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Greville Street Gatherings

3rd October —Alexey Feigin

Our monthly Grevmeets continue as Zooms. Alexey Feigin led our October meeting and covered his involvement as one of the founder members of a new political party, the Science Party which is energized by the need for a science based approach to the challenges we face and the inability of our current system to move beyond the political needs of the major parties. <https://www.scienceparty.org.au/> .

Alexey followed with an introduction to the work and writings of Nick Bostrom. in particular, his views on the pros and cons of space colonization.

See: <https://www.nickbostrom.com/astronomical/waste.htm>

7th November—Christopher Ash

Christopher's talk was an explanation of the significance of sense in our level of well-being, showing how we tend to pay little attention to the messages our senses are giving us in the immediate moment of experience and the associated emotional feelings arising in the occasion. We are far more concerned with what we have done in the past, or what we are about to do, or to do in the future than we are with what is actually going on. He referenced two books for follow up: *Focusing* and *Philosophy of the Implicit* —by Eugene Gendlin

19th December — Eliot Redelman

Eliot proposed a theme which follows very neatly from the above and for which he provided this introduction:

Integration. As spiritual seekers, spiritual finders, discoverers and journeyers, we often find ourselves with a realisation of some kind or another. And then a week later it seems like that

understanding "didn't stick". Somehow, we need to retake the same class, learn the same lesson a few times before we get to know this one in such a way that we really feel like we got the message this time. This is my topic of discussion. I don't have the answer to the puzzle but I do like the idea of comparing notes on integration, or non-integration of experience. Looking forward to seeing you there.

Note that the Eliot's December meeting is on the third Sunday, not the usual first, Sunday of the month.

Listening from Alan Mann

Steve Taylor's latest book 'Extraordinary Awakenings' sub-titled 'When Trauma Leads to Transformation' was included in our October issue. The book examines the phenomenon of suffering as a cause of spiritual awakening. He calls this transformation through turmoil and offers a series of 'case studies' demonstrating examples of transformation which have occurred spontaneously in the most unlikely circumstances such as imprisonment in harsh conditions, war situations in the face of imminent death, suicidal depression, near-death experiences and serious addiction.

Both the occasional brief openings, or its sudden manifestation as a more or less permanent condition, can be interpreted by the subject as either a welcome awakening or resisted as a fear of going mad. In what might be considered positive outcomes, the experience carries with it an assurance of a much more authentic sense of being than everyday consciousness assumes.

It occurred to me that if this is the case it should be available to our everyday consciousness and not dependent on chance revelation or traumatic experience. Why, as in the book title, should these awakenings be extraordinary rather than ordinary? With that in mind, I applied the question to my own experience. Whilst this is a subject covered in many religious traditions, I have always approached it as a strictly secular aspect of our being. I have kept a diary record of what can be described as altered states of consciousness for many years and the principal factor in their occasional manifestation seems to have been the absence of my sense of self as a separate observer of the occasion, an identity shift in which I seem to be immersed in and as whatever is happening rather than a separate, detached component.

One of the most interesting expressions of this condition is *The Orange Tree* by John Shaw Neilson.

The young girl stood beside me. I
Saw not what her young eyes could see:
- A light, she said, not of the sky
Lives somewhere in the Orange Tree.

- Is it, I said, of east or west?
The heartbeat of a luminous boy
Who with his faltering flute confessed
Only the edges of his joy?

Was he, I said, borne to the blue
In a mad escapade of Spring

Ere he could make a fond adieu
To his love in the blossoming?

- Listen! the young girl said. There calls
No voice, no music beats on me;

But it is almost sound: it falls
This evening on the Orange Tree.

- Does he, I said, so fear the Spring
Ere the white sap too far can climb?
See in the full gold evening

<p>All happenings of the olden time? Is he so goaded by the green? Does the compulsion of the dew Make him unknowable but keen Asking with beauty of the blue?</p> <p>- Listen! the young girl said. For all Your hapless talk you fail to see There is a light, a step, a call This evening on the Orange Tree.</p> <p>- Is it, I said, a waste of love</p>	<p>Imperishably old in pain, Moving as an affrighted dove Under the sunlight or the rain?</p> <p>Is it a fluttering heart that gave Too willingly and was reviled? Is it the stammering at a grave, The last word of a little child?</p> <p>- Silence! the young girl said. Oh, why, <u>Why will you talk to weary me?</u> Plague me no longer now, for I Am listening like the Orange Tree.</p>
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The poem presents us with a young girl, representing unconditioned awareness, this is accompanied by the sense of self or ego, desperately trying to remain the centre of attention by offering endless concepts and interpretations in its attempts to ensure that the immediacy of being is not allowed to overwhelm its assumed, egoic identity. Of course, I have no way of knowing whether the poet would agree with this interpretation but it provides a very useful metaphor for my experience of the wider view.

If I am right about the availability of such awakenings, or openings, it should be possible to actualise them. Taking the young girl's explanation that, in her case, listening is the necessary action, what does it involve? Perhaps it is just a matter of attention to the occasion, but a more intensive attention than I normally allow. The poets offer endless examples of such experiences and Zen is bristling with guiding aphorisms. Our family favourite is: *Sitting quietly, doing nothing, Spring comes, and the grass grows by itself.* I imagine 'doing nothing' in this example. excludes thinking about the occasion, the experience, and not allowing yesterday and tomorrow to spoil the being of it. In my own case, the inclusion of the space I seem to be looking out of, as well as what I seem to be looking at, opens the door to the alternative perspective.

When asked for examples, I often pull out this quote from 'To the Lighthouse':

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.'

In a recent ABC programme, David Gulpilil, in a bush setting, says, "If you sit down here, really quietly, the land will be talking to you". I think he's right, but I first have to learn how to listen. There is great resistance to this perspective from the reasoning mind as it refuses to give ground to the wider view, what is always the case but almost invariably overlooked. And as to the word extraordinary, which is invariably used to describe these openings, it is

meaningful only in the sense that we have lost contact with the perspective in which it is revealed as the ‘ordinary’ made plain.

Alan Mann

This Still Centre—Douglas Harding

This poem appeared recently on the Contemplative Enquiry website. This is a service provided by James Nichol which he describes as providing a perspective which supports a spirit of openness, an ethic of interdependence and a life of abundant simplicity. He describes his practice and path as seeming to have their own evolving trajectory: grounded in modern Druidry, whilst open to the wisdom of other traditions.

Here, indeed, is no ordinary spot:
no place on the map, in the cosmos,
is anything like it.
This still Centre is the one spot
where energy is actually discovered
welling up out of Nothing.
All the irresistible torrents
which swirl and roar through every other place
rise silently in this place,
never ruffling its perfect calm.

Douglas Harding *Everyday Seeing: daily meditations on the One within*. London: The Shollond Trust, 2019 (Quotations selected by Richard Lang)

Contemplative Enquiry blog: <https://contemplativeinquiry/>

The Red Umbrella a story by Margot Mann

She had seen him before, somewhere; mid-thirties, reddish hair and intense blue eyes. They had both arrived at the end of the bus queue at the same time and he smiled and gestured for her to go first, then, as rain suddenly began to fall, he unfurled a very large red umbrella and invited her to stand under it with him. Stella was happy to comply as the rain quickly became heavy. She observed his expensive suit and looking down, noted the bespoke shoes beginning to stain as puddles appeared on the footpath. He wasn't a regular in the bus queue.

“This bus is always late,” Stella said conversationally.

“I don't usually travel by bus but my car is at the garage and my wife is using hers today. I'm expected at work early for a meeting. Should have got a taxi but you can never get one when it looks like rain.” The owner of the red umbrella laughed ruefully and brushed a small stream of water from his briefcase. They jumped to avoid the water sprayed by passing vehicles and the next moment a car stopped suddenly at the kerb creating an impressive arc of water, to the annoyance of other queuers, and a male voice shouted, “Jack, get in mate.”

Within seconds, Stella found herself propelled into the back seat of the car closely followed by the red umbrella dripping on her new skirt, and its owner, now identified as Jack.

“Didn’t expect to see you in a bus queue mate,” their rescuer said, half turning to smile at Stella. “Introduce me to your friend. How do you two know each other?”

“I’m Stella,” said Stella, as Jack began to explain how they came to meet and why he was catching the bus, but the explanation became so complicated he gave up and said simply “Old friend.” Stella laughed and winking at Jack said, “We met when we were both in a television show a few years ago.” “I got killed off pretty quickly as I recall,” Jack added, kicking Stella on the ankle.

“Is that right?” said the car driver, whistling. “Jack you old dog, you never told me you were an actor.” He half-turned to Stella again, looking at her with renewed interest, and said, “I know what Jack does now because I work with him – unless he’s moonlighting, ha ha, - are you still in television?” Instead of answering the question, Stella said, “Can you let me out at the next lights? Glad to meet you, and thanks for the lift.” She pulled a card from her handbag and handed it to Jack. “Give me a call, we haven’t had lunch for ages.” Before Jack could speak, and even before the car had properly stopped, she jumped out and walked quickly down a side street.

The rain was light and misty as Stella half walked, half ran the couple of blocks to work, giggling to herself as she thought about the events of the last half hour. What did she think she was doing, offering to have lunch with someone she had just met in a bus queue and who was married into the bargain? She had definitely seen Jack somewhere before, even if it wasn’t on the set of a TV show. She laughed out loud at the memory of their conversation with the car driver, and entered a building through a revolving door just in time to catch the lift to the 6th floor.

She was busy at work for the next few weeks and for days on end forgot about Jack. Once when it rained while she was waiting for the bus she looked around quickly as if half expecting him and his big red umbrella to materialise at the end of the queue. A couple of times she even cautiously followed a red-haired man in a suit, without really believing that it was Jack, and occasionally she found herself wondering idly where she might have seen him before, but as the weeks passed she thought about him less and less, until finally their meeting became just a good dinner party story.

One fine day at the end of spring, she was standing in the middle of the bus queue reading a novel when she felt a tap on the shoulder. She looked up to see Jack smiling at her. “What are you reading?” he asked as she snapped the book shut. Stella, to her extreme annoyance, felt herself blush at being caught at a disadvantage and for some seconds she could think of nothing to say.

“I hoped I might find you here,” Jack continued, unfazed by his cool reception.

“Don’t tell me you’ve been forced to catch the bus,” Stella said at last, embarrassment lending a sarcastic edge to her voice. She was surprised to see that Jack was wearing jeans and a blue t-shirt that matched his eyes. “You look different. Where’s the suit? And, come to think of it, why didn’t you call me?”

“Here comes the bus. Meet me at the Blue Angel at one for lunch and I’ll reveal all,” said Jack dramatically, walking backwards, waving and smiling. Stella, unimpressed at being the centre of attention in a bus queue, stared straight ahead and moved to board the bus.

Jack was sipping beer at a table for two near a window when Stella walked into the Blue Angel later that day. She briefly considered ignoring his invitation, but curiosity won, and at 12.30 she told her colleagues she would be back in a couple of hours. Stella could feel them

exchanging surprised looks behind her back as she walked purposefully towards the lift. She smiled to herself.

Jack waved her over to the table. “Thought you might have stood me up,” he said cheerfully, as she slowly took off her jacket and sat down opposite him. “What’ll you have to drink, Miss TV star?” Stella laughed and realised that she was glad she had come.

While they were eating frittata and salad Jack said, “When we met that rainy day in the bus queue I was about to be sacked from my job – I was in finance by the way, you might have seen me on the telly from time to time, being grilled by someone from the anti-bank lobby,” he paused, grinned, and looked up enquiringly as Stella said “so that’s where I’ve seen you”. Jack went on, “It’s been a difficult time what with court cases and stuff and although I’ve been cleared of any wrongdoing, I still don’t have a job.” He paused and sipped his beer slowly, waiting for Stella to ask him what he was supposed to have done. When she said nothing he added “then my wife did a runner, couldn’t stand the idea of no more shopping money. No kids fortunately - and I’ve given her most of our belongings to shut her up. She even took my red umbrella.” He shook his head in disbelief. “And then I lost your card.”

It was late afternoon when Stella got back to the office. Ignoring curious glances, she sat at her desk and noticed that there was a text from the boss upstairs asking her to work late. She tapped a reply: “Sorry, can’t work tonight – dinner date.”

Margot Mann

Spiritual Exercises from Alan Mann

Dave, in mentioning the work of Hadot, raised the question of what our spiritual exercises are, whether religious or philosophical?

I have never read Hadot, but in considering how I would answer the question I thought I would opt for a “way of life” approach as opposed to systems based on ideas. My main concern is to do away with the assumption that the spiritual and the secular are mutually exclusive, rather than aspects of a complete whole. I take this to be an error shared by both the materialist and the spiritual camps. My ‘external’ spiritual exercise is to promote this wholeness as best I can and the NOWletter is my principle means. The Now of the title is drawn from Traherne’s poem *My Spirit... ‘His name is Now, His nature is forever, none can his creatures from their maker sever’*. My ‘internal’ exercise is to become aware, in my everyday doings, that what is experienced, rather than what the self makes of experience, by way of interpretation or explanation, is what I truly am; an exercise in exploring the possibility of replacing the opacity of knowing with the transparency of being. This is what I take all the contributors to my ‘wider view’ collection are pointing to. (NOWletter 231). I like to think that even Heidegger was on to it with his “We are too late for God and too early for being...etc.”

Alan Mann

Online Interviews with Colin Drake

Colin speaking: Links to an unedited interview, in 3 sections, soon to be on a new internet 'platform' Alitheia (Truth) which was shot on my verandah. It was carried out by my stunningly beautiful African daughter in law and starts with the 'investigation of experience' which underpins all of my books and reveals our true identity as Pure Awareness. This takes one 'Beyond The Separate Self' by becoming 'A Light Unto Your Self'. Colin.

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That Shady Nothing, from Traherne and Bohm

I have previously recorded my fascination with comments on the quantum vacuum and claims that “there is more energy in a cubic metre of what we refer to as space than in the total matter of the visible universe” by scientists like David Bohm and Brian Cox.

The latest assignment from my Canberra guide is Rupert Sheldrake’s book ‘The Science Delusion: Freeing the Spirit of Enquiry’ in which I found another reference to the significance of what ‘appears’ to us as nothing.

In 2019, only about 5 per cent of the universe was believed to be made up of familiar matter and energy such as atoms, stars, galaxies, gas clouds, planets and electromagnetic radiation. Far from providing a satisfyingly complete explanation of the universe, modern physics suggests that we understand less than one-twentieth of it.

I can’t help but wonder to what extent we can compare this apparent nothingness with what Traherne had to say about nothing in this line from his poem ‘My Spirit’:

That being greatest which doth nothing seem!

He adds to this by pointing out that we overlook an important aspect of our existence if we remain unaware of this ‘nothing’:

Till we see our nothing we cannot understand the value of our being.

The following is lifted from *The Essential David Bohm* by Lee Nichol. *The Enfolding-Unfolding Universe and Consciousness* 1980 D. Bohm p78.

Indeed, if one applies the rules of quantum theory to the currently accepted general theory of relativity, one finds that the gravitational field is also constituted of such "wave-particle" modes, each having a minimum "zero-point" energy. As a result, the gravitational field, and therefore the definition of what is to be meant by distance, cease to be completely defined. As we keep on adding excitations corresponding to shorter and shorter wavelengths to the gravitational field, we come to a certain length at which the measurement of space and time becomes totally undefinable. Beyond this, the whole notion of space and time as we know it would fade out, into something that is at present unspecifiable. So it would be reasonable to suppose, at least provisionally, that this is the shortest wavelength that should be considered as contributing to the "zero-point" energy of space. When this length is estimated it turns out to be about 10^{-33} . This is much shorter than anything thus far probed in physical experiments (which have got down to about 10^{-17} cm or so). If one computes the amount of energy that would be in one cubic centimetre of space, with this shortest possible wavelength, it turns out to be very far beyond the total energy of all the matter in the known universe?

Bohm and Traherne may well have had different perspectives on the ‘no-thing’ but there is in my view, an uncanny correspondence in what they had to say about it. The most often quoted

work of Traherne is meditation 29 of his Centuries of Meditations starting: “*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, etc*”. Meditation 29 is followed by number 30 which includes a reference to the subject of this piece:

*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.”*

As an access point to the nonduality of this nothingness/everythingness I have found the Harding experiments to be an ever present, open doorway.

Alan Mann