



Monthly Musings — August 2018

The present is a potent time—William Wray

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Live not as though there were a thousand years ahead of you. Fate is at your elbow; make yourself good while life and power are still yours. Marcus Aurelius

The present is a potent time. It's where everything lives. We think about past, present and future as being the same sort of thing. The truth is that our perception of the present is quite different from that of past and future. The past is a recreation of what once existed, the future a speculative assessment of what might be. Unlike these two, the present is not an imaginative exercise. It's what actually is. If we could but free ourselves from unnecessary concerns about the other two and make contact with the present and all that it offers, we would make contact with a reality that the other two do not have the power to possess.

The present is where the act of creation takes place. For us to act creatively we should therefore make every effort to visit as much as possible. This is our opportunity and we shouldn't put it off.

We look back at the past, often with regret - time past. We may often try to recreate the past in a more favourable sort of way, indulging ourselves in an 'if only' exercise, which is bound to be full of regrets and recriminations. Likewise, we may endeavour to look into the future in an attempt to divine what it holds in store. Driven by desire, we often fill our minds with fearful expectation. Cool reassessment of the facts and the creation of well laid plans do have their validity as long as it is appreciated that the longer we live in the past and future the longer we are missing out on real time— the time of opportunity. When the ego becomes all demanding, the present must be coloured by ideas we have about ourselves, which by necessity are carried from the past to be projected onto the future, that time where we hope to gain something of what we desire and avoid what we fear.

The present is ours, but there is that part of us which is happy to put things off. ‘We’ve got time.’ The truth is that we may not have the time we imagine, and even if there is time, the truth is the only time we truly possess is NOW.

Practice: Discover this present time - the only time - In all its originality and particular power.

William Wray

Meditation and the Poets—Alan Mann

In July we talked about Metzinger’s meditating kitchen and considered how the unsayable is best managed by the poets who, on occasion, capture the reciprocal nature of the observer and that which is observed. A friend lent me the book ‘The Old Ways’ by Robert Macfarlane in which I found another example.

The author is referring to the poet Edward Thomas’s correspondence: ‘Not one [pebble] but makes me think or rather draws out a part of me beyond my thinking,’ he writes to Bottomley. His observation of the difference between being made to think, and being drawn out beyond one’s thinking, is tellingly precise; it records the transition from a perception exercised by the self upon the stones to the perception exercised upon the self by the stones. Nature and landscape frequently have this effect on him: trees, birds, rocks and paths cease to be merely objects of contemplation, and instead become actively and convivially present, enabling understanding that would be possible nowhere else, under no other circumstances. ‘Something they knew – I also, while they sang,’ he will write of song thrushes in an early poem titled ‘March’. He senses that the light-fall, surfaces, slopes and sounds of a landscape are all somehow involved in accessing what he calls the ‘keyless chamber[s] of the brain’; that the instinct and the body (the felt smoothness of pebbles, the seen grain of light) must know in ways that the conscious mind cannot.

...The challenge, of course, is how to record such experience – apprehended, but by definition unsayable – in language, using the ‘muddy untruthful reflection of words’. Poetry is the form of utterance that can come closest; this he knows as a reader. But he has never written poetry, and has little reason to think he can.

The above relates to a time before Thomas started to write poetry. Apparently he decided to turn to poetry when Robert Frost persuaded him his writing was poetry disguised as prose.

Alan Mann

Krishnamurti: Preparing to Leave —Trisha English

Krishnamurti: Preparing to Leave. Scott H. Forbes. SHF Publications, 2018

Jiddu Krishnamurti was born in India during the reign of Queen Victoria, when India was regarded as the jewel in the crown of the British Empire. He was discovered by members of the Theosophical Society and groomed to be The World Teacher, in accordance with the belief system of the Theosophists who influenced major social trends in Edwardian England and Imperial India in the first half of the 20th century.

He remains today one of the most mysterious, enigmatic and controversial characters ever to emerge from the river of Masters, gurus, spiritual leaders and philosophers.

He died in Ojai, California in 1986 of pancreatic cancer having left a treasure trove of insights on a par with those of the Buddha. These insights are referred to as “The Teachings” and represent a priceless perspective of what is possible if human beings will dare to be free from

their conditioning. Various biographers have attempted to record his journey through life. Those sanctioned by Krishnamurti include the three volumes by Mary Lutyens, who was a lifelong friend; and the Memoirs and Unfinished book by his devoted assistant, Mary Zimbalist.

But the best has been left to last. It is the book, “*Krishnamurti: Preparing to Leave*” by Scott H. Forbes, who became an intimate of Krishnamurti after he went to work at the Brockwood Park Krishnamurti Educational Centre in 1974 . As the years passed Scott became more enthralled with Krishnamurti’s life and teachings and it was not long before he became an intimate member of the family group which comprised Krishnamurti, Mary Zimbalist, Dr. Parchure and Scott and his wife .

Scott’s book “*Krishnamurti: Preparing to Leave*” is a priceless account of the last months of Krishnamurti’s life from approximately 25th May, 1985 until February 17th, 1986.

During this period, Scott spent six to eight hours a day caring for Krishnaji - as he was affectionately called - and he wrote his account while it was fresh in his mind and before his notes became lost. He was only thirty seven years of age. He was the youngest man ever to be so intimately connected with the mature-age World Teacher.

Everything about the book, from the quality of the paper, to the photographs, to the fast-paced descriptions within, strives for excellence. Biographies, even of famous men, can be boring but not this one.

In an age of visual communication it is an almost insurmountable challenge to make the truth critically relevant and compelling.

Scott H. Forbes succeeds where many before him have failed. It is Scott’s unpretentious style which is so engaging. He has an unadulterated love for Krishnaji and this shines through his writing. But, there is no sensationalism in this book, rather a commitment to truthfulness as evidenced in his avoidance of any kind of spiritual mumbo jumbo. His account is a moving experience to read. He describes events exactly as they occurred. He does not attempt to mystify, glorify, or interpret.

Long years ago, Krishnamurti described his relationship with Scott in terms of “cooking him”. Those who are familiar with Krishnamurti’s entire life, will know that this was a term he coined for “preparing the ground”. When the time was right, Krishnamurti trusted that Scott would flower and use his talents and energy to help him sow the seeds for generations who would come after. There are many incidents in Scott’s account which have parallels with the actions of a loving father towards his son, though Scott in no way pursues this line of enquiry. Scott never avoids a mystery - and there are numerous mysteries surrounding the life and death of Krishnamurti - but he never attempts to explain or intrude with his own interpretation. He merely tells the story of an incredible man, faced with the seemingly insurmountable task of putting his affairs in order, prior to his earthly departure and in such a way that his lifelong mission of “setting humanity free” would continue until his final breath and more importantly, beyond. To this end he was confronted with the task of resolving divisions, conflicts and clashes of ego in the organizational structure of his Schools and Foundations in India, England and America. He worked tirelessly and to the very end to reconcile the disparate forces.

This is not a book of pain and suffering, though these dimensions are certainly present. Rather it is a tale of endurance, faithfulness, and compassion. No one interested in Krishnamurti’s life

and Teachings should miss reading this book. It reveals a side of Krishnaji which is arguably missing from other books about him.

To Scott Forbes, Krishnamurti bequeathed the care of Mary Zimbalist who looked after him unselfishly and with complete devotion from 1965 until his death in 1986. He also bequeathed the responsibility of completing the Study Centre at Brockwood Park as he wished it to be. Scott's book is important for one final reason. I believe that it will have great appeal and relevance for young people, who are faced with the conflict and divisions of society in the 21st century. More than anything else, Scott tells the final chapter of a momentous time in human evolution, when a single human being dared to challenge humanity to be different, to be self-aware, and to examine what it means to be truly human.

Trisha English - Western Australia

"My Heart was strangely warmed"—Alan Mann

At a recent meeting, over dinner at a Lebanese restaurant, two non-churchgoers admitted to being unaccountably moved when, for whatever reason, they find themselves in a church. As one of the people concerned I decided to find an explanation. It is probably to do with my early conditioning at a Methodist school, devout and loving grandparents, endless readings from the bible, etc. That is mere explanation, it doesn't handle the experience which seems to be direct and beyond any words. Poems sometimes have the same effect, for example, the George Herbert poem 'Love bade me welcome'. And speaking of Methodism one of the regular participants at our monthly meetings told us of something John Wesley wrote about his heart being strangely warmed at a service he attended in 1738. Maybe the cause of the warming may not have been the same for him but his words convey the feeling.

My view of the Church is that it has lost its soul. Or at least in much of its public manifestations. Douglas had a good way of describing this. He said "the church is the custodian of a mystery it no longer comprehends" or something on those lines. Traherne seems to have experienced something of this. He was both an Anglican clergyman and a seer of what gives rise to his religion and religious activities. There is the explanatory side, the bible and its creation myth, the story of the historical Jesus etc., this extends to the rituals which uphold the myth, give it continuity, etc, and that is largely the function of what we see as 'the church'. I am not a churchgoer as I don't feel it reflects what I understand as its 'truth'. On the other hand, the voluntary work and services provided by religious organisations can be seen as an expression of the mystery and I feel a bit guilty about not participating at that level.

Here are a couple of quotations from 'The Existential Theology of Nikos Kazantzakis by Howard F. Dosser, which I think relevant:

The ever-present danger is that we should invest our myths with reality and thus become entrapped in them. Perhaps this is what we have allowed to occur with respect to Christianity. Howard Dosser.

I said to the almond tree, 'Sister, speak to me of God. And the almond tree blossomed.' Nikos Kazantzakis

Traherne was enmeshed in this tradition and a daily practitioner of it but in his case it was an expression of something he experienced directly. His view of God was not of some omnipotent creator but of life in act. *God being all Act / His name is NOW, his nature is for ever... / Whose bosom is the glass in which we everlasting see... etc.* And he was anxious to draw our attention to 'Heaven Now' and critical of Christians who seek it hereafter. Anyone reading his Centuries of Meditations could reasonably conclude that he was some sort of heretic. What comes through most strongly in Traherne is his conviction that love is at the heart of things.

So, the answer to my question is that for me the surroundings of church, temple, certain writings can press the love button as it were, one falls in love, into love. Perhaps that is what the ritual, the surroundings, the community of interest, the fellowship is designed to do. I recently read a book by Bishop Spong, *The Fourth gospel: Tales of a Jewish Mystic*, here is version of Jesus as he probably was, stripped of the divine attributes added by subsequent generations, and as William Blake indicated in a reply to someone who asked him what he thought of Christ, he replied "he is the only God Sir, and so am I and so are you". So, I see Atheism as another belief system and consider God to be a matter of experience and not of belief.

I once asked a leading Trahernian cleric, on a visit to Hereford some years ago, a question about Traherne. There is a benediction which turns up two or three times in every Anglican service "May the blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom we live and move and have our being, be with us now and evermore. Amen". I asked him whether he understood "that in whom we live and move and have our being" was the same as what Traherne refers to as *Capacitie ...no brims nor borders such as in a bowl we see my essence was Capacitie*. (And that is what Traherne's lengthy poem "My Spirit" is all about). He said he would think it over but I never received a reply.

I was mightily cheered recently when David Loy, a prominent Buddhist scholar, chose not a Buddhist but Traherne as an example of how an awakened person sees the world. I put it in NOWletter 196.

Alan Mann

Martin Seligman visits Australia—Katie & Alan Mann

Dear Katie, Thanks for the advice to listen to Seligman, very interesting as you will see from the following. No reply needed as you are too busy for these side issues but I felt need to clear my head and maybe I'll use a version for the NOWletter.

I listened to the two Martin Seligman talks as recommended. He makes much sense but I have a couple of quibbles. He says we usually think of ourselves as products of our past experience but that our brains are, or should be, recognised as prospective 'organs and more engaged with the future than the past. Failure to recognise this is a barrier to well-being. He says that the present and past are more accurately described as products of the future. He calls them artefacts of the future. By this I understand him to mean that the brain is forward looking and our absorption with what is going to happen or might happen is the form our present consciousness most often takes. I imagine he regards the past as a collection of present moments which although now gone were determined in their time by this forward- looking consciousness. He then goes on to talk of optimism and hope and the regions of the brain in which they seem to reside and suggests that we might become capable of activating the hope centres of depressives

as an effective cure of their learned helplessness compared to present methods of drugs, etc., which he regards as 'cosmetic' approaches to depression and hopelessness.

I think this 'future looking' effect is true of our everyday consciousness but well-being, by definition, must be about happiness in and about the present, what is actually happening now. Future happiness is a desirable aim but it would be better described as 'will being' rather than well-being. He talks of the first axial shift that produced the various spiritual traditions - and says they were about overcoming suffering rather than making us happy. But in offering systems to overcome suffering they were also offering the possibility of future happiness what I call his 'will-being'. In addition, they focused on the present as the only place where happiness can actually be experienced, pointing out that our concerns with past and future are the cause of unhappiness not the cure for it. There are numerous sayings which exemplify this, for example the Zen, 'Let your actions be determined by place and circumstance' and 'There is just this and nothing else' and so on.

Having said all that it is a good idea to check how much my actual, present well-being depends on my expectations of what is expected to happen in the future. The prospect of a happy birthday with the family or a few days at Glen Davis certainly raise the well-being level and the thought of upcoming dental appointments or dreary social commitments sends it through the floor. So, he is right about the ability of thought about the future to impact well-being. I just think there are other aspects that affect my well-being and one of them is the awareness of what the present is, the actuality of it.

In the second podcast he concludes by telling us about his challenge to the Dalai Lama about Buddhism being all about 'now' at the expense of future wellness. To support his case he then adds that the resting brain when inspected by electroencephalograph, or whatever the - exploratory technique is used to check neural activity, demonstrates that its default condition is seen and measured in that bit of the brain which lights up when the future is being thought about and that seems to be nearly all the time if it is not deliberately interrupted by the need for attention to present tasks or challenges. He doesn't tell us what the Dalai lama said in reply. Apparently, the Dalai Lama held his wrist through their lunch together. If I can answer for the Dalai Lama I would say "Martin, you have answered for me by saying that the mind defaults to the future. There it concerns itself with what is not and what might be. Buddhism sees that this is necessary but not to the extent of obliterating the present. It is in the present that well-being must be or not at all. And, by the way, during lunch when I held your wrist, were you sensing my fingers on your arm and thinking what a nice thing to do and how great to be sitting here with me or were you worrying about when or whether I would ever let go?"

I get the feeling that Seligman is saying no future prospect of psychological wellness equals no happiness. That clearly doesn't work as a general rule. What about those with very limited future ahead, nearing the end of life like me . Not much future but plenty of well-being. What I think is really good about what he is doing is working on the restoration of hope for the hopeless, overcoming learned helplessness. Love Dad

Hi dad, thanks for your interesting insights. I would also be interested in what the Dalai Lama responded. Seligman obviously was in awe of him.

I liked how he (Seligman) talked about our evolving (or not) brain, how it is designed for survival quite rightly and having a hard time keeping up with our massive lifestyle changes/technology/advances. The fact we now live in a time of wealth and plenty...certainly for many, and certainly much more so than even 100 years ago...and therefore how we need to

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'manage our mind' to speed up to this positive modern day phenomena, where we don't have to worry about dying from ice age, a tiger or starvation.....but in fact can 'enjoy' life, expect good things and be grateful for them.

I think Seligman is concentrating on optimism in terms of human mental well-being, re-training the brain, and hence why he refers so much to the future-focus. Tweaking our perspective from pessimistic (survival) to optimistic (gratitude) leads to a happy and resilient individual, and in fact encompasses the 'present thinking' even if Seligman did not connect the dots. Optimism intrinsically encompasses the definition of being hopeful about the future (the future focus that you refer to) and maybe that is why he talks about it like that - you cannot talk about optimism without talking about the 'future'.

Optimism definition: hopefulness and confidence about the future or the success of something.

But despite Seligman concentrating on Optimism, I think he would agree that the ability to actually be NOW, to be grateful and present with what is, is an essential component of well-being, and in fact also a component of optimism (success of being 'now'). So I interpret it in a slightly different way - to be optimistic 'allows' an individual to be present, to be connected, to understand its importance and be grateful to be able to do so (as well as grateful for life...full stop). Hope that makes sense. Lots of love Katie

Greville Street meetings

We had nothing planned for the August Greville Street meeting and decided to make 'nothing' the subject for the day.

We considered the wide-ranging nature of the word and its various applications, for example:

Traherne. *Till we see our nothing we cannot understand the value of our Being* (Select Meditations 4/66) and *...That Being greatest which doth nothing seem!* (From 'My Spirit)

Emily Dickinson Poem 1563

By homely gift and hindered Words
The human heart is told
Of Nothing—
"Nothing" is the force
That renovates the World—

David Bohm — Michael Talbot and David Bohm (in quotes) in Talbot's *The Holographic Universe*, Chapter 2: *The Cosmos as Hologram*, p.51 According to our current understanding of physics, every region of space is awash with different kinds of fields composed of waves of varying lengths. Each wave always has at least some energy. When physicists calculate the minimum amount of energy a wave can possess, they find that every cubic centimeter of empty space contains more energy than the total energy of all the matter in the known universe.

Space is not empty. It is *full*, a plenum as opposed to a vacuum, and is the ground for the existence of everything, including ourselves. The universe is not separate from this cosmic sea of energy, it is a ripple on its surface, a comparatively small "pattern of excitation" in the midst of an unimaginably vast ocean. "This excitation pattern is relatively autonomous and gives

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rise to approximately recurrent, stable and separable projections into a three-dimensional explicate order of manifestation," states Bohm.[12] In other words, despite its apparent materiality and enormous size, the universe does not exist in and of itself, but is the stepchild of something far vaster and more ineffable. More than that, it is not even a major production of this vaster something, but is only a passing shadow, a mere hiccup in the greater scheme of things. [12] Bohm, *Wholeness*, p.192

The Upanishads— "What is called Brahman, that is what this space outside a man is; and what that space outside a man is, that is what this space within a man is; and what that space within a man is, that is what this space within the heart is. That is the 'full' – inactive, undeveloping. Whoso knows this wins good fortune, full, inactive, undeveloping. Chandogya Upanishad III, xii, 7-9."

Krishnamurti — Discovering or uncovering 'the space between the thoughts'.

Colin Oliver — Thought-Bees

If thoughts were bees,
 who would dare to shut them
 tight in the hive of the head?

He who shatters
 this hive of pretence
 with the swift hammer of seeing,
 sees no box, no house,
 no door to lock.
 The spell of images is broken
 and the swarm
 breaks out
 to scatter in the world.

The hive of nothingness
 brings to the world
 the honey of love,
 and thought-bees,
 watched by the queen
 of the eye, roam free.

Future Meetings

Sunday 2nd September An Uncommon Collaboration , Bohm and Krishnamurti — Graeme Wilkins

Sunday 7th October The Dhamma Study Group experience — Garry Booth

Sunday 4th November The Master & His Emissary — Dave Knowles

To be advised Self-deception —Don Ross