

**Issue 174—February-March 2014**

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### **Next Greville Street Meeting – Saturday March 1st**

This will be the last NOWletter for a few months. I have a long overdue project to combine my collection of notes and quotes on *The Backward Step* in a self-published anthology. The title is taken from the famous verse by Dogen see last item in this issue.

We aim to be back in action for the July-August NOWletter. Thanks to the contributors to this issue and please let me have an 'Unsubscribe' email if you want me to remove your address from the list or a 'Subscribe' if you want to join the list.

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### **Inner Weather by Jenny Stewart**

<http://www.hybridpublishers.com.au/inner-weather-learning-from-depression.html>

This is a book about depression. The author has suffered from depression since she was seventeen and provides a first person account of the condition and how she has dealt with it over the years. It is not a subject that we normally consider in the NOWletter but, as I hope to demonstrate in this brief commentary, issues involved in overcoming or coming to terms with depression are similar to subjects we often discuss.

Margot and I know the author whom Margot met at Macquarie University in the 70s. Margot was aware of Jenny's struggle but I was oblivious to her condition. She is a very competent academic with considerable musical ability and I always find it difficult to understand how people with superior talents can possibly suffer from depression. I have to admit that I am one of the people that Jenny points to on page 56, who respond to depression sufferers who seem to have so much going for them with a 'pull yourself together' attitude—a complete lack of understanding of the difference between the external circumstances and the *inner weather*. Reading this book has certainly cured me of that.

The various categories of depression are explained and the distinction between inner and outer causes are followed by a look at outer and inner help for the problem and a commentary on what has and what has not worked for her. As I read I realized how closely Jenny's journey matched my own enquiry albeit hers at a much deeper level.

It is, in the end, all about freedom. In the case of depression it's a matter of freedom from the black dog. In the case of what is referred to as the spiritual search, it is freedom from deep identification with the egoic self, the search for a meaningful answer to the question 'what am I'. We can see in the search for an ending to depression, a parallel journey: outside help from the experts—psychologists and psychiatrists together with medication in one case, various gurus in the other; self improvement books for both; coming to grips with the monkey mind through meditation in both cases; collective enquiry through group sharings, and finally the realization that the issue must be resolved by some form of inner adjustment.

This is not a review, it's a personal response so here goes with a few of the things that got to me. I was interested in reports of some of the work-place bastardry Jenny has endured with incompetent bosses, managerial cane toads she calls them, who mask their incompetence with favouritism and bullying. I have had a bit of that myself and remain perplexed how such people wangle their way into positions of power.

Where I find wonder in being, the depressed state finds only the blankness of meaningless existence, but there are sudden glimpses of freedom.

*I understood how important the battle was for me when, one day, I realised that I did not actually feel depressed. I felt benign towards the world, and my usual worries did not impinge on me. What is going on here, I asked myself, amazed. The door that I had been pushing against was mysteriously open, and the secret garden of normality beckoned. P125*

I had a strong reaction to this paragraph as I recognised that moments like the one Jenny describes here set me off on my own journey and whilst they are wonderful catalysts they can generate expectations of permanent bliss, the ‘enlightenment’ trap. Not that that is a problem in Jenny’s case and although we are dealing with a serious issue here there is acknowledgement of the importance of humour and, in my experience, it is as though when the light breaks through it seems to be laughing at me. She reminds us that ‘many depressives have a wonderful sense of humour’ and perhaps that is what makes it harder for others to accept the presence of their darker side.

She includes some comments on the relevance of religion, not as providing answers to the great questions but, as she points out, in enabling those questions and she compares Buddhism and Christianity:

*Like Billy Connolly, the comedian, who spoke once of his serious self in an interview, giving me a clearer way of thinking about this, I find myself enormously uncomfortable with organised religion. It stresses me out, I question it too much, I have no talent for it. Of course, it is the people that stress me, not the religion, I can no more be an official Buddhist than I can an official Christian. But Buddhism is cool where Christianity is hot. It is reflective, and a bit arrogant, cerebral and analytical, where Christianity is full of emotion and passion, sacrifice and redemption. When all else fails, it is reason that we must fall back on. At a time when the grey waves just kept coming in, over and over, on the shore, Buddhism gave me some space and some words to think with, a sense that there was a context I could understand; it helped, not so much to make sense of reality, but to ask much less of it than I had done. P73*

This reminded me of the Jesus Sutras in which the Christian Daoists refer to the Holy Spirit as the Cool Breeze. I don’t think we can easily dismiss religions—they all arise as a response to human suffering. And stripping away the supernatural and institutional aspects we find that some of their finest sons and daughters the so-called mystics (who should be re-labelled experientialists) of all traditions point to what is involved in identifying the causes and the management of suffering.

In her concluding comments Jenny tells us that depression can be a good teacher and convincingly explains why. She quotes Samuel Johnson who said ‘Be well when you are not ill and pleased when you are not angry’. Which is very much like my version—Thich Nhat Hanh’s question about whether I’m really enjoying my non- toothache. The book made me consider the possibility that my everyday mind is a form of mild depression and, if that is so, then for the last forty years or so I’ve been trying to ‘pull myself together’.

Because the book is both a personal revelation of what is involved in severe depression and such a comprehensive analysis of what can be done about it, I think it will be of great benefit to people who suffer from the condition and perhaps even more so for people like me who, until I read this book, had no real understanding of serious depression, or its effects on its sufferers.

*Alan Mann*

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**Poem from Margot Mann**

Still and torpid  
the land waits for rain.  
Black cows sprawl  
in rare patches of shade.  
Nothing moves.  
Birds wait til dusk  
to dip in the small pool  
where a red-bellied black  
blinks its tiny eye – its body  
a semi-submerged bicycle tyre.  
Goannas have been in the pool before  
but never a snake.  
Its pinhead moves.

The baby trees shrivel in the heat,  
their leaves curled and papery.  
Many die.  
Propagated from local seeds  
they have been planted in the paddock by the road  
and must fend for themselves,  
although their wire cages sometimes  
deter kangaroos and rabbits.  
Indeed, some small trees flourish.  
This year is different.  
Even the foliage of many established trees  
is burnt and lifeless.

Heavy rain falls. We wait.  
Tiny green and red leaves appear on  
Seeming-dead small branches.  
A pair of eastern spinebills skitter  
around the pool,  
darting nervously to the casuarina  
close by.

The snake has gone.

*Margot Mann*

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## **Nisargadatta in NOWletter 173 – Responses.**

*This was the original content in the January issue, headed: Dissolving the 'I' sense by Nisargadatta Maharaj*

**Nisargadatta:** *“You must deal with the 'I'-sense if you want to be free of it. Watch it in operation and at peace, how it starts and when it ceases, what it wants and how it gets it, till you see clearly and understand fully. After all, all the Yogas, whatever their source and character, have only one aim: to save you from the calamity of separate existence, of being a meaningless dot in a vast and beautiful picture.*

*You suffer because you have alienated yourself from reality and now you seek an escape from this alienation. You cannot escape from your own obsessions. You can only cease nursing them.*

*It is because the 'I am' is false that it wants to continue. Reality need not continue—knowing itself indestructible, it is indifferent to the destruction of forms and expressions. To strengthen, and stabilize the 'I am' we do all sorts of things—all in vain, for the 'I am' is being rebuilt from moment to moment. It is unceasing work and the only radical solution is to dissolve the separative sense of 'I am such-and-such person' once and for good. Being remains, but not self-being.”*

### **Questioning the Nisargadatta conclusion.**

**Alan:** Nisargadatta says: Being remains, but not self-being, I equate his term self being with human being. Self being seems to remain, but not as first person primary identification, it is now seen as the person in the mirror, as others see the person, as third person. It is relocated rather than obliterated—is it not?

**There were a number of responses, here is the exchange that followed:**

**Shane:** your comments on the Nisargadatta quote in the last NOWletter, “Dissolving the I sense”, reminded me of another passage from I Am That, enclosed, which I’ll call “taking the self into the Self”.

It’s a lovely passage, and reminds me strongly that non-duality is just that: NON-duality - a unitive vision, pointing to a seamless whole. I feel there’s too much cranky jibing at the dreaded ego in modern so-called non-duality (in this context, what I mean by ego is the feeling of “I” experienced as separation and lack). The importance of paradox at the heart of it all can be forgotten, for the ego is strengthened by resistance to it (perhaps, from a certain perspective, ego IS resistance?). As Ramesh Balsekar said, the complete acceptance of ego is its dissolution. Anyway, it’s a dense passage, full of rich insight, and is well worth contemplating and mulling over. I find it provokes a deep “aahhh” of release in the organism as I read and take it in.

*Nisargadatta: There must be love in the relation between the person who says "I am" and the observer of that "I am". As long as the observer, the inner self, the higher self, considers himself apart from the observed, the lower self, despises it and condemns it, the situation is hopeless. It is only when the observer (vyakta) accepts the person (vyakti) as a projection or manifestation of himself and, so to say, takes the self into the Self, the duality of "I" and "this" goes, and in the identity of the outer and the*

*inner the Supreme Reality manifests itself. This union of the seer and the seen happens when the seer becomes conscious of himself as the seer; he is not merely interested in the seen, which he is anyhow, but also interested in being interested, giving attention to attention, aware of being aware. Affectionate awareness is the crucial factor that brings Reality into focus. When the vyakti realizes its non-existence in separation from the vyakta, and the vyakta sees the vyakti as his own expression, then the peace and silence of the avyakta state come into being. In reality the three are one: the vyakta and the avyakta are inseparable, while the vyakti is the sensing-feeling-thinking process.*

**Alan:** Yes, that's perfect Shane and takes it the necessary extra step so to speak. I'll put it in the next issue with your comments if that is OK with you?

**Shane:** Y'know.....it's all very high-falutin' Hindu in the jargon, but the Nisargadatta quote really is *exactly* what you were saying, isn't it? You were pointing to an ease and acceptance of Alan-in-the-mirror and Alan-as-he-is, weren't you? I like your comment re "the necessary extra step" - but I wonder, is that a step we "take"? In my experience, it's a shift that just *happens*, and in my case, over-and-over again, not claiming or believing in some "state" of ongoing enlightenment or post-egoic life. More and more I wonder if the whole enlightenment thing is a bit of a myth. There are times of relative ego entanglement, and times of living in a larger whole. But increasingly I'm assured that "this" is always right here, the heart of the moment, and so it's just entanglement in thought that creates the impression that something "goes away".

**Alan:** Yes, that was what I was trying to say. A bit cheeky telling Nisargadatta wot's wot because I know he is the full bottle and I was having a go at that particular expression which, as you say, is completely made clear in the follow-up you sent. And a shift is a better word to describe what is necessary. I am rather 'step' oriented at the moment as I'm pulling together a book, really an anthology of quotes and examples of what I'm calling, after Dogen, *The Backward Step*. Like everything else, to quote Sam Blight, once the pointing finger reveals that *what I'm looking out of is what I'm looking for* becomes plain, then examples seem to pop up everywhere.

Enlightenment is a funny business. The way I handle it is that there certainly is something or no-thing that the word is pointing to but it's a no-thing to do with me. (Alan in the mirror) Alan can't have it, get it or acquire it in any way but now and again it can 'get' him, maybe I should say always has him whether he's aware of being in its embrace or not. And I see headlessness as an opening to that ever-present capacity. A doorway to unentanglement. I have just written to Jim Clatfelter who also popped up again as a result of the last issue. We recalled Chris Cheney's fairly regular reminder of the Buddhist saying '...open mouth already big mistake!'. Very amusing but doubly amusing for me is that it is 'a saying'.

**Garry Booth then added this note:**

Hi Alan, Enjoyed your email exchange with Shane very much. - and would love to join the enquiry on Saturday and add my two- bobs worth . Would you believe I was going to suggest non duality as a topic but thought I've probably said enough on the subject. For what it is worth— between you and me—by putting my thoughts down on paper, it helps me verbalize my experience, so far.

I have found that words cannot describe what “happens”, as all words and concepts are intrinsically dualistic. It’s very hard to talk about. There have been thousands of words and descriptions on my journey, as there have been for others . Also it is all quite confusing. Personally, I have had to reduce the words along the way , simplify the jargon until no word can be of use anymore. At the “threshold” between material and non-material sense of being there are no words or concept , and thoughts if any are gentle, infrequent and peripheral. The final shift appears to be a seeing, knowing, being, filling the space vacated

I agree that ego is essential for living in the dualistic everyday material world. But the ego or “fuzzy entity” ( \*which may require definition) can “fade away” and not be annihilated—as is the fear of most— and gain more than the “ego” could ever dream of. For me that’s the greatest paradox of all . To lose “your-self” and gain “everything”— in other words—“coming home” to one’s essential nature prior to ego and any conditioning.

So Nondual (non material) state of mind can be visited repeatedly for “escape” from the dualistic (material) world to a place of inner peace , bliss , union, transcendence, self-realization—whatever name suits the individual— yet words cannot successfully describe the nondual state of mind. As I previously mentioned to you, my path was via the silent witness and eventually the silent witness had to fade away, which was possibly easier than transcending an “un-cooperative ego” not yet familiar with the journey and fearful of loss of identity . Who or what is the silent witness is still a mystery to me , but from experience “seeing” seems to be all-knowing & altruistic . I am as much fascinated by the experience of silent witness as the experience of crossing the threshold, which for me is also impermanent . I believe once the ego gets a taste of the blissful state and there is no threat , then future “visits” become easier

This statement by Nisargadatta resonated with me as it speaks to me of the silent witness’s transition (aware of being aware) to pure seeing awareness .

“This union of seer and the seen happens when the seer becomes conscious of himself as the seer ; he is not merely interested in the seen , which he is anyhow, but also interested in being interested , giving attention to attention , aware of being aware”

\*Ego needs to be defined . Amazingly the ego/personality is a formidable entity in the material world and essential without any doubt , yet when one looks inside & watches, all one finds is energy, senses, memories, thoughts, worries, ideas, predictions, plans for the future , likes & dislikes, opinions etc all arising and falling in pure consciousness.

*Garry Booth*

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**I then received a couple of emails from Joanna Malinowska:**

**Email 1:** Dear Alan, Thank you for the NOWletter. And lots of love and best wishes in the New Year.

I've just read what you've written about the "Dissolving the "I" sense. I am always confused by the vast number of persons you are talking about, so I will not be asking you again which person is which, because I am afraid that when the I sense dissolves, then all these persons will dissolve too. The "I think" dissolves, and the observer dissolves, and whoever holds the mirror for the third person to be seen dissolves, and there are no others too.

I suspect that all those persons are needed to make shift in the way of seeing and realize that you can perceive yourself in many ways and identify yourself with whatever you choose. But when there is no I THERE IS NO NEED TO IDENTIFY YOURSELF WITH ANYTHING again, there is no sense of yourself as separate from anything.

And yes, to be more precise, all that dissolves is just the sense of I, or mine, or me,( or others). The being is just being, but it does not have the I or mine or you or they attributes. It is not even dissolving, it is kind of collapsing. So everything stays, the body stays, coffee tastes good, just it is kind of all together.

So many words, but it is very simple, very basic and not a big deal. Only, it cannot be expressed in words. Many things cannot be expressed in words. Can LOVE be expressed in words? And yet we all love, and yes, we are trying to express it since the humanity was born

The whole nature of talking and communicating in words divides the world into I (who is talking) and you, to whom I talk. Hm, perhaps love puts it together again? With Love

**Email 2:** Dear Alan, I do not know, and when I start thinking about that, then perhaps this sense appears, but who is really thinking about that? It is difficult to find this self, is it? So perhaps there is a sense of self and there is not. Perhaps both statements are true, and none is. And why would that matter?

Maybe the best example is love again. The real true love, which goes to everybody and everything, and allows to receive from everybody and everything. It grows from the love to other person or even object, to love without choice and without needs, and without distinctions. There is no self in this love and there are no others, it melts and holds everything together, there is no time too. On the human level it holds together all who lived, all who are here, and all who will live after them. And yet there is also always an action in there, because even if all is equally loved, there is just this person in front of you who wants to talk, or to listen, or there is a tree, or a piece of bread to be eaten. Very simple, love in action, you may call it life.

The sense of self? I guess to act, to make this body move, to make this mind think and talk the sense of self must be, because otherwise how it could work? In fact, there is a psychiatric term for losing connection to your body and feelings... So there is a sense of self, even stronger, because everything is perceived stronger. And still, there is no "I" in that. It is difficult to find this "I", at least. So there is self and there is not.

I've just read what I've written and I am not sure if it makes sense. It is something to live through, and it does not matter if the self appears just now or not, because when it does it is just like a little child inside to be loved. Again, just words, I am sorry, words are inadequate.

This is why we have poetry, and music. Perhaps music is closest.

Joanna

## Taitetsu Unno

*I thought the following quotation a particularly helpful way of rounding off these exchanges:*

***Non-duality is not the opposite of duality, nor is it a simplistic negation of duality. Non-duality affirms duality from a higher standpoint. It is not an abstract concept but lived reality. But the difficulty is in understanding it, because we have here a double exposure, so to speak, of duality and non-duality'. Taitetsu Unno***

*Rev Taitetsu Unno is a scholar, lecturer, and author on the subject of [Pure Land Buddhism](#). His work as a translator has been responsible for making many important Buddhist texts available to the English-speaking world and he is considered one of the leading authorities in the United States on Shin Buddhism, a branch of Pure Land Buddhism.<sup>[1]</sup> Dr. Unno is an ordained Shin Buddhist minister and the founding Sensei of the Northampton Shin Buddhist Sangha.*

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***Finally a note from Jim Clatfelter re-established a valued friendship and led me to his latest version of the Daodejing. Here is Jim's introduction from the website at: <http://daodejingle.net/wangbi.txt>***

### Daodejing translation by Jim Clatfelter

The Daodejing is a poem, a collection of aphorisms, that talks about the natural design of life, the Dao, and the way we humans can live in accordance with this design rather than oppose it. It celebrates simplicity and spontaneity, naturalness and freedom. Above all, perhaps, it shows us the way to a wholeness of vision.

Just what is the Dao?

It is yin on my shoulders

And yang in my arms. (42)

Dao is a single presence that can be viewed two ways. Look within to see the yin, your own faceless awareness. Look outward to see the yang, all that appears and occurs in this awareness. These two aspects of Dao are meant to be seen, not merely named and discussed. You can point to each of them with your finger. Point at your own face. What do you see? Certainly, you don't see a face. Isn't it more like a faceless openness to all that appears? The Daodejing often calls it emptiness, wu. But it's a living emptiness, aware of itself as empty, and it's full of ten thousand things. Dao is your own faceless embrace of the living world. Dao is awareness (wu) embracing appearance (you).

What is de? De is the power and harmony and flow that comes into a life in touch with its inner nature, and therefore with the Dao. When you see both sides of your natural

presence, you are whole and fully anchored in the here and now. This is deeply satisfying. This is de, the wholeness of life.

These two views of the Dao are in no way separate or divided. They represent a single presence. They go together. They are complements. The Daodejing uses the umbrella terms yin and yang only once. More often it uses the demonstratives this and that, words that actually tell you where to look. Look in at this simple faceless capacity that embraces the world. Look out at that world of spontaneous appearances and happenings. Dao is both simple and spontaneous. Here the Dao does nothing and is nothing, and there all is done. This view of Daoist wholeness translates easily into the two prime and inseparable Daoist values of simplicity and spontaneity. Natural life is designed around these two views and values. One yin, one yang: this is Dao.

**Simplicity.** The Daodejing uses things in the natural world to symbolize simplicity. Pu is the uncarved block of wood. It is a symbol for simplicity, our natural state before we learn the rigid "ways" other people expect us to be and behave. Simple living, fewness of desires, and knowing when enough is enough are prime Daoist values. The infant and the child also suggest simplicity. They live from their own natures, not from what they have been told by others.

**Spontaneity.** The Dao does nothing and all is done. Water is a natural symbol for spontaneity. It does nothing (wuwei) but what is natural for it to do. It follows its own nature. Humans can do the same when they yield to their own natures (ziran) and allow others to do the same. We witness our experiences but do not cause them. They are given. They arise on their own.

**Wholeness.** There is no division between yin and yang or wu and you or this and that. They are complementary views of a single presence, of the Dao, of life, of this-here-now. Dao is both one and whole. The two are one and whole.

Look in and see the yin.  
 Look out and see the yang.  
 Look in and out and see the Dao,  
 And now you see the whole shebang!

Look in for nothing doing.  
 Look out for all is done.  
 Look in and out for wholeness,  
 And see the two as one.

*Jim Clatfelter*

**Jim's full translation of the Dao de Ching from the Chinese text of Wang Bi follows these introductory notes at:** <http://daodejingle.net/wangbi.txt>

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## **Gurus are your Creations—Trisha English**

*(What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow: Our life is the creation of our mind). Buddha.*

Like him or loathe him, it is very difficult to ignore the books of Osho, previously known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Almost everyone remembers the extraordinary cult figure, who captivated a whole generation of young people in the seventies and eighties. In fact, he once considered setting up a commune in Western Australia before moving on to richer pastures in Oregon in the United States. His life history is so dramatic and unusual that it defies description, though most writers settle for the titles of Indian mystic, guru and spiritual teacher. From 1989 he became known as Osho, and with his orange robes, long beard and soulful eyes he embodied everything the New Age wanderers were looking for. Those who had not succumbed to George Harrison's guru, Maharishi, for whom the song *My Sweet Lord* was written, found an alternative in Osho.

During his colourful lifetime, most people in the mainstream thought Osho to be a dangerous influence on Western Society. He preached a version of free love and freedom that was viewed as scandalous by conservatives, earning him the dubious title of "sex guru". However, he also taught the traditional values of meditation, awareness, love and courage albeit from a totally fresh perspective and in a context which denounced authority and repressive behaviour. In 1970 he set up an ashram in Bombay where he initiated his followers as neo-sannyasins and in 1974 did the same thing in Pune. But by 1981 he had relocated to the United States where his followers tried to establish an international community in Oregon, which in effect became a State within a State attracting deep consternation and conflict within the USA.

The commune disintegrated in 1985 in a climate of chaos and condemnation and multiple accusations of murder levelled against Ma Anand Sheela, his main associate, and his caretaker girlfriend, Ma Yoga Vivek. They were ultimately denounced by Osho as responsible for the collapse of his empire. He called them "a gang of fascists" but, by the time he tried to regain control of his organisation, it was too late to repair the damage.

By this time conflicts had arisen between the Bhagwan's followers and the Oregon farmers and residents. Soon accusations were made of serious crimes, including bioterrorism attacks (in the form of food contamination) and other charges of immigration violations. The Bhagwan was arrested and following a plea bargain he was deported to India, but not before twenty one countries refused to take him. He died in Pune in 1990 where his Indian ashram continues to operate to this day.

This is the bare bones of Osho's life and unfortunately it disguises the fact that he had a most insightful mind. In his many discourses, now in publication, he brought fresh and vivid insights into the teachings of various religious traditions including Taoism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and mysticism in general, to name but a few. His criticism of socialism, Mahatma Gandhi and institutionalized religion was at the time controversial but would be less so today. In fact his views on these matters do not differ from those of Jiddu Krishnamurti.

I am currently reading Osho's book *The Empty Boat: Encounters with Nothingness – reflections on the Stories of Chuang Tzu*. I find Osho's style captivating, engaging and original. He certainly knows the power of the parable and conveys his insights in an unambiguous way. For those readers who have gone beyond the guru sickness—the need for an authority to tell them what and how to think— I sincerely recommend this book for the challenges and insights that it embodies.

*Trisha English*

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### **TAT FOUNDATION RETREAT**

At first glance, Doing Nothing and Being Nothing may seem easily dismissed as New Age or Neo-Advaita clichés. In fact, there have been many words spoken at TAT over the years that indirectly, or directly postulate the answer for the seeker, i.e. “you are awareness” and such things that seem to lead many into thinking they know the destination and so now all they have to do to get there is just sink into the proper meditative trance, etc. Yet, if you were to take either statement and examine what it really bears witness to, in your own experience, you might come to a state where you ask "What do I know for sure?" That state of uncertainty and urgency is the doorway to finding out. Join us for a weekend of examining the case of the forgotten self, and come a step or two closer towards discovering who you really Are.

**Art Ticknor** – author of *Solid Ground of Being* and the forthcoming *Beyond Relativity*

Longtime spiritual practitioner **Paul Schmidt**

Poet and Filmmaker **Shawn Nevins**

**Bob Cergol** – *TAT Forum* contributor and all-around spiritual good guy

**Open Space Technology** – a session harnessing the wisdom and interests of conference participants

**Nature Walks, Tai Chi, Group Inquiry and Meditation Sitzings**

**Date, Time, Place, Cost:** April 12-13, 2014, 9 AM Saturday through 3:00 PM Sunday

- Penn Scenic View 180-acre conference facility in Rockwood, PA
- \$100 per person (\$60 for students) – includes lodging and meals
- Registration due by April 7<sup>th</sup>

More information is available at: [www.tatfoundation.org](http://www.tatfoundation.org)

Or call: (609) 414-3676 Or email: [events@tatfoundation.org](mailto:events@tatfoundation.org)

[http://tatfoundation.org/april/tat\\_april\\_intensive\\_2014.htm](http://tatfoundation.org/april/tat_april_intensive_2014.htm)

## Notes on a Meeting— Alan Mann

Jack asked me a question last night which I didn't answer. Maybe it is not a question that has an answer relevant to all cases. It was on the lines of how is it possible to check these claims for a human dimension inaccessible to reason or which is not accessible solely through reasoning. This question arose because of Dawkins dedication to rational, scientific enquiry and his apparent rejection of all else in what I see as his commitment to the substitute—his God as reason.

I can only explain how I handle this issue. After a number of those 'openings', of the sort Ojars reported, I set about finding what this aspect of myself was about. This led to the perennial philosophy and all that goes with it mainly in my case Krishnamurti and Traherne. Finally, I stumbled on Douglas Harding. Although most of us interested in what Douglas was able to show us have travelled a 'spiritual' path of enquiry he always claimed his approach was ultra-scientific in that it is based on what is actually experienced to be happening rather than what is 'known' to be going on; experience as opposed to explanation.

Now we have two prominent atheistic scientists in Sam Harris and Susan Blackmore using Harding experiments to make their points clear, Harris in alerting his audience to the NOW with the *Closed Eye* experiment and Blackmore using the *Pointing Finger* experiment to reveal our fundamental and shared awakesness.

In a word, the experiments reveal that I am not at centre what I appear to be to others. The 'self' as we discussed last night is realised to be a secondary aspect of my being (we sometimes actually refer to it as second nature) and when it is put in its place first nature becomes apparent. It's really no big deal in the sense of a WOW! revelation, it is just the way things are but almost always overlooked.

Blake's take on all this was:

*"If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."*

The Harding experiments do the cleaning job for me. The Sam Harris You Tube *Death and the Present Moment* talk to the atheist conference is at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITTxTCz4Ums> and some of the Harding experiments are at <http://headless.org/experiments.htm>

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## Undivided Wholeness—Joan Tollifson

*(Thanks to the reader who sent me the following and my apologies for losing your covering message).* <https://www.facebook.com/JoanTollifson>

...Realizing the undivided wholeness (the emptiness or seamlessness) of everything is vital for liberation, but we can't deny the differences and variations either. This appearance or event that we call Joan is also undeniable—it's just not the solid, substantial, independent, continuous "thing" that we THINK it is. But even a mirage or a dream is real as an appearance. So we don't need to go around denying relative

reality or insisting that we are not a person or not our body. That's not quite the whole truth.

...It is, I believe, what Nisargadatta meant when he said, "The universe is not bound by its content, because its potentialities are infinite; besides it is a manifestation, or expression of a principle fundamentally and totally free." He was pointing to the unconditioned, the totally free. It is also, I believe, what the great Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki was pointing to when he urged his students to keep their beginner's mind—the mind that is child-like, open, curious, not knowing, empty (in the best sense), always ready to see something new. Awareness is the heart of what this is all about, this liberation or enlightenment, which is best not conceptualized as some grand final event that permanently transforms seekers into sages, but rather as the ordinary (but totally extraordinary) awakening that can only happen Here / Now, the wakefulness in which no seekers or sages remain. The sound of the traffic, the morning breeze, the cry of a bird, the taste of coffee...the awaring presence beholding it all...just this.

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#### **The Third Policeman by Flann O'Brien—Alan Mann**

This is a remarkable book for which the author couldn't find a publisher during his lifetime. It was published two years after his death in 1967 and became something of a literary classic. It is a book that hides its message under a veil of Irish tomfoolery taking the reader on a wild ride of surrealistic revelation. It is the story of a murder and its consequences for one of the killers who finds himself engaged in a series of engagements with the highly eccentric constabulary as he attempts to find the black box containing the money stolen from the murder victim. It is likely every reader will have an individual interpretation of the tale and I imagine that is one of the reasons for its appeal. The uncertainties surrounding the unfolding story invite the reader's own input or response and I assume that to be the aim.

My first response was that it is a dream, otherwise how to explain the shifts and non-sequiturs of speech and action. The policemen are obsessed with bicycles and convinced that regular bike riders become increasingly a part of their machines and vice versa, what they do and think becomes an amalgam of what they are. This I chose to interpret as a parody of how we identify with our possessions, jobs, knowledge, etc., and progressively lose our true self or first nature. (Look at me in my new Ferrari!) This is confirmed when the police sergeant, challenged as to why he refuses to answer questions, replies never answer questions, no value in answers, only in the questions left unanswered. This points at our dependence on explanation and on external sources rather than our own perceptions and seems to be confirmed by the author's constant referencing of an imaginary authority, de Selby, with extensive footnotes dealing with de Selby's ponderous absurdities.

An urgent search for a missing bicycle results in the various bicycle parts recovered remarkably quickly by the eager policemen leading to an admission that they had been hidden by the police in the first place. A parable about how we hide our true identity,

completely forget it and revel in its restoration? And possibly a dig at our brave protectors.

One of the policemen shows him a fine wooden and brass-bound chest he has made. He opens it to reveal a smaller and then another even smaller, like Russian dolls every chest opening to another smaller identical version and so on, ever smaller and smaller until a magnifying glass is required and then invisibility. An interesting comparison with the Harding identity reduction of the human, from bodily aspect, through the organs, to molecules, atoms, particles then to the no-thingness of energy.

Common sense is supplied by Joe, our murderer's inner guide or soul, who puts in a reassuring comment from time to time. At one point when threatening to leave, Joe provides an extensive commentary on the nature of soul and the interconnectedness of all souls.

It becomes clear that the police are aware of our protagonist's (I don't think his name is given throughout the book) crime and he is told he will hang for it. Awareness of the nearby construction of a scaffold, his imminent hanging a metaphor for the individual life approaching its inevitable end. I wondered if the absence of name was another way of diluting identity.

The mysterious policemen give him a tour of *eternity* a complex system of mechanical devices which they have to maintain through constant readings and re-calibration and which can manifest anything that is desired but nothing it manufactures can be taken out into the world of time without causing the death of the remover. After leaving this complex contraption our hero finds and escapes on a feminized and semi-humanised bicycle who/which shares his desire to be free of the police station and they end up at the house in which he committed the murder. There he finds the third policeman who, unbeknown to the minders of eternity, Sergeant Pluck and Constable MacKruiskeen is the designer of their eternity, which he has made possible by the application of an all powerful substance called Omnium which he says rightly belongs to our murderer and awaits him when he arrives home.

He hastens home to his reward only to find his former accomplice in the murder, John Divney, sitting before the fire with a bottle of whiskey, wife and son. Divney collapses in terror as he knows his visitor is dead. He was blown to pieces when he activated the bomb Divney had planted instead of the fruits of their murder our hero had been led to expect when he accessed the hiding place Divney had finally revealed. The story concludes with John Divney, having died of fright at the appearance of his dead accomplice, joining him as he again arrives at the same police station. And so we are left with these two in a hell of endless repetition of meaningless but fearful experiences.

And the questions the book itself asks but doesn't answer, what am I, what is death, what could eternity be?

A fascinating read and a warning not to take unusual events too lightly.

*Alan Mann*

P.S. I had hardly finished *The Third Policeman* when my guide in Irish literature, Brendan Frost, thrust another classic into my hand—*The Crock of Gold* by James

Stephens. I didn't expect to enjoy reading this book, another present from Brendan, as I thought I was long past fairy stories, but once again I was surprised. I was particularly impressed by the author's attempt to capture the sense of a thought before it is framed by words and consequently reduced to mere description.

What won me over was the author's wisdom and humour and the realization that the reference to the magical was a successful attempt at re-enchantment of a world drained of mystery and delight by our worship of reason. I also found a number of examples of what I have found to be critically important but often overlooked aspects of our lives.

I was particularly impressed by the author's attempt to capture the sense of a thought before it is framed by words—and consequently reduced to mere description. Caitilin, a shepherdess, leads an isolated life and has met very few people, her only close relationships are with the animals she tends.

Page 38. *The three cows after they had grazed for a long time would come and lie by her side and look at her as they chewed their cud, and the goats would prance from the bracken to push their heads against her breast because they loved her.*

*Indeed, everything in her quiet world loved this girl: but very slowly there was growing in her consciousness an unrest, a disquietude to which she had hitherto been a stranger. Sometimes an infinite weariness oppressed her to the earth. A thought was born in her mind and it had no name. It was growing and could not be expressed. She had no words wherewith to meet it, to exorcise or greet this stranger who, more and more insistently and pleadingly, tapped upon her doors and begged to be spoken to, admitted and caressed and nourished. A thought is a real thing and words are only its raiment, but a thought is as shy as a virgin; unless it is fittingly apparelled we may not look on its shadowy nakedness : it will fly from us and only return again in the darkness crying in a thin, childish voice which we may not comprehend until, with aching minds, listening and divining, we at last fashion for it those symbols which are its protection and its banner. So she could not understand the touch that came to her from afar and yet how intimately, the whisper so aloof and yet so thrillingly personal. The standard of either language or experience was not hers; she could listen but not think, she could feel but not know, her eyes looked forward and did not see, her hands groped in the sunlight and felt nothing. It was like the edge of a little wind which stirred her tresses but could not lift them, or the first white peep of the dawn which is neither light nor darkness. But she listened, not with her ears but with her blood. The fingers of her soul stretched out to clasp a stranger's hand, and her disquietude was quickened through with an eagerness which was neither physical nor mental, for neither her body nor her mind was definitely interested. Some dim region between these grew alarmed and watched and waited and did not sleep or grow weary at all.*

There was a lesson here for me as the Harding experiments, to be effective, rely on a suspension of knowing of this sort, and further, a resistance to any attempt at converting the revelation of the experiments into knowledge.

Page 128. *“Sir”, said the bearded man, “ your words thrill in my heart like music, but my head does not understand them.”*

*“I have learned” said the Philosopher, that the head does not hear anything until the heart has listened, and that what the heart knows today the head will understand tomorrow.”*

There is an example of this later in the book: Page 197. *Following came the fierce winds of hate to work like giants and gnomes among the prodigious debris, quarrying the rocks and leveling the roads which soar inwards; but when that work is completed love will come radiantly again to live forever in the human heart which is Eternity.*

I am interested in the possibility of Eternity manifesting in time and examples wherever they can be found. My response to the Philosopher’s claim is one of instinctive affirmation accompanied by an inability to explain why I find such strong agreement with his words, a case of the head lagging well behind heart perhaps.

Page 211. *“...The poets have sung of this beauty the philosophers have prophesied of it, thinking that the beauty which passes all understanding is the peace which passeth understanding; but I think that whatever passes understanding, which is imagination, is terrible, standing aloof from humanity and from kindness, and that this is the sin against the Holy Ghost, the great Artist. An isolated perfection is a symbol of terror and pride, and it is followed only by the head of man, but the heart winces from it aghast, cleaving to the loveliness which is modesty and righteousness. Every extreme is bad, in order that it may swing to and fertilize its equally horrible opposite.”*

This rejection of perfection as void or pure anything is an opinion I have held through thick and thin. It is found in Eastern traditions where it is described as the void or pure consciousness, or more likely in a misinterpretation of the traditions. The separation of what the author calls the great Artist or Holy Ghost from the artist’s work, of creation is for me true blasphemy.

Page 221. *Growth is not by years but by multitudes, and until there is a common eye no one person can see God, for the eye of all nature will scarcely be great enough to upon that majesty. We shall greet Happiness by multitudes, but we can only greet Him by starry systems and a universal love.*

I think I would have enjoyed the book even more if I’d been grounded in Irish myth and legend but it was great fun. Thank you Brendan, I will now pass the Crock of Gold to Antony on the understanding he will then return it to the Leprechauns.

*From The Crock of Gold by James Stephens*

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**Beyond the Separate Self by Colin Drake**

*Beyond the Separate Self* by Colin Drake is now available on Kindle. It is accompanied by a review which compares the book favourably to books by Osho, Eckhart Tolle and other teachers and authors. I would be interested to include a review of the book by one of our readers if anyone feels like accepting the challenge. *Alan*

**The Backward Step—Dogen**

*Cease practice based  
On intellectual understanding,  
Pursuing words and  
Following after speech.  
Learn the backward  
Step that turns  
Your light inward  
To illuminate within.  
Body and mind of themselves  
Will drop away  
And your original face will be manifest.*

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