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Meetings

Our monthly Chatswood gatherings came to an end when Margot and I moved to our new home in Leichhardt. So far, we haven't found a means of re-establishing the Dialogue meetings in our Inner West location. We moved in here on 21st October 2023. Since our move we have produced only two NOWletters, in September and December 23. I hope to return to a more regular programme from here on. The circulation list has been through hoops again as a result of various computer upsets and I have reassembled it from old backups. Please give me an 'unsubscribe', if you have been included in error. I welcome contributions from readers, this edition comprises notes on recent exchanges with friends, comment on my reading list and matters arising from Andrew's weekly Krishnamurti meetings at Summer Hill.

There is much going on in the background of course and friends have kept me busy absorbing how Max Velmans and Bernardo Kastrup handle matters that we have been dealing with over the years.

Reflexive Monism

A philosophical position developed by [Max Velmans](#), in his books *Understanding Consciousness* (2000, 2009)^[1] and *Toward a Deeper Understanding of Consciousness* (2017),^[2] to address the problems of [consciousness](#). It is a modern version of an ancient view that the basic stuff of the universe manifests itself both physically and as conscious experience (a [dual-aspect theory](#) in the traditions of [Spinoza](#) and [Fechner](#)).^[3] The argument is that the mind and, ultimately, the universe is psycho-physical.^[4] [Wikipedia](#)

Notes on reading Understanding Consciousness 1

Alan: Dave Knowles sent me the first of the above books, *Understanding Consciousness*, and the following are my notes on reading which I put together as feedback for Dave and later decided to use for this issue of the NOWletter.

Alan to Dave: Very interesting to hear he has crossed intellectual swords with Metzinger and Chalmers. Also to find he starts life in Amsterdam then educated in Australia and now in UK. His early aim of creating minds in machines echoes Frederico Faggin's attempts.

Alex Velmans reporting enlightening moments: There wasn't any additional experience of the street either 'nowhere' or 'in my brain'. *In terms of their visual phenomenology*, the 'physical street' and 'my experience of the street' were one and the same. And that seemed to be true of other experiences such as bodily sensations. For example, if I pressed my fingers together, I would feel a tactile sensation at my fingertips and there was no added experience of pressure 'nowhere', or 'in my brain'.

Alan: That is essentially what the headless experiments can reveal, enabling experience to dominate by pushing aside the customary third person mindset of explanation and concept.

Alex: For many of us, a longing to explore the depths and limits of our ability to experience and to learn what we can from that about who we really are lies at the heart of what it is to be alive.

Alan: That would serve as a summary of what we have been doing all these years. It was to James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* that I turned in the early 70's on stumbling into some of the altered states to which Velmans refers. Towards the end of the second book there is a quotation from William James which caught my attention.

William James. *Varieties of Religious Experience*. 1902. Page 388.,

One conclusion was forced upon my mind at that time, and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness, as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all

about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality, which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final, which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question, for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes, though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality. Looking back on my own experiences, they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance. The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity.

Alan: What struck me about this passage was his suggestion of multiple forms of consciousness. It made me realise that I have been sustaining the idea of a very fixed, indivisible form of consciousness. And holding this idea in mind notwithstanding that I have been talking about and experiencing at least two variations by way of third-person and first-person consciousness. Welmans describes what I regard as a first person experience in his Bromley High Street moment.

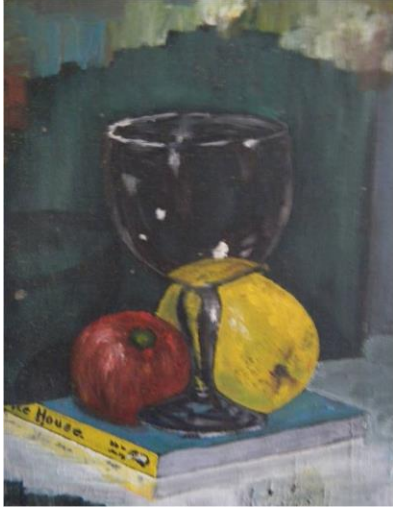
Halfway through the book and I feel that Velmans, whilst convinced that consciousness is a matter of experience and beyond the reach of explanation, is determined to do his best to give explanation his best shot. The content following a page number is a quotation from the author's book unless otherwise indicated.

P 97. He says: Our primary knowledge about consciousness derives from being conscious. In sum, functionalism is a useful but partial theory of mind. We are not just human doings, we are also human beings.

On page 111 he has a heading 'Who says this?' and lists the people who endorse the consciousness as content perspective. No mention of Metzinger there but maybe the book pre-dates Metzinger's realisation, and no mention of Harding the most prominent Western exponent of the 'show', not merely 'tell' approach.

P.112. Transparency. I must have mentioned before that my first steps into the wider view involved an interest in transparency. This was a long time before my Headless days. (Further notes are recorded below).

Alan: Sometime in my late forties I became interested in the representation of light in painting. I wondered how painters managed to capture transparency on canvas



and I looked up the European masters. I even got out my old oil-paints and knocked up a picture of a wineglass on a piece of wood to see if I could work out what is involved. It sat on a windowsill at Greville Street for years.

The Buddhist injunction, if applied, “Only don’t know” results in the subjective, me-free perspective which we could even describe as Being itself.

Thomas Jackson 1579- 1640 *He speakes more fully and more safely, that saith, God is being itself, or perfection itself.....*

From:

- **A Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes:** By Thomas Jackson
Doctor in Divinitie, Chaplaine to His Majetie in Ordinary, and Vicar of S. Nicolas Church in the Towne of Newcastle Upon Tyne. 1668

There is an entry in my diary about this time, (1981) which refers to Hosso Buddhism, the doctrine of Yuishiki: the fundamental doctrine of Hosso Buddhism, is that all existence is based on subjective awareness.

Another name for the school, Vijnanavada, is more descriptive of its philosophical position, which is that the reality a human being perceives does not exist, any more than do the images called up by a monk in meditation. Only the consciousness that one has of the momentary interconnected events (dharmas) that make up the cosmic flux can be said to exist. Consciousness, however, also clearly discerns in these so-called unreal events consistent patterns of continuity and regularity; in order to explain this order in which only chaos really could prevail, the school developed the tenet of the alaya-vijnana, or “storehouse consciousness.” Sense perceptions are ordered as coherent and regular by a store of consciousness, of which one is consciously unaware. Sense impressions produce certain configurations (samskaras) in this unconscious that “perfume” later impressions so that they appear consistent and regular. Each being possesses this storage consciousness, which thus becomes a kind of collective consciousness that orders human perceptions of the world, though this world does not exist. This doctrine was cheerfully attacked by the adherents of the Madhyamika (“Middle Way”) school of Mahayana Buddhism, who pointed out the obvious logical difficulties of such a tenet.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dosho>

Martin Buber— ‘With a Monist’

This is the glorious paradox of our existence that all comprehensibility of the world is only a footstool of its incomprehensibility. But this incomprehensibility has a new, a wonderful secret to bestow; it is like Adam’s knowledge when he “knew” his wife Eve. What the most learned and ingenious combination of concepts denies, the humble and faithful beholding, grasping, knowing of any situation bestows. The world is not comprehensible, but it is embraceable: through the embracing of one of its beings. Each thing and being has a twofold nature: passive, absorbable, usable, dissectible, comparable, combinable, rationalisable, and the other, the active non-absorbable, unusable, undissectable, incomparable, noncombinable, non-rationalisable. This is the confronting, the shaping, the bestowing in things. He who truly experiences a thing so that it springs up to meet him and embrace him of itself has in that thing known the world.

A Few Interjections Gebser and Others.

Eternity is in love with the productions of time.

William Blake

“Your enjoyment of the world is never right till every morning you awake in Heaven; see yourself in your Father's palace; and look upon the skies, the earth and the air as celestial joys; having such a reverend esteem of all, as if you were among the Angels

Thomas Traherne

A similar combination of monism and reflexivity is found in later [Vedic writings](#) such as the [Upanishads](#), as well as the Buddhist views of [Chittamatra](#) and [Dzogchen](#).^[5] (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reflexive_monism) END OF WIKIPEDIA NOTE.

*Where trusting heart and mind are not estranged,
Words fail, and cannot tell of THAT
Which has no yesterday, tomorrow or today.*

That is the final verse of the Hsin Sing Ming and, notwithstanding that conclusion, it is the final verse of about thirty or so previous verses, about seven hundred and fifty words, making the case for its message.

Coincidentally, this was rolling through my head on Thursday. I often go to the Krishnamurti meetings on Thursday mornings at Summer Hill, this week we were dealing with a question Krishnamurti had raised about security when we got involved in the question of the nature of time. Again, Gebser to the rescue with his ‘presentation’ and although it is very doubtful that Krishnamurt would agree with

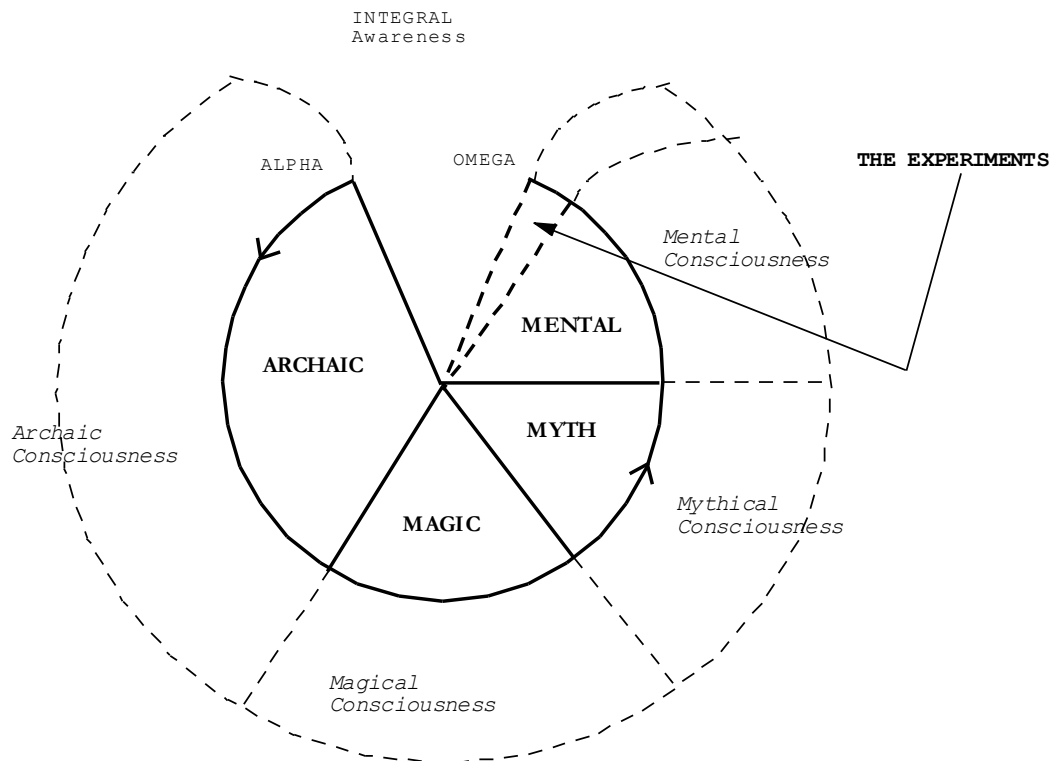
Gebser about that, as he rarely agreed with anybody else on these matters, it prompted me to refresh my memory on my return home.

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

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

Quote 2 is to do with his 'presentation'.

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



Dwg 6

Gebser proposes that we have reached what he calls the 'integral' phase of human development which combines seventeen areas of human experiencing in relation to

the five underlying structures mentioned above. (I have summarized the Gebser story in past issues of the NOWletter, the latest being NOWletter 235 - The Ever Present Origin & Duration—Gebser and Bergson. The diagram below is George Schloss's version of the Gebser framework in which he inserts the Harding experiments as a doorway to the integral awareness proposed by Gebser and others, the latest being Max Welmans.

The prospect of a multiform consciousness manifesting in its various modes strikes me as one of the reasons it is so hard to pin down. Before Velmans turned up I was reading Frederic Faggin and although one of my key advisors does not like what he sees as Faggin's unjustifiable parallels with quantum science I think his particle wave analogy is helpful. Federico says:

"I like to think that I have experienced my nature both as a particle and as a wave, to use an analogy with quantum physics that is impossible to comprehend with ordinary logic. The particle aspect was the ability to maintain my identity despite experiencing myself as the world (the wave aspect). But my identity was also part of the world, because I felt myself to be the world with "my" point of view. So now I think that my identity is like one of the infinite points of view with which One—the totality of what exists—observes and knows itself. In other words, each one of us is a point of view of One, a part of One indivisible from It that contains Its essence and, as such, is eternal." (from "Irreducible: Consciousness, Life, Computers, and Human Nature" by Federico Faggin)

Be that as it may, it is an interesting way of apprehending our first-person perspective, as an expression of the wave where, for example, Velmans' experience as 'the street' makes perfect sense. Gebser also coins the word 'verition' to capture the sense of the first-person perspective.

From time to time, when considering these matters, it becomes clear that my analysing and explaining is reinforcing my particle, strengthening the third person consciousness. On such occasions I almost invariably get a tap on the shoulder from the wave reminding me of the Buddhist saying, "Only don't know".

Third particle Alan considers that to be absurd, resists it as a matter of course but occasionally he succumbs. Adopting waviness, particle fades into listening then listening into Being. As I wrote that 'the wave' reminded me of the lines of Edwin Arnold's, *The Light of Asia*, ... *Seeking nothing, he gains all; foregoing self, the universe grows "I."*

'Only don't know'. We could say, that is the call of Origin breaking on the shore as 'This', but I suppose that's just more groping for knowing.

I think Thomas Traherne was riding the wave.

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

Notes on reading Understanding Consciousness 2

Back to extracts from the Velmans work:

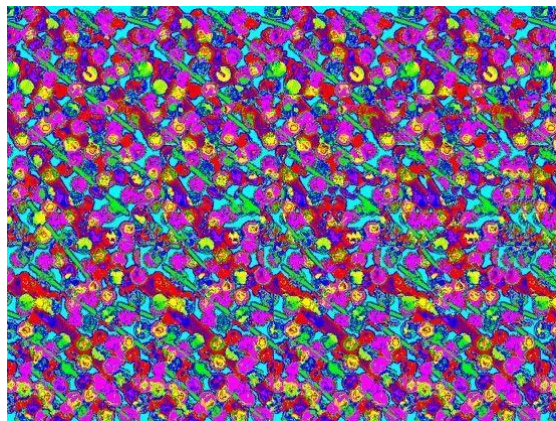
P. 162 The status of observed phenomena, series, and the thing itself.

This cautious stance regarding the observer- relative nature of observations, and the conjectural status of any given scientific theory is consistent. With the critical realist epistemology that I adopt in this book. It is also implicit in my analysis of how consciousness relates to knowledge. In chapters 10 and 12.

In essence, this epistemology involves 3 interacting elements.: observed phenomena., series, and an implicit reality or thing itself. That observed phenomena and theories represent. In broad terms, I assume the status of these elements to be as follows:

And here he starts an extensive commentary on the three. Aspects.

P. 123 A picture of a stereogram. Gladney Oakley introduced our monthly meetings to stereographic images around 2006. I always found them a particularly helpful metaphor for two perfectly ‘true’ interpretations of the same phenomena.



<https://au.pinterest.com/pin/717057571894036248/>

Can you see both the random pattern and then the interlocked rings?

P. 170 Quoting Alan Chalmers on the danger of assuming that one's present knowledge covers all the bases: (Note not David Chalmers). *And just as a happy steeplejack may be blissfully unaware of some of the implications of some ominous discovery made by labourers digging near the cathedral's foundations, so a lofty theoretician may be unaware of some new experimental finding for the theory on which he works. In either case, relationship may objectively exist between parts of the structure, independently of any individual awareness of that relationship.*

P. 218 Velmans speaking. OK. Why do I reject epiphenomenalism? Because I do not believe that one can give an exhaustive account of the nature or function of consciousness from a third person perspective.

Epiphenomenalism is a position in the philosophy of mind on the mind–body problem. It holds that subjective mental events are completely dependent for their existence on corresponding physical and biochemical events within the human body, but do not themselves influence physical events. [Wikipedia](#)

P. 225 The phenomena of which we are consciousness at any given moment are the *content* of consciousness.

P. 228 According to the present analysis, the contents of normal phenomenal consciousness are neither *beyond* three-dimensional space (as dualists assume), nor contained *within* just a tiny bit of three-dimensional space (as materialists assume). Rather, these contents *define* and *fill* three-dimensional space as they are none other than the everyday world or universe as experienced. What one experiences at a given moment depends, of course, on how one directs one's attention. Conscious contents differ enormously, for example, depending on whether one's eyes are open or closed. However, with open eyes, the contents of consciousness stretch to one's visual horizons. They include not just inner and body experiences, but also what we conventionally think of as the 'physical world'.

P. 229 The Iceberg Metaphor. In this vision, human consciousness is embedded in and supported by the greater universe (just as the tip of the iceberg is supported by the base and the surrounding sea). The contents of human consciousness are also a natural *expression* or *manifestation* of the embedding universe. In humans, the *proximal* causes of consciousness are to be found in the human brain but it is a mistake to think of the brain as an isolated system. Its existence as a material system depends totally on its supporting surround, and the contents of consciousness that it, in turn, supports arise from a reflexive interaction of perceptual processing with entities, events and processes in the surrounding world, body and the mind/ brain itself.

P. 233 Reflexive Monism. In this vision, there is one universe (the thing itself) with relatively differentiated parts in the form of conscious beings like ourselves, each with

a unique, conscious view of the larger universe of which it is a part. Insofar as we are parts of the universe, that, in turn, experience the larger universe, we participate in a reflexive process whereby the universe experiences itself.

P. 247 Ontological Monism. The above analysis rather suggests a seamless universe, of which we are an integral part, which can be known in two fundamentally different ways. At the interface of consciousness and brain, it can be known in terms of how it appears (from the outside) and in terms of what it is like to be that universe (from the inside). This is *ontological monism*, combined with *epistemological dualism*.

P. 250 psychophysical process. If first and third person perspectives on the mind are complementary and mutually irreducible' then the nature of the mind is revealed as much by how it appears from one perspective as from another. If so, the nature of mind is not *either* physical or conscious experience, it is at once physical *and* conscious experience. For lack of a better term, we may describe this nature as *psychophysical*. If we combine this with the features above, we can say that mind is a psychophysical process that encodes information, developing over time.

P. 253 Causal Paradox. How could one identify entities or events unless one was aware of them, or decide which ones require urgent attention. How could one think, remember, reflect, plan, dream, feel, be creative, give a lecture or write a paper if one were not conscious? And Howard, without awareness of the world, could one adjust to a complex, novel or rapidly changing environment? In short, from a third person perspective, phenomenal consciousness appears to play no causal role in mental life, while from a first person perspective it appears to be central. This is the Causal Paradox.

P. 260 knowing what it is like to see the beauty in someone's eyes, or hear the nightingale at dusk, is a distinct form of knowledge. It differs from abstract knowledge (or knowledge by description) in a very obvious way. One can only know the sorrow of losing a child if this sad event actually happens. One can only know what it is like to feel inspired if blessed by an actual inspiration. And one can read about love and innumerable books and scientific papers' but it becomes subjectively real only if one experiences it for oneself. This, I suggest, gets to the heart of the matter. It is only when we *experience* entities, events and processes for ourselves that they become *subjectively* real. It is through consciousness that we *real-ise* the world. That, and that alone, is its function.

P. 280 Final paragraph. Whatever the full truth of this may be, who can doubt that our bodies *and* our experience are an integral part of the universe? And who can doubt that each one of us has a unique, conscious perspective of the larger universe of which we are a part? In this sense, we participate in a process whereby the universe observes itself and becomes both the subject and object of experience. Consciousness

and matter are intertwined in mind. Through the evolution of matter, consciousness is given *form*. And though consciousness, a material universe is *real-ised*.

In this vision, life and evolution have a purpose that can only be understood in first person terms. For the reasons set out in chapter 1711, I find it useful to think of consciousness as the creator of subjective realities rather than objective existence, and I would argue for a less anti presenting view. Whether one prefers to think of realities immensely larger than oneself as God? The universe or the natural world is also a matter of personal choice. But the essential insight is the same.: consciousness gives meaning to existence. This is a perennial saying, as old as recorded history. One finds it, for example, in ancient Egypt in the revelation of the soul of Shu inscribed on the coffin of GWA, a physician sage of the 12th dynasty.

I am SHU
 The dweller within the one million beings.
 I gain awareness from them.
 I disseminate to his own generations the word
 Of the one that creates himself from himself.
 The generations will identify me.
 With the right mystical ship steered
 By him who liberates his being from his own Self.
 For I have seen the abyss becoming I.
 He knew not the place in which I became
 Nor did he see me becoming his own face.
 I forge my Soul in creating the concept of my Soul
 Wwithin the dwellers of the Lake of Fire.
 My becoming is the force of the entire creation
 Which flows forth from the Great Lord
 Of THIS.

For a short explanation of Monism, Reflex Monism and Max Velmans see:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Velmans

Bernardo Kastrup and Metaphysical Idealism

This is Bernardo's introduction to himself and his work on his website at: <https://www.bernardokastrup.com/> . I plan to include commentary and responses to his work in future issues. Alan

I am the executive director of Essentia Foundation and my work has set off the modern renaissance of metaphysical idealism, the notion that reality is essentially mental. I have a Ph.D. in philosophy (ontology, philosophy of mind) and another Ph.D. in computer engineering (reconfigurable computing, artificial intelligence). As a scientist, I have worked for the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) and the Philips Research Laboratories (where the 'Casimir Effect' of Quantum Field Theory was discovered). I have also been creatively active in the high-tech industry for almost 30 years now, having co-founded parallel processor company Silicon Hive (acquired by Intel in 2011) and worked as a technology strategist for the geopolitically significant company ASML. Formulated in detail in many academic papers and books, my ideas have been featured on 'Scientific American,' the magazine of 'The Institute of Art and Ideas,' the 'Blog of the American Philosophical Association' and 'Big Think,' among others. My 11th book, coming in late 2024, is 'Analytic Idealism in a Nutshell: A straightforward summary of the 21st-century's only plausible metaphysics.'