of consciousness, into all of life. It is the Implicate Order which is the Ground of All Existence...From an article on David Bohm at: http://www.bizint.com/stoa_del_sol/plenum/plenum_3.html

Intelligence is defined in the OED as understanding. Krishnamurti and Bohm used to remind us that the word is a re-presentation of 'that which stands under'. So, what if intelligent design is not about a creator but whatever it is that stands under, whatever 'Unfolding understanding' might be, as opposed to blind chance?

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Neo Darwinism and Design 2

In our November NOWletter I reported on my research into this question and in particular the books by Michael Behe and Stephen Meyer which challenge the orthodox Darwinian explanation. I have since read another book by the Finnish biochemist Matti Leisola in which he explains his shift from ardent Darwinian to an advocate of some form of intelligent design. This, his third book on the subject, was interesting as a personal explanation of a prominent scientist's change of mind but also as a revelation of the unscientific resistance of the scientific community to serious engagement with alternative theory.

After all the reading I remain somewhere in the middle and feeling that natural selection of random mutations based on environmental opportunity, does not meet the main objections which are: Irreducible complexity, Novel forms, Sudden appearances exemplified by 'The Cambrian Shift' and the origin of life. The following extract from "Heretic: One Scientist's Journey from Darwin to Design" by Matti Leisola and Jonathan Witt points to a possible alternative.

'Information is crucial in understanding life. Biological information is more than its material carrier. The mechanisms of chemistry and evolutionary biology are insufficient to explain the information labyrinth that makes life. Systems biology approaches engineering science and uses the language of systems science, which is teleological. Explanations based on the mutation-selection mechanism of evolution are of no practical use in synthetic biology and systems biology'.

Leisola adds a much earlier comment on these lines:

...Recall a quotation from Chapter 1, a passage from the Philebus of Plato (427–347 B.C.E.). In it Socrates asks the key question: “whether we are to affirm that all existing things, and this fair scene which we call the Universe, are governed by the influence of the irrational, the random, and the mere chance; or, on the contrary, as our predecessors affirmed, are kept in their course by the control of mind and a certain wonderful regulating intelligence.” Ever since then, great thinkers have debated those two possibilities. It’s educationally backward to declare this monumental issue off limits and insist that a properly rigorous approach to origins may only entertain the materialist position”.

My most recent discovery is an article by Professor Watson of the University of Southampton which seems to offer the middle ground by way of suggesting the possibility of introducing progressive evolvability of intelligence in step with material change.

There are echoes in this, for me, of Bohm’s ‘self-ordering principles of the universe’.

Intelligent design without a creator? Why evolution may be smarter than we thought by Richard A. Watson Associate Professor, Institute for Life Sciences/Electronics and Computer Science, University of Southampton. The article was originally published on The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/intelligent-design-without-a-creator-why-evolution-may-be-smarter-than-we-thought-52932> January 28, 2016 9.55pm

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

On Beauty and Evolution

Observations on a New York Times article--How Beauty Is Making Scientists Rethink Evolution by Ferris Jabr.

The extravagant splendour of the animal kingdom can't be explained by natural selection alone — so how did it come to be? (This article follows contributions to NOWletters 208 and 210 dealing with aspects of evolution which are not explained by orthodox Darwinian theory. This month's article covers an aspect that I was surprised to find had also exercised Darwin himself. The article describes how certain developments defy Darwinian orthodoxy and remind us that the evolutionary development of what could be considered aesthetic as opposed to survival benefits are not uncommon. I found this particularly interesting in view of my recent research into the various aspects of evolution that remain unexplained by orthodox neo-Darwinian theory. Finally, and to my delighted surprise I find that Darwin himself had a Theory of Beauty which was dismissed by his peers and successors as contradictory to his major work and apparently abandoned. It is now being taken out and dusted down as current research provides evidence of the evolution of characteristics which do not comply exclusively with the rules of natural selection.

'A male flame bowerbird is a creature of incandescent beauty. The hue of his plumage transitions seamlessly from molten red to sunshine yellow. But that radiance is not enough to attract a mate. When males of most bowerbird species are ready to begin courting, they set about building the structure for which they are named: an assemblage of twigs shaped into a spire, corridor or hut. They decorate their bowers with scores of colourful objects, like flowers, berries, snail shells or, if they are near an urban area, bottle caps and plastic cutlery. Some bowerbirds even arrange the items in their

collection from smallest to largest, forming a walkway that makes themselves and their trinkets all the more striking to a female — an optical illusion known as forced perspective that humans did not perfect until the 15th century’.

The article contains a number of similar examples and points out that Darwin did not think it necessary to link aesthetics and survival. He thought animals could appreciate beauty—that an innate sense of beauty could be an engine of evolution. An interesting aspect of the article is evidence of the closed-mindedness of the orthodox believers whose resistance to even considering this development mirrors the response to the work of Matti Liesola I reported in NOWletter 210. Unlike natural selection, which preserved traits that were useful “in the struggle for life”, Darwin saw that sexual selection, concerned with reproductive success as opposed to survival, often resulted in features that jeopardized an animal’s well-being. The arguments for and against are outside the range of this brief summary. One final example is that of the Club-winged Manakin whose wings have developed to rub together at a rate of 100 times per second making what seems to be for the female an irresistible sound, but at the expense of efficient flight.

Here is the link:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/09/magazine/beauty-evolution-animal.html> — There is a follow-up review by James Gorman at :
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/29/science/evolution-of-beauty-richard-prumdarwin-sexual-selection.html?action=click&module>

These are fascinating articles and beautifully illustrated—they were brought to my attention by Katie Mann, thank you Katie—highly recommended.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

On being drawn to some great thing

Traherne asks us whether or not we are drawn to ‘some great thing’. Centuries 1-2. Part of my answer takes the form of all this activity, the NOWletter, meetings, reading, writing, discussions, etc. What can I say about the point of it all? I think that all that can be said, or all that I can say, is that it leads to an awareness of the undivided in the immediacy of being. The personal slips into the impersonal only to find that the impersonal is paradoxically, as John Wren-Lewis liked to remind us, the most personal; most personal in the sense of being truly what I am, or more accurately, what is actually the case.

In my late thirties I was reading Jung and keeping a dream diary. I was prompted to start on this enquiry by a dream in which, for the first time, I came upon the name Krishnamurti and an odd aspect of the dream, as I subsequently discovered when I read one of his books, was that it supplied not only his name but the essence of his teaching. Krishnamurti seemed to have the situation under control and I was impressed by his explanations of the need for humanity to awaken to a transition from the individual to the undivided aspect of being. However, in spite of exposure to his endless lectures the matter remained for me a conceptual possibility and not a realised fact. David Bohm offered some practical help by way of his ideas on the implicate order and promotion of Dialogue as a means of effecting the necessary transition, but I remained stranded in doubts. In December ‘76 I came upon this I quote from St. Augustine: *Go not outside, return into thyself: truth dwells in inward man.* I had developed a meditation method of watching 100 breaths without loss of attention. If I lost focus on the breath I had to restart the count. The most interesting example of the successful application of this technique occurred on 23 December 1975. My notes record that on

this occasion my concentration broke at 95 so I had the frustration of starting again. On reaching the hundred mark I had earned the right to ask a question. On this occasion I asked: In view of the presence of Atman in all human beings why can't 'Atman purity' illuminate the individual system (organism)? The striving for perfection or illumination in the presence of perfection, i.e., Atman, seems odd? The response arrived in the following form, "It is in the perfection of creation that we are engaged". I can't remember the exact way I framed the question. But I remember the reply exactly, it appeared in my head without any conscious construction. I had thought, at the time that there is a component of the individual system requiring perfection and, possibly, that if this imperfection is remedied all will become clear. I interpreted the 'reply' as a correction to this view, an awakening to the fact that it was not about me as an individual but to do with making plain the undivided. In the middle of all this I came upon Traherne whose wonderful prose and poetry reveal an awareness steeped in the undivided and his descriptions of 'capacities' were the closest match to my own occasional openings to wholeness. Nevertheless, occasions of direct experiencing were few and far between. Then, in 1991, Douglas Harding came to Sydney and demonstrated that the door to the undivided was wide open and ever the case.

This, of course, has been the message of the sages of all ages—that you are already and always what is sought. In Harding's case he demonstrated, as opposed to merely describing, that what I am looking for is what I am looking out of. What then are the consequences? I think that one of the best the best answers I ever came across was Francis Lucille's reply to a question. His group had been discussing the nature of self and arrived at a general acknowledgement that the self is not an entity but a process, a non-entity. One of the group then asked "...if there is no self, then what is it that is enlightened?" After a moment's consideration Lucille

replied—THIS. How very close to the message about perfection being of the whole and not of Alan. In recent times and in these notes, we have considered meditation not as something to be done but as to be entered into as a pre-existing and foundational condition of wholeness--obscured by my intensely focused identification with my identity as Alan. So, if true and accessible, how is this to come about? Strangely, the misunderstood words of my childhood come to mind, "...the kingdom of heaven is at hand/abide in me as I in you/I and the father are one", etc. Removed from their usual religious context and observed through a secular lens these statements can be understood as accurate representations of the perspective of the undivided.

What then is the necessary action? I doubt there is one exclusive and reliable answer, the Harding experiments provide a foundation, a gateway to simply being, and what works for me is to stop at that point for a while. Praying and meditating can become more about self-improvement than self-transcendence—if the matter strikes me as important enough to explore—I just have to learn to be. My response to Traherne's challenge, his question of whether or not I am drawn to "some great thing?"— is yes, I am and, if I can learn what that 'drawing' might involve, the necessary action, or more accurately inaction, becomes clear. Thereafter, it is over to that great thing—whatever it might be.

To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by the ten thousand things. —Eihei Dogen (1200-1253)

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Why Traherne?

When the great Zen master Fa-ch'ang was dying, a squirrel screeched out on the roof. "It's just this, he said, and nothing more." Quoted by Ken Wilber in *Eye to Eye* p.123

This is a version of my notes on the Greville Street Meeting of 12th May. Some of you will have already received my summary of the day and this is an extended version which includes both my summary plus some material which I included in NOWletter 201 plus some relevant commentary that has arisen in the meantime. "If the doors of perception were cleans'd, everything would be seen as it really is, infinite." Wm. Blake.

So, why Traherne? In my case there are several reasons. First I have found Traherne to be one of the finest expressions of the complete human being I have encountered, secondly, I found affirmation of this long held opinion of mine when the Buddhist scholar David Loy chose Traherne as the best example he could find to demonstrate how an awakened person perceives the world, thirdly, Traherne seems to have discovered the 'This switch' as mentioned by Fa Chang in the above quotation and fourthly, Hubert Benoit has what I have found to be a very convincing description of what can only be experienced, as opposed to described—the state into which Traherne is asking me to awaken . This is the extract David Loy used to illustrate why he selected Traherne as the best example he could find of how an awakened person sees the world.

"The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold; the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees when I saw them first through

one of the gates transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things. The Men! O what venerable and reverend creatures did the aged seem! Immortal Cherubims! And young men glittering and sparkling Angels, and maids strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty! Boys and girls tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels. I knew not that they were born or should die. But all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places. Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day, and something infinite behind everything appeared; which talked with my expectation and moved my desire. The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven. The streets were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins and ruddy faces. The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the World was mine; and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it... So that with much ado I was corrupted and made to learn the dirty devices of this world. Which now I unlearn, and become, as it were, a little child again that I may enter into the Kingdom of God.” Traherne—Centuries 3/3

Loy analyses this meditation from the perspective of nonduality which, of course, is the perspective from which it was written. He recognizes that Traherne is awake to the light and ecstasy of simply being, his emphasis is on the everlasting, the Blake-like understanding of ‘eternity now’, and the sense of an underlying wholeness out of which manifestation appears and a direct experiencing of life which transcends the everyday world of explanation in which our separative selves seem to be entrapped.

Loy's comprehensive interpretation appears in full in NOWletter 196 and in earlier in this book under the heading The Awakened Person.

We have recently considered a less conventional approach to what might be necessary to wake up in the sense that David Loy is talking about. I was prompted to explore, what for me was a completely new approach, by Metzinger's meditating kitchen which we included in an article for NOWletter 202. "I was in a hurry and washing dishes, extreme hurry, had to clean kitchen and had to get into that car and get out. And while I was mindlessly washing dishes and was nervous and anxious I thought 'Oh hell! I haven't even done my evening meditation yet'. How am I going to fit that in, there's no time for it? — The moment I had that thought I suddenly realised the whole room is already meditating, the cupboard, the shelves, etc., the room—was meditating. It sounds very mystical it isn't — but imagine if the room was meditating all the time and I was ignoring it by practising mindfulness".

That reminded me of an experience I recorded in my notebook in 1976: 16 October 76. I was following a traditional meditative practice of observing an object and progressively identifying and naming its characteristics, shape, colour, size, etc., down to the smallest detail until all description is exhausted. I had started this meditation on the green vase Arnold and Wright gave to Margot when she resigned her job with them in Christchurch, when I noticed that the carpet colour seemed unusually intense. It was a gold colour, a cheap flax or jute product called Tintawn. After about ten minutes, I had a sense of depth to the pot I hadn't noticed before and a feeling of gladness. I had a sense of affection for the vase and a sudden awareness of this being reciprocated, or rather, common to us both. I remember thinking "what sentimental rubbish" when the words "no it is not, it is love" entered consciousness. Two examples of a sense of an underlying primary energy or essence in which both the assumed observer and assumed object of observation are subsumed.

In recent meetings and NOWletter articles we have recognized that the poets seem best equipped to communicate this aspect of human experiencing. One of my earliest schoolboy recollections is of an assignment to learn a poem entitled Leisure by W. H Davies:

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.
No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.
No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.
No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.
No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.
No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.
A poor life this is if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

This poem, lurking in my subconscious, might explain my recent interest in 'looking longer' which we considered in NOWletter 201 and which we illustrated with the following verses:

If you look long enough at anything
It will become extremely interesting;
If you look very long at anything
It will become rich, manifold, fascinating:
If you can look at anything for long enough,
You will rejoice in the miracle of love,

You will possess and be blessed by the marvellous blinding radiance of love, you will be radiance.

Delmore Schwartz

and:

A certain minor light may still
Leap incandescent
Out Of kitchen table or chair
As if a celestial burning took
Possession Of the most obtuse Objects
now and then—
Thus hallowing an interval
Otherwise inconsequent
By bestowing largesse, honour,
One might say love.

from Sylvia Plath's Black Rook in Rainy Weather.

These examples strike me as very similar to my vase experience and in both cases the sense of love as the critical component seems to confirm this interpretation'. Can we assume that these brief glimpses are more than occasional aberrations? Do they offer a glimpse of a deeper reality than I normally experience? And is it possible to test this?

The January 201 newsletter of the Traherne Association included an article by a contributor, Jill Robson, in which she writes: "I would like to suggest a small daily exercise which will help us all to reorientate our looking—to open our eyes and see as Traherne exhorts us to do. Take 10-15 minutes every day to look continuously and steadily at one thing—a natural thing if possible, but any thing will do. Look at it continuously with a steady focused attention. Don't think about what

it is; concentrate on looking; make that looking as dispassionate and disinterested as possible. Just look. Do this every day simply as a gently relaxing but attentive exercise. After a while, you will notice a change in your attention and perception as you do this looking, as you gain an awareness of the thingy-ness of what you look at. But this repeated exercise will also slowly change how you see the rest of the world at other times”.

This may open me to the revelation that Traherne insists is my birthright and I think it is what Kafka was trying to express in this well-known piece. *Remain sitting at your table and listen. Don't even listen, simply wait. Don't even wait. Be quite still and solitary. The world will freely offer itself to you. To be unmasked, it has no choice. It will roll in ecstasy at your feet.*

The results of this exercise might well vary from person to person but perhaps the Robson experiment is the most direct way to an experience of awareness that is self-unseeing. Traherne provides endless examples, the most famous being lines from his poem ‘My Spirit’:

No brims nor borders such as in a bowl we see
My essence was capacity.

The poem is bristling with appropriate quotations and included here as Appendix 1.

One of my first contacts with Zen thought was a book called ‘Let Go’ by Hubert Benoit. The following is extract is from pages 16 & 17. It is a bit hard to untangle but well worth the trouble as it is one of the best expressions of the three perspectives on our actuality that I’ve found. Extract begins:

The partial adequacy of my mental image to the reality of the Object supposes an identity of structure between the object and me. If contact with the object, through my sense-organs, awakens in my mind an adequate image, it is through a type of resonance which supposes a structural agreement between the object and me. If I produce the note 'A' near a violin, the violin string which itself gives the note 'A' starts to vibrate of its own accord by resonance. That which emanates from an object and excites my sense organs awakens in me a complex mental vibration which is in accordance with this emanation. This vibration, of which the appearance in me is released by the object, is not produced by the object; it pre-existed in me. The object did no more than awaken or actualize it. If my perception of the object supposes an identity of structure between this object and me, I do not perceive this identity. I do not, as it were, surrender totally to the phenomenon of resonance, I do not offer my centre to it. My response to the emanation of the object remains superficial, partial; thus, I am given only partial consciousness of the object and of myself. It could be otherwise. If I were completely open to the emanation of the object, the phenomenon of resonance would be produced in my very centre, in that centre where the same unique Reality resides which also resides at the centre of the object. The image that would then be formed in me would be totally adequate to the object and my perception of the object would be at the same time the perception of our identity. In other words, the perception would be a trinitarian perception of the totality of the object, of the totality of myself, and of the underlying essence which makes us identical beneath our differences. My ordinary perception is not of this kind. It lacks the underlying essence, which alone would be able to realize the identity beneath the differences. For lack of this essence, the identity-in-the difference is divided into identity and difference. The discrimination between the object and myself corresponds to all that is lacking in my partially adequate image; the object, to the degree

that its totality eludes me is a stranger to me. The identity which is not perceived is replaced by a fusion of two poles, subject and object; in other words, by an identification. In ordinary perception I am identified with an object whose reality evades me, and moreover my own reality evades me also. I said just now that I was able to offer my centre to the phenomenon of resonance, but that I do not do so. One can equally well say that the outer world offers to release in me a total resonance, but that I refuse it; and this refusal corresponds to my fundamental claim to-be-absolutely-in-so-far-as-distinct.

Hubert Benoit

Alan speaking: Here is my translation of the Benoit quotation. My everyday consciousness interprets actuality as an interaction between me, the observer, and whatever my environment presents to consciousness, the observed. This interpretation of actuality overlooks the 'ground' from which both the 'separate' observed and the 'separate' observer arise. Nondual philosophies of East and West offer explanations of how my customary oversight of the nondual 'ground' can be seen through and the full picture made plain. There is a poem by Emily Dickinson which I interpret as first suggesting the nature of the problem and then concluding with a possible solution.

A loss of something ever felt I-
The first that I could recollect
Bereft I was-of what I knew not
Too young that any should suspect

A Mourner walked among the children
I notwithstanding went about

As one bemoaning a Dominion

Itself the only Prince cast out-

Elder, Today, a session wiser
And fainter, too, as Wiseness is-
I find myself still softly searching
For my Delinquent Palaces-

And a Suspicion, like a Finger
Touches my Forehead now and then
That I am looking oppositely
For the site of the Kingdom of Heaven-
Poem 959

At our meeting we took the forehead touching finger as a guide to where we should be looking, and I invited the group to try to apprehend what we were all looking out of as opposed to what we were looking at. What, going strictly on the present evidence provided by the senses, do we experience here at centre? This is of course a version of the headless recommendation, the proposal that I should consider becoming familiar with what is ever the case where others see my face. As a result of preparation for the forthcoming David Loy workshops I happened on this version of this proposal:

Then, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bāhiya, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in

connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress." Bāhiya Sutta (Udana 1.10)

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Ice-block Consciousness

In discussing the Harding experiments with a member of the Sydney nonduality group we adopted an ice-block analogy to represent the stuckness of individual identity. The ice-block thinks there is only the ice of individual, separative existence but suddenly comes across free flowing water (representing the wholeness of life, the ‘undivided’).

Ice-block, overwhelmed by the wonder of water, wants a piece of the action. It is however, trapped by its desire to have the water rather than be the water. It remains blocked, in both senses of the word, until it melts.

I was rather pleased with this little parable and thought Josh and I were the creators of it but whilst working on this edition of the NOWletter I came across another version at the website below: It reads as follows:

The greater the contraction and density of this sphere of Consciousness, the less wisdom is cognitively present. It doesn't know its true nature as being pure Consciousness. The greater the dynamic self-centered focus on the sense of localized “me”-ness, the more “dense” the energetic contraction and its lack of intelligence. Whether one is inhabiting any particular domain of samsaric experience (the Six Lokas), is determined by one's degree of energetic self-fixation. Yes, by clinging to the sense of personal identity, we get a sense of being a continuing self, but at the price of forfeiting the Natural Bliss of Being, which always, intrinsically attends our impersonal Natural State. Our nature is always this Divine Consciousness, even in the contracted state of localized selfhood.

This is like water appearing as an ice cube. No matter how energetically contracted our inner consciousness seems to be, it is never other than contracted Consciousness, whose fundamental nature is “Knowing Awareness”. By recognizing our own empty, “Knowing Awareness”, at any time, there is a relaxation and expansion, whether great or small, back into our own impersonal Natural State, like ice melting back into water. <https://zenawakened.com/ocean-of-consciousness/>

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Michael Pollan & Norman Swann

A dialogue at the Opera House on the 20th July 2019. In an ABC interview some days before this event Prof. Pollan was asked what specific benefit is provided by psychedelic drugs or how he would summarise the consequences of a 'good' trip. He replied that it was a completely new, or at least, a most unusual perception of reality, involving the complete displacement of the ego from its central and primary position and in many cases its temporary obliteration. It raises the question of whether this displacement of ego is possible by means other than drugs.

Two options were discussed at the Opera House interview: meditation and holotropic breathwork. Pollan emphasised that 'set' and 'setting' are aspects to be considered to ensure positive outcomes. 'Set' being mindset of the experimenter and 'setting' being the need for a pleasant environment in which to carry out the experiment. There was reference to historical reports of experiences resulting from ergot and the extensive research under way prior to the '60s which ground to a halt under the flood of popular promotion by Timothy Leary, etc., and the subsequent banning of LSD. As far as the effect on the brain is concerned Pollan gave examples of research under such techniques as MRI which demonstrate that the areas of the brain which provide our default, ego-centric orientation close down under the effects of, for example, LSD-25. This is the part of the brain which is endlessly engaged in self-reflection, mind-wandering, future and past imagining. With this in suspense, the customary subject-object duality is no longer apparent and nonduality prevails. This is often an ecstatic experience which, he reminded us, is literally Ex-Static. Out of the stasis of our habitual mode.

Pollan mentioned research which demonstrated that our default mode is something we develop, and from which very young children

are free. This is something Douglas Harding demonstrates with his identity experiments with the young. Pollan spoke about Stanislov Grof and his holotropic breathing which he himself had tried and found useful, mainly as a preliminary to taking a psychedelic dose. Not recommended if you suffer from arterial fibrillation. One of the benefits is that psychedelics are non-toxic and non-addictive. He mentioned that his wife had joined him in some of his experiments with good results. His own experiments, four I think, were good and there was only one really terrifying occasion but that was a trial of toad venom, so a bit off his usual course.

There was an interesting note about Leary who, as a scientist, became disenchanted with the scientific approach to psychedelics and switched interest to the poets, writers and the arts as sources of ongoing involvement. (We have had a version of this ourselves recently by way of the inclusion of poetic examples in recent meetings and NOWletters). In reply to a question on why the psychedelic movement ran out of steam he thought that perhaps the generational differences were the cause, in that the younger generation saw the positives whilst their elders saw only the negatives and clamped down.

Pollan had some interesting ideas about the relationship of the psychedelic experience to religion and mentioned the work of Terence McKenna's talks, "The Stoned Age". He gave an example of an American woman in London suffering from terminal cancer who had a wonderful psychedelic experience which cured her depression. She was ecstatic and said that she had "kissed the face of God". Pollan said how could that be if she was still the atheist she had always been. She replied that there wasn't any other word big enough to describe the happening. There was speculation as to what extent psychedelics have provided spiritual inspiration through history and, of course,

when the inspiration falls into the hands of our default brain, we get the familiar religious bitterness, competition, and nonsense. The problem of getting humanity at large into the frame of mind that psychedelics offer was discussed but considered impossible at present and due, of course, to that self-centred default mode in which we seem to be entrapped. Here is a quotation from his book:

"If the experience of transcendence is mediated by molecules that flow through both our brains and the natural world of plants and fungi, then perhaps nature is not as mute as Science has told us, and "Spirit," however defined, exists out there—is immanent in nature, in other words, just as countless premodern cultures have believed. What to my (spiritually impoverished) mind seemed to constitute a good case for the disenchantment of the world becomes in the minds of the more psychedelically experienced irrefutable proof of its fundamental enchantment. Flesh of the gods, indeed" (from "How to Change Your Mind: The New Science of Psychedelics" by Michael Pollan)

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

The Experiments

I was asked what effect a successful application of the Harding experiments has in everyday life.

Despite filling an A4 sheet of paper with a list of the consequences I find it rather difficult to recall them all. That is partly due to my memory and, to some extent, to the fact that by the nature of the experiments the outcome is not a matter of added knowledge but about intensified experience of the occasion in the moment of its happening.

The first lesson is that it is not about me, about a wiser, nobler, enlightened Alan. It is about making plain what I really am, or what is revealed when identification with what I've come to believe as myself is laid aside. And speaking of belief it involves the suspension of belief so that the 'what is' rather than the 'what is not' can prevail.

In the end, explanation must give way to something else and that involves a shift from detached explanation to engaged participation. If this step is taken the destination is revealed as 'This' and that is ALL. Hence the 'backward'. The eternal is restored to awareness. That might sound fanciful but that which is common to all, at all times, is what the experiments uncover.

As Douglas encapsulated in his most quoted quotation:

"To realize this instantaneous Now, to live in the present moment, taking no thought for to-morrow or yesterday must be my first concern. And my second must be to find in this Now all my to-morrows and yesterdays".

The commonly accepted view of the now is of a fleeting blink in an imagined 'time'. As long as I hold to that interpretation the actuality

of the present moment cannot work its restorative effect. The experiments simply open the window to the immediacy of being. (Appendix 3 lists my experience of the consequences).

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

APPENDIX 1—My Spirit

My Spirit—Thomas Traherne

1

My Naked Simple Life was I:
That Act so Strongly Shind
Upon the Earth, the Sea, the Skie,
It was the Substance of My Mind.

The Sence its self was I.

I felt no Dross nor Matter in my Soul,
No Brims nor Borders, such as in a Bowl
We see, My Essence was Capacitie.

That felt all Things.

The Thought that Springs
Therfrom's it self. It hath no other Wings
To Spread abroad, nor Eys to see,
Nor Hands Distinct to feel,

Nor Knees to Kneel:

But being Simple like the Deitie
In its own Centre is a Sphere
Not shut up here, but evry where.

2

It Acts not from a Centre to
Its Object as remote,
But present is, when it doth view,
Being with the Being it doth note.
Whatever it doth do,
It doth not by another Engine work,

But by it self; which in the Act doth lurk.
Its Essence is Transformed into a true
 And perfect Act.
 And so Exact
Hath God appeard in this Mysterious Fact,
 That tis all Ey, all Act, all Sight,
 And what it pleas can be,
 Not only see,
Or do; for tis more Voluble then Light:
 Which can put on ten thousand Forms,
 Being clothd with what it self adorns.

3

This made me present evermore
 With whatso ere I saw.
An Object, if it were before
My Ey, was by Dame Natures Law,
 Within my Soul. Her Store
Was all at once within me; all her Treasures
Were my Immediat and Internal Pleasures,
Substantial joys, which did inform my Mind.
 With all she wrought,
 My Soul was fraught,
And evry Object in my Soul a Thought
 Begot, or was; I could not tell,
 Whether the Things did there
 Themselves appear,
Which in my Spirit truly seemed to dwell;
 Or whether my conforming Mind
 Were not even all that therein shind.

4

But yet of this I was most sure,
That at the utmost Length,
(so Worthy was it to endure)
My Soul could best Express its Strength.
It was so Quick and Pure,
That all my Mind was wholly Evry where
What ere it saw, twas ever wholly there;
The Sun ten thousand Legions off, was nigh:
The utmost Star,
Tho seen from far,
Was present in the Apple of my Eye.
There was my Sight, my Life, my Sence,
My Substance and my Mind
My Spirit Shind
Even there, not by a Transeunt Influence.
The Act was Immanent, yet there.
The Thing remote, yet felt even here.

5

O joy! O Wonder, and Delight!
O Sacred Mysterie!
My Soul a Spirit infinit!
An Image of the Deitie!
A pure Substantiall Light!
That Being Greatest which doth Nothing seem!
Why twas my All, I nothing did esteem
But that alone. A Strange Mysterious Sphere!
A Deep Abyss
That sees and is
The only Proper Place of Heavenly Bliss.
To its Creator tis so near

In Lov and Excellence
In Life and Sence,
In Greatness Worth and Nature; And so Dear;
In it, without Hyperbole,
The Son and friend of God we see.

6

A Strange Extended Orb of Joy,
Proceeding from within,
Which did on evry side convey
It self. and being nigh of Kin
To God did evry Way
Dilate it self even in an Instant, and
Like an Indivisible Centre Stand
At once Surrounding all Eternitie.
Twas not a Sphere
Yet did appear
One infinit. Twas somewhat evry where.
And tho it had a Power to see
Far more. yet still it shind
And was a Mind
Exerted for it saw Infinitie
Twas not a Sphere, but twas a Power
Invisible, and yet a Bower.

7

O Wondrous Self! O Sphere of Light,
O Sphere of joy most fair;
O Act, O Power infinit;
O Subtile, and unbounded Air!
O Living Orb of Sight!
Thou which within me art, yet Me! Thou Ey,

And Temple of his Whole Infinitie!
O what a World art Thou! a World within!
 All Things appear,
 All Objects are
Alive in thee! Supersubstantial, Rare,
 Abov them selvs, and nigh of Kin
 To those pure Things we find
 In his Great Mind
Who made the World! tho now Ecclypsd by Sin.
 There they are Usefull and Divine,
 Exalted there they ought to Shine.

The following verse is entitled *The Apprehension* and seems to be a postscript designed to deal with the question of why the realisation is impermanent and needs to be refreshed.

The Apprehension

If this I did not evry moment see,
 And if my Thoughts did stray
 At any time, or idly play,
 And fix on other Objects, yet
 This Apprehension set
 In me
Was all my whole felicitie.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

APPENDIX 2 –Pointing Experiment

Experiment lifted from the website at www.headless.org

(See the site for a range of experiments, different experiments work for different personalities. Some find the Closed Eye experiment the most powerful. I prefer to question ‘what I really am’ than the ‘who I really am’ of the following experiment but take your pick. The following is a version of the Harding experiment which opened the door for me. A door I thought closed but discovered to be ever open. Try not to be underwhelmed by the simplicity of this process.)

When you point anywhere in the world you point at appearances. You are distant from what you are looking at and you see things, you see objects. Observe this – direct your attention at things by pointing at them. (The following images are a guide only -- it's imperative to actually DO the experiment.)



Pointing at objects I experience: Finger—space—objects.



Pointing at my foot I experience: Finger—space—foot.



Pointing at my knee I experience: Finger—space—knee.



Pointing at my chest I experience: Finger—space—chest.



Pointing at where others see my face I find:

Finger—space—space.

What do you see? You are now looking inwards – turning the direction of your attention round 180° from the objects out there to you the Subject, to the place you are looking out of. Do you see your face? Do you see anything at all there - any colour or shape, any movement?

Looking into the place where others see my face, I find no colour or shape here. I find boundless capacity or awareness this side of my pointing finger. This capacity is empty, clear, transparent. It is self-evidently awake, aware.

At the same time this capacity is full of everything happening in it: my finger, my view of the scene beyond, sounds, feelings...I am now seeing Who I really am – seeing the boundless One at the very heart of myself, the One in whom the world is happening. What do you find? Are you also looking out of this wide-open, crystal clear, awareness?

(I would add to this that, paradoxically, this clarity of awareness must be sustained for awakesness to manifest. The awareness of itself is the opening, offering the potential of awakesness, sticking with it, ‘looking longer’ as Michael Mayne’s book explains. See article on Wonder earlier in this book).

One of the frequent responses to the pointing finger exercise is ‘Well, thanks Alan, you have just demonstrated that I can’t see my own face’. No, bear with me, I realise that you can’t see your own face but that is not the point, I am asking you to apprehend what is going on where others see your face. As a matter of direct experiencing you don’t find a face, so what is revealed, what is on show? Now, at this moment and every moment.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

APPENDIX 3— The Consequences

SELF

It is not about ME (nor about me getting or becoming something else but of rediscovering what is already the case, what I really am).

Experiencing the ‘two in one’ perspective, revealing the first-person view as well as the customary third person outlook.

Note: Kahneman’s useful distinction of the believing versus the experiential self.

BEING

Establishment of the aperspectival. (see Gebser)

Capacitie/No-thingness and fullness. (The ‘two in one’) (see Traherne)

Revelation of the ‘field that is not contaminated by the known’. (see Krishnamurti)

End of the consensus trance—the freeing of Being.

Death—Immortality revealed as the *impersonal* aspect of 2 in 1.

MEANING

Rediscovery of the meaning-free. (Not meaningless)

Significance and meaning = NOW.

Cure for the ‘existence yes or no’— arguments. (See neo-Advaita)

Time no longer apprehended as context but as arising in Being.

Freedom from explanation. Explanation does not = meaning. (See the Buddhist— ‘Only don’t know’).

BEHAVIOUR

Seeing replaces Saying

Seeing displaces seeking—finding is no longer relevant

Participation replaces Observation as the primary condition.

Fellowship of the Mystery—Aloneness=all oneness. The sea of Being.

APPLICATION or EFFECT

The Eternity Now puzzle solved

Not mysterious/ Not remote/ Immediate and accessible.

Not for the elect but for all

A clear view of the necessary and the unnecessary action.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

Conclusion

‘What is’ is whatever is happening now.

Awakening is simply freeing the ‘occasion’ of what is not present.

And what the ‘I’ really is— is simply

—awareness of what is happening.

First, I become aware that my everyday consciousness

—is overlooking something.

Then my ‘seeker’ sets forth.

All traditional and contemporary explanations

are explored

Until at last, they show that it is not to be reached by explanation.

The unrealised aspect must be directly experienced.

Attention is reversed—‘the backward step’

Revealing that I am looking out of

what I am looking for—

Resting in that realisation

The ‘I’ lets go of any residual observer perspective

Merges into the nonduality of the present moment and—

There is just This

An impersonal awareness of unfolding being.

The being of BEING

From time to time, Chris Cheney, would remind us of the saying 'Open mouth—already big mistake'. I now see that 'pick up pen' might be an even greater error.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

5 January 2020



