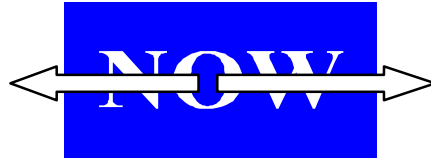


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Saying, Seeing, Being.

To Rightly See — *"What hinders then but we in Heaven may be Even here on Earth did we but rightly see?"*
Thomas Traherne

I have spent years unravelling the threads of the perennial philosophy, which I understand to involve the exploration of an aspect of our being which is largely ignored and which can be summarised as — 'the interest of the individual in the undivided'.

What I am calling the undivided is a perspective which replaces the customary sense of identity, of 'me looking, hearing, etc'., with a sudden realisation and identification with the totality of the occasion. This can happen spontaneously or manifest as the result of meditative practice. It has been described as REALISING 'the wholeness of life'.

This perspective, or versions of it, is the source of various attempts to codify or capture in explanations which become the sacred texts, bibles, scriptures, etc., of all religions and the basis of mystical traditions.

The written works are what I mean by the saying of it, the direct experience I am labelling 'the seeing of it'. As to the being of it, that is the tricky part as the seeing of it reveals the being of it to be ever the case, albeit an actuality that is obscured by everyday interpretations of experience.

If it is simply the immediate experience 'rightly seen' why is it not self-evident. The answer ironically, is simply that the self gets in the way. As the leading article in this issue by Brentyn Ramm explains.

Even if I have a massive realisation, an awakening to this as fact, the realisation does not prevail. There is an apparently inevitable default to the customary third-person, individual view of the assumed self, of Alan back in the driver's seat. This is necessary for the individual to function but because it seems so vital it is assumed to be fundamental and the flashes of awakening are considered to be aberrations. This, I consider to be a reversal of the true situation.

Is it possible to demonstrate that the undivided perspective is fundamental and the observer perspective secondary? No amount of analysis and explanation will help as that is the field of third person, individual enquiry, the 'saying of it', it has to be a matter of whether or not experience will do the trick. Can the ego-self be persuaded to stand aside and thus enable the 'seeing of it'?

This sounds like poppycock to the ego-bound listener, but in my view that response is evidence of ego entrapment. It is the first line of defence of Alan and ego-identity at large — seeing through the illusion of distorted identity is the challenge. When challenged to find an example of the being of it I usually draw on the following extract from Virginia Woolf's, *To the Lighthouse*:

...Foolishly, she had set them opposite each other. That could be remedied tomorrow. If it were fine, they should go for a picnic. Everything seemed possible. Everything seemed right. Just now (but this cannot last, she thought, disassociating 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 around them. It partook she felt, carefully helping Mr. Banks to an especially 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 tonight, she had the feeling she had had once today already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing it is made that remains forever after. This would remain.

"Yes," she assured William Bankes, "there is plenty for everybody."

One of the barriers to moving from seeing to ‘the being of it’ is the notion that it should be offering more. A better, wiser self rather than a self-free perspective. As I was considering how best to deal with this problem, I received Brentyn Ramm’s latest article in which he describes what I have found to be the perfect answer. (See below).

Alan Mann

Big Link Article – No-self

As I was writing the above Katie sent me a link to an article which is one of the best presentations of ‘the saying of it’ I have read. Long time friends and readers of this publication will be amused to find the famous reference to the famous Wei Wu Wei quotation.

Eastern philosophy says there is no “self.” Science agrees
“Why are you unhappy? Because 99.9 percent of everything you think, and of everything you do, is for yourself — and there isn’t one.”

<https://bigthink.com/the-well/eastern-philosophy-neuroscience-no-self/>

Freeing Yourself from Self-Consciousness — Douglas Harding and Jean-Paul Sartre on Being Authentic. By Brentyn J. Ramm

This article is included with permission of the Daily Philosophy website where it was first published. <https://daily-philosophy.com/brentyn-ramm-self-consciousness/>

Editor’s note: Brentyn’s covering email reads: “Here’s also the poster I presented on May 26 at The Science of Consciousness conference in Taormina, Sicily. The tube experiment (with a mirror at one end) was very popular. I had 2 tubes going at a time and there was a constant stream of philosophers, scientists and other consciousness researchers coming to see the void/pure awareness for a couple of hours”.

Here is a link to the poster: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1W3zwny1hBj54WEp9NVXHCS8-vcNphqCS/view?usp=sharing>

We can change the way we perceive ourselves by a simple switch in our first-person perspective, argues author Brentyn J. Ramm, following Douglas Harding and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Feeling awkwardly self-conscious is something that we’ve all experienced.

For many, this feeling is so prevalent as to be debilitating in social situations. This is known as morbid self-consciousness. In some situations, like public speaking, pretty much everyone feels anxious. There is even a commonly cited study showing that people fear public speaking more than death! [1] The reality is actually a bit more complicated [2] but the fact that public speaking is up there with death as a fear really says something about the extreme dread which this prospect can invoke.

On this, I would like to introduce an experiential approach developed by Douglas Harding which can be helpful for freeing oneself from self-consciousness.

Harding was a philosopher and mystic. Up to his late 20s and early 30s, Harding suffered from morbid self-consciousness. He was brought up in a fundamentalist Christian sect, the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren, in which he wasn't allowed to read literature, newspapers or watch films. Any books other than the Bible and a few school books were liable to be burnt. Laughing out loud was actively discouraged if not outright forbidden. [3]

When he broke away from the sect at the age of 21, as far as his family were concerned, he was dead to them and was destined for hell. No wonder he felt self-conscious and ill-at-ease in the world. He particularly didn't like his nose. He felt that it was too big. [4] He was shame-faced around other people. But all of that changed when he had a radical shift in his conscious experience of himself. It happened when he noticed that he couldn't see his head.

The young Douglas Harding was suffering from a particularly bad case of what the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre called bad faith. According to Sartre, you are radically free. You cannot be pre-defined. You are continually inventing yourself whether you recognise this or not. For Sartre, being self-conscious, thinking of yourself and acting as if you are a mere object, is a form of false consciousness. You aren't really an object at all, you only think that you are. That's just how you appear to others. You are actually a pure consciousness, a kind of 'nothingness', that cannot be constrained or predicted – a form of pure spontaneity.

Sartre spent much of his time smoking his pipe in cafes and observing life. That was how he did philosophy. To illustrate bad faith he gives the example of a waiter he observed in a cafe:

Let us consider this waiter in the cafe. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton... We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing at being a waiter in a cafe. [5]

Sartre, as with the other phenomenologists like Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, was concerned with how one encounters others in personal relationships. [6] Why aren't I a solipsist with the sense that everyone else is just a picture in my consciousness? Sartre's answer was that, in a sense, you have no choice. In particular, in human relations I encounter others' subjectivity directly when they look at me, or what Sartre called 'The Look'.

To illustrate this he gives a famous example of being caught looking through a keyhole. [7] Whilst I am there immersed in the scene, I am completely free. But then suppose another catches me in the act. I suddenly experience myself as an object for the other. This profound experience of shame is inseparable from seeming to be a mere object for the other. For Sartre this means that human relationships are primarily based upon conflict. They are an unstable dynamic in which

you are either subject or object. No wonder he thought that hell was other people. We could say that hell is being constantly aware of how you look to other people.

This raises the problem of how we can deal with problematic feelings of self-consciousness in our social interactions. Sartre criticises our tendency to think of ourselves as mere objects in the world, but he gives little advice on how exactly to overcome this inauthenticity. How do we recognise being an absolutely free consciousness if indeed that's what we really are? Do we have to religiously study his notoriously difficult 800 page philosophical tome *Being and Nothingness*?

Instead, let's return to Douglas Harding and how he overcame his own acute self-consciousness. In particular, I will guide you through some of the simple experiments he developed for recognising your essential non-thing-like nature.

The shift in Harding's self-perception came when he noticed that he couldn't see his face; instead he saw the world. Try looking down at your own body and notice that you see your feet, legs, hands, arms and torso, but not your head. As the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty described it: "In the matter of living appearance, my visual body includes a large gap at the level of the head." [8] "So, what?" you might ask. Why is this significant?

For Harding this was profoundly significant. He saw that in his direct first-person experience he was looking out of a kind of nothingness here, not a head. But rather than a mere void, this space was aware and contained the given world. He wasn't a mere thing in the world up against others, but in reality he was radically open to the world and others. He described seeing this as having "dropped an intolerable burden." [9] To notice this for yourself, please carry out the following experiments. Try to set aside beliefs, memory and common sense and just go by what you see, as if for the first time:

Experiment 1: Exploring the Gap

You know what it's like for someone to put their hands past their head, but what is it like from your perspective? Hold up your hands in front of you as if you were holding a basketball. Notice the gap between your hands, and how it contains part of the room. Now very slowly bring your hands back. Notice how your hands grow larger and the gap between them also grows. They begin to blur and finally disappear altogether – into what? For me they just disappear into a void. Is it like that for you? Bring them forwards again and watch as they reappear. Repeat this a few times to get a sense of what this seemingly empty (yet full) region is like.

"But I can see my nose!" You might say. What about Douglas Harding's nose that he was so self-conscious of? The best way to answer this question is to investigate what your nose is actually like for yourself:

Experiment 2: Nose Blurs

Try opening and closing one eye to see what your 'nose' is like. I call it my nose, but remember that we are setting aside common sense. Is what you see like what is in the middle of someone's face? I find that it seems to be a large pink translucent blur that stretches from the top to the bottom of the scene. In fact, there are two of them, and they switch from side to side. Are they

attached to a head in your current experience or are they floating in space? When you look straight ahead perhaps the nose blurs disappear or perhaps there is a slight blur. In any case, it's what is behind the nose blurs that we're interested in.

Experiment 3: Holding Your Ears

Gently take hold of your ears with your hands. Focus on the hand-blurs in the periphery of your vision. Now please consider the following questions. On present evidence is there a head between these blurs? Are there any eyes? Are there any colours or shapes? Is there a head? Now attend to your 'ear' sensations. How far apart are they? Is this a head sized gap or is it world-wide? Is the gap visually bounded by anything or is it boundless? Is there on present evidence a head between your ears or the world itself? Are the head sensations between your 'ears' currently forming an opaque head-box in which you are trapped or are the sensations transparent and in the same space as the scene? Isn't this 'nothingness' here also awake to itself and the scene?

What has this to do with the true or authentic self? [10] One way of understanding what this means is to consider an analogy – first-person shooter video games. One might not think of these games as containing any profound philosophical insights, however they are a rather accurate depiction of what it's like to be you from the first-person visual perspective. What they show is not the head of the character, but the scene. Perhaps it shows some arms holding a weapon and occasionally some legs. So, in the analogy, you are like the unmoving screen on which all of the action happens. When you play these games the scene always moves, not the screen. Just like in first-person shooters, you as the first-person are the unmoving screen on which things happen – at least this is the claim to be tested. Your first-person stillness is particularly noticeable when you are driving and you see the road opening out and trees, houses and light poles moving past. (Here is a video that makes the point about your first-person stillness even more salient). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PUhkNoaBMI>

According to Harding, at the root of the human condition is that we 'thing' ourselves. We do it by habitually imagining ourselves from the outside, but this habit can be unlearned. Harding applies this to the case of Sartre's waiter:

Let us take up the story. If, instead of playing at being a waiter in a café, he were to see that in his own immediate experience he is the café itself, along with all that is going on there (including those limbs of his, going about their own business), why, this phony and ineffectual waiter would turn into the opposite sort. If, instead of pretending to be a thing, he were to come off it and be no-thing: if he were to be himself for himself, he would be for others one of the best waiters in Paris instead of one of the worst. True to his reality, he would appear false to none. [11]

This practice of noticing your first-person facelessness has applications to the problem of being overly self-conscious. In particular, notice that the lived experience of talking to someone is not of being face-to-face, but face-to-no-face. You can't help but disappear in favour of others. For Harding it took a few years to stabilise this new form of self-perception, after which it became a lasting cure for his problematic feelings of self-consciousness. [12] Freed from imagining a face

in the middle of his world, he could once again take an interest in the people before him, just like he did as a child.

This perspective can also be applied to cases where you might reasonably be expected to be highly self-conscious – when you are speaking from a stage. Here the remedy is noticing that, from your perspective, the audience is really looking at ‘nothing’. You are just space for the audience, your voice and any jitters that arise. In fact, the sea of faces are the ones that are on display. They are how you are currently manifesting. Of course, self-consciousness will still naturally arise. The goal of the ‘headless’ practice isn’t to try to inhibit this or to try to forget what you look like. But rather to notice that you are space (or capacity) for those feelings and imaginings as well as the world. At least that is the claim for you to investigate.

For Sartre, the look of the other almost inevitably makes me into an object for them. Harding, however, pointed out that this process can be short-circuited by noticing your first-person facelessness. This can be noticed even when someone is looking directly at me. How effective this is as a remedy for self-consciousness is of course something to test out for yourself. It’s been immensely helpful for me.

Taking notice of this perspective doesn’t mean losing sight of the fact that for others from over there (and for yourself in the mirror) you appear as a person. This is your third-person identity. Developing this identity was a profound developmental achievement and something you needed to be able to function in the social world.

But what are you for yourself? The claim for testing is that you are not merely a person. Your true authentic nature, your first-person identity, is not a person at all, but a space for everything that is happening, including all of those lovely people. [13]

What is pure awareness? Douglas Harding (1909-2007) proposed a series of simple but surprising experiments that one can perform to learn more about oneself as the subject of one’s own first person view.

(See one of Brentyn’s earlier papers [How to Recognise Pure Awareness](https://daily-philosophy.com/brentyn-ramm-pure-awareness/).)

<https://daily-philosophy.com/brentyn-ramm-pure-awareness/>)

Notes

[1]: Watson, P. 1973, October 7. What people usually fear. The Sunday Times [London].

[2]: Dwyer, Karen & Davidson, Marlina M. 2012. Is Public Speaking Really More Feared Than Death? Communication Research Reports, 29 (2), 99-107.

[3]: Harding, Douglas E. (1992). The Trial of the Man Who Said He Was God. London: Arkana. p. 361-262.

[4]: Harding, Douglas E. (2000). *Face-to-no-face: Rediscovering Our Original Nature*. Carlsbad: Inner Directions Publishing. p. 4-5.

[5]: Sartre, Jean-Paul. (1978). *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. New York, NY, USA. p. 59.

[6]: For more detailed comparison of Harding, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty see my article *Body, Self and Others Harding, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty on Intersubjectivity* (freely available here).

[7]: Sartre (1978), p. 259-265.

[8]: Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002). *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge Classics. p. 108.

[9]: Harding, Douglas E. (1986). *On Having No Head: Zen and the Rediscovery of the Obvious*. London: Arkana. p. 3.

[10]: Of course, Sartre who thought of the self (or ego) as an object of consciousness would have rejected calling this non-personal consciousness our 'true self' (see Sartre's, *The Transcendence of the Ego*), but I take this to be merely a terminological difference.

[11]: Harding, Douglas E. (1999). *Head off Stress*. London: The Shollond Trust. p. 11–12.

[12]: Harding (2000), p. 15.

[13]: Ramm, B. J. 2021. *Body, Self and Others: Harding, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty on Intersubjectivity*. *Philosophies*, 6(4), 100. Section 9.

Brentyn Ramm

The Enjoyment of Awake Presence

Extract from Joan Tollifson's blog, *Contemplative Exploration* 9 April 2023

Meditative or contemplative inquiry, exploration and discovery is not a matter of thinking about ideas. It is not about believing ideas either. It is about a quality of open listening and attending, an energetic presence—seeing directly, dissolving into this open spaciousness, being this whole happening, just as it is. It involves sensing and awaring, not trying to analyze ideas or figure all this out. Of course, there is a place in life for critical thinking, which is a very important capacity. But spiritual exploration is in a different realm, at least for the most part.

<https://joantollifson.substack.com/p/contemplative-exploration>

The Tree House, a story by Margot Mann

Miranda slid down the pole from the tree house, ran across the grass to the back door and went quickly to her bedroom. She noticed she still had the binoculars round her neck, so she whipped them off and pushed them under her bed. Her father forgot to take them when he left. Her heart was beating quite fast and it wasn't just because she had been running. She looked at her reflection in the mirror and replaced a lock of hair behind one ear. Brushing a bit of bark from her jeans, she sauntered down the passage to the kitchen.

Her older brother Larry was sitting at the table making a model aeroplane. All Larry ever did in the school holidays was make model planes. Occasionally his friend Jason would visit and the pair of them would take up the whole kitchen table with their model-making paraphernalia. On rare occasions they took the models into the backyard and pretended to fly them, which usually ended with the fragile craft crashing into a tree and breaking apart.

"Where's Mum," asked Miranda, gazing out of the window above Larry's head to the house next door. Larry grunted. "Where's Mum," Miranda repeated more loudly, picking up an unfinished model. Larry swiped at her hand and said, "Put that down. How would I know? Next door talking to Maureen." "Maureen's out," said Miranda, replacing the model on the table just out of Larry's reach. "Well she must be talking to Brian then," Larry replied, exasperated. "Go away," he added, again swiping the air in the direction of Miranda's hand. "She said she'd be home by now," pursued Miranda.

She took a cold drink from the fridge, walked slowly down the passage to the sitting room and turned on the TV. A middle-aged woman was holding the arm of a much younger man, pleading with him. He seemed anxious to leave and made several attempts to move towards the door. The woman began to cry and the young man gave her a push, and it was a moment before Miranda realized that the young man was the woman's son and she was upset because he wanted to leave home. Miranda screwed up her face and stabbed at the remote. The picture faded. Since their father walked out six months ago, she was forced to admit to herself that although Larry was a big pain and he regularly got on her nerves - mostly because he was always bossing her around - nevertheless she was glad to have him at home. Not that he needed to know that, of course, and besides, he had never shown any signs of wanting to leave. She hadn't spoken to him about anything she had seen through the binoculars. Larry probably wouldn't care much anyway and he would tell her to mind her own business.

Miranda knew that her mother was next door. She also knew that Larry was right when he suggested that she must be talking to Brian, Maureen's husband. Miranda had seen them clearly through the binoculars, sitting at the kitchen table with their heads close together. It was difficult to get a good angle from the treehouse to the house next door, and a couple of times she nearly lost her footing, which would have been embarrassing, if not dangerous. This was the third time in the past week that she had spied on her mother and Brian, and although it wasn't a perfect picture because a tree branch sometimes moved across her line of vision, each time she looked they were talking together at the kitchen table. Occasionally, one of them would laugh; sometimes they both laughed together. Brian worked at home and Maureen had a part-time job somewhere. Miranda felt her stomach clench. She quite liked Brian but she didn't want him

to come and live with them, and she didn't think Larry would either. Maureen would be terribly upset. To stop herself from thinking of all the shocking possibilities, she slipped out a side door, put on her bike helmet and rode off up the street.

When she arrived back at the house, about an hour later, her mother was humming a tune as she prepared dinner. She hadn't heard her mother sing for months. This was a really bad sign. She wondered whether Larry noticed and decided that he probably hadn't. Larry never noticed anything unless it was directly in his line of vision. He was still taking up space at the kitchen table, gluing bits of balsa wood together and promising his mother he would put everything away soon.

"Where have you been," Miranda said accusingly, in response to her mother's cheerful greeting, "I thought you were coming home ages ago." "Just doing a few chores," her mother replied, smiling. She signaled to Miranda behind Larry's bent head to follow her through to the passage. Miranda stood still. She could feel her heart thumping through her thin shirt and resisted a strong impulse to dash outside and ride off on her bike again. Her hands were suddenly damp and she had to force her legs to move, as she slowly followed her mother down the passage to the living room.

Her mother spoke in a low voice. "I just wanted to tell you that I've decided we'll give Larry a surprise birthday party. What d'you think? You know it's his birthday next month and we've all had a pretty tough time since your father left." She paused for a moment and then continued, "Maureen and Brian have been really helpful and Brian was just now telling me that he'd be happy to organize the music and the dance floor. Maureen knows a good catering place and . . . What on earth's the matter? What's happened? Miranda darling, stop crying and tell me what's wrong."

From NOWletter No 2 - 1 May 1993

Meetings are now held at 10 am on the second Sunday of every month at 81 Greville Street, Chatswood and are open to anyone interested in the possibility of working out for themselves, rather than relying on others, whether transformation of consciousness, enlightenment or whatever you want to call it, can come about.

(June 2023-The question now is whether they will continue and, if so, where?)