

NOTES ON THE FOURSOME EXPERIMENT by George Schloss

The Foursome is a condensed version of the Circle but it addresses, I think, a somewhat different aspect, a variation on the theme. Four people, arms linked—let's say, you, Margot, Douglas and myself—form a circle to see what the structure of reality has to say for itSelf. Let's say Douglas and I, presumably "facing" one another north-south, form one axis and you and Margot the other at east-west. (Mindful, of course, that, as demonstrated in the Unclassified, the designations "latitude and longitude", though not purely arbitrary, make possible the fitness of the environment and so like everything else in this world are created for our convenience. As the Romans used to say and two-way looking confirms: "It's not necessary to live; it is, however, necessary to navigate.") In any case, coming from where I am at 1st Person absent memory and imagination, what do I or rather I AM see on present evidence? Well, I see two things. Looking straight at Douglas, I see that in order to see him at all I first have to get out of the way, not his way but my way. I have to disappear in his favor. I also see that this is not a question of choice but simply the way I'm built, the way things are. Dante calls it the love that makes the world go round, that moves the sun, moon and other stars, not as a feeling but a fact. And the same pertains when, looking left and/or right at you and/or Margot, I receive you singly or together in my field of vision whether or not you return the courtesy. But then a funny thing happens. I notice that, despite what may be going on interiorly in each of you—and at this stage I can only assume that the identical process is taking place in both of you since this disappearing act seems to be the only operation that works—you and Margot looking at each other don't seem to be disappearing at all in one another's favor. On the contrary, from where I stand or sit it very much looks to me like you two are actually confronting each other.

What to make of it? Even more important, what to do about it? The first thing that comes to mind is to point out that though in this instance I've been referring to my own experience for the sake of clarity, this particular but by no means peculiar experience is not confined to me but is an absolutely universal phenomenon, equally applicable in one degree or other of awareness to every living creature on earth. Thus, although the content may vary and I in your line of sight replace you in mine, the container never does. Which would seem to indicate that, as the saints and sages have been insisting since time began, at bottom we're all one. Nevertheless, though it's now evident to all that somewhere in the region of the heart headless is where we begin, it's equally obvious we don't end there. There's still the stubborn fact—and there's no denying the world, too, is a fact; the philosopher Hobbes calls it the war of all against all—that regardless of where you, Alan and/or Margot, are really coming from (and this would equally apply to a fly on the wall), it very much looks like you two are confronting one another, even though, as we've already seen, that's not really the case at all.

Well, which is it, then, and how reconcile these two diametrically opposed yet seemingly legitimate views? Has my eye—the same eye with which I see God and, according to Eckhart, the same eye with which God sees me—deceived me? The most obvious answer, and it's been around for millennia, is the one adopted by, among others, the Vedanta which, on the strength of its indisputable familiarity with the 1st Person or what, in its impersonal way it was to acknowledge as the 1st Person, was to sweep it under the rug, to declare that the so-called confrontation was pure illusion—that yes, my eyes have deceived me. To which the more down-to-earth, like Hobbes for instance (and the Hindus have their share of the likes of him too), immediately respond that, aside from the social consequences, if confrontation is an illusion it's a helluva real one as even language testifies when it advises against rushing "head-long" into the lion's mouth in hot pursuit of its nature.

Now I don't know how far you want to go with this in our limited space—you ask for a few words—but it may help clarify a point I made in my paper to explore one more time the uses of "illusion" which is no illusion at all but, as the lion's mouth attests, merely a half-truth: how, for example, the "appearance" of history—what Douglas calls the "we"—has providentially affected not only our knowledge but also our experience of reality. If nothing

else, it may help demonstrate my conviction that the logical ramifications of the experiments, of any experiment, are virtually infinite.

In one of his Discourses, Rumi, one of the great precursors of two-way looking and meditation for the market-place, begins by bemoaning the almost universal sway of what he calls Heedlessness, the inattention to who we really really are. But—and, of course, this is precisely where his greatness lies—he almost immediately catches himself up by recognizing, as Headlessness and particularly this experiment does, that one-way looking, whether devoted exclusively to this world or the “next”, is, aside from a miscalculation, a physical impossibility, since, very much like the interplay between foundation and superstructure, a distinction Douglas makes, you don’t get one without the other. A foundation alone is worth exactly what it looks like—nothing. It’s certainly not habitable. And it would appear the Power behind the throne “wants” the world inhabited, at least for (and in) the moment. By the same token, a superstructure without foundation—and, as we’ve already seen, it’s a foundation grounded in love—cannot stand. As we’ve known all along and even our pop tunes, especially our pop tunes, not to speak of a paper-bag, proclaim it—when it comes to reality it takes two to tango. Without that special one and its non-Other—and, no doubt about it, from a God’s eye perspective we’re all special since, as we see now, he counts on that for his very ex-istence—there’d be no world at all, just as this blank page would reveal nothing but silence were there no writing on it. As in the paper-bag, without you, where would I be? You guessed it. Nowhere.

How else, then, except under conditions which demand a foil—an object to love—where you and Margot have to seem to be confronting one another, could God—awareness, consciousness, love, call Him, Her, It anything you like—be said to ex-ist at all, be brought to birth as Eckhart puts it, a detail which any mother, practiced in the labor of love by means of separation, will corroborate? Even more important, how could it succeed in having its Presence not only felt but known? To quote Angelus Silesius again: “I know that without me, the life of God were lost; Were I destroyed, he must perforce give up the ghost.” It’s no accident that, in Western thought especially, the human, by right of its body, a body that, as in the Resurrection, signifies the realization of all possibilities, of redemption as well as election, is raised higher than the angels. And like nothing else in this world or even out of it, the experiments, by making explicit what is implicit in the body, sing that certainty like nothing and no-one else ever has before. Finding ourSelf fallen so deep into what used to be called the abyss, we’re finally in position to heed the wake-up call. It’s only then we can confirm the fact that “the same eye with which I as subject see God as “object” is the same eye with which God as subject sees me as object” is the absolute truth, the immemorial words promising heavenly harmony and re-union finally set to the music of the spheres. Eckhart and St. Teresa and Angelus Silesius (who belied his name) and the rest weren’t just bumping their gums.

I suppose if we have to talk about it—and apparently we do—aside from reminding us of the primacy of the senses when unhindered by memory and imagination, its purpose is to point us to the ways of God and man. As the dying Lear says to his dear Cordelia, “we take upon us the mystery of things/ As if we were God’s spies.” We can now see how everything arising out of Nowhere, it reaches apotheosis at center, and then returns to where, Nowhere, it began. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust and so forth. And yet, and yet, if we want to survive, no less live, we still have to navigate the Meanwhile. Why don’t you have Margot, standing behind you, slowly dangle a wrist-watch in front of you? See how at dead-center, at the high-noon of your life, the moving hand of time and, by extension, its surrogate, history, is contained within your space and so in its coming to be and passing away acquires meaning, not in the order of cause, of course, but of value, how without that time ticking away Your empty space would have no meaning, right down to the realization that possibly in-and-for itSelf it really does have none. And what Good would that do, no less be? In two of his greatest plays, Hamlet and King Lear, Shakespeare comes to almost identical conclusions: in the one that “readiness is all,” in the other, “ripeness.” Half-way across the great globe, the Zen people, who knew a thing or two, too, about such matters (and I dare say still do), announced, and acted on it, that, aside from food and water, the one thing necessary to living the good life—a life of

benevolence without purpose—is to pay attention. I suggest, as befits two-way looking, the experiments meet all these requirements, get it coming and going. If ripeness is all, then the “purpose” of history satisfied by their very Presence, we’re now ready to fit the bill by paying it. Whether we’re willing to do so is another matter but it’s certainly possible that, thanks to the joint venture of history in the service of providence—the Power behind the throne—for the first time ever we’re now able to. Become aware, finally, of the capacity, not only do we see we have it, we have the where-with-all, we see that that awareness is the capacity. Of course, as with any of the experiments, we’re free to read and interpret them anyway we want so long as we remember that if God helps those who help themselves, God help those who, lapsing into license, get caught helping themselves. I think it was St. Augustine who said, “Do what you like. Do what you like—and pay for it.” What I get from this one is the “backness” of things, that I really and truly am backed, in this case, by death itself if needs be and, of course, as we all know, it needs be. They say we don’t have eyes in the back of our heads. And as far as it goes that’s true. But does it go as far as it can go? Does it go all the way and tell the whole story? Because, courtesy of two-way looking, I now know of one eye that does see into the back of my no-head and beyond and what it finds is reassuring. And it’s reassuring because it’s trust-worthy which, as it happens, is the original meaning of “true”—that in life as in death we’ve been given all we need. Whether the goods of this world get fairly distributed is at once a matter for politics and economics and at the same time the matter with politics and economics and, as again in two-way looking, it’s necessary to remember that. But that the Good of this world (and the “next”) is there or rather here, at least in potentia, and not so much for the taking as for the asking and receiving, is unquestionable. Like the song says or should have: “The best things in life really really are free.” It’s as simple as the paradox that dictates it: that all we have to do to make our way home, the place we never left, is to move out, disappear in our Own favour.