

CONTENTS

Solitude versus Loneliness	Margot Mann	2
My Prayer for a Beautiful World	Joan Tollifson	3
An observation on BLM	Thomas Traherne	3
Life in the Coronavirus World	Trisha English	4
That's the Spirit!	Alan Mann	6
The Interview	Margot Mann	9
Looking Through God's Eyes	Hans van den Boogaard	11

Greville Street Meetings now online

NEXT MEETING SUNDAY 6 September — 11AM

*Two monks happen to meet in the road.
In the customary mode of Zen combat, the first asks,
"Where are you brother?"
"Oh me, I'm in the place where nothing ever changes."
"But I thought everything was always changing."
"Yes, that never changes either."*

With thanks to Jim Clatfelter

Solitude versus Loneliness — Margot Mann

Henry David Thoreau is famous for living alone for “two years and two months” in a cabin he built himself near Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts in 1845. In the June/July issue of *Philosophy Now*, J. R. Davis outlines some of the ways in which Thoreau’s experience of isolation can help us deal with these socially distancing times, as Thoreau writes in his book *Walden*, published in 1854.

A course of action much touted by the people who give advice on these matters is to simplify our lives. Davis points out things don’t stress us out, it’s stress that stresses us out and instead of tidying the cupboards (or perhaps as well as), we should start by tidying our personal lives and suggests that reducing our dependence on social media would be a good start. As Thoreau points out: ‘Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the fictitious cares and superfluous lay coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them.’

Living need not be complicated if one lives deliberately, according to Thoreau. We should reframe our negative thoughts and let the world wash past us without affecting us. This is often easier said than done of course. He says “By a conscious effort of mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent.”

At this sometimes surreal time it is often difficult to make sense of what is happening around us. Davis suggests that Thoreau’s first aim was to understand himself so that he could then understand the world and further, that rather than lamenting, we should take a breath of fresh air and reflect happily on our lives and what we love to do. In other words practise gratitude.

Thoreau says: “I experienced sometimes that the most sweet and tender, the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object, even for the poor misanthrope and most melancholy man.” Plant some seeds, watch some birds, gaze at clouds or sunsets, smile at dogs – or simply stand at your window and breathe in the air – and feel better.

We can transform loneliness into solitude, Davis suggests Thoreau is saying, when we engage with ourselves on projects we value. Thoreau took great pride in how he built his small house near Walden Pond with his own hands, all by himself, and said of his cabin: “I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude; two for friendship, three for society.”

In summary, the message from Thoreau’s remarkable experiment a couple of centuries ago seems to be to get rid of stuff you don’t need, both real and personal; to consciously reject the thoughts that drag you down; to practise gratitude; to commune with nature; and to spend time on projects you value. Good advice which applies in any age and all of which has a familiar ring, but is probably even more essential in an isolated life.

Margot Mann

My Prayer for a Beautiful World in Distress— By Joan Tollifson

From: <https://www.scienceandnonduality.com/article/my-prayer-for-a-beautiful-world-in-distress>

Introductory Note for any of you who don't follow US news:

George Floyd was a Black man who was murdered by a white police officer during an arrest. The officer had his knee on Floyd's neck for almost 9 minutes while Floyd repeatedly said he couldn't breathe. Floyd was face down on the pavement and handcuffed at the time. His murder set off massive demonstrations (mostly peaceful) and also riots and looting in cities across the US. Demonstrations also occurred in London, Berlin, Auckland, and other cities internationally.

May we all have compassion for every one of us being exactly as we are in each moment, and for the world being exactly as it is. May we forgive the world and each other and ourselves for disappointing or hurting us. May we find the path from hate to love in each moment, from judgment to openness. May we see that we are a Net of Jewels, each of us a reflection of all the others—that we contain multitudes. May we see that the world we see is like a mirror showing our own face. May we have compassion for that face with all its blemishes and defects. May we see its beauty and its wholeness. May we embrace it with love and recognize that it is never exactly the same way for even a split second. May the heart be open and free. May we learn to love each other and ourselves. That is my prayer.

An observation on BLM from Thomas Traherne

Much of the commentary arising from the black lives matter movement is aimed at reminding us of the horrors of the slave trade, which was officially but not practically ended by an 1807 Act of Parliament. The transatlantic trade in people started about the middle of the 17th century at about the same time as Thomas Traherne, a minister of the Anglican Church, wrote these words:

“By this you may see who are the rude and barbarous Indians: For verily there is no savage nation under the cope of Heaven, that is more absurdly barbarous than the Christian World. They that go naked and drink water and live upon roots are like Adam, or Angels in comparison of us.

From Meditation 12/3 of his Centuries of Meditations.

Life in the Coronavirus World – 2020—Trisha English

Everyone on the face of the planet, is now acquainted with the pandemic that is sweeping the world. The interesting thing, is that no country and perhaps no state within a country, has bonded together to solve the problem. Is this the result of globalisation? Is it the result of hedonism that has overtaken human logic? Is it a commentary on the belief that man is just a superior animal, and that our main concern is “survival of the fittest”? Do we even have an understanding of the fact that we are all related? And could this be just another propaganda “thought bubble” which deflects from the fact that we are not born equal in any sense of the word.

At birth we resemble each other enough to be categorized as “homo sapiens”. But our brain structure, though similar to one another in shape and form, in no way shares the same capacity for learning, or the same internal brain potential. Our eyesight varies, our motor coordination varies, our earliest nurture varies, our socio-economic background varies and our opportunities vary to an extreme degree. If you are born this moment in Beirut, Yemen, China, Russia, USA or Australia there is no sense in which the term “equal” can apply. Human rights in one country have a totally different meaning to human rights in another. The value of human life differs from country to country. Sometimes this is superimposed by the Government regime and sometimes by religion.

To some extent this view was supported by Socrates, who thought that democracy was a pretty stupid concept. See what you think: <https://youtu.be/fLJBzhcSWTk>

There is one thing that we do share in common and that is “money”. There is nowhere on the planet that is without money as the means of exchange, the means of existence, the means of survival. But do we really know what we are talking about when we use the term “money”? See for yourself: <https://youtu.be/mzoX7zEZ6h4>

If I had to name the present epoch, I should call it “The Age of Deception”. Everything we were told that was good, honourable, noble and worthwhile has fallen into the trash bin. One opinion is as good as another. Respect, sensitivity, sincerity and honesty are values that have been discarded on the way to ruin. Long years ago, it went like this: Extreme Liberalism, Spanish Flu (which incidentally is supposed to have killed between 50 million and 100 million souls), World War 1, Great Depression and finally another World War. Is there anyone out there who can see a repeat of this depressing cycle? Japan just celebrated a remembrance of the only country to suffer a nuclear attack. The Japanese Government said how dreadful this was, how terrible, and that it must not happen again.

But make no mistake. Had Japan not suffered an horrendous nuclear attack, it would never have surrendered. A friend of ours was a prisoner of war on the infamous Changi Railway and assisted the famous physician known as “Weary” Dunlop. The conditions they experienced are still beyond adequate description. After the war was over, like thousands of others, he seldom if ever mentioned the conditions which prevailed. Close to the end of his life, we had a discussion, in which he said quite simply and with humility, that without the bomb all the prisoners of war would have perished.

Since most countries in the world have pursued or are pursuing the nuclear option, one wonders how long it will be before another catastrophe occurs, whether by accident or intent. The whole of humanity is at war in one way or another, with various countries buying and selling weapons as fast as they can. Internally, various countries are at war with their fellow citizens, or with their governments, or simply because anarchy feels right without due consideration for the consequences. The age of deception is alive and well.

I want to finish this brief article with a warning. I consider myself reasonably alert to deception, but recently I had a personal experience of a very sophisticated kind. I am only telling you about it, so that you can protect yourself.

The girl at the end of the phone sounded like all the other girls, warning of NBN failures, Microsoft or internet failures and so on. Usually, I simply hang up and get on with my life. This time the girl managed to catch my attention just as I was about to disconnect the call. She said she was phoning on behalf of the government, because I was entered on the “do not call register”. She wanted to verify my particulars and clarify that I was “legitimate”. Disconcertingly she told me my name, details of my bank card, and other particulars. She also asked me to verify my birth date, which I did, and regretted doing so almost as the words came out of my mouth. It was when she asked me to verify my bank card and pin number that I hung up. I was shaken, because I realized how close I was to making the fatal error. But that was not the end of it.

Within 10 minutes, I had a call from a sophisticated Indian, telling me that he represented my bank and notifying me that they had prevented a scam. He said he was from the fraud squad. He wanted my phone number (which he would have had anyway) but also my new mobile phone number, which he did not have. It all sounded legit. But I don't even trust myself these days, so I phoned the bank immediately for verification. I gave them the name and his ID but neither existed!!

In the first instance I was told that Bank representatives never announce that they are members of the fraud squad. I had arranged to meet this individual face to face, and he was to phone me on Monday morning and arrange a time. All this didn't happen. But what did happen, was that I immediately notified (a) my bank (b) the ACCC government scam watch on the internet and my friends who may have been susceptible to the sophisticated level of the scam. I also arranged to see my bank manager the following Monday and from whom I learned a great deal of information.

The gist of this story, is that if you are old and frail, or simply in a certain age group, the scammers rely on your ignorance to proceed to trap you. They are also interested in getting young people (who are addicted to social platforms like facebook to reveal personal details). Even Google asks you on your phone to give them permission to access your photos, videos, emails etc. I wonder how many young people realise that once permission is given, you can never change your mind?

Moral of the story? You can never be too careful. Trust is something that is rarer than diamonds or gold. Don't be fooled. Don't sign up for any ideology, or news, or enquiry unless you have researched it, and checked it out for yourself.

Be safe and well.

Trisha English

That's the Spirit!

I have been drawn by Dave Knowles into consideration of what we mean by the word 'spirit'. In one of his messages Dave wrote: "... a question physicist Erwin Schrodinger raised in a very famous 1944 book (probably still in print). I was interested here in the suggestion that the extra 'ingredient' living being could be equated with spirit".

The following is my contribution. Yes, to that. But what is 'living being'? I am engulfed at present in McGilchristian music of the hemispheres which sings to me that what passes for living being is an everyday, left-brain awareness that ignores its 'better half'.

If you ask me to define spirit I turn to the poets. I offered Wordsworth's 'holy calm' to the Grevzoom meeting:

Oft in these moments such a holy calm
 Did overspread my soul, that I forgot
 That I had bodily eyes, and what I saw
 Appear'd like something in myself, a dream,
 A prospect in my mind.

From The Prelude: Book 2: School-time

and here he is again with this famous slice from Above Tintern Abbey:

....And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.

As you well know, I claim that the separation of secular and spiritual is a misunderstanding of what 'stands under'. That is to say, awareness of the primary wholeness is hidden or distorted by my left-brain's domination of the actual. The full spectrum of being is unbalanced by the overloaded left hemisphere perspective.

So, what is spirit? I offer in reply, Traherne's struggle to explain in his poem 'My Spirit'** <https://www.bartleby.com/236/46.html> it is not merely a poem but a powerful lecture on the subject, concluding with a helpful note about the remedy for the inevitable backsliding he entitled The Apprehension:

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

And bringing us our senses in the true sense of the word sense here is Judith Wright:

Reading Thomas Traherne – a poem by Judith Wright

Can I then lose myself,
 and losing find one word
 that, in the face of what you were,
 needs to be said or heard?
 --Or speak of what has come
 to your sad race
 that to your clear rejoicing
 we turn with such a face?
 With such a face, Traherne,
 as might make dumb
 any but you, the man who knew
 how simply truth may come:
 who saw the depth of darkness
 shake, part and move,
 and from death' s centre the light' s ladder
 go up from love to Love.

I find her distinction between upper and lower case love to be very perceptive and helpful as well as her claim that truth may simply come.

Many years ago, Dave persuaded me to read Gebser's Ever Present Origin. I think we can take that title to mean the same as what many might call God, Bohm's self

ordering principles of the universe. Gebser spoke of verition, which I interpret as ‘making true’, the action necessary to apply if one is to awaken to Origin. I think that would be a condition in which the wholeness of life, the immediacy of being, is rightly apprehended by a mind that is not enslaved by the Emissary. A mind to which, in Judith Wright’s words, ‘truth may simply come’.

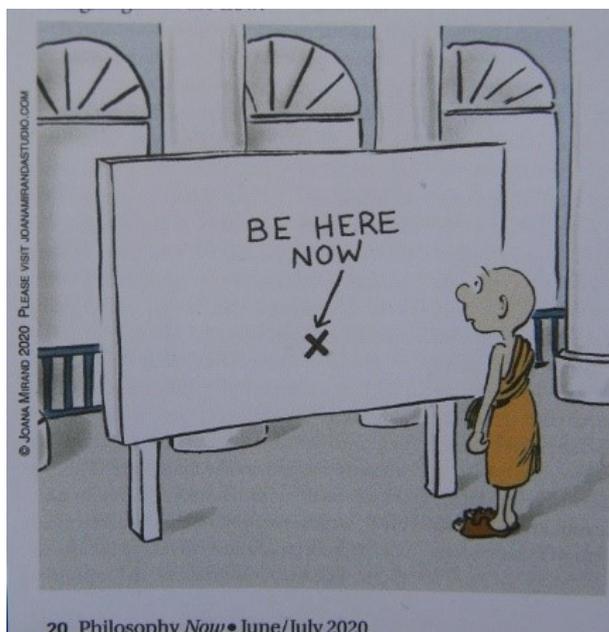
I am now wondering whether I can enrol Iain McGilchrist as an ally in this enterprise and I plan to dig into his extensive comment on the ‘self’ in his book *The Master and his Emissary* because Traherne’s right apprehension seems dependent on our ‘right experiencing’ of the sense of self.

** The poem *My Spirit* is too long to include here but it is readily accessible on the web, at the link given above or on the *Capacitie* website:

<https://www.capacitie.org/traherne/My%20Spirit.pdf>

Alan Mann

This cartoon is lifted from an article by Peter Abbs in the June/July issue of *Philosophy Now* magazine Buddha Travels West. I used it for our August Zoom meeting to illustrate the question of whether ‘here’ is where you are or whether ‘here’ is what you are, or both.



The Interview — a story by Margot Mann

Dave adjusted the zoom lens on his camera to get a wider shot of the beach. Perfect. The sun was in exactly the right position to reflect the light on the water where it ran up the shoreline. Children ran in and out of the brightly-coloured bikinis dotting the white sand.

He looked around, trying to locate the rest of the tour group. They were probably souvenir-hunting in the surrounding streets. He tended to go off alone when the tour guide was explaining local highlights and he had no idea how many pictures he had taken. Hundreds, possibly thousands, and the tour had only been going for a few days. He smiled at the thought of the shots he had put on Facebook in the last couple of days and the enthusiastic response they had received. The members of his Camera Club back home would be eating their hearts out. He felt a slight heart-plunge at the unbidden thought of Ruby, forced to travel with him via Facebook. This was quickly followed by a familiar sense of annoyance that she had the power to make him feel guilty about their relationship, a reaction which always had the effect of making him angry and defensive. It was really up to her to arrange her life so she could come with him, he thought, kicking an empty Coke can. He caught sight of a couple of tour members and strode down a side street to catch up with them.

Dave had always been a bit of a loner. He was the only one travelling alone on this tour. He tended to work long hours for his software firm and then take a month off to indulge his passion for photography, this time on the Costa del Sol where his overall impression was of minimally-clad white European bodies lying in the sun. He took hundreds of photos of cathedrals with their intricate wooden sculptures decorated in fine gold leaf. Ruby loved his pictures of high altars and gold leaf figures from the Bible. She especially loved the huge wooden sculptures in some churches of Mother and Child and she often had a lump in her throat when she saw the Virgin looking tenderly down at baby Jesus. Dave always said he would take her with him next time but she could never get the time off work when he was ready to travel again, so she kept track of his excursions through Facebook. She knew that it irritated him when he felt guilty about leaving her behind, and that he blamed her for making him feel bad. It wasn't as though they were even an item. They lived apart, in the same suburb, and had an unspoken agreement to spend the weekends together, but they never socialised as a couple. Dave's few friends seemed oblivious to the fact that he spent weekends with Ruby, and Ruby's friends had learned not to ask questions about the relationship. Once, when Ruby had playfully said to Dave that they should get married and have a family, she had been shocked by his reaction. "I'm never having children," he had spat at her, adding, "if you want kids you'd better find someone else." The subject was never mentioned again.

Ruby carefully checked all the photos Dave posted on his Facebook page when he was travelling. She didn't even admit to herself that she was looking for evidence that he was attracted to other women. Sometimes she commented awkwardly on beautiful young women in his pictures, especially if there were beach scenes. She would scrutinize each snapshot, looking for half-clad, red-haired young females, while

unconsciously winding a strand of her own thick red hair around her index finger. Occasionally Dave would text a brief message to My Favourite Ranga, which had the unfortunate effect of making Ruby suspicious: she would skip over all the stunning scenery shots and closely inspect the people Dave had caught on camera, sometimes allowing a tear of self-pity to trickle down her cheek if she noticed, for example, a statue of the Virgin smiling at Baby Jesus in a cathedral, or adults playing with young children on a beach, especially if they had red hair.

Dave lost sight of the tour members he had spotted. He turned down a side street and soon realized he was back at the beach. Involuntarily, he adjusted his camera lens and took several more shots of the summer-soaked scene: bare skin in various tones of pink and tan; small children throwing a large rubber ball to each other and shouting as they ran to stop it rolling into the sea; striped beach umbrellas faltering in the stiff breeze like large birds. If only his camera could capture the smell of ozone and coconut oil.

He walked slowly towards a mobile coffee stall and was about to order when four or five young men surrounded him, pushing and shoving and yelling in Spanish. His first thought was that they were trying to steal his camera, but a tall guy with a large black beard stuck his face close to Dave's and screamed "You pervert. You take photos of children. We call police." He pushed Dave roughly. His friends loudly repeated "We call police" and pinned his arms. One of them spat on the sand near Dave's foot. A small crowd began to gather near the coffee stall, and Dave, who had said nothing to this point and was trying to protect his camera, eventually focused sufficiently to recognize two of the members of his tour group, who were watching proceedings a few metres away. They smiled uncertainly. He shook his head. A few people called out 'pervert' and others pushed Dave up against a stone wall behind the coffee stall.

The police arrived a few minutes later and took Dave away. There was a buzz of conversation around the coffee stall and the two members of his tour group hurried off to tell the guide. Soon everyone in the group had returned to the bus from souvenir-hunting and knew about Dave's arrest. Drugs were mentioned and someone was heard to say 'he seems a nice enough guy...' Others said they had never noticed him taking photos of small children, 'but you can't tell with those telephoto lens.' Someone else said Dave had bought them a drink the night before but they didn't know much about him because he was always off somewhere with that bloody camera. An air of uneasy excitement pervaded the group.

Sooner than expected, the tour leader returned to the bus with Dave. "The police were a bit aggressive when they first started questioning me. I think they thought I was a pedophile." Dave looked around at the expectant faces turned towards him. "But it didn't take long for them to check all the images on my camera and they realized straight away that there had been a mistake, and apologized. In the silence that followed, a voice from the back of the bus called out, "I couldn't take a picture of your police interview but I got a great shot when you were arrested. Check out Facebook."

Margot Mann

Looking Through God's Eyes" by Han van den Boogaard

The title of the book is based on the oft quoted claim of Meister Eckhart that: *"The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love."*

I was introduced to the book by Shane Keher who recognised similarities between our past dealings with John Wren-Lewis and the effectiveness of the Harding experiments in making clear what Eckhart was talking about. The author had a similar life-threatening experience, an NDE which seems similar to the one John Wren-Lewis reported. That is, on recovery, they both awakened to an entirely different apprehension of their world.

Han van den Boogaard writes that, *to his immense surprise, the 'usual' was replaced by the 'wondrous and the incomprehensible'*. The book goes on at length to describe in exactly what way this new perspective unfolded. Apart from the intensified appreciation of the 'everyday' world the immediacy of the occasion is seen as primary, the here, now, this, relegating yesterday, tomorrow, my story, all interpretation of the here-now to subsidiary roles. The actuality of being, free of all explanation and the 'contamination' of what is known about it.

This is familiar territory to readers of the NOWletter but Hans provides an interesting personal account of his realisation with some interesting examples of how this way of being turns out in his daily life and how it is regarded in other cultures. In particular, cultures where identification with the 'whole' is regarded as primary as opposed to the customary adoption of the separate identity, the 'me' as the basis of understanding. I selected the following quotation as an illustration of this aspect:

The sense of place that is embedded in the Cherokee culture perhaps reveals most clearly how we humans learned in the past to understand the connection between landscape and the mystical aspect of human existence—a connection that's almost nowhere to be found in our own modern western culture. This understanding is encoded directly into the language of the Cherokee. They don't have four, but seven different words to situate someone or something in space: north, south, east, west, up, down and here. A Cherokee named Tom Belt explains that "in our language, everything is here, which means that we're just part of this big here, as opposed to being the centre of it. We are more in touch with place as where things are, as opposed to where we are." The focus of these people is not on location, but on being itself."

Alan Mann