



Monthly Musings – November 2018

Out of My Head, On the trail of Consciousness by Tim Parks

The book, which was recommended by D. Knowles, starts with the author contemplating a recent assignment he's been given, a contribution to a seminar on the question of whether science is replacing religion. He is somewhat taken aback by his friend Ricardo Manzotti's claim to have developed a new theory of consciousness which he has called his *Spread Theory of Consciousness*. I couldn't find an exact definition of the theory in the book but this quote from the New York Review of Books record of conversations between Parks and Manzotti gave me a weak grasp of the theory.

The mind a consequence of the meeting of body and world –the mind is actually one with reality, for at that point the mind is the happening of body and environment together, the environment including, of course, other people; so, far from being isolated and deluded, in this scenario the mind becomes the proof of a real encounter.

Spread Theory sounds suspiciously like what Krishnamurti has been expounding for years, not to mention sages through the ages, i.e., The observer is the observed, you are the world, etc. Throughout my reading of the book I tried to maintain a comparison between the Manzotti approach and that of Douglas Harding. At another point in the book I did, after all, come across this definition:

Manzotti: You could say that, at any moment, a person is the collection of all those objects that are presently active thanks to a particular body. Or, again, it is the world that exists, now, relative to a certain body, an immensely complex amalgam of things spread in space and time, but all, at one moment or another, perfectly available to the senses.

Parks finds it hard to make his mind up, he dithers around, at one moment feeling it makes sense at another that it is nonsense. I think the matter is resolved when we make and hold the distinction between experience and explanation. The uncertainties and contradictions are the result of treating both as if they were on the same plane and interchangeable modes of being.

They are distinct, and the spread theory only works if priority is given to a purely phenomenological perspective. Once we start allowing back in what has been bracketed out, spread theory collapses as does phenomenology itself. Apparently, Husserl himself was guilty of this sort of backsliding. Parks make unfavourable reference to the not-knowing tradition of Zen, not realising that it is an ancient form

of separating the clarity of experiencing from the fog of explanation and exactly what is required for understanding spread theory.

He wrestles with the apparent problem of the persistence (existence) of objects when they are no longer the subject of his consciousness. “Does the memorial to Joseph von Eichendorff continue to exist when he is no longer observing it”?

But what happens when I am not there, and no one else is there, and no animal is there? Then there is no experience of the memorial. And since experience and object are the same, and since, in this theory, there is no absolute object, but only the relative object created by its causal relation with whatever animal is experiencing it, what is there?

This is a classic example of mixing the modes. Explanation will say of course the monument continues to exist. Experience, with no immediate evidence of its presence or its continued existence remains mute, in the ‘don’t know’ zone.

There is an undeniable duality of being which is neatly characterised by David Loy as the duality of non-duality. Meaning, I think, that the underlying wholeness of being expresses itself in both third person and first person perspectives.

This is the first of the Tim Parks books for me and he is a good writer and an engaging personality. I like his rambling personal style and his cheerful uncertainty. He would go well at our meetings. As for science replacing religion I think that is undoubtedly the case—with true believers in scientism as firmly established at their end of the belief spectrum as believers in the older traditions at the other.

Alan Mann

Meditation at Large from Nick Morris

(In the July NOWletter, No. 205, we considered the type of meditation referred to by Thomas Metzinger when, washing the dishes and running late he realised he hadn’t got around to his regular meditation. He thought ‘why am I worried about missing my meditation when the whole kitchen is in meditation and, more to the point, what if my regular meditation is an interference with rather than a participation in this fundamental meditation?’ Nick Morris came across a much earlier version and sent me the following extract. Alan)

I was reading my School Philosophy notes which include CHANDOGYA UPANISHAD 7.6.1. "The earth is meditating as it were. The intermediate space is meditating as it were. The heaven is meditating as it were. Waters are meditating as it were. Mountains are meditating as it were. The gods and humans are meditating as it were."

In fact, in the class also, if you have to listen to one hour without dropping a single word, you require what? Attentiveness and alertness. Otherwise, gaps will come. If you do not want gaps, you need not close your eyes; but, what is important? The mind must be open, alert, vigilant and attentive. And the upanishad is highly poetic. If you watch nature, the upanishad says, it appears as though everything in nature is practising meditation! He does not say everything is practising meditation. Be alert. Be attentive. Everything is, as though, practising meditation... ..In fact, the whole creation seems to be in meditation, following the force of their action, perfectly. So, the waters, the

ocean. They are also as though in meditation. If you go to Himalayan ranges and see all the peaks, it looks as though each peak is a sage, sitting in meditation, being erect all the time.

Nick Morris

https://archive.org/stream/ChandogyaUpanishad_SwamiParamarthananda/Chandogya%20Upanishad_Swami%20Paramarthananda/Chandogya_Upanishad_S_P_djvu.txt

Iain McGilchrist's The Master and His Emissary

The Divided Brain and the making of the Modern World.

At our November Greville Street meeting Dave Knowles introduced a dialogue on a book by Iain McGilchrist 'The Master and his Emissary'. Dave drew on his own right hemisphere stroke experience to give a very personal account of the Iain McGilchrist book. I won't try to summarise Dave's talk but add a number of references below for follow-up. There are the notes I included in NOWletter 152 <https://www.capacity.org/now/Now152.pdf> and two videos in which Gilchrist himself presents his case. Dave has authorised me to send a copy of his talk notes to anyone wishing to follow up on his story.

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbUHxC4wiWk> This is a 32 minute talk which is also available in book form from Amazon as a Kindle download for \$1.89. Title: *The Divided Brain and the Search for Meaning*

2. <https://youtu.be/oXiHStLfjPo> This is a more extensive talk given at Schumacher College and entitled *Things Are Not What They Seem*. This is probably the best option if you haven't the time or inclination to read the book. There is a good review of the book by Mary Midgley at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/jan/02/1>

As an example of what I found so interesting about the book I have scanned two pages and inserted a number of comments in italics.

I have taken pages 450 and 451 of the book as an example of how the phenomenological insight or shift is so often revealed by poets and by contemporary philosophy, although the 'phenomenologists' themselves seem reluctant to accept the fruits of their discovery. The pages are copied from the final chapter which is entitled 'The Master Betrayed'. I found McGilchrist's comments in this concluding section of the book particularly interesting as they come very close to a prescription for resolving the problem which is not too far removed from the Harding experiments. 'Close but no cigar' as George Schloss would have said. Speaking of the need to overcome the dominance of the left-brain perspective McGilchrist says that it might be the very fact of extreme dependence on our left brain and the negative consequences of that dependence that somehow institutes a return to a more balanced sharing of perspectives between left and right. We might say, in the context of headlessness, an awakening to my first-person perspective followed by an understanding of both first and third-person views.

I have inserted notes in italics to explain why I think what is being said is relevant to what Douglas Harding has to say on the subject.

Page 450. ...Change however would require a willingness to accept being seen as naïve for not getting caught up in the dialectic of the clever ironies, on the one hand, or of scientific materialism on the other.

We proponents of the headless way are used to accusations of naivety.

Now, says Hegel, that the oracles ... no longer speak to men, and the statues have become stone corpses' (there is much in that phrase alone), the remnants of the past, the glories of its art, history and culture, are like 'beautiful fruit broken off a tree; a kindly fate has passed those works on to us much as a girl might offer us such fruit.'⁴⁹.e The tree, and the earth in which it grew, and the climate in which the fruit ripened, are no longer available to us except as a 'veiled remembrance', something we represent to ourselves by picturing it. Yet, Hegel says, the knowingness with which we have to recapture this is like the glint of self-awareness in the eye of the beautiful maiden who offers us the fruit; it is the same Nature that produced those fruit, but at a higher level', and it can add as well as take away.

The contrast is like that between the country folk at the fair which Wordsworth sees from Helvellyn, and Wordsworth's poem on the subject, which, though it lacks an unrecapturable quality of the 'self unseeing' that is still available to its subject, is itself a great work at a higher level of self-awareness, which the country folk could not achieve. Of what the ancients were happily unconscious, we are necessarily conscious, Hegel seems to say, but we see more: perhaps as the innocence of the adult, where it is achieved, is greater than the innocence of a child, though bought at the cost of much painful awareness.

'Self unseeing' is a very good description of the headless or first person view and probably as close as you get to a third person 'explanation' of first-person perception.

But such innocence is rare. Age has a chance of bringing it only if we are very lucky or very disciplined. Wordsworth's achievement, like that of Blake and Keats, is that he retains a degree of innocence despite his experience, an innocence which all three evidence in what one might call their vulnerability. Through it alone they are enabled to achieve an inspired quality which could be mistaken by the foolish, at times, for foolishness. The price of their achievement is that they must make themselves open, even to ridicule, rather than shelter behind a self-protective carapace of ironic knowingness and cynicism.

Well, we can confirm that sort of ridicule is often the response to headlessness. Usually, I think, evidence of an inability or unwillingness to shift from concept to direct perception or inability to see the difference.

Excessive self-consciousness, like the mental world of schizophrenia, is a prison: its inbuilt reflexivity — the hall of mirrors — sends the mind ever back into itself. Breaking out of the prison presents a problem, since self-consciousness cannot be curbed by a conscious act of will, any more than we can succeed in trying *not* to think of little green apples. The apple of knowledge, once eaten, cannot become once more 'unbitten in the palm'. Nonetheless conscious reflection, the root of the problem, may itself provide the antidote to its own effects. Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Merleau-

Ponty, all of them critics of reflection, embodied in their writing a reflective attempt to surmount reflection. Holderlin's lines once again come to mind: 'Where there is danger, that which will save us also grows' (see p. 232).

He has the sense that the solution lies in seeing the self for what it is, just another object for attention arising in awareness, not the centre itself. In Tim Park's 'Out of my Head' there is a reference to the question of whether the memorial in the park exists when there is nobody there to observe it. This strikes the left brain as silly but it needs to be considered seriously as it points to the distinction between knowing and direct apprehension or experience. (See below)

... because philosophy does not answer our questions but shakes our belief that there are answers to be had: and in doing so it forces us to look beyond its own system to another way of understanding.

Another way, not just a better application of the usual way.

One of the reasons reading Heidegger is at the same time so riveting and such a painful experience is that he never ceases to struggle to transcend the Cartesian divisions which analytic language entails, in order to demonstrate that there is a path, a way through the forest, the travelling of which is in itself the goal of human thinking. Though we can emerge into a 'clearing', we cannot hope to reach the clear light of the Empyrean, which as Holderlin's devastating poem *Hyperions Schicksalslied* makes plain, is reserved only for the gods. Perhaps inevitably Heidegger's last writings are in the form of poems. Wittgenstein also saw the true process of philosophy as a way of transcending or healing the effects of philosophy in the philosophical mind: philosophy is itself a disease, as Karl Kraus said of psychoanalysis, for which it purports to be the cure.⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty, more explicitly than either, held out the hope that we could learn to see things again by a process of *surréflexion*, hyper-reflection, which would help to redress the distorting effects of consciousness by making us conscious of them.

I think surréflexion is first person seeing, the aware space revealed by the experiments as foundational.

This idea had already occurred to the Romantics. At the end of his famous essay 'On the Puppet Theatre', Kleist offers the possibility that the crippling effects of self-consciousness may be transcended through a form of still further heightened consciousness, by which we might regain a form of innocence.

'Grace appears purest in that human form which has either no consciousness or an infinite one, that is, in a puppet or in a god.'

'Therefore', I said, somewhat bewildered, 'we would have to eat again from the Tree of Knowledge in order to return to the state of innocence?'

'Quite right', he answered. 'And that's the last chapter in the history of the world.'⁵²

Or try the experiments!

With that his essay closes. In this last phrase Kleist may be warning us, as Hölderlin does, that what we crave can be had only in another world, where there are

gods. But his essay also confirms that we can move only onward, not back-ward, and that by doing so we might transcend our situation and, in this way, return to something lost. Perhaps the very emptiness of self-reflection, what Vico called 'the barbarism of reflection', may push us towards the necessary leap of faith that alone will allow us to escape. After all, even the emptying out of consciousness achieved by Zen is not a random gift but achieved by years of consciously embraced self-discipline.

No longer the case since the arrival of the experiments. And as Heidegger intuits it is in fact a backward step notwithstanding Holderlin's view above.

Reflection, self-reflection, *surréflexion*: what we are talking about clearly has something to do with the plane of vision that we adopt. Gombrich writes that the true miracle of the language of art is not that it enables the artist to create the illusion of reality. It is that under the hands of a great master the image becomes *translucent*'.⁵³ I have used the language of transparency and translucency — of seeing through' — repeatedly: because as Gombrich says of the work of art, as Jean Paul says of metaphor, as Kerényi says of myth, and as Merleau-Ponty says of the body, our vision must not stop there at the bounds of the 'thing' - but neither must it be replaced by something else. It is the function of such translucent, or themselves, semi-transparent, beings to remain transparent rather than draw attention to themselves because in doing so they achieve their goal.

It would be enough to simply discover that the transparency he proposes is always the case and immediately available for the looking once the cataract of habit is removed.

In response to a request for a definition of phenomenology Dave Knowles provided the information below.

Phenomenology defined.

From Taylor Carman's 'Merleau-Ponty'

Merleau-Ponty was first and foremost a phenomenologist. Alongside pragmatism, logical positivism, and structuralism, phenomenology was among the dominant philosophical movements of the first two thirds of the twentieth century. Its founder was Edmund Husserl, and besides Merleau-Ponty its leading figures were Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre.

What is phenomenology? Simply put, it is an attempt to describe the basic structures of human experience and understanding from a concrete first-person point of view, in contrast to the reflective, third-person perspective that characterises both scientific knowledge and received opinion. Phenomenology calls us to return, as Husserl put it, "to the things themselves." The "things" Husserl had in mind were not concrete external things (Dinge) but issues or matters (Sachen), the stuff—both form and content—of our experience and understanding as we live them, not as we have learned to conceive and describe them according to the categories of science and prejudices of common sense. Phenomenology is in this sense a descriptive rather than explanatory or deductive enterprise; it seeks to reveal the basic forms of experience and understanding as such, rather than construct hypotheses or draw inferences beyond their bounds.

[End-Note: Of course, the distinction between description and explanation is neither sharp nor exclusive, for some descriptions, precisely by describing as they do, also explain. The difference remains, however, since it is possible to describe without explaining.]

Carman, Taylor, 2008, Merleau-Ponty, Routledge, London and New York p. 14. Taylor Carman is an American philosopher. He is Professor of Philosophy at Barnard College, Columbia University. [Wikipedia](#)

Here are a couple of extracts from the Tim Parks book 'Out of My Head'.

What I was not aware of – to arrive at my point – was Husserl. So that discovering him – Edmund Husserl, 1859–1938 – in the summer of 2016, I had to weigh very carefully the conclusions he reached about perception, consciousness and objects, with those of Manzotti, because for quite a while the two seem to travel the same road, then part company. Who is right?
Location: 3,239

But the key difference of course, is that while Husserl claims that experience is not the real world but a mental representation, Riccardo denies the subject/object divide and insists that your experience simply is the world.
Location 3642

I think that Manzotti is a true phenomenologist and Merleau-Ponty a pseudo phenomenologist. Manzotti takes the phenomenal to be the fundamental actuality whereas for Merleau-Ponty it is mere appearance.

Alan Mann

Neo Darwinism and Design

We have been exchanging views on this debate following our Emily Dickinson inspired dialogues and my recent reading of books by Michael Behe and Stephen Meyer which challenge the orthodox Darwinian explanation.

I am agnostic about both ends of the explanatory spectrum. I listened to Dennett again. He offers 'design without intention'. I think that is another two bob each way position. I can acknowledge the drive to fill an environmental opportunity through natural selection. The opportunity will be 'taken' by whatever organism latches on to the advantage of relevant random variations. It is the blind chance aspect that I have difficulty with. (And the notion that given enough time anything and everything just happens). Does the environmental opportunity exert a 'pull' a sort of directive? Is what we understand by intelligence exemplified by and limited to the human version? I don't know.

Alan Mann

Thomas Nagel – It is perfectly possible that the truth is beyond our reach, in virtue of our intrinsic cognitive limitations, and not merely beyond our grasp in humanity's present stage of intellectual development. But I believe that we cannot know this, and that it makes sense to go on seeking a systematic understanding of how we and other living things fit into the world. In this process, the ability to generate and reject false hypotheses plays an essential role. I have argued patiently against the prevailing form of naturalism, a reductive materialism that purports to capture life and mind through

its neo-Darwinian extension. But to go back to my introductory remarks, I find this view antecedently unbelievable—a heroic triumph of ideological theory over common sense. The empirical evidence can be interpreted to accommodate different comprehensive theories, but in this case the cost in conceptual and probabilistic contortions is prohibitive. I would be willing to bet that the present right-thinking consensus will come to seem laughable in a generation or two—though of course it may be replaced by a new consensus that is just as invalid. The human will to believe is inexhaustible.

Thomas Nagel

David Bohm (From Yvonne Truen)

For Bohm the Holy is a "being beyond what can be grasped in thought" and Bohm calls the Subtle Nonmanifest "holy" in the sense that it is whole. It is a Presence within cosmic energy.

The Bohm cosmic model also suggests that this "holiness" has existed since the foundation of the cosmos. It is present in the cyclical process of the universe. It is pure, active intelligence from which all that is manifest in the cosmos comes. It acts through an inwardness in consciousness. It enfolds information into the many levels of consciousness, into all of life. It is the Implicate Order which is the Ground of All Existence...

*An article on David Bohm at:
http://www.bizint.com/stoa_del_sol/plenum/plenum_3.html*

Intelligence is defined in the OED as understanding. Krishnamurti and Bohm used to remind us that the word is a re-presentation of 'that which stands under'. So, what if intelligent design is not about a creator but whatever it is that stands under, whatever is 'Unfolding understanding' might be, as opposed to blind chance? *Alan*

The Brotherhood of All Life

Thank you, dear Alan, for sending me your newsletters. It makes me feel part of your discussions and stimulates my thinking and feeling and "intuiting", which I call pondering.

This theme today is especially interesting = Design or Adaptation ?

May I add my little bit?

I "see" a definite blueprint all through the whole cosmos - which one could call Design - but then, also within that Design is the miracle of "Life"! The step between substance and aliveness! which then leads to Adaptation and an ongoing Evolutionary Movement.

So that we could say = what is added moment to moment through consciousness - hence we are co-creators in this whole scheme - - - that "we" includes the whole of nature.

The Step from matter to consciousness which is still a puzzle to scientists - is due to the presence of the Angelic Kingdom - from the tiniest life in the cell, the guardian angel people pray to when they are in trouble, to the little grass-elf, living in the hundred year old Rainforest Tree, to the giant presence in the Himalaya Mountains (the Sherpas invoke them before every ascent) - or the "spirit" we recognize in certain places like sacred springs, sacred sites, Cathedrals, - or the one we sing to when we say "Britannia rules the Waves".

They are also the guiding light in the adaptation process of plants, animals and humans - writers know where "inspiration" comes from - - - artists, "saints", children and spiritually aware people see then in their visions. Ancient writings acknowledge their presence, sharing this amazing journey of evolution of consciousness with us in this unfolding cosmos = co-creators, the Brotherhood of All Life ! My loving greetings to you and Margot and your friends,

Celia Novy

The Krishnamurtis from Mal Mitchell

Amongst other things it was 'funny' to read Graeme Wilkins' piece re Jiddu Krishnamurti and David Bohm in the latest NOWletter partly as I've just been on an interesting little re-exploration of David Bohm's ideas, and also given something that happened just this morning as I was out jogging...

I had a kind of vision 'precipitate' of Jiddu Krishnamurti and U G Krishnamurti hugging each other and sobbing – as if they'd broken through a barrier which was between them in their lifetimes, with 'freezes' of energy by way of their own inner narratives relating to their consciousness/ ego/ supposed freedom from ego/ subtly weighted internal narratives.... So in this vision such energy had been freed, unfrozen, and it was flowing between them as intimate nutrient dynamic connection. There was an energy of [secret] regret transformed – being transcended, metabolised, its energy re-utilised – as they realised things which they'd been unaware of, protectively self-shielded from, by subliminal narratives prior to their deaths; an energy of an opportunity, or opportunities, missed that were NOW being realised in certain way.

Mal Mitchell

And a political postscript from Mal in reply to my question about Brexit.

Brexit

Is the UK going to have another referendum? Ooo - big question... To say just a thing or two on it, it's gobsmacking that despite how much has emerged since the first vote about how campaign rules were broken, whopping lies told, people were targeted and manipulated via Facebook algorithms and whatnot, it [the 'Leave' vote] is still cleaved to by many as actually "democratic"... Like the democratic freedom of those at Jonestown who were persuaded to drink poison... Anyway, no, the outlook just now isn't looking good on any front - especially ironic in terms of the NHS, which so many folk were persuaded would be so massively better off with 'Brexit'. Absolute effin

madness, if you'll pardon my non-European turn of phrase...Tragically funny little [spooof on it here](#), playing around Boris Johnson's so very richly spouting about how Brexit would be a "Titanic success".... I've been on a march or two calling for a 'People's Vote' but such a proposal is certainly up against powerful forces. We'll see... I'd think things are likely to shake up somewhat around the Tory and Labour party conferences. We're all marching behind stiff ill-prepared Englishmen into a blizzard like Scott's team into the Antarctic.... Chilly if extra-globally-warmed times ahead...

Mal Mitchell

Greville Street Meetings

Future Events

Sunday 3rd Feb	Self-deception — Don Ross
Sunday 3rd March	Dialogue Plus — Christopher Ash (McLean) & Alan Mann
Sunday 7 th April	Spread Personality Theory — Dave Knowles

The April event deals with a theory at present in the early stages of development and may change its content and title as it unfolds between now and April.

Wisdom Works—Philosophy for All

This is a regular bulletin prepared and circulated by William Wray dealing with philosophical issues and rooted in Stoicism. The latest issue includes this invitation— If you know somebody you think might benefit from these emails please send them this link so that they can enrol themselves: www.wisdomworks.co.uk

Harding Workshop

The Nonduality Sydney Meetup group have asked me to do a two-hour workshop with them on Sunday 9th December. The time and place are not yet confirmed but it will probably be at the Genki Centre, 1 Arundel Street, Glebe. If you would like to come along let me know and I will reply with the details as soon as they become available. Alan