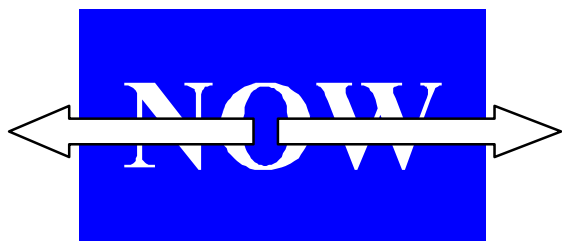


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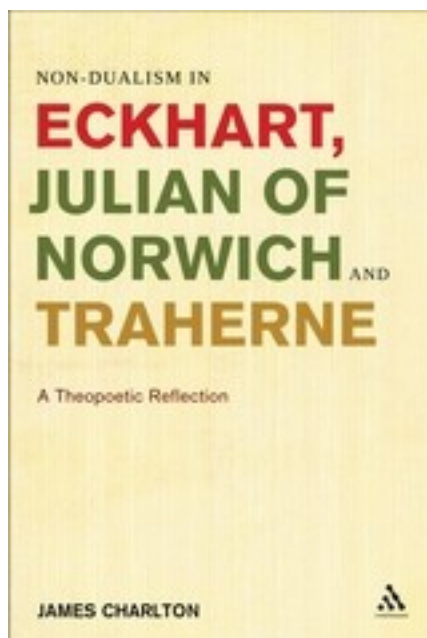
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Next Greville Street Meeting – Saturday 4th May

Another single-issue NOWletter, following the publication of a new of book. I have included an ‘official’ review followed by the anonymous short comment which appears as a descriptive comment on the Amazon website and then my personal response after first reading.



James Charlton is an Australian poet and writer in the area of interfaith and interreligious studies. Born in Melbourne, Australia, Charlton has lived mostly in Tasmania. [Wikipedia](#)

New Book on Non-dualism

Title: Non-dualism in Eckhart, Julian of Norwich and Traherne: a Theopoetic Reflection

Publisher: Bloomsbury 2013

Author: James Charlton

This review was, in the main, written by Dr Anna Alomes, Dr Wayne Hudson and Dr Lucy Tatman. All three worked in the School of Philosophy at the University of Tasmania.

This is an important 'crossover' book which draws on Western and Eastern perspectives, respecting differences but focusing on shared concurrencies of interest.

It carries a unique exposition of Eckhart, Mother Julian and Traherne in relation to Eastern ideas, principally about 'the Self' and 'Awakening'.

Parts of the book are theologically complex; other parts are written from a poet's point of view. The author aims to stimulate readers to embrace what he regards as humanity's vital task: Openness to the evolutionary non-dual thrust of Spirit.

To that end, he includes his own poems insofar as they bear upon his explorations of the purport of non-separation. All in all, this is a creative, theological work of 'inter-weave'. It perceives and conceives fresh connections.

A qualified commonality of interest is proposed between the three Europeans and the version of *Advaita Vedanta* put forward by Ramana Maharshi (d.1950).

'Non-dualism is confronting. ... It confronts us with potential layers of meaning that require response. The field is tricky to walk across. Clear boundaries are ever more unlikely' (page 93).

'The perichoretic metaphor, of mutual dancing around in a circle, speaks of participation in reciprocal relations. None of us can find our true identity solely within ourselves. We need an activated or realized sense of interdependence' (page 148).

The main characters are differentiated; it is clear that they share a passion for unitive spiritual experience, nuanced in three ways. By way of counterpoint, the focus switches to Ramana Maharshi's thorough-going non-dualism and its implications.

No claim is made that Hinduism and Christianity are compatible. In terms of cosmology and metaphysics they are incommensurate. Nor does the author necessarily assert that similarities are readily observable at the level of lived experience. Lines of difference are laid out; but as the encounter progresses, real connections become evident.

'Today's interpenetration of religions can result in vapid syncretism. It can also bring the deepest truths of reality to the fore. ... Wherever the goal is to move away from duality, there is also a need to attend to particularity. ... I maintain that Eckhart, Julian and Traherne inscribe a movement away from a dualism of the divine and the human towards a moderate non-dualism. ... There is less emphasis on a personal sense of self and a greater recognition of one infinite Selfhood' (page 146).

This book is innovative in two respects: First, by linking Eckhart, Julian and Traherne in terms of non-dualism; second, by its constructive work vis-à-vis inter-religious perspectives.

The publisher considers that *Non-dualism in Eckhart, Julian of Norwich and Traherne* represents an advance in knowledge and, arguably, wisdom in the field of non-naïve pluralism.

This second review is attached to the book in a number of websites from which it is available.

The words 'me,' 'mine,' 'you,' 'yours,' can mislead us into feeling separate from other people. This book is an exhilarating contribution to the spirituality of non-duality or non-separation. Meister Eckhart, Mother Julian of Norwich and Thomas Traherne are interpreted as 'theoposets' of the body/soul who share a moderate non-dualism. Their work is brought within the ambit of non-dual Hinduism. Specifically, their passion for unitive spiritual experience is linked to construals of both 'the Self' and 'Awakening', as enunciated by *Advaita Vedanta*.

Charlton draws on poetry, theology and philosophy to perceive fresh connections. A commonality of interest is proposed between the three Europeans and Ramana Maharshi. The concept of non-duality is basic to much of Asian religion. On the other hand, Christianity has usually ignored its own non-dual roots. This text contributes to a recovery, in the West, of the vital, unifying power of non-dual awareness and connectedness.

Non-dualism in Eckhart, Julian of Norwich and Traherne, A Theopoetic Reflection

A NOWletter commentary from Alan Mann

The book comprises five main chapters: Thomas Traherne , Meister Eckhart , Mother Julian of Norwich, Losing and Finding the Self, Non-dual 'Awakening'— A Way Forward. It includes a comprehensive bibliography, notes, glossary and index.

(Extracts lifted from the book are offset and in italics. References to related NOWletter contributions shown as NOW followed by the number of the issue identifying the NOWletter concerned).

I am not qualified to write what could be described as a review of such a book but on the basis of a lifetime interest in the subject matter I have the urge to explain why I think it is one of the finest I have read. It joins my Desert Island selection: *The Ever Present Origin, The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth, Zen in English Literature and the Oriental Classics, Centuries Of Meditations, Wholeness and the Implicate Order, The Complete Emily Dickinson* and perhaps one or two others if I think about it.

The book could have been written for my personal benefit, not only am I a committed Trahernian, interested in Eckhart and to a lesser extent Dame Julian, but the theme of the book, the complexities of non-dualism, is what has kept the NOWletter alive for the past 20 years. I decided that I'd make these general comments on first reading and link some of the issues the author presents to corresponding contributions to the NOWletter in recent times.

In bringing Eckhart, Dame Julian and Traherne together and then extending the enquiry to non-duality in Indian philosophy the author opened my eyes to connections I hadn't seen and provided me with a more comprehensive understanding of aspects which I had glimpsed but not found the words to adequately express. For example, the sub-title of the book is *A Theopoetic Reflection*. I hadn't come across the word theopoetic and imagined it was a word James Charlton had coined to capture his particular approach. I now discover there is what might be called a theopoetic discipline which is defined at length in a Wikipedia entry from which I extracted this paragraph:

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.

My point in raising this is that I find that I am, and have been for many years, an unwitting practitioner of the theopoetic if not myself a poet. And at this point I should mention that the author is himself a distinguished poet which explains why I feel he speaks not simply about what his three subjects say but also from what they see and what they ask us to see ourselves. I have long maintained that poets seem to tap a clarity of expression when talking about non-dual aspects of our being, which is rarely the case in more analytical and academically constrained commentaries. The content of the book has been the subject of my attention for many years but I found the theopoetic reading of these matters had an effect like the ‘refresh’ button on an updated webpage in ‘making all things new’— well not quite all things, but certainly many.

In discussing the non-dualism of Eckhart, Dame Julian and Traherne, Charlton finds a common thread in their determination to affirm the world of manifestation, to celebrate creation. Thus, their dualism, he argues, is what he describes as ‘moderate non-dualism’. This is what I have been calling rather clumsily ‘the essential dualism’ as a reaction, possibly an over-reaction, to the voidists or extreme non-dualists who assure me that neither I nor they, nor anything else exists. (NOW 114/115/116/117) Charlton speaking:

As I mentioned above, Traherne conceives of the divine as interconnecting living Spirit. This Spirit is not separate from me; we are not two. But neither are we one, in the sense of numerically one. The corollary of this is that I am not separate from twitchy-nosed wallabies. I am also not separate from those people whom society might designate as ‘evil’. We are not two; neither are we one. ...Traherne is interested in the recognition or recovery of union with the divine.

...He (Traherne) appears, with Julian and Eckhart, to assume that the divine exists both outside the world and inside it. The divine remains transcendent and yet can be encountered within the world of nature and culture.

He inserts a poem ‘*Moments*’ and explains that the words ‘nothing separate’ and ‘animal unity’ in the poem are not meant to imply mysticism. The intention is to reduce the gap, fostered by various religious perspectives, between the world and ‘the beyond’.

Moments

The mind by its nature is a *singulare tantum*.

I should say: the overall number of minds is just one.

Erwin Schrodinger

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.

I was also delighted to find someone who saw in his subjects the shared aspect of their revelations, Traherne in particular referring to it as the *Fellowship of the Mystery*, and in general what can be described as the perichoretic aspect— another bee in my bonnet as demonstrated by my preference for referring to ‘capacitie’ as first person *plural* present tense in preference to Douglas’s familiar first person *singular* present tense. (NOW 129/163)

The unitive mystery is perichoretic in origin and outworking. It is not remote from other contingent creatures. It is not separatist; nor does it lack communal concern.

Here are examples of the similarities Charlton finds between Eckhart, Dame Julian and Traherne.

Eckhart’s ‘birth mysticism’ is positive towards the human body. Neither he, nor Julian nor Traherne preach self-denial. Eckhart’s congregations are not required to make a dualistic choice. They do not have to choose between cultivation of the soul at the expense of nurturing the body. There is no focus on eternity at the expense of responsibility for what happens in the present time. Eckhart is capable of being distinctly practical. He opposes, for example, a popular idea that contemplation is a passive activity, fit for a recluse. The ‘true seeing and true knowing’ of contemplation is intended to nourish, not a ‘gazing at being’, but a ‘participation in being’. Eckhart’s hearers are expected to be verb-oriented, giving birth to the ‘Son’ by actively becoming and begetting. This would have resonated with Traherne. It appears to me that both men eschew ‘prayer’, in the sense of requesting something from God. For if we are ‘full’, we have no need to pray in that sense.

and

...The three mystics (if that imprecise word is appropriate) employ words which point to humanity’s participation within the Infinite.

...None of the writers at the centre of this study approve of escapist or pietistic religiosity. Transpersonal and communal engagement is always placed ahead of individualistic cultivation.

There isn’t much to record, as far as I could see, about differences of approach between the three. I selected this extract :

Traherne’s non-dualism can be nominated as ‘experiential’. Relatively speaking, the non-dualism of Julian and Eckhart can be described as ‘more conceptual’. ...Traherne’s use of ‘spirit’ is different from that of Eckhart or Julian. He seems to elide divine Spirit with human spirit.

Reference to David Bohm was an unexpected bonus for me as it was Bohm's work which inspired the dialogue meetings we have held for the past 20 years and which in turn gave rise to the NOWletter. (The title of the NOWletter is drawn from verse 3 of Traherne's poem *The Anticipation*).

Julian's motif of enfoldment was taken up, curiously, by physicist David Bohm in Wholeness and the Implicate Order. Whereas, in mechanistic physics, two of the 'foundations' are extension and separation, this is not exactly the case with quantum physics. Bohm proposes the words 'implicate order' to characterize the dictum that 'everything is enfolded into everything'. The 'implicate order' is contrasted with the 'explicate order'. In the latter, physical entities are accorded particular space and time for their unfolding, as distinct from Bohm's enfolding.

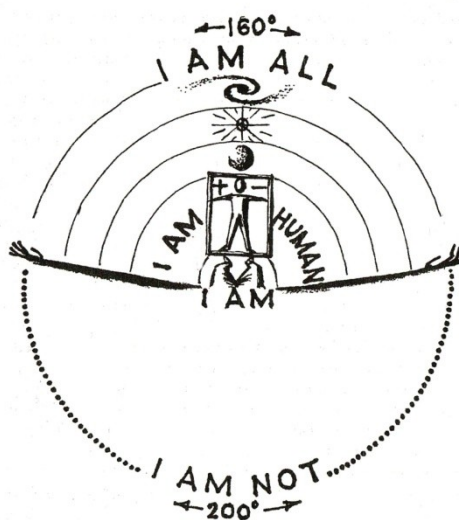
...In the implicate order we have to say that mind enfolds matter in general and therefore body in particular. Similarly, the body enfolds not only the mind but also in some sense the entire material universe.

The book provided me with regular reminders of Douglas Harding whose focus on the experiential and the simple experiments he developed gave me the most readily available and easily opened door to what our three guides are asking us to recover.

He (Traherne) creates and is created by the world around him, the world which seems to flow through him. The terms internal and external which are useful on ordinary levels of consciousness cease to be valid for him.

There are some interesting comparisons between the three mystics and Ramana Maharshi who propounded a more extreme non-dualism than our trio but nevertheless there are connections.

Charlton points to the difference between Ramana's absolute non-duality and the moderate dualism of the Eckhart, Julian and Traherne but in view of Ramana's acceptance of a manifest order I think that it is not so much a matter of difference in what is intended by what they say about non-duality but more a question of focus or which level of the



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spectrum is under consideration. I find it helpful to consider these sorts of questions in the light of Harding's diagram of the hierarchy. (above)

For example the 'I am not' or No-thing end of the spectrum is what Traherne points to when claiming that *...Till we see out nothing we do not understand the value of our being.*

...This leads to a possible claim, by non-dualists, that we are Awareness itself, in some absolute sense. Eckhart, Julian and Traherne do not employ such language, but Ramana Maharshi does do so, even though his tradition is likewise premodern. But if the Christian use of 'Oneness' is treated as 'Awareness', then Oneness in the three Christian teachers might be viewed as 'That' in which the thought, feeling and sensation of separateness appears. The Oneness/Awareness is not an object, but is the background 'on which' objects appear. Accordingly, in terms of the absolute truth-level, this Oneness/Awareness is our true nature. We appear within That, within the One. A traditional Christian ontology might wish to add that the One is the I Am, whose nature is the creative love of agape. A Christian inclined to non-dualism might wish to affirm: 'The divine I Am is my being (absolute level of truth) but I am not (conventional truth-level) the being of the I Am'.

It is interesting to compare the Ramana approach and the above reconciliation of his more extreme non-duality with that of Bernadette Roberts' claim that we have to go beyond unitive consciousness to get to the bottom of things, somewhat like Eckhart's 'going beyond God'. These issues strike me as being beyond rational argument and best resolved by agreeing on the likelihood that every aspect is relevant to a particular level of the all embracing hierarchy. (NOW 164)

Charlton makes further comments from which I selected:

In view of the above, and at the risk of facileness, the word 'non-separation' can serve to summarize the outlook of Traherne, Julian, Eckhart and Ramana.

and turning again to Ramana:

..If the world of beings that Brahmā produces is regarded as absolute, then that is illusion. That is to say, the world is only illusory when regarded erroneously as absolute. Between Brahmā and the beings which Brahmā generates there is an accepted dualism. On the other hand, Brahmanic union is taken by thorough-going Advaitins to mean the complete absence of differentiation. Read more at location 2033

To the question are you a Christian, my answer for many years has been yes and no. My childhood exposure to daily prayers and Sunday sermons has given me a 'language of the spirit' which I value but what passes for religious observance most often seems to mask the teachings of the New Testament. And one of the messages of this book, and the three mystics, is that language of spirit is fine as far as it goes but that it doesn't go far enough. I think it is clear that some of the words of Jesus which have survived oral communication and translation clearly point to the message of awakening to 'what is' in the most complete way possible and that I also find represented in the lives and writings of our trio. So, in my reading of this book, a Theopoetic perspective on the Christian message would be to understand the Christian story as a mythic attempt to represent the underlying wholeness which cannot be reduced to words; a message aimed at the recovery of an innocence in which, in Traherne's words, enables us "*...to enjoy the world aright*" or in those of Jesus '*to live life more abundantly*'.

Of the many contributions to the NOWletter on aspects of non-duality, I will identify only the most recent, those on Wei-Tsin's Mountains and Waters classic. (NOW 158/159/161/162/163). I found that whilst reading the Charlton book, the lingering mists of uncertainty began to clear. My notes can provide only a taste of what I found to be a wealth of helpful commentary and reference. Charlton brings a rare clarity to the issue of non-duality and that seems to me to be the effect of a poet's eye, ear and heart when handling its complexities. With this in mind I'll conclude with one of his poems from the book.

Without Images

the sight of the invisible
will be no blazing illumination
but inner sight I mean to say insight
which means seeing without images

the sight of the invisible
will be possible only to eyes large enough
or rather enlarged enough to see the sacred
everywhere

Postscripts:

1

One of the references he quotes is particularly interesting to me:

'Non-duality is not the opposite of duality, nor is it a simplistic negation of duality. Non-duality affirms duality from a higher standpoint. It is not an abstract concept but lived reality. But the difficulty is in understanding it, because we have here a double exposure, so to speak, of duality and non-duality'. *Taitesu Unno*

2

Information on the author at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Charlton_%28poet%29

3

Poetry by James Charlton :

Luminous Bodies <http://www.booktopia.com.au/luminous-bodies-james-charlton/prod9781876597085.html>

So Much Light <http://www.pardalote.com.au/titles/somuchlight/>

4

Non-dualism in Eckhart, Julian of Norwich and Traherne, A Theopoetic Reflection

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