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Greville Street Meetings now online— NEXT MEETING SUNDAY 7th June 11AM		

The Literature of Mysticism

This is an edited version of speaker notes for the U3A presentation to the “Enjoying Literature” group on 5 Mar 20 by Dave Knowles. There is a lengthy list of the books referred to in this summary, too long for the NOWletter but available by email on request. Alan

Notes: So, why would I, who has no religious affiliation, and has sometimes thought of himself an atheist, be talking on such a subject?

To answer this question I will have to delve into my past, so this presentation may have a little more autobiographical content than is usual.

Well, as a lot of good things start, it starts for me riding my bike all day in the Peak District of England and absorbing the peace of nature & exercise into my body and my mind and, if I thought I had had one, my soul. What I did notice in the subsequent week of school was my great relaxation and ability to concentrate at my schoolwork.

What I primarily valued from these experiences was the freshness of vision in contrast to the normal mundane vision of the everyday world. This was emphasized by the expansive natural beauty of the Peak District with its moors, crags, dales and rivers. The reward for a steady ascent of Axe Edge was a fast exciting precipitous descent into say Dovedale or Manifold

Valley followed by a gentle ride alongside the river. When there was a timing conflict between attending Sunday School or spending all day in the saddle in the countryside at my door it was pretty obvious what would win out.

As this was the 60s I was bound to stumble across the Gia-Fu-Feng & Jane English translation of the “Tao Te Ching” with its beautifully evocative black & white photographs of nature, which made explicit the intimate connection between nature & philosophical Taoism. Taoism as presented by Lao Tsu seemed more an appreciation of nature than anything to do with religion.

The next seed was planted at University where I met an American who introduced me to the Russian mystic, Gurdjieff and suggested I read “In Search of the Miraculous” written by his chief follower, P. D. Ouspensky. I eventually did and while some of it was a bit too way out for me, I was very impressed by Gurdjieff’s main message that Humankind spent most of its time in a ‘waking sleep’ instead of being fully awake to the self and its being in the world. This resonated with me as I had experienced the sensation of having got to a destination without being aware of the trip and the opposite sensation of being fully awake on my rides through the Peak District. I started to read all I could of this “controversial spiritual teacher” and “Rascal Sage” and eventually joined one of the many Gurdjieff groups throughout the world.

Here are 3 relevant books from my library: “Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth” A biography by James Moore, “The Gurdjieff Work” by Kathleen Roirdan Speeth, Personality vs Essence and “The Teachers of Gurdjieff” by Rafael Lefort

The latter attempted to trace the Eastern origins of G’s thought and, controversially suggested it came from Sufi origins. G himself once styled his teachings as ‘esoteric Christianity’ but to me it now seems more like deep psychology or secular mysticism and in its emphasis on “self-remembering” now seems uncannily similar to current teachings on “mindfulness

A Search for Background. At this point a Pelican Original by an English schoolmaster “Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology” came to my rescue with more authoritative information on the subject and its many manifestations over time. The Study drew distinctions between different types of mysticism such as the mysticism of Love & Union, the mysticism of knowledge & Understanding, Nature mysticism, soul mysticism & God mysticism. It also talked about the Perennial Philosophy, the Astronomer’s Universe and the problem of Knowledge The Anthology drew on 25 Christian examples 2 Hindu, 1 Taoist, 1 Buddhist, 1 Sufi, and here I was introduced to Thomas Traherne as a prime example of Nature Mysticism.

Later, when I was preparing to read Ulysses for the first time, I find this quoted in Gilbert’s “James Joyce’s Ulysses” p. 50n & 57 · Also seeking background I devoured William James’ “The Varieties of Religious Experience: A study in Human Nature” even the list of contents of the chapters on .Mysticism is fascinating - page 13. The four marks of mystic states: p.299-300, Ineffability, Noetic quality, Transiency, Passivity and recognition of what is understood as Secular Mysticism.

So - Mysticism as I had so far encountered it was a mixture of the traditional & the secular with both Traherne & Gurdjieff spanning the two realms, though Gurdjieff, we need to remember, was “The Rascal Sage”

I was bound to stumble across Spinoza sooner or later with his strange equivalence between God & Nature. Spinoza (as far as I can understand him) - I know George Eliot & Einstein could be characterised as Spinozists and that the identity of God & Nature is congruent with my feeling of being part of the consciousness of the Universe - I’ll use the quote in Max Velman’s Understanding Consciousness:

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 the universe becomes both the subject and the object of experience. Consciousness and matter are intertwined in mind. Through the evolution of matter, consciousness is given form. And through consciousness, the material universe is real-ised.

Let's see how Einstein talked about his sense of religion. *"I believe in Spinoza's God who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with fates and actions of human beings"*.

Where Science runs out. *Mind & Cosmos* by Thomas Nagel who went beyond the pale of Scientific Orthodoxy in discussing the Mind and was labelled a heretic for his temerity

The Fifth Miracle: The Search for the Origin of Life by Paul Davis - Evolution cannot start from nothing and though evolution is now well-accepted, biogenesis is still a heavily-disputed subject and the title resorting to the word 'Miracle' reflects this. The search ranges far & wide from superbugs cooked in the oceans to panspermia and the Hope (?) that we have a bio-friendly universe. "God of the Gaps" here I think!

My Way. I think I am ready to become a Spinozist with Einstein & George Eliot, two people I admire greatly and I'll find my practice in laying myself open to Epiphany in Nature, trying to self-remember, and digesting the explorations on the frontiers of science: consciousness, biogenesis, cosmology and anything that induces awe.

I have given up on Phenomenology as a possible way. And What About Australia? I was drawn to Australia by several things: 'Songlines' by Bruce Chatwin, 'Do Out of the Desert the Prophets Still Come?' by A.D. Hope. And I didn't feel at home until I had walked over the Sydney Harbour bridge, visited Uluru & Kata Tjuta, and been called a whinging Pom. Australia houses the true Nature Mystics - the Aboriginals - what can we learn here? Should we take up the Aboriginal connection with Land to better belong & manage things like Fire, conservation, etc?

A Modern Secular Mystic. Douglas Harding wrote: *On Having No Head: Zen and the Rediscovery of the Obvious* in 1961. The subject of the book is you—your true identity... it takes the message of all the great mystics and a number of contemporary philosophers and demonstrates a simple way of converting their explanations into direct experience.

Dave Knowles

Next Greville Street Meeting—Sunday 7th June 11am—By Zoom

Dave has offered to enlarge on the James Joyce aspects of his talk by leading our June Zoom meeting with a presentation "How James Joyce can help you see the World Afresh". The link to the meeting will go out to all addresses on this list.

Fire Front Report from Don Ross

The long winter drought with the onset of spring had become punishingly hot. Even the rainforests were becoming dusty and the usual damp understorey of leaves crackled underfoot and the pleasant musty perfume of rotting vegetation was absent. The first fires started west of the northern rivers in parched grazing land and soon, fed by an inevitable west wind and the fire friendly eucalyptus bush, it marched eastward eventually involving the rainforest which had never previously been affected by fire. The peat like accumulation organic material acquired over decades continued to smoulder well after the main fire had done its worst to the trees, causing villages and towns to be clouded with suffocating smoke long after the fire front had passed. In the fury of the main event even bare ground was prone to burn as it contained so much organic material accumulated over aeons. These forests with many trees destroyed may never recover especially if such droughts become more frequent.

Much further south in Blue Mountains east of Sydney, a region used to impressive bush fires every ten years or so, we looked with horror at the dense understorey of shoulder high vegetation baking in the dry heat and the towering gum trees colouring and scenting the foreboding air. It had to burn we thought but unlike in '94 when an idiot deliberately set fire to the south side of Bells Line of Road or when the army started the 2003 burn by having live firing exercises near Lithgow, we had been spared.

Owing to the severity of the fires up north many of our experienced RFS crew volunteered to assist the growing emergency up there. Eventually a lightning strike in the region of the Gosper's Mountain eighty kilometres north of us started a fire which rapidly spread east and slowly but relentlessly south through the Wollemi national park. Before Australia became arid several thousand years ago it was covered by rainforest species which were gradually replaced by fire tolerant eucalyptus trees with the ancient plants surviving the inevitable waves of bush fires only in a few deep gorges and on the eastern slopes of higher rainfall regions close to the sea. One such refuge is in the Wollemi park where the famous eponymous prehistoric pine was found. The only such trees on the planet were now in danger from mankind's recklessly induced climate change. As the fire front reached their deep gulley refuge, aerial water bombing and the efforts of a small fire-fighting crew, helicoptered in, prevented their incineration.

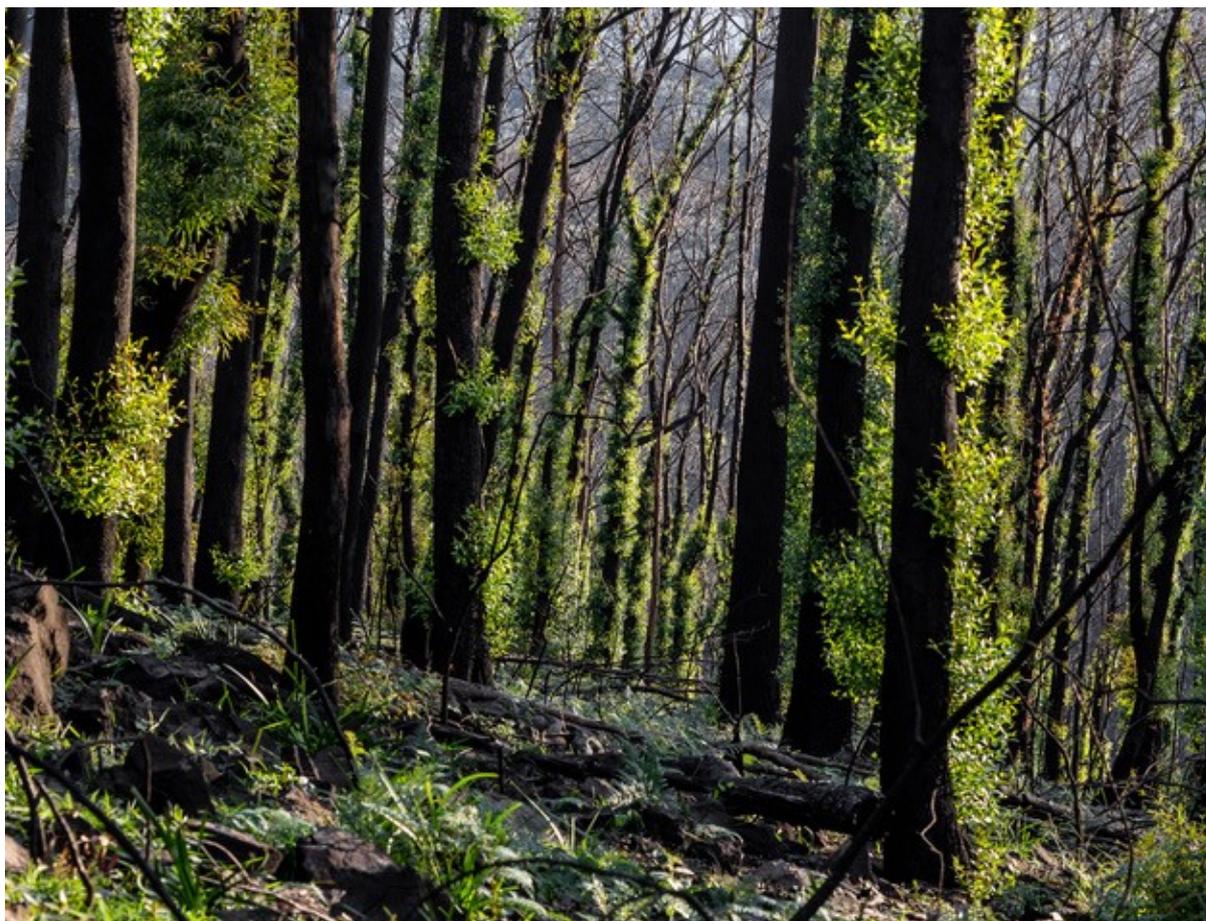
Inevitably after a couple of weeks this southerly moving fire emerged from the national park threatening all the settlements north of Bells Line of Road. Because of this threat over such a huge area, several suburban professional fire fighters were brought in to augment the stretched FRS volunteers. This mix of volunteers, who had fought many fires in this environment, with those without such experience was unfortunate. As the fire began to encroach on Mt Wilson many RFS crews were deployed to protect that village and a not unreasonable plan to begin a back burn north of the main road to Lithgow to prevent the fire from crossing it and entering the Gross valley was conceived. Such a back burn in those conditions is a tricky business. It should be done with a few widely spaced fires closely monitored and kept in check with frequent application of water to ensure it spreads in a controlled manner, something with which the local fire crews are very familiar. Regrettably a professional fire truck was sent. They ran a long line of contiguous fire which to their surprise quickly developed into an uncontrolled wall of flame which rapidly showered embers across the road causing a similar inferno there and, in addition, ensuring Wilson was surrounded by fire and Bell was engulfed a couple of days later.

In the final analysis this error mostly just accelerated the inevitable southerly march of the Gosper's fire by a few days, a fire like all the others of the terrible Spring of 2019 which for the most part couldn't be controlled despite the thousands of men on the ground and the

somewhat late augmentation of water bombing resources. Thousands of properties were destroyed and most of the NSW population exposed to long periods of smoke pollution.

On the night when the fire finally ran up the west side of Mt Tomah there was a considerable southerly component to the wind which spared the properties on the south of the Bell's road thanks to the excellent work of the RFS crews and the sometimes comic efforts of the city firemen all of which I observed sitting on my lawnmower equipped with thirty litres of water which I used to quell the few embers which landed in my place.

Don Ross



Don sent this picture to show the first stage of the 'recovery', the remarkable epicormic bursts of foliage from the fire ravaged trees. (Epicormic growth is a plant response to damage or stress. It is the growth of new shoots from epicormic buds that lie dormant beneath the bark

The Zero Silent Source of the Mortal Cosmos

All things such as particles, waves, electrons, dogs, humans, the moon, the sun and universes have emerged within a Zero, Silent, Source and at various time spans have emerged back into it. That is, they were born within it and have died within it. All things now dead have lost their physical forms. They are again formless.

Dinosaurs and thousands of species of birds have appeared and vanished within the Zero, Silent, Source of the mortal Cosmos.

At present there are many cockatoos flying around where I live. They are a majestic sight with their white plumage, sulphur crests and strong protruding beaks that are wreaking havoc with the leaves and twigs of the trees. Soon they will lose their majestic, physical existence and return formless within the Zero, Silent, Source of the temporal Cosmos.

The sea is calm. Then up come waves that speed to the shore and vanish. The waves were inseparable from the sea. They did not hover above it.

So, the majestic cockatoos are united with the Zero, Silent, Source of the mortal Cosmos. There is no distance between the cockatoos and the Zero, Silent, Source.

Countless members of the human race have risen within the Zero, Silent, Source, and have now lost their physical forms, and vanished back into that which was always nearer to them than hands or feet or even breathing.

What I have written might seem to you, the reader as fantasy or science fiction. I will seek to assure you this is not the case. I will demonstrate by a couple of experiments.

Experiment 1:

The pointing finger and nothing.

I now point a finger outward. It is a thing pointing to other things including windows and a fence. I turn the finger around to where a friend in the room is seeing my head. But for me there isn't any head. My finger, a thing, is pointing to no-thing. I can't describe it or explain it for there is nothing to describe or explain. But astonishingly it's alive. It's seeing my grey jumper, my scarred hands, from which skin cancers have been removed, and the paper I am writing on. It does not speak, yet it is hearing the blow-heater whirring.

Experiment 2:

A hand mirror and the T.V.

I get up from a chair with a round mirror in my hand. I stretch out the hand until mirror is alongside the T.V. and touching it. My head is now part of the scene that is on the T.V.

But it can't be. It must be an illusion or a reflection.

Then I remembered the pointing finger. I point it at the scene which includes my head, a newsreader and a man lying on the ground splattered with blood.

I turn my finger to where my friend sees my head. It's the same as in the other experiment.

It's not an illusion or reflection.

No. It's very much alive. It is seeing the newsreader's lips going up and down, up and down and hears words, "He's dead. Murdered." Likewise, this reality sees my lips go up and down, and my ears still, and words, "What a rotten thing for someone to do," are heard by this nothing.

I repeat, I cannot describe it for there is nothing to describe. Yet it is the only reality that is truly alive. I refer to it as the Zero, Silent, Source of the mortal Cosmos.
Now I will offer some prose verse to summarise this article.

ATTENTION

Pay attention

To the natural world

To the created world of humanity

To the Zero, Silent, Source of the natural and human world

To the Zero, Silent, Source that is nearer to the Cosmos than hands or feet or even breathing.

* * * * *

Doug Lloyd. April 2020.

The Interpersonal World of the Infant. From Alan Mann

The book: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology. Daniel N. Stern. Published in 1985.

Heinz Rahn lent me this book. He thought I would find it interesting. He didn't explain why he thought I'd be interested but most likely because Stern's work on the development of the self bears some correspondence with both the Buddhist transcendence of self, most clearly expressed in Zen aphorisms, Haiku, etc., and the Harding approach most clearly demonstrated in practice.

In the preface, the author explains the need to provide an explanatory account of how the patient who walks into his office becomes that particular person—a *psychodynamic formulation*. Existing theory (the book was published in 1985) tended to make all cases sound alike yet the people he met were very different. The book aims to create a dialogue between the infant self as revealed by experimental approaches and the infant self as clinically reconstructed, this in the hope of resolving the contradiction between theory and reality.

At the age of seven the author, Daniel Stern, says he was 'bi-lingual' in that he could understand both the adult's and the child's 'languages' and wondered if he would lose that facility as he grew older. I found this as an interesting point as the possibility of recovering the 'infant eye' is something in which I am particularly interested.

He proposes the questions:

1. How is the person constructed?
2. How do we imagine the infant experience?

He says 'this book is an invention, a working hypothesis about infants' subjective experience of their own social lives. There are two principal approaches:

- Developmentalism, where emphasis is usually on objective phenomena only—objective happenings and not on the subjective aspect, it is based on the view that all children go through a similar process in growing up. This can exclude inferential data involving theories of the subjective states—the experiential aspect.
- Clinical psychology. In contrast to the infant as observed by developmental psychology a different 'infant' is reconstructed by psychoanalytic theories in the course of clinical practice (usually with adults). This infant is a joint creation of two people, the adult who grew up to be a psychiatric patient and the therapist who has a theory about infant experience. This recreated infant is made up of memories, present re-enactments in the transference, and theoretically guided interpretations. From p14

Stern says that he plans to place the sense of self at the centre of his enquiry.

“While no one can agree on exactly what the self is, as adults we still have a very real sense of self that permeates daily social experience. It arrives in many forms. There is the sense of self that is a single, distinct, integrated body; there is the agent of actions, the experiencer of feelings, the maker of intentions, the architect of plans, the transposer of experience into language, the communicator and sharer of personal knowledge.”

At nine months infants sense an interior life of their own. Union experiences are viewed as the successful result of actively organising the experience of self being with another, rather than a passive failure of the ability to differentiate self from other.

There are a number of perspectives in the development of self and Stern gives several examples of the shift from an earlier to a later level and tells us that the later stages include, to a greater or lesser degree, the earlier. The author allocates a chapter to all of the four categories I summarise very briefly as follows:

Four senses of self:

1. Emergent up to 2 months.

During this period the infant experiences apparently unrelated experiences that have yet to be integrated into one embracing perspective. The integration is a process of organisation which is the foundation of what will become the ‘self’.

2. Core 2 to 6 months

The experiences needed to form an organised sense of core self are:

- self-agency in the sense of authorship of one’s actions,
- self-coherence of being a non-fragmented physical whole,
- self-affectivity experiencing patterned inner qualities of feeling,
- self-self-history as having a sense of an enduring continuity with one’s past.

3. Subjective 7 to 15 months

Until recently it was assumed that self/other undifferentiation continues until about 12 months until which time there is a sense of dual unity with the mother. Stern argues that the infant develops a ‘core’ self-awareness much earlier, between two and seven months. There are some interesting examples and explanations of merging and the apparent switching between infant awareness from the earlier, undifferentiated consciousness to the self/other awareness of this third stage.

4. Verbal

At around 15 to 18 months children begin to imagine or represent things in their minds in such a way that signs and symbols are now in use. (163) They begin to conceive of themselves and to refer to themselves as external or objective entities. They need to have both the experiential and a conceptual version of this ‘self’ as well as a representation of self as an objective reality that can be seen from both the inside and the outside, as seen by others.

On page 165 he gives examples of the infant’s awakening to the mirror image as a reflection of its body and on the distinction, at this stage, between the experiential and the conceptual self, leading to growing awareness of an external social order to which they are required to conform. Words form a bridge between experience and the experienced contents of the occasion. He goes on to consider experiences that are not readily managed by words and points

to the ability of art and poetry to overcome, to some extent, this difficulty. Also, the paradox that language itself can evoke experience that transcends words. (Pages 176/177)

There is some interesting commentary on amodal perception in which the totality of the occasion is the primary experience before some trigger such as a call 'look at that' focuses on the sense of sight to the detriment of all other sensory input, causing a shift from a holistic apprehension to a partial view. The modes, in this case being the forms of self perception referred to above.

I conclude this note with three paragraphs lifted from the book:

P.178 ...Our point in demonstrating the many ways that language is inadequate to the task of communicating about specific lived experience is not to minimise the import of language at all. Rather, it is to identify the forms of slippage between personal world knowledge and official or socialised world knowledge as encoded in language, because the slippage between these two is one of the main ways in which reality and fantasy can begin to diverge. The very nature of language, as a specifier of the sensory modality in use (in contrast to amodal nonspecification) and as a specifier of the generalized episode instead of the specific instance, assures that there will be points of slippage...

P. 181...There is another type of slippage between experience and words that deserves mention. Some experiences of self, such as continuity of coherence, the "going on being" of a physically integrated non-fragmented self, fall into a category something like your heart beat or regular breathing. Such experiences rarely require the notice needed to be verbally encoded. Yet periodically some transient sense of this experience is revealed, for some inexplicable reason or via psychopathology, with the breathtaking effect of sudden realisation that your existential and verbal selves can be light years apart, that the self is unavoidably divided by language...

P. 182...Finally, with the advent of language and symbolic thinking, children now have the tools to distort and transcend reality. They can create expectations contrary to past experience. They can elaborate a wish contrary to present fact. Prior to this linguistic ability infants are confined to reflect the impress of reality. They can now transcend that for good or ill.

P. 206 In the section on Intersubjective Relatedness there is the description of a twenty-nine year old paranoid schizoid mother, we read "Because of her preoccupation with trying to both read and control the external world impinging on her baby, she remained unavailable to enter into the baby's subjective experiences and share them. I wondered whether the difficulty people have with realising that in which the self arises is also due to commitment to

"trying to both read and control the external world". In other words the need to sustain the sense of self as entity at all costs. Then he himself points out that the absence of learned intersubjective awareness can lead to an ego-syntonic condition in later life. (egosyntonic refers to the behaviors, values, and feelings that are in harmony with or acceptable to the needs and goals of the ego).

My Reaction to the book

The book is way beyond my ability to evaluate its content but I have decided to conclude this note with a commentary based on what I understand of the relevance of the book to Harding's work on freedom from the self, sadly labelled 'Headlessness'.

The progressive development of infant consciousness to self awareness through four stages is extended by Harding from self-aware infant consciousness to that of child, then teenager , then adult and finally, if the process is carried to conclusion, to seer.

Infant consciousness as defined by Stern.

Adolescent - Mature Adult - Adult Seer

There are several aspects of the infant's progression that also apply in the case of the Harding story:

Later levels include the earlier ones.

There are occasions of 'regression' where an earlier state prevails over the current, later level.

There are times when the undifferentiated state of pre-self-consciousness seems to take over, to re-establish itself, i.e., oceanic awareness, immersion, undividedness, etc.

The final stage of the Harding ladder is what the Big Mind people refer to as 'aware ego' in which the ego is not eliminated but seen as secondary to the primary undifferentiated consciousness in which it arises. One is returned to ego but now aware of the deeper dimension.

Stern's observation that 'realisation that your existential and verbal selves can be light years apart' reflects the realisation demonstrated in the Harding experiments which commonly reawaken us to the existence of our first person perspective as well as our customary third personhood.

Is the rejection by most people of the Harding hypothesis evidence of the ego-syntonic condition mentioned above? That is, are the demands of the ego, in terms of its continued existence as entity, irresistible?

Alan Mann

Definition of Amodal. Amodal perception is the perception of the whole of a physical structure when only parts of it affect the sensory receptors. For example, a table will be perceived as a complete volumetric structure even if only part of it—the facing surface—projects to the retina; it is perceived as possessing internal volume and hidden rear surfaces despite the fact that only the near surfaces are exposed to view. Similarly, the world around us is perceived as a surrounding plenum, even though only part of it is in view at any time. Another much quoted example is that of the "dog behind a picket fence" in which a long narrow object (the dog) is partially occluded by fence-posts in front of it, but is nevertheless perceived as a single continuous object. Albert Bregman noted an auditory analogue of this phenomenon: when a melody is interrupted by bursts of white noise, it is nonetheless heard as a single melody continuing "behind" the bursts of noise. (From Wikipedia)

Odds and Ends about Self

Ramana Maharshi

Following a recent Zoom meeting discussion at which we'd discussed the persistence of the sense of 'I am' Graeme sent this quote from a Ramana Maharshi meeting:

Visitor: I begin with asking myself ' Who am I ? ' and eliminate the body as not-I , the breath as not-I , the mind as not-I , but then I am unable to proceed further.

Bhagavan : Well, that is all right so far as the mind goes. Your process is only mental The Truth cannot be directly indicated ; that is why this mental process is used. You see, he who eliminates all the not- I cannot eliminate the I.

In order to be able to say 'I am not this ' or 'I am That' there must be the 'I' to say it. This 'I' is only the ego or the I-thought.

After the rising up of this I-thought all other thoughts arise. The I-thought is therefore the root thought.

If the root is pulled out the rest is at the same time uprooted. Therefore seek the root 'I' ; question yourself : ' Who am I ? ' ; find out the source of the 'I' . Then all these problems will vanish and the pure Self alone will remain.

From one of my email chats with Andrew.

Yesterday you said something on the lines that the fundamental openness, stillness, emptiness, the undivided, or whatever we call it, still involved relationship. I know K talked about it, saying things like 'life is relationship'. I never quite understood what he meant by that as in our day to day doings it is obviously so. I assumed he was saying that, at the deeper level of the undivided he meant that relationship also applied. And I think that is what you were saying yesterday.

Last year, Sydney received a visit from the American Buddhist scholar David Loy. I went to his weekend at the Buddhist library. In one of his essays on nonduality he says what is needed is a nonduality of duality and nonduality. In other words, I think, he is saying that the undivided level does not exclude the level of individuality. I wonder if that is what you were pointing to yesterday?

My early conditioning was the New Testament, as you know, but you don't have to be a Christian to see that Jesus was on to this with his "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me". In fact, I would risk claiming that 95% of professed Christians haven't a clue about what he was pointing to.

Krishnamurt's 'Other'

I have often puzzled over what Krishnamurti was trying to indicate in his frequent references to what he referred to as 'The Other'. If he meant awareness of what he called the undivided as opposed to individual awareness, I think the word 'This' would be a more accurate pointer. As in Fa Chang's last words 'There is just this and nothing else". I was surprised to find that Krishnamurt had given a direct answer to this question which is related in the following item.

A Dialogue with Death - As dictated by Krishnaji to Mary Zimbalist

My thanks to Trisha English for passing on this circular from the publishers of the book.

Greetings from the SHF Publications Team. We hope that this newsletter finds you and your loved ones safe and healthy.

During our current time of pandemic, it seemed it might be interesting to read what Krishnaji said about the last great pandemic—the Spanish flu of 1918 through 1920. We could find nothing. The excellent archivist at Brockwood also looked, and found nothing. A very skilled academic researcher friend took up the search looking also for anything from any of the other Theosophic luminaries of the day, and she found nothing. That flu, which killed uncounted numbers of people, some estimate 100 million (presumably Theosophists amongst them), and the Theosophical Society had nothing to say about it? It seems strange. If any of you know of anything, please contact us.

Of course, Krishnaji talked about death in almost every series of public talks he gave for decades. He always said that death was very near for him. But he spoke uniquely about death after a minor operation in which he almost died. While still in the hospital Krishnaji began dictating the following which he called *A Dialogue with Death to Mary Zimbalist*, and it appears, along with other details of the event, in her book, *In the Presence of Krishnamurti: Mary's Unfinished Book*. What follows is Krishnaji's dictation as it appears in that book.

Warm Regards, SHF Publications Team

Excerpt from Chapter 44 of *In the Presence of Krishnamurti: Mary's Unfinished Book*]

“It was a minor operation not worth talking about though there was considerable pain. While the pain continued, I saw or discovered that the body was almost floating in the air. It may have been an illusion, some kind of hallucination, but a few minutes later there was the personification—not a person—but the personification of death. Watching this peculiar phenomenon between the body and death, there seemed to be a sort of dialogue between them. Death seemed to be talking to the body with great insistence and the body reluctantly not admitting what death wanted. Though there were people in the room, this phenomenon went on, death inviting, the body refusing. It was not a fear of death why the body was denying the demands of death, but it realized it was not responsible for itself; there was another entity that was dominating, much stronger, more vital than death itself. Death was more and more demanding and insisting, and so the other interfered. Then there was a conversation or a dialogue between not only the body, but the other, and death.

So there were three entities in conversation. He had warned before he went to the hospital that there might be a dissociation with the body, and so death might intervene. Though the person was sitting there and a nurse [came and went], it was not a self-deception or kind of hallucination. Lying in the bed, he saw the clouds full of rain and the town below stretching for miles. There was spattering of rain on the windowpane, and he saw clearly the saline solution dripping drop by drop into the organism. One felt very distinctly and clearly that if the other had not interfered, death would have won. This dialogue was expressed in words with thought operating very clearly. There was thunder and lightning, and the conversation went on.

Since there was no fear at all, neither on the part of the body nor the other—absolutely no fear—one could converse freely and profoundly.

It is always difficult to put a conversation of that kind into words. Strangely, as there was no fear, death was not enchaining the mind to things of the past. What came out of the conversation was very clear. The body in considerable pain was not apprehensive or anxious, and the other was discerningly beyond both. It was as though the other were acting as an umpire, [in] a dangerous game of which the body was not at all aware. Even if it was, there would be no withdrawal from the scene. Death seemed to be always present, like one's shadow. Being concerned with the whole movement of life, death cannot be invited. That would be suicide, which would be utterly foolish. But death and life, or rather the living, in this peculiar phenomenon that was going on, the three were never separate. During this conversation, there was no sense of time. Probably the whole dialogue lasted about an hour, and the time by the watch did not exist. There were no words used but an immediate insight into what each was saying. Of course, if one is attached to anything—ideas, beliefs, property, or person— death would not come to have a conversation with you. Death in the sense of ending is absolute freedom.”

“The quality of conversation was urbane. There was nothing whatsoever of sentiment, emotional extravagance to distort the absolute fact of time coming to an end, and the vastness without any border when death is taking part in your daily life. There was the feeling that the body would go on for many years, but death and the other would always be together till the organism could no longer be active. There was a great sense of humor amongst the three of them, and one could almost hear the laughter. And the beauty of it was with the clouds and the rain.”

Here Krishnamurti was interrupted by the hospital routine. He said he would review it or add to it later. During the day, he got up and walked several times, and ate well. I went out and got some fresh cherries, the first of the season, which he said were very good. ...

On May thirty-first, Krishnaji finished dictating the Dialogue with Death that he had begun in the hospital on May tenth. He didn't reread what he had said, saying, “I would only rewrite it,” so began dictating: “Of course it wasn't death, K and the body, three separate activities on their own, but it was a humorous whole moving together without distinction among them.” When in the evening he did have me read the whole piece to him, I pointed out that he had been speaking of death, the other, and the body, and now he referred to death, K, and the body, so he changed that sentence, putting the other in place of K.

“You know what I mean by the other?” he asked. I nodded, and he said, “The mind that is inhabited by K.” Then he continued the dictation: “Words cannot describe this strange movement, which is essentially timeless. Putting this down in black and white on paper is the expression of thought, is the expression through words, and so the movement of thought and time. But the movement of death is not of time. So the description is not the described. However cunningly thought may try to capture it, death is beyond measure. It was a conversation without word, without thought, and so not of time.”

Here he paused, searching for words, and said, “Don't look at me.” Then he continued: “The sound of this conversation was expanding endlessly, and the sound was the same at the beginning and was without end. It was a song without a beginning or an end. Death and life are

very close together, like love and death. As love is not remembrance, death has no past. Fear never entered this conversation, for fear is darkness and death is light.”

When I reread this part to him in the evening, I couldn't continue for a bit as I was on the edge of tears, too moved. Then I went on and finished, and he asked if I had felt something then. I said I had felt something there, something listening. He said, “I had tears in my eyes.” Neither of us had looked at the other; it was of course “death is light” which lifted something in me that was like a rising light. He finished the dictation: “This dialogue was not illusory or fanciful. It was like a whisper in the wind, but the whisper was very clear, and if you listened, you could hear it, you would then be part of it. Then we would share it together. But you won't listen to it if you are too identified with your own body, your own thoughts, and your own direction. One must abandon all this to enter into the light and love of death.”

J Krishnamurti with Mary Zimbalist

Some of My Best Friends, a story by Margot Mann

Some of my best friends don't do birthdays. Carol never remembers mine, although we've been friends for many years, and so usually I don't bother about hers. Last year for some reason I rang her on her birthday. "This is the right day isn't it?" I asked, pretending not to be sure. She was pleased to hear from me and asked if I was busy on Sunday because she was arranging a little celebratory something and I was on her list. This was Friday, so it was late notice, even for Carol. I said I'd come and offered to bring something but she said no just bring yourself – and a nice bottle, if you like. She rang back five minutes later to say on second thoughts would I also bring the lemon cake with lots of lemon icing I made for lunch last year.

I hadn't thought to ask what kind of 'little celebratory something' Carol had in mind, but it turned out to be quite a bash. People kept arriving until about 9 o'clock when the small inner-city unit was bursting at the seams. The noise was deafening. I hardly had time to put my lemon cake on a side table before it was swooped upon, broken into pieces and eaten, with much licking of fingers and dropping of crumbs. The icing is delicious, if I do say so myself. I didn't actually speak to Carol until some time later when I wriggled through the crowd and slipped outside into the tiny back courtyard for a breath of fresh air. A few people were smoking. A young Japanese man was standing next to Carol, who was sitting on a milk crate, drink in hand. She noticed me after a while and beckoned me over. "This is Daisuke," she said. We smiled at each other and murmured greetings. Carol didn't say anything more for what seemed like ages, and the situation was becoming awkward, when she finally said to me "Daisuke is in Sydney for the Mardi Gras. He's staying with me." Daisuke nodded and smiled.

There was another awkward pause and then Carol leaned forward, took hold of my hand, and flashing me a brilliant smile, said, "I've just had a great idea. Could you possibly put Daisuke up for a couple of weeks. He's very well house-trained, doesn't speak unless spoken to and makes delicious sashimi – don't you Daisuke?" The young man smiled uncertainly and picked at his belt buckle, clearly not understanding what Carol was saying, but realising that she was talking about him. He looked from one to the other of us, enquiringly. "The thing is," Carol continued, ignoring him, "I'm going away for a while and I'm having terrible trouble finding someone to give the poor guy a bed. I was only putting him up as a favour to a friend in the first place. He won't be staying long."

My partner's initial barely concealed hostility to the appearance of Daisuke soon vanished because Daisuke was such a treasure around the house, quietly doing things that he saw needed to be done in such a way that the household began to run smoothly. Carol was right – at first he didn't speak unless spoken to, but over the months he gradually picked up enough English to make himself understood. Even our children liked him and he cooked delicious Japanese dishes which impressed our dinner guests.

Once or twice when I tried to ask him about his travel plans, he suddenly couldn't understand a word I was saying, and he would look at his watch, point at the time, smile and say he had to go to the shops to pick up stuff for dinner. If we told him to take the day off and go out and enjoy himself, he would laugh and nod politely, but he never seemed to go far from the house, and usually it was on errands for the family. After a while I gave up asking him questions, probably because I didn't want him to leave. I didn't bother trying to contact Carol for the same reason. One Sunday morning we were drinking coffee and reading the paper when there was a knock on the door and shortly after, our son came into the kitchen, followed by a Japanese man wearing a black leather jacket. "He's come to visit Dai. Do you know where he is?" asked our son, and without waiting for a reply, he left the room. Daisuke usually spent Sundays pottering in our vegetable patch, which had received a much-needed new lease of life since he came to live with us.

I felt very much at a disadvantage, caught lounging around in an old track suit in my own kitchen by a disconcertingly intimidating foreigner, and I instantly had a strong gut feeling that this man who wanted to see Daisuke was not the bearer of good tidings. “I haven’t seen Dai this morning, do you know where he is?” I asked my partner. We murmured and muttered to each other for a minute or two, and then made a pretence of looking down the passage. By common consent, we refrained from going into the back garden where Dai was likely to be found tying up the tomatoes. Our visitor meanwhile said nothing. He just stood there, leaning against the sink, face impassive.

After some minutes, he handed me a card, said “Please give to Daisuke”, and bowing low, left the house by the back door. I left the card on the bench and wandered out to the back garden to tell Daisuke he’d had a visitor. He was in none of his usual haunts and, becoming concerned, I walked right down to the end of our long block to the compost heap. There was no sign of him. I hurried back to the house telling myself not to be dramatic – he could have walked to the shops, or anywhere. He might even be in his room.

He had vanished. His bedroom revealed nothing. It was as neat and tidy as you might expect, his few clothes and belongings stacked neatly in the cupboard. We tried to remember when we saw him last, but he made himself so inconspicuous, and his presence was so taken for granted that none of us could pinpoint our last sighting of the man who had become indispensable to our family. I tried to contact Carol without success and presumed she must be away again. We discussed Dai’s disappearance endlessly among ourselves and gradually came to accept that he was not coming back. Meanwhile our household resumed its pre-Dai chaos. I looked closely at the visitor’s card for any explanation and then, defeated, put it on the shelf next to the coffee pot, a mute reminder of the short time when our household ran smoothly. We were in mourning.

Weeks later, when I was finally able to contact Carol, she had forgotten Daisuke and couldn’t understand what all the fuss was about. Then one day, out of the blue, she rang me. “Isn’t it your birthday today? Happy birthday but I’m not really ringing about that.” She paused and then said, “Guess what! Daisuke is in town for the Mardi Gras and wants to see you but he’s too embarrassed to visit so I said I’d call you. I’ve got his mobile number if you want to contact him.”

When Daisuke came to our house for dinner the following week, he brought a friend and insisted on cooking the meal. “This my friend Attiko,” he said, smiling. It transpired that the man who came looking for Dai months before had been hired to bring him home to save further loss of face for the family. I found the card he left, now rather stained, under the coffee pot, and asked Daisuke to translate. “It says they will find missing people anywhere in the world. My family were ashamed of me, bad for them if I live with a man, but they see I am happy and they like Attiko, so all good now,” he said, laughing as he deftly served us with minute portions of a delicious squid dish, one of several delicacies we ate that night. Attiko nodded and smiled.

We couldn’t entice Daisuke to come and live with us again, but we always have a crowd for dinner when he and Attiko cook. They turned on a real banquet for Carol’s birthday.

Margot Mann