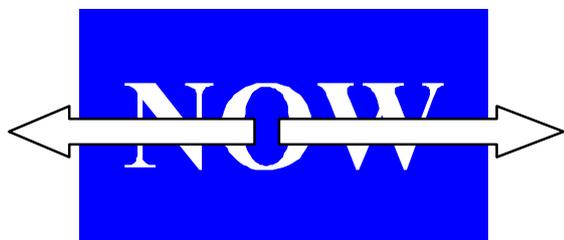


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Next Greville Street Meeting — March (See note below)

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Thanks to this month's contributors and, as always, please remind me if you have sent something which I've failed to include and let me know if any of the links fail. I will circulate plans for the 2015 Greville Street meetings within a day or so.

I have exhausted my wrestle with Nietzsche and welcome counter argument from his supporters. A new Jeff Careirra book is available and I include the excerpts he circulated, plus details of where to get the book. The opening article by Sam deBrito which appeared in the Sydney Sunday paper, the Sun Herald, is another welcome sign that Douglas Harding is gradually making his way into the mainstream.

(This article first appeared in the Sun Herald, Sydney on Saturday 11th January)

Photos can steal your soul by Sam deBrito

You could make a case that the more photographs taken of a person, the more screwed up is their life.

The list of our most pictured humans is a murderer's row of the dysfunctional, who have or might perish badly: Diana, Elvis, Marilyn, JFK, Gandhi, Hitler, Garbo, Ali and now Obama, Angelina and Kim Kardashian. With the exception of the current "most powerful man in the world" and the bald Indian guy, how'd you like that crew as the faculty of your kid's high school?

Traditional societies that believe photography "steals your soul" might well be hinting at a deeper truth about the human condition; the more you see your face, the more isolated you become from our natural state – which is having no face at all.

Test it. Check for your feet, legs, hands, arms and chest. All there, right? Your head, however, is only a blurred outline of an eye socket and nose. Before silver spoons, looking glasses and cameras, this was all humans saw of their face, save for glimpses in still water.

For 200,000 years we lived in a world without reflections but also one without their filter. The landscape, weather, wildlife, stars and every person we met resided in us – in the space where we could only imagine our head might be. That's all changed now; we need only consult a mirror or mobile phone to see our face, yet how many well-adjusted and mature people gaze at themselves or take endless "selfies"?

In the 1890s, the Austrian physicist and philosopher, Ernst Mach drew an unusual self-portrait, from his point of view. We see his feet, legs, arms and chest but, no head. Mach's sketch formed part of the inspiration for English architect, Douglas Harding's epiphany—he too was missing something above the neck. In 1961, he wrote his cult-classic, a "rediscovery of the obvious", *On Having No Head*.

It's the sort of book you'll either love or hate, however, its simple truth is irrefutable; others see our head but not us.

Harding writes: "This hole where a head should have been was no mere nothing ... it was very much occupied. It was a vast emptiness vastly filled, a nothing that found room for everything - grass, trees, shadowy distant hills, clouds riding the blue sky ... I had lost a head and gained a world."

Ponder this revelation and you may spy an origin for human spirituality; that we are inextricably part of a whole. You may also see how daunting a realisation this may be for some who, bereft of traditional or religious explanations for their place in the world, seek succour in the self or, more visibly, the "selfie".

The selfie's pervasiveness is often dismissed as simple narcissism but I wonder if there's not a metaphysical reason behind it; a flight from the incredible complexity of modern life through digital validation?

Harding's grand point is that when we see ourselves as separate from the world, we actually confine ourselves – via vanity, ego, selfishness –and cut ourselves off from communion with the planet. The selfless, however, leave room for further observation in that empty space above their shoulders.

Turning a camera from the wonder of a sunset or public spectacle to include your face might seem like an assertion of one's place as the "true" protagonist in the universe, yet it might also be a sign you're not sure what that place truly is.

A "self-lessie", on the other hand, an unadorned picture of what you saw – now there's a bold statement.

Sam deBrito

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/on-having-no-head-20150110-12hcot.html>

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Reflections on Sacred Space by Eric Best

On my way back to Tamworth from Newcastle recently, I stopped by the Franciscan retreat centre at Stroud. Haven't been there for years. Where once (the last time I visited) there was a living community, now there was a solitary caretaker priest. She kindly opened it up for me. I was very impressed by the chapel, with its tree trunk altar – it felt like a sacred space.

I started inquiring into the sense of sacredness. What is this? It was the sense that I was in the midst of subjectivity – of knowing – that did not belong to me.

My usual consciousness is that I possess the knowing. I am the seer and that which I experience is the seen. In this sacred space the knowing was no longer mine; rather, it was suffused into, as a quality of, the space and all that it contained.

- Not in an animistic sense that the objects were themselves localised points of consciousness looking back at me.
- Nor in the intellectual recognition that the objects of experience, by virtue of their being objects of experience, are already forms of knowing.

More like: that everything, including myself, is lovingly held by and suffused with impersonal knowing. The knowing no longer belongs to me as the knower but, rather, adheres to, or is an aspect of, the things being experienced. This moment becomes the occasion of all things experiencing, celebrating, themselves!

Perhaps one way of looking at it is like this: You are watching a bird. From an objective point of view, say, of someone else watching this, that person will see you watching the bird. Now, your normal consciousness tends to internalise this objective perspective so that your experience of seeing the bird will also include, as a background framework, the sense of “I’m watching the bird”. So, if someone were to ask you “what’s up?”, you could well immediately reply, “I’m watching this bird.” (Perhaps, an infant or toddler who has not fully developed this objective framework that includes the sense of self as an object, would simply reply “Bird!”) In this normal adult consciousness, the knowing is felt to be localised behind the eyes of the observer. The bird is not part of the knowing; it is, rather, the *target* of the knowing. In this way, the objects of awareness are bound in a binary relationship to one’s reflected sense of self, the sense of ‘me’.

I might add that this way of knowing, which objectifies and reflects the self to the self, is profoundly instrumental: it enables us to plan and get things done that would otherwise be impossible.

Consciousness is not static. One direction away from the consciousness described above is experienced in trance-like absorption. For example, you might be absorbed in a film. Now, if I were to ask you “what’s up?”, you might reply, not with “I’m watching a movie”, but with “the moon Nazis are about to invade the Earth!” (This is similar to the toddler’s response.) Here, the sense of knowing is not, as before, contracted to behind one’s eyes, but has disappeared altogether. There is only the film.

A sense of the sacred is also a step away from normal consciousness but in the opposite direction to absorption. Here the sense of knowing is no longer contracted to behind one’s eyes or lost completely. Rather, Knowing is sensed as being distributed throughout the experiential field. It is pervasive and palpable and takes on the sense of *presence*. It is no longer in the background but occupies the foreground. Moreover, because it adheres to the objects of perception rather than to the sense of ‘me’ as the perceiver, the things I experience are freed from dependence upon me. They stand fully in their own ontological / epistemological

ground and the binary quality of experience (me – you / me – it) is loosened. Things are liberated, to be themselves, from me!

Frequently, the experience of being seen, or known, evokes a sense of judgement and shame. Being seen can also be the experience of being loved. But in taking the foreground and being non-localised, the experience of Knowing is purified of judgement and thus has the sense of being lovingly held. I imagine this is what mystics mean when they talk about by feeling the love of God. I take it that this is very different from fantasising that there is a God who loves me on the basis of some preaching and wishful thinking. A little more of this below...

Sacred Space, Religion and God

This being a Franciscan chapel and me being a Christian, there was certainly a disposition for me to recognise the space as sacred. It's a bit like knowing a style of music, say, jazz: if you understand jazz, it will be easier to recognise the genius of a Charlie Parker piece than if you don't. But, while it helps, I don't think intimate knowledge of a form is necessary for recognition. I imagine that any well crafted space designed for such a purpose from whatever religious culture has the potential to trip the mind of the viewer into a different way of experiencing. Furthermore, such occasions have, for me, been most commonly elicited in outdoor, natural settings.

Is the idea of God helpful in allowing for such experiences? While I do not think a belief in God is necessary (or sufficient), I do think that the idea of God can be helpful as a way to overcome the prejudice that the only things that are real are objects and that, therefore, this Knowing I am experiencing is something that belongs to me (something I have, that the reflected 'me' is doing). The problem of thinking in this way is that it is antithetical to the sacred experience itself and will sabotage it. Instead, a view along the lines of: "this experiencing is not really my experiencing but God's (or Reality's) self-experiencing and the particular experiencing occurring here, now, is an instancing of this" would harmonise with the experience.

The way I am using the term 'God' here is quite different to how it is commonly used by religious (and non-religious) people. I'm using it as a useful shorthand for, as well as a reification and mythologisation of, the sense of non-localised Oneness disclosed in the experience of sacred space: oneness of subject and object, Being and Knowing, actor and action, thereby conceived as the source, medium, power and end of everything. (Well, something like that, anyway!) Sometimes, in

occasions such as finding oneself in a sacred space, Reality suffers a 'wardrobe malfunction' to expose this usually veiled divine Oneness.

However, in my experience, for many, God is, instead, imagined as an all powerful entity external to ourselves, with whom we relate as we would one person to another: an adult version of the child's imaginary friend. Such localisation of God into an individual point of subjectivity with which *this* point of subjectivity (myself) can be in relationship (me as knower, God as known / God as knower, me as known), while in some ways useful (prayer is better than worry), will, in the end, serve to reinforce unquestioned investing into one's reflective sense of self ('me') as something absolute. Whereas, as I see it, spiritual maturity is very much about learning to sit lightly with the sense of 'me' as it (naturally) arises and passes. That is, I do not make I / me / mine the absolute orienting point of this life lived. In love, I open to find the orienting point anywhere and everywhere. This is finding myself in sacred space.

As a caveat, I do not think it is particularly useful to chase altered mind states such as the one described here. It is more important to be mindful to whatever state is self manifesting in the present moment. Indeed, state chasing can serve to further cement the dualist 'me – not me' perspective of normal instrumental consciousness; wakeful acceptance, however, may keep us alert to state changes that otherwise would not get a look in while we are preoccupied with getting somewhere else. Nor am I suggesting that there is anything wrong with dualistic instrumental consciousness – as mentioned earlier, it gets things done. But the altered state of knowing that I am describing does seem to be more complete, as the knowing here enfolds all arisings of the sense of me or of instrumental thought, for these too are objects in / manifestations of the field of knowing.

So, if you've read thus far, what has been your experience of sacred space? How does your experience coincide or differ from my analysis in this essay? Have I overlooked anything bleedingly obvious? Your thoughts are appreciated!

(PS. If you have an interest in spirituality, you may be interested in some of the links on my [Links page](#).)

Eric Best

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My last word on Nietzsche–Alan Mann

One repays a teacher badly if one remains nothing but a student. (Thus spake Zarathustra)

A number of commentaries on Nietzsche describe him as the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century. As I pointed out in my earlier notes I am intrigued by this claim as it does not seem to be borne out by reading his works. Nor do his admirers offer what I have found to be satisfactory explanations of why they have formed this high opinion of his contribution. For example, H. James Birx introduces an essay on Nietzsche by saying that Nietzsche emerged as the most influential philosopher of the 20th century, although both controversy and confusion surround his life and thought. I can accept the controversy but whence the confusion? I discover there is no Nietzschean philosophic system but rather a vast range of perspectives on almost any topic you can think of some of which are contradictory. So, it is pointless for me to have an argument with him, I have to tackle the perspectives one by one. He is highly quotable, note my opening example, but he said so much that, like Bible or Koran, you can usually find something he said that supports whatever you are on about.

This series of notes on NZ started out with my objection to Manu Bazzano claiming that Nietzsche is the father of European Zen. I presume this claim is based on the similarity between the Zen perspective captured in Fa-ch'ang's dying words "There is just this and nothing else" and Nietzsche's rejection of any transcendental or supernatural aspect of life. My argument, I now see, is not so much with Nietzsche but with Bazzano's failure to find early examples of 'Zen' in the European tradition.

The main areas identified as the key points of the Nietzschean story are as follows:

Death of God

As mentioned in earlier notes the death of God is invaluable as a version of the updated myth, the sacrifice of transcendence and awakening to immanence but it can not possibly be attributed solely or even primarily to Nietzsche. Altizer mentions Nietzsche as one of a number of sources (see below) including Blake who turned Altizer's thinking in a Nietzschean direction.

Perspectivism

Nietzsche's view that any occasion is subject to a variety of perspectives is admirable but also a cause of the uncertainty about where he himself stands on a number of important issues. This is another case of laying unearned tribute at his feet because his predecessors did quite a bit of this, we only have to think of Plato as an example. And unbridled perspectivism has led in some instances to the 'anything goes' notions of contemporary relativism. Are we to thank him for that?

Eternal recurrence

The eternal recurrence only makes sense if it is pointing to the ever present origin identified by Gebser or in the ever-present first person perspective made plain by

Harding. Here I am, trying to find a reasonable explanation for a completely batty idea, a trap which is exactly what I feel many commentators on Nietzsche can't help falling into. His reputation elicits a favourable response where none is justifiable.

The overman theory

He was influenced by Goethe and I wonder if his overman notions were inspired by Goethe's famous quotation:

There is a delicate empiricism that makes itself utterly identical with the object, thereby becoming true theory (visible). But this enhancement of our mental powers belongs to a highly evolved age.

Goethe. Maximen und Reflexionen

The notion that we are evolving into a higher form of humanity is not unreasonable but in Nietzsche's case it involves abandoning compassion which he sees as an obstacle to the necessary outcome in which pity for others is considered contemptible.

Evolution

He accepted Darwinism, natural selection through mutation, adaptation, etc. up to the point of the development of the modern human but thereafter it becomes a matter of the 'will to power' and man's self transformation to the next level, that of the overman. This take-over of the evolutionary process and placing it in the hands of mankind seems the height of hubris and an extension of third person power rather than a necessary shift into a participatory, first person wholeness. And, if true, why would this shift in itself not be an evolutionary development? There is also the question of how the will to power is not in opposition to his contempt for free-will.

Value renewal

I think we can go along with him on this one in the sense of his recognition of the need to tear up the values of his time and start afresh and even of his notion of a future higher, nobler humanity capable of deciding its own values rather than adopting the pre-digested dogma of the various traditions. The problem seems to me that if this is at the price of entrenching the split between the higher and lower orders it is fundamentally flawed. My perspective involves the view that any evolutionary benefit to humanity requires an awakening to what we have in common rather than enhancement of what makes us different. That leads into the ethics of Nietzsche's overman perspective which is far beyond the scope of this note but it is interesting to ponder how he would integrate his periodic attacks of compassion and sensitivity with the consequences of his overman world. His personal values, judging by his rejection of anti-semitism and nationalism strike me as one of the positive aspects of the man. And there is the oft quoted report that, after seeing a horse being whipped in the streets of Turin, Nietzsche had a mental breakdown that put him in an asylum for the rest of his life. Nietzsche is reported

to have run over to the horse and held it in his arms to protect it before he collapsed to the ground.

Having said all this I am left with a problem. And that is that George Schloss for whom I have a great admiration (as a result of his insistence on reminding us how important Douglas Harding's work is as a necessary outcome of the history of human thought) was an admirer of Thomas Altizer. George thought Altizer had come closest to closing the gap between saying and seeing; the contemporary theologian who had, in fact, achieved all that was possible by way of concept and explanation. And Altizer, in turn, I now discover, acknowledges that Nietzsche along with Blake and very few others were major contributors to his own conclusions. These conclusions I understand as the transcendent God myth evaporating in a self-emptying that is exemplified by the crucifixion and consequently becoming fully immanent in and as the world and as exemplified, I imagine, by the holy spirit which, inaccessible to objective observation, can be apprehended as our first nature.

It is hard to find an Altizer quotation which expresses his philosophy but here is one that provides the flavour:

Now a uniquely Christian dysangel truly reverses itself, and if this occurs only by realizing Godhead itself as an absolutely actual absolute nothingness, this can be understood as a necessary and inevitable destiny of that Godhead, a Godhead that is absolute sacrifice itself. Hegel and Nietzsche are those philosophers who most profoundly understand an absolute sacrifice, hence they are inevitably philosophers of the Crucified God, but it is Nietzsche who has given us our deepest interior understanding of that sacrifice, and if this is a sacrifice calling forth an absolute nothingness, and one that is fully actual in the depths of our own interior, that interiority is finally exteriority itself, and an absolute exteriority, but only insofar as it is an absolute nothingness.

This being, as George explains, a rather convoluted attempt to conceptualise what can only be accessed as the direct apprehension of that openness of our first nature and as revealed experientially in the experiments. (GS Letter numbers 66 and 67) The essence of George's commentaries is that the transformation of transcendence into immanence involves the complete, or apocalyptic in Altizer's terminology, shift from myth and concept into the direct revelation of participatory ground or 'being' that cannot be described without reversing the revelatory process. It has to be 'done' and the doing is what the experiments provide.

I am much more well-disposed to Nietzsche than when I set out on the exploration six months ago. Nevertheless I think his reputation as a philosopher is inflated and he would be best remembered for his literary genius. This thought had hardly come to mind when I read a year 2000 article by Dr. Eva Cybulska in which she says:

Nietzsche was a dreamer who never quite developed a sharp boundary between the world of fantasy and the world of reality.

This sums up my feelings about Nietzsche but I haven't finished with Altizer, I'll get back to him in a future NOWletter. I'm sure many will disagree with me about Friedrich and I'd welcome any alternative perspectives readers would like to fire back. However, no more books! I'm thoroughly Nietzsched-out as far as reading matter is concerned. I did find one book, in addition to those mentioned in my earlier notes, it's a sympathetic reading of Nietzsche and now on my Kindle. I think I can lend to anyone interested and equipped with a Kindle, or a Kindle reader, through the Kindle library option. The title—*What Nietzsche Really Said* by Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins. Another useful source was *The Philosophy Now Magazine. Issue 29 October /November 2000*. It was dedicated to Nietzsche and includes a series of articles about the various aspects of his thought.

Alan Mann

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Limitation of Enquiry from Andrew Hilton

I want to speak about what I experience as limitation of enquiry.

Friends, friends are our second selves, the trouble is to associate with them, you've, to delicately and now not so delicately, to cut off a limb or two to meet.

Exchange.

Friends for living is where you invest.

They're an appetite, a serious one, like food or money.

You invest.

It's too lonely and limiting to row all by yourself.

See yourself in the now-like mirror (of how you see them. Whatever that means.)

The world is dying for a story it can inhabit, one that speaks of virtuous conduct under this planet's sun, oh jeez it was all worth it!

Let's just say God traverses between 3 modalities.

OK there's my no-thing/related to all thing modality. This is my choiceless awareness gig.

Then there's a unique self with inclinations that pull like a magnet in the direction of grandiosity and mostly a consequent/subsequent urge for self abasement, oh dear, the feelings of others have been trampled on again! Now to manage this fairly unique dude I must needs acquire some deliberate attitudes and strategies.

Most of us can tap into rejection, and abandonment, and displaced sexual feelings, perhaps unresolved stuff with mummy and daddy being played out.

The chief alibi:

So rather than close my eyes and say what's my next thought, and disappear into a notion that the self is just a construct of thought as the me, this belies the sublimation of the doubts, the conscience, the conditioned state, the inner persecutor, closet saboteur demands to be taken out,

We do this via cognitive means through cultivating self knowledge, contextual, through deliberately developing attitudes that don't deny our inner turmoil in close relationship but that involve thinking, like understanding, acceptance, perhaps forgiveness, confidence, self belief, trust, friendship, control, love in all its forms, and the breath... embodiment... and wholeness, regulating, consciously developing our life as a whole, physical, social, dependability, all that and so much more.

People call us out, for that to happen our eyes must be open. Now I want to mess with bifurcation.

OK, God uses a woman, manifesting in the qualities of blind justice, mercy and pity. Sex-god. Beauty. All affect, esp. kindness.

This woman you serve always. She turns into your wife, if you're lucky, and have that disposition, and you serve her, especially when she looks dowdily unattractive until a moment when you least expect it the lovelight shines and she is the most beautiful woman in the world and you know she's both located in the boat with you, and more she feels the same about you, your her man for this time 'round.

We don't sit under a tree with roots in the air, eyes closed, we do for...

"Well I am the One (one) who loves changing from nothing to (One) one" - as Leonard Cohen once sang and wrote.

The experience of the sacred segues from the no thing I am, I am related to all thing, into I'm the servant in the face of the master, never Jesus as friend, mentor or older brother, so one serves life, and I am called upon to act, with decency and etiquette like injections into my sense of the spiritual/perennial philosophy but this master plays with me, like a woman's charm and beauty, imploring chivalry and style, all along learning what pleases.

Sometimes that tree without roots in the wind, at other times learning to sustain shelter, and yes, in part(s) on my knees serving, thankful, played by je ne sais quoi.

Andrew Hilton

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Van Loon's Lives from Dave Knowles

Being a true and faithful account of a number of highly interesting meetings with certain historical personages, from Confucius and Plato to Voltaire and Thomas Jefferson, about whom we had always felt a great deal of curiosity and who came to us as dinner guests in a bygone year.

Written and Illustrated by Hendrik Willem van Loon (1943)

This book came into my hands as a gift from a fellow enjoyer of Literature and attending the same U3A class in Canberra. She had given up on it but thought it might appeal to me for some reason. She turned out to be right and I'll try to explain why.

Hendrik Willem van Loon apparently loved history, having lived & worked through a number of prominent historical events like the Russian Revolution and both World Wars. He was born in Rotterdam, went to the USA to study at Cornell when he was 20, married there but moved to Germany to take his PhD at Munich. He became an American citizen in 1919.

In this book, set in the small town of Veere in the Netherlands with his American wife "Jimmie", Dutch cook Jo and his good friend Frits the Dutch-American author hits on the delicious fantasy of conjuring up historical personages from the past to invite them round for dinner at his house and enjoy conversation and music with them. The planning for the dinners is almost as enjoyable as the evening: deciding what should be on the menu, what wines to serve and what music to play. For Frits' benefit (and the reader's) Hendrik also provides a capsule history of each invitee before the dinner. It's never quite clear how the invitations reach the guests; it is enough to put a slip of paper bearing their name under the stone lions at the Town Hall. The guests are also amusingly circumspect about their current residence.

Being recommended to dip into the book where my fancy took me I started with "Dante and Leonardo Da Vinci come to dine, the latter of whom drops in in the literal sense of the word", followed by "How we entertained Monsieur Montaigne and Doctor Rabelais and how their visit almost led to a public riot in our peaceful village of Veere". Enjoying these and wanting to meet more interesting people I went back to the first chapter: "Desiderius Erasmus, our first guest, arrives punctually on time and gives us a most delightful evening". I found I liked Erasmus as much as Hendrik & Frits who found him a room in the Veere Town Hall and invited him along to subsequent dinners where he was most helpful as translator with his vast knowledge of languages. I tracked down a Penguin Classics copy of his "Praise of Folly" so I could learn more of this Renaissance Humanist. I then ploughed on reading every chapter and learning a great deal of history and a little philosophy in a most easily digestible form. Hendrik also makes a number of interesting comments on the present as Veere was under Nazi occupation at the time the book was written.

One of my favourite chapters was where Empress Theodora of Byzantium and Queen Elizabeth (I) of England came and Theodora proved a bit of a vamp and Elizabeth displayed a surprisingly bawdy sense of humour! Other surprising pleasures included the meeting of Plato and Confucius and that of Emily Dickinson and Frédéric Chopin; a hair-raising evening ensued when Robespierre and Torquemada met over dinner.

I regretted too that the Buddha sent his regrets but there are many more delights in the 21 chapters to go with the intriguing presence of Erasmus and the ongoing threat of Hitler.

So not a mighty work of literature but a very pleasant read with a lot of incidental knowledge to absorb almost without effort.

Dave Knowles, 10 December, 2014

(P.S.: It looks like you can still pick up a used copy at Amazon)

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Re: Notes re the Body-Mind dualism, or not, question from Robert Penny

While this is obvious, very few people are aware of the simple yet astonishing fact that -- speaking for myself -- as an observing-Subject, all the bodies or objects or events in the world that I experience, sense-perceptually or in imagination, are IN me; that is, are present, at my Centre, in my Awareness / Consciousness. There's no separation between my essential Me, which is Awareness / Consciousness, and my sense-perceived or imagined world. My Me (Awareness) and my world are one. This is not a concept. It's how I sense-perceive it.

Looking down, what I see, what I have in my Awareness, is my upside-down headless body! Other people, and their cameras, and my mirror, sense-perceive or contain my upright headed body.

My mind includes the objects or bodies or events in the world that I sense-perceive, or imagine, which are present right here, at my Centre, in my headless, boundless Awareness, replete with their qualities of there-ness and otherness, and coloured by my feelings and structured by my thoughts. On the other hand, *my body* is in all the world for my observers to appropriate. These facts are established by numerous detailed observations. I give examples here:

The form of my sense-perceived body, to or in my observer, depends on the distance away of my observer: Armed with appropriate instruments, my approaching observer progressively sees or contains me as a man, cells, a single cell, molecules, a single molecule, sub-atomic particles, a single particle, and finally, when all the way up to me, as nothing. And if s/he retreats from me, my traveling observer sees my human body become absorbed or transformed into larger and larger bodies, namely a house, suburb, city, country, earth, solar system, galaxy, and finally a galaxy cluster which eventually fades away altogether. If my observer comes all the way up to me (i.e. at minimum distance), or goes all the way from me (i.e. at at maximum distance), I disappear altogether. This links with the basic relativity principle, much touted but little understood, which has been expressed as follows: 'An event or thing is nothing in itself, and is the system of its manifestations to observers elsewhere'.

So what I am depends on the distance between my Centre and my observer. Distance is the making of me (and of things in general). The whole truth about me-as-object incorporates the sum of all of my appearances viewed by my outside-observer from all situations and distances.

A crucial question is: What I am, for myself, on the inside, at no distance from myself, here at Centre? My conclusion, after experimentation using Harding experiments, is that my view out of my Centre, which we call mind, is the *unity* of the Aware-Nothing that I essentially am, here, for myself, at Centre, AND the objects of my world, which are as extensive as I care to make them, and in the limit, at their most extensive, embrace Everything, the Whole-of-things. Furthermore, what I need in order to be human includes all grades of things and events. And my thoughts and feelings involve and are attached to all grades of things and events.

The above are some of the essential insights that I've gained from my study of Douglas E. Harding's books and essays and other publications. For more along these lines, for starters I recommend Head off Stress, The Little Book of Life and Death, On Having No Head, and The Trial Of The Man Who Said He Was God. in that order.

Robert Penny

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A word with Greg Campbell

Hello Alan, Greg coming to you thru linked in again. Something I forgot to add in my last email.

It seems that the forever mysterious life/death force (commonly called God, Buddha, etc.) cannot create anything except out of itself. This means it seems we together with all other possible objects are fundamentally Divine. However there is a deep wound in human awareness - in that we take reality to be duality "day/night, male/female, life/death, etc. So called "Enlightenment" is simply the healing process which heals our tragic misunderstanding. The Old Testament called that wound "Original Sin" a most unfortunate choice of words."Original split" would be better. Anyway enough God Talk for today. My best to Margot—I enjoyed her descriptions of your travels in England. As ever, Greg

Thank you Greg, it occurred to me that the original split as you call it with its consequent commitment to our apparent separateness results in an urge to reconnect. Sadly, not at the level at which we are absolutely together and to which you point in your writing but at the superficial, relative levels by means of Facebook, Linked In and so on. All the best , Alan

On Free Will from Chris Cheney

Commenting on the You Tube presentation by Sam Harris of his belief that free will is an illusion.

Nope, i disagree with something in the short film. None of Sam Harris's points there actually prove, or indicate anything about whether or not people have free will.

Mostly, he is talking about "dependent origination". So in the sense of meaning that a will of any kind could be utterly independent, in the sense of completely separate from all other events, i would agree with him. But that is not what is generally meant by "free will". Further, by responsibility for thoughts and/or emotions, what is generally meant, is that the responsibility arises after the fact. The thoughts or feelings may be spontaneous, but whether, or in what manner one acts upon them may be regarded as a matter of choosing, and when people insist that all of those choices are illusory, because they are all pre-decided by karma or DNA or God's Will or something, I say Bullshit.

In fact, i would say that if an ego or thinking in general has any purpose, that is probably mostly what it is for, basically just "yes" and "no" in one form or another, and maybe technical stuff, creativity, language, and tool making, that sort of thing.

In the sense that "free will" is a concept, and therefore a human invention, like the I, an I dea, then it cannot be said not to exist in the same sense that an apple can be said to exist. It only 'exists', so to speak, as a convention in thought.

However, 'no free will' is subject to exactly the same criteria, and so is 'destiny', or 'predestination' which is even easier to prove, since most people will guess wrong most of the time at the racetrack, as with 'probability', in the sense that while Von Neumann may have said "we live in the most probable of all possible worlds", he is clearly wrong, in the sense that of the millions of worlds discovered so far, this is the only one that has people on it.

The only probability there, is that a world that supports human life is a necessary prerequisite for one that has people on it (which is trivial) not that such a world is particularly probable in the Universe.

That is why the 'no free will' argument still seems sketchy to me. If a conceptual matrix has no real existence, then its antithesis can't either. And if the thought of say, a chair, just arises by itself 'out of nowhere', then what will you say when you order a blue Edwardian to match your dining room set, and Amazon sends you a red Indian settee, bills you double, and tells you that it just came to them to do that out of nowhere, and they have no responsibility for it?

Anyway, Sam Harris, and the rest of you no free will lot can just send me all your money, oh come on...you know you so deeply want to do it...you are growing sleepy... you are reaching for your checkbook...

Chris Cheney

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Soul Of A New Self: Excerpt Chapter 1 -

*Covering email: On this New Year's Day I am happy to send you an excerpt from the first chapter of my forthcoming book *The Soul of a New Self*. This excerpt explores the transformative process of meditation and hints at how it ultimately leads to a new collectively held sense of self, which is the main focus of the rest of the book. Jeff Carreira*

My deepest visions of a new reality came first in spiritual openings that occurred in deep meditation. While following the impossibly simple instruction of total acceptance of the way things are, I have on numerous occasions slipped out of my current experience of reality into something completely different. Those experiences have left me with an unshakeable conviction that there is a different reality waiting for us. It is our destiny and our future and it will not arrive without our conscious collaboration to manifest it.

In meditation practice I adopt a position of perfect passivity allowing all experience to simply arise and pass away as it will. As I become more and more still I lose all sense of myself. There is only the arising and passing of experience and one experience that arises and passes away is the sense of being me, but there is no me having that experience. It is simply another experience in consciousness.

I am just another piece of experience that arises in the field of awareness. My body, my mind, my history, my qualities, my faults are all experiences that arise and fall away. The sense that all of these things point toward a being that exists independent of them is itself a transient experience that occasionally arises and falls away. There is nothing that exists other than as fleeting experiences that arise and pass away in an unending parade. Our experience of reality is created from mental fragments in the same way that a movie is created from a rapid succession of snapshots.

The moments spent in this flow of consciousness free of any enduring sense of self is more liberating than can possibly be described. There is no independent existence, nothing that is separate from anything else. This is what in Eastern mystical traditions has been referred to as the play of consciousness. The parade of experiential snapshots creates the illusion of reality. It creates the world as we know it. In this world we feel like a thing - an entity that exists separate from other things. We feel that we are a special kind of thing because we are an independent source of

consciousness. We have our own mind that perceives both the inner world and the outer world.

In deep meditation we first adopt a stance of passive acceptance in relationship to all of the content of our mind. Eventually we see that our experience of reality is being generated from perceptual fragments that pass through awareness. We awaken to what Buddhists call emptiness and recognize that reality is nothing more than a collection of fleeting experiences. This revelation is profoundly liberating and can be deeply disturbing. I remember the first time I began to feel myself slip into this state of consciousness. It felt as if I were going to die even though I knew that I was just sitting on a meditation cushion. In a sense, of course, I was going to die, at least my self-concept was.

The meditation experience doesn't end with the freedom found in the emptiness of passive acceptance. That is just the doorway that leads to something more. The first stage of meditation allows us to become deeply absorbed in the space between all thoughts and feelings. It liberates our consciousness from the dictates of our usual habits of thought and feeling. In that stillness we begin to become aware of subtle movements and energies that begin to move us physically, emotionally and spiritually along a path of transformation that we cannot understand.

At times I have spent hours in meditation feeling that my body was being reconfigured. Sometimes it can be painful and uncomfortable, other times blissful and ecstatic, either way I simply allow it to occur. The meditative stance of passive acceptance now takes on a different flavor. It becomes an active passivity. I am still allowing whatever wants to happen to occur without willful intervention, but I am also aware of actively making myself available to be moved by spirit. I am not leaning toward anything in particular. I am simply making myself available for an ever-deeper presence and surrender.

It feels as if forces far beyond my understanding are supporting and guiding a delicate process of awakening that I feel in my heart, mind, body and soul. At this point it no longer feels as if that awakening is happening in or to me. It is happening in reality itself and I am participating in that awakening process while having a localized experience of it. A great deal of this book will be dedicated to the possibility of collective awakening in which a number of people simultaneously open to this higher source of energy and intelligence. In collective awakenings the presence of something bigger than any individual becomes obvious and undeniable, but even individual awakening experiences reveal that something much bigger than any individual is moving us.

When we realize that we are locked inside a world created from fleeting fragments of experience we simultaneously recognize that we have no definitive way of knowing if that experience is ultimately connected to anything that we could call independently real. This can be a frightening realization from the point of view of our current sense of self because it offers only the disillusionment of that sense of self. Any attempt to embrace the truth of absolute continuity and flow from our

current sense of a solid and fixed self will lead to deep unease. We cannot fully embrace a new reality from our existing sense of self because that self has no place in the new reality. A new reality can only be embraced by a new sense of self. The point of this book is to explore what kind of self is capable of stabilizing and abiding in the reality of continuity-unfolding.

I am compelled to explore what I see as two different aspects of spiritual practice and conscious evolution. They represent two levels of surrender. The first surrender is attained through perfect passivity. It is the surrender of letting go of everything. The second surrender is an active passivity that moves us toward greater availability to the energy and intelligence of the larger being that we already are.

In my earlier book *Radical Inclusivity* I wrote about Edwin Abbott's 1884 novella called *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* and the exploration of multi-dimensional reality that it contains. I want to use that same book again here to illuminate our path forward.

Flatland is a world that only exists in two dimensions. It is flat plane like a table top with no height. In Flatland the only thing you can see are lines. The actual being in flatland might be a circle or a square, but inside flatland you can only see their edges. In the story only the mysterious entity visiting from the world known as Spaceland can see the surface of the circle or square because the Spacelander exists in three dimensions not two.

The important insight here is that as long as we stay inside our existing reality our perception will always have less dimensionality than our being. There is always more to us than we can see! The square in Flatland can never see its own surface because to do that it would have to jump outside of the two dimensional world that it exists in. The three-dimensional being, perhaps it is a cube, already exists outside of the plane of Flatland so the cube can get up over the square and see its surface.

From within our world we may see beings that have more dimensionality than we do, but we will only see those aspects of them that exist in the dimensions available in our world. When the cube from Spaceland crosses the plane of Flatland it doesn't appear as a Cube. It appears as a line because lines are all you can see in Flatland. The cube could never explain what it looks like in three dimensions. That possibility lies outside of the Flatlanders' capacity to imagine. The cube can't even explain the existence of the Flatlanders own surface – the idea of surface is not imaginable in Flatland.

When a three-dimensional cube passes through Flatland it simply appears as if by magic. One instant it is not there, the next it is. No entrance from anywhere. It simply appears out of nowhere because from the Flatland perspective nowhere is exactly where it came from. If this line that appears as if by magic then tries to explain itself, the Flatlanders simply have no idea what they are talking about; they can't imagine it.

All manifest beings exist within a limited dimensionality. Dimensions beyond those do not exist to them. This book introduces a reality that exists beyond our own current level of dimensionality. Generally it is not visible at all to us. Occasionally we get glimpses of it. These glimpses, as seen from the vantage point of the limited being that we are, feel unintelligible and mysterious because our powers of perception have less dimensionality than that reality has.

I call the consciousness that gives us access to this high dimensional reality continuity-unfolding. A vision of a continuously unfolding reality can appear to us, and has to me, in deep meditation. If these experiences remain anchored to our current sense of self, in other words if they are viewed from within our current limits of perceptual dimensionality, we can only see a thin slice of that bigger reality.

If we are able to leave our current sense of self behind and float off into another dimension something even more amazing occurs. If we not only 'see' higher dimensions from here, but actually leave here behind and move into higher dimensions we can actually experience this new reality in its fullness. When we are inside of it, having left our limited self far behind, that reality appears to us as totally intelligible. In fact, it makes more sense to us than anything else we have ever experienced and we have no doubt about its existence.

Imagine a Flatland square that lets go so deeply of its sense of reality that its consciousness floats up out of its current plane of existence. All of a sudden the Flatlander is seeing the impossible, squares, triangles and circles not as lines, but as surfaces from above. From the point of the Flatlander he or she is standing in nowhere seeing everything, which sounds like descriptions mystics use to explain their spiritual awakening experiences.

I believe this is a very useful way to understand our own mystical experiences. They are journeys to other dimensions that occur once we have let go of our current sense of self and reality. These experiences are profoundly intelligible and seem to make sense of everything. When, and if, we return from such a journey we find that squeezing back into the limited dimensionality of this world is uncomfortable. We also discover that what was so clear and simple and true out there, is mysterious when remembered from back here. Our mystical journeys beyond our current dimensionality are often impossible to communicate to anyone else, unless they have had a similar experience.

Of course I am making all of this sound horribly dualistic, as if there is a reality out there that is separate from a reality over here. This separation is a line of division that is useful in describing our mystical experiences. Our minds are conditioned to see things dualistically in terms of separate objects and my description here fits comfortably into our current patterns of thought. Ultimately it is not true. There are not two realities there is One. Reality is one continuous whole without breaks or gaps. That is the core insight that characterizes the reality that we are moving into and that I am calling continuity-unfolding.

In this first chapter we have explored how we come to have perceptual glimpses of a new reality. We live in a world of things-in-space and have glimpses of a new world of continuity-unfolding. These glimpses, which we often refer to as mystical experiences, come in weaker and stronger forms. The weaker forms are glimpses of a new reality as viewed through the perceptual limitations of our current sense of self. The stronger forms are journeys that we take in consciousness beyond our current sense of self directly into a new reality. The weaker forms leave us compelled to continue. The stronger forms leave us convinced. The weaker forms have the power to initiate a true spiritual search. The stronger forms have the power to end it.

In the remainder of this book we will expand our exploration of continuity-unfolding consciousness and more importantly we will discuss the possibility of not just having perceptual access to a new reality, but actually creatively embracing a new sense of self that can abide there. We can glimpse a new reality from our current sense of self. We can learn to liberate our consciousness and journey beyond our current sense of self into a new reality. But even more significantly than both of those we can let go of our current sense of self and embrace a new one that allows our awareness to stabilize in continuity-unfolding consciousness. In this book I intend to share with you everything I understand about how we can stabilize in a new reality.

My experience tells me that this is not a solo journey. The sense of self that we must embrace is collective not individual. We will not become a new being on our own. We will become a new being together. I have experienced this shift into a collective self with others. It is a miracle. It is almost impossible to describe and yet I feel compelled to do so. You are invited to a journey that takes us beyond our current sense of self, beyond the experience of no self, beyond even an individual transformation of self, into a sense of self that only emerges between us.

End of Excerpt

Jeff Carreira

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