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Meetings

Margot and I are still awaiting relocation at the Leichhardt apartment. We expect to be moving in sometime around the final week in October when we hope to have a few ideas about re-establishing our meetings in some form.

There will be a Headless Way Workshop led by Brentyn Ramm on Sunday November 12 at Whites Creek Cottage, 31 White Street, Lilyfield, Sydney, Cost: \$20 . I will circulate full details nearer the day. Alan

The Voice from Dave Knowles

Alan, below is an extract from my email to the Editor of the Quarterly Essay; whereas what Megan Davis is talking about is the most important issue to involve Australia certainly since I arrived here from Canada in 1987 and maybe in 200 years?

As David Tacey points out in Chapter 4 of “The Postsecular Sacred: Jung, Soul and Meaning in an Age of Change” Routledge, 2020, we are being offered an Aboriginal gift we will not [yet] accept and as Iain McGilchrist says in “The Matter with Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions and the Unmaking of the World” Perspective Press, 2021 “The Greeks, the Inuit, the Penan, the Chinese, the Indians, the intellects of the Western Middle Ages and of the Renaissance, the Australian Aboriginals, the Romantics, the Navajo, the Romans, the Blackfoot and the modern Japanese - and countless others - all thought, or think, that there is something speaking to us in nature. If we alone can’t hear it, in the West in the twenty-first century, how do we know it’s we who are right?” (Page 1904)

I feel a “Yes” vote opens up a spiritual promise for all Australians and I feel immensely privileged to find myself in Australia at this time. With best regards & Namaste Dave 🙏

Dear Professor Davis,

I hope you didn't mind me blind-copying you on my email of complaint to the Quarterly Essay on how they had presented your essay in QE20? I had gone to bed with QE20 intending to learn what I could about the Voice but got so distracted by QE's layout I spent most of the night decoding and checking the Notes and never getting round to giving your essay the attention it deserved. (I had seen you on Australian Story the preceding week and wanted to know more.)

As I said, I feel privileged to be in Australia at this time. Two things were instrumental in wanting to come to Australia: (a) coming across Bruce Chatwin's “Songlines” on a cold slushy winter's day in Ottawa and (b) coming across the line, “Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come” in A. D. Hope's poem “Australia”. Fortunately working for large US computer companies made it relatively easy to find a job in Australia and so my wife & I and our two daughters (Canadian-born) arrived in Australia in 1987 in time for our daughters (and us) to learn about the bicentenary and how poorly the First Peoples had been treated and still were.

As I indicated in my quotes from David Tacey and Iain McGilchrist that Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders may have a valuable gift to offer white Australia & its immigrants if we could only bring ourselves to accept it!

Another sign that seems to indicate I have a deep connection with Australia is that back in England in my youth I had the privilege of living on the edge of one of the most beautiful parts of England: the Peak District National Park. I remember my father telling my Sunday School teacher, “I doubt you'll be seeing David again, he is out all weekend riding with the Cyclists' Club.” I was, exploring every inch of the beautiful moors and dales of the Peak District on my bicycle, much more important to me than subscribing to any orthodox religion! I have since had the privilege of exploring the Great Plains and the Rockies of Canada & the US, the High Veldt of South Africa, the Etosha Pan in Namibia, the Andes & Machu Picchu in Peru, and the Red Centre of Australia. Love of Country comes naturally to me and I had a shiver of awe when I descended from the Aboriginal Rock Shelter in Namadgi National Park as I realised it was reminding me of descending from the Roaches in the Peak District!

Another quote for you (I am an inveterate reader) from Felipe Fernandez Armesto in his “Ideas that changed the World” Under “No Dice: The Idea of an Orderly Universe” we find “Early descriptions of the world seem echoed in the “dreamtime” of Australian Aborigines, in which the inseparable tissue of all the universe was spun.” Do you find this acceptable?

My long exploration of philosophical ideas in search of a spiritual foundation I have now paused on a short introduction to Spinoza and the Handbook of Contemporary Animism. But I wait for the gift from Uluru! I already have the gift from “The Ever-Present Origin” (Jean Gebser) - that of 2 Australian sons-in-law and 4 Australian grandchildren I feel blessed but by what or who? - I don't know.

I wish the Voice campaign every success and I hail Anthony Albanese for promoting it. A last request: do you know of an Aboriginal Elder in the ACT I might learn more from?

With best regards and I salute you in greeting (Namaste?) Dave 🙏

David Knowles

Akhenaten - the Enigma from Trisha English

Akhenaten - the enigma: the mystery man of Ancient Egypt

I have been trying to write this article for months, and every time I begin, I discover new information, the result of more recent archeological discoveries. If this endeavour has taught me anything, it is that Jiddu Krishnamurti was correct. Knowledge is one thing, and wisdom another.

But let us go and make our journey. Akhenaten was originally called Amenhotep IV and he ruled Egypt in the Eighteenth Dynasty of the New Kingdom approximately from 1353 BC to 1336 BC. During this period, Egypt worshipped many gods, one of the most prominent was named Aten.

Amenhotep IV was never meant to be Pharaoh but when his older brother died, he became the crown Prince of Egypt and his tutors set about preparing him for his role in history. Some historians believe that he was a co-ruler with his father, but others do not. In any event when he embraced the leadership mantle, Egypt was at the peak of its prosperity. It was one of the most powerful and wealthy among the nations.

In the fifth year of his reign, Amenhotep IV changed his name to Akhenaten.

For thousands of years Egyptians had worshiped gods called Amun, Isis, Osiris, Horus and Thoth, but with the spiritual awakening of Akhenaten, he introduced the belief in a new spirituality which involved the worship of the sun god Aten. It literally meant "Living Spirit of Aten"

In meditation he had observed the sun rising between two mountains, and suddenly realised that the sun was the source of all energy, at least for earthlings. Without the sun, nothing could exist. Archeologists and historians believe that this led to the establishment of monotheism and the worship of the sun disc, but my feeling is that he worshiped *the energy* of the sun. Energy is the one constant through the entire cosmos.

Already I began to see that there were certain parallels between the life of Akhenaten and Krishnamurti. Like Akhenaten, who had been conditioned by the royal court of Egypt, Krishnamurti had been nurtured and conditioned by Theosophists, especially Dr. Annie Besant and C.W Leadbeater. Both were heavily conditioned by Christian theology. Besant had been married to a clergyman, and Leadbeater had played a similar role. Overarching these influences, were the insights of Madame Helena Blavatsky the mystical Russian seer and founder of the Theosophical Society together with Henry Olcott.

It is not within the scope of this essay to go into Theosophy and its historical influence, it is enough for our purposes to recognise that every person born into physical existence is fashioned and formed by the social influences of the environment into which they are born.

Like Akhenaten, Krishnamurti conformed to the zeitgeist of the time. Later on, he was to say that such information was “poured into him” but did not leave a lasting impression. Maybe, maybe not.

Similarly, Akhenaten seemed filled with a remarkable “mission” for he left the traditional mould into which he had been born and moved the entire ancient city from Thebes to a new site at Amarna. The priests of the old religion were not well pleased. In fact, they were out of a job.

In the early days, Akhenaten recorded his feelings in poetry, as did Krishnamurti. The poetry tended to be romantic, but also dedicated to a love which transcended earthly realms.

Akhenaten’s main wife was Queen Nefertiti who was considered to be the second most powerful person in Egypt. Somewhat remarkably, Akhenaten did not want his image to be that of an idealised stereotype. The depictions of him and his wife show them both as “mortal”, and their images were a “warts and all” portrayal. The most notable feature was the distortion of their physical appearance. Some contemporary experts believe that they were suffering from a disorder called Marfan’s Syndrome. They are shown with elongated heads, wide hips and long drawn faces. Uncharacteristically, they are depicted in loving poses with their children, and above all basking beneath the rays of the sun.

However, when Akhenaten died, the priests of the old religion set about dismantling the new kingdom at Amarna and every trace of the new religion. By the time Tutankhamun became pharaoh, Egypt had returned to its traditional religion in Thebes and the city of Amarna was abandoned.

When I was in Egypt in 2019, I stood among the ruins of Amarna, facing the mountains where the sun rose as it had for Akhenaten. I remembered that Krishnamurti, who claimed never to have read anything of note, often mused about Akhenaten. Scott Forbes, author of “Krishnamurti Preparing to Leave”, also remembers Krishnamurti referring many times to Akhenaten. People will remember that the Theosophical Society also reverted to earlier teachings after Krishnamurti left the TS. But the eternal truths can never be obliterated. They live on in spite of what human beings may accept or reject.

So it is with Akhenaten who is credited with establishing monotheism. My feeling is that Krishnamurti and Akhenaten were not interested in establishing any kind of new religion, but endeavoured to show that beyond human knowledge there is a cosmic wisdom. And, as Krishnamurti often said: “It may come to you, but you cannot go to it”. Even so, throughout history, there are indications that this wisdom did come upon people, but not as a result of effort. It seems to have been a gift of some kind, and as a result humanity has been changed forever, not uniformly so, but like the wind as a gentle reminder of something long forgotten which cannot be controlled or contained.

People who may be interested in researching further, are directed to Youtube, which incidentally, has been showing many new documentaries about Akhenaten as well as the Teachings of Jiddu Krishnamurti.

Adelstrop

Yes. I remember Adlestrop—
 The name, because one afternoon
 Of heat the express-train drew up there
 Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
 No one left and no one came
 On the bare platform. What I saw
 Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
 And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
 No whit less still and lonely fair
 Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang
 Close by, and round him, mistier,
 Farther and farther, all the birds
 Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

Edward Thomas

To A Relative Suffering from a Terminal Illness from Peter Lim

At some stage of one's life, it often happens a person becomes transcendental.

All earthly things vanish. He's by himself alone to reckon with himself, his purpose and his fate. The saints and mystics are best examples. Life is not just body but part of a cosmic whole which exists and lasts through all eons of time. There's no longer desire, hope, pain or suffering as the ego has perished. The nothingness is a new beginning. In itself it's eternity. Nothing is lost. One merges with the cosmic mystery and mysteriousness. There's no death as we humans regard. Death is a mere metaphor.

There's no room for fear or doubt. One is reborn in this new consciousness.

Such an experience wakes us up from our spiritual darkness, blindness and ignorance. It's as though we are touching the palm of eternity and are drawn into infinite time and space. We are no longer flesh and blood - we are ethereal and in this state all seems bliss and ecstasy as all pain and suffering no longer affect us.

Another beautiful experience we gain is that we are drawn into greater love and understanding of the people we love and will love forever. They will sense and feel this light that suddenly emanates from us though we've not uttered a single word. A new unity and proximity emerges and binds us in a spirituality that is the mystery beyond mysteries.

I have no religion as a humanist. I will not fuss over trivia and the angst of living. I will accept my inevitability as far as I can. This equanimity removes my fear and all my ego.

And I am content and happy to enter into my blessed and happy slumber.

Peter Lim (Lim Meng Sing)

Please write an existential poem in the style of T S Eliot? By ChatGPT

I have had a bit of fun lately, asking ChatGPT to provide me with meeting notes and my last exercise was to request the following poem which it dashed off in about 15 seconds. Alan

In the depths of existence, I pondered lost,
Amidst the fragments of a world's tempest
tossed,
Through the foggy mists of time's
ceaseless flow,
Seeking meaning where it's unwilling to
show.

Like Tiresias, with blinded sight I wander,
A witness to life's anguish, its echoes
yonder,
The hollow men, with voices empty and
weak,
Despairing souls that mutter but do not
speak.

In the wasteland of souls, I roamed alone,
Haunted by specters, in shadows they've
grown,
The stench of decay, a scent on the air,
As dreams dissolve into the void's cold
stare.

Whispers of distant voices, I strain to hear,
Yet they fade into nothingness, drawing
near,
Faces mask their fears in deceptive guise,
And truth eludes, as each secret it denies.

Oh, to decipher life's cryptic design,
To glimpse the essence beneath the
surface's fine,

But reason falters in this paradoxical
dance,

Where words entwine in an intricate
trance.
The world turns on, a relentless carousel,
As time's cruel hand casts its somber spell,
Weary souls yearn for respite from the
strife,
But find no solace in this fickle game of
life.

And so, I tread the path of endless
question,
In search of meaning, in this existential
session,
Like Eliot's pilgrims, lost in a desolate land,
I yearn for purpose, in a world's shifting
sand.

The universe expands, stars twinkle and
fade,
A cosmic symphony, where we all wade,
In the grand tapestry of existence's art,
We play our part, then vanish, a fleeting
dart.

In this eternal struggle, we find our place,
Embracing life's contradictions, its cosmic
grace,
For in the depths of darkness, a spark still
gleams,

And hope persists, even within shattered dreams.

So, let us journey on, amidst this disarray,
With Eliot's spirit guiding our weary way,
And as we navigate this existential sea,

ChatGPT (Response in about 15 seconds).

The Man with 20 Brains from Mark Whittaker

First, he built the brain that taught itself to play Pong. Now, Hon Wen Chong is focussed on building a “body in a box” to support that grey matter and send it out into the world.

Hon Weng Chong stunned the world last year when his company, Cortical Labs, grew human brain cells in a dish that then taught themselves to play Pong – old-fashioned computer tennis - albeit not very well.

“Dish Brain’s” computer-tennis feat was published in Neuron and helped attract US\$10 million in investment led by Hong Kong based Horizon Ventures.

But now it’s time for the 35-year-old Melbourne medical doctor to scale. So how do you do that with living brain cells grown onto electrodes? Afterall, they need to eat and breathe. And wee.

The first iteration of Dish Brain lived in an incubator at 37 degrees with set concentrations of carbon dioxide and oxygen swirling around it in a pink fluid of electrolytes, glucose and growth-factor medium. “It’s the equivalent to artificial cerebral spinal fluid, the same stuff that bathes our brain,” says Chong.

But the first commercial product, the CL1, needs to go out into the world with confidence. So he needs to build it a “body in a box”.

“And this is how we change its diaper,” says Chong, pointing to a picture of an outlet. ““This is the inlet and outlet, the mouth and bum, that allow us to keep it sealed so it doesn’t get contaminated. There’s no immune system ... We suck up 50% of the old fluid and we top it up with new fluid, new nutrients.”

He points to the “kidneys” – a filtration unit – the “hearts” that pump the fluid around. “This is a gas mixer, think of it as a lung. And these are two reservoirs for the pink fluid. The idea is this would keep the cells alive as long as you want.”

He’s got 20 of these neural units grown up, with more on the way.

But Chong harkens back to where the IBM S/360 mainframe was in 1964. “Large computers with teams running around to keep it going. No memory, so everything needed to be in punch cards. What we need to do is to build the equivalent of the Apple I (1976-77) so we’re building the CL1.”

Chong says the system's most obvious first advantage is that it uses orders of magnitude less energy than standard computers. "To put it in perspective, I trained a pocket calculator to play Pong. No one in silicon world can do that. They're all using giant GPUs that suck up a minimum of 250W to do this. And we don't produce heat. So you also have a reduction of energy usage for cooling.

"The second great advantage is sample efficiency. AI systems need a lot of data to work. ChatGPT is supposedly so smart because it's read the entire internet. I'm pretty certain I don't have even a fraction of the internet in my life experience, but I'm pretty good at navigating the world without that. Sample efficiency is one of the things these biological systems are good at. They can operate in real time. These things learn with less information."

The first major money spinner for Cortical will probably be the study of how cells react to new drugs and drug combinations. UK-based Bit Bio which provides human cells for research and drug discovery has signed up to receive a CL1 by the end of 2023, or possibly early 2024.

Personalised medicine stands to take its use further, says Chong. "One of the things that people kinda get mindblown by is the fact these neurons are grown from people's blood. If we take some blood from you, we could grow neurons outside your body that would be genetically identical to the ones currently in your brain. Why would you want to do that? They would theoretically have the same properties as your brain and so the same drug profile, the same disease patterns. Rather than a clinician taking a guess: 'Take drug A and come back in six weeks and tell me if it worked.' We should know exactly before any drug is prescribed that drug A, B, C and D are not good candidates for you, so skip to drug E for the highest efficacy."

Chong says they are planning a trial whereby brain cells grown from a volunteer's blood will be tested with certain drugs then compared to how the volunteer's actual brain reacts when the volunteer is given the same drug.

Cortical plans to sell the CL1 to other labs, but also plans to have server racks of 40 CL1 units connected to the cloud.

"And each of these will have a brain that's kept inside it. Each will be individual brains running the simulation programs in a data centre. Each will have 800,000 to a million neurons growing inside them. We're in discussion with the cloud providers to plug this into the cloud so that people can use this anywhere in the world. They don't need a wetlab. We can take care of that. They just have to write the code."

He wants to create an environment in which "a student in a dorm with a novel idea" could play around with it and maybe take the whole field in a new direction. "A lot of people forget that's how we got where we are with AI today ... You never know where the innovation is going to come from. You just have to make it accessible so lots of people can try it out."

While some might evoke science fiction – like Steve Martin's *The Man with Two Brains*, in describing such an achievement, others on Reddit evoke a Matrix-like dystopia. Chong is aware of people's concerns about potential ethical problems and welcomes that conversation.

"You can have sentience without consciousness. Sentience is the ability to respond to a stimulus. Even an amoeba falls into that. But is it conscious? We don't think it is ... Bioethics is always a conversation to be had. It's not static. It's fluid depending on the values of society

at the time.” He cites fears around in-vitro fertilisation when it began in the 1970s. “Today, it seems to be well accepted, even among the conservative community.”

He would also like to remind politicians that what he’s talking about is the world’s first “neural cluster” about to be built in Brunswick with millions set to go into the Victorian economy. “It would be nice if you mentioned that because we hardly hear anything from the government. They’re obsessed with quantum computing and all the other bits, and I’m like, ‘Come on guys, we just invented something equivalent to quantum right in our backyard and we’re leading this space ... If somebody in the US gets more funding than us, which is usually the case, it will be hard to maintain the lead.

“The Europeans have just poured ten million euros into this space. Who knows what the Chinese are up to, but I get a tonne of hits coming from China. And the Russians are in this space as well. But I think we’re the first commercial company to really do this.”

Mark Whittaker

The original unabridged article with pictures at:

<https://www.forbes.com.au/news/innovation/meet-the-man-with-20-brains-powering-this-game-changing-aussie-start-up/>

The Voice from Lenore Taylor (Editor Guardian Australia)

I planned to include this article by Lenore Taylor which I thought an excellent exposé of the skulduggery and dishonesty of much underlying the No campaign. However, the Guardian requires far too much form-filling for permission to reprint so I thought I would provide the link instead.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/aug/30/australians-have-six-weeks-to-make-a-decision-on-the-voice-it-needs-to-be-based-on-facts-not-fear>

Margot

Our short story writer is at present taking a break to research material for upcoming tales.

Kyoshi

How much more heavily the rain is shed
On this old hat—filched from a scarecrow’s head!