

Issue 180—April 2015

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Next Greville Street Meeting — Sunday 19 April (*See 2015 Programme*)

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Thanks for this month's contributions which include a note from Colin Drake on false expectations of the awakened state. Colin was recently interviewed by Iain McNay on Consciousness TV, the link to the video follows his article. After some helpful feedback we decided to keep the Greville Street meetings going and the 2015 programme is included in this issue.

Through Atheism to Anatheism

By 2014 I was beginning to feel like openly admitting to being an atheist, even though I still inclined towards various transpersonal ideas, could not give up on spirituality completely and found Dawkins a little strident for my taste and unable to consider anything beyond scientific rationality. I collected a number of atheist works and read them with interest, particularly Christopher Hitchens' compendium of writings in *The Portable Atheist*. It was in this state I encountered while browsing in Dymocks a book called *50 Great Myths about Atheism* by two philosophers, Russell Blackford (Australian) & Udo Schüklenk (Canadian). The comments on the back intrigued me, particularly one by Peter Singer that read, "With humour, wisdom, and sound philosophy, Blackford and Schüklenk dismantle 50 important myths about atheism. In doing so, they have done atheists and religious believers a great service, for putting aside the myths enables us to see where real differences remain."

I was also intrigued by some of the myths selected by the authors like: Myth 8 No Atheist Believes in Anything Supernatural and Myth 24 If There is no God We are Soulless Creatures

As I started to read it at home I promoted the book to my men's group (most of them being religious believers) saying, "If you want to enjoy some clear philosophical writing that will really invigorate your brain, this book will supply it." I added, "I am also looking forward to the final historical review of Part 9 - The Rise of Modern Atheism. I will hopefully be finding a way to reconcile my interests in Advaita Vedanta and in a Universal Consciousness with my nominal state of Atheism and my (academic?) interests in religion."

When I had finished reading I agreed wholeheartedly with Peter Singer's comment on the cover.

My review was well received by the men's group with one member ordering the book immediately and an intriguing reply coming in from another (an ordained priest): "Have you caught up with Anatheism yet? There is an excellent book by that title by Richard Kearney. Well worth a look." Not having heard of anatheism before, I resorted to Amazon finding its subtitle of *Returning to God after God*,

mentions of “sacred secularity”, Merleau-Ponty, epiphanies, and James Joyce all of which piqued my interest enormously so I purchased the book and started reading.

So what did I find?

Well initially the talk of wagers of faith and of hospitality to the (sacred) stranger left me a little adrift although I could see Kearney’s logic of wanting to find a third option to dogmatic theism and militant atheism (“the polar opposites of certainty that have maimed so many minds ...”). Kearney talks more about “the Wager”, delineating five main movements in the anatheist wager: imagination, humour, commitment, discernment, and hospitality. I read this with interest but without deep connection to the ideas. However when Kearney, in his fourth chapter, “In the Flesh,” “deals with a sacramental experience of the everyday as adumbrated by contemporary philosophers like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Julia Kristeva,” he really grabbed my attention! I have long been fascinated by Phenomenology but also frustrated by my inability to fully grasp the epoché, its main instrument. (See my other writings on this subject and also earlier in this thread.) Kearney seemed to focus, through Merleau-Ponty, on those transpersonal aspects of phenomenology that had so appealed to me in my initial exposure and also through the admired writings on consciousness of Francisco Varela, who had introduced Merleau-Ponty to me.

When Kearney, in his fifth chapter, “In the Text,” applies “sacramental poetics” to an anatheist reading of three novelists—Joyce, Proust, and Woolf—“who retrieved sacred epiphanies at the heart of the ordinary universe” he struck another strong chord with me. I am a James Joyce enthusiast and have long found his work a rich source of the epiphanies that so appeal to me (Again - see my other writings on this subject and also earlier in this thread.)

His chapter on the hermeneutics of political action, covering controversies on the role of theism and atheism in matters of war and peace, democracy and violence, compassion and intolerance was readable as was his final chapter on three exemplary modern figures who, in his view, “refigure our understanding of faith by encountering the sacred at the heart of the secular world of action and suffering”: Dorothy Day, Jean Vanier, and Mahatma Gandhi.

But what spoke more resonantly was to be found in Kearney's conclusion ("Welcoming Strange Gods"). Like, "The wise person, as Socrates taught, is one who seeks truth precisely because he "knows he does not know"; a teaching that, we noted, finds its anatheist equivalent in the famous *docta ignorantia* of Nicholas of Cusa." And, "Anatheism is not atheism then, but it does agree with enlightened atheism that the God of theodicy is dead. To return again to the specifically Western context, anatheism embraces the Enlightenment critique of the triumphal deity who rules over his creatures and metes out punishment and plaudits. It concurs ... with the dymythification of religion carried out by Nietzsche, Freud, and the postwar advocates of religionless faith. And ... it endorses the spirit of the phenomenological epoché—the provisional suspension of inherited confessions and assumptions—not to enter some positivistic value-free zone but to attend more faithfully to the sacred "things themselves" in the midst of life. For, as phenomenologists remind us, "what we leave outside the brackets of suspension we can gain back again a hundredfold after we return."

The last paragraph of Kearney's Epilogue has this, "... and wonder at the very strangeness of it all. Indeed, it is perhaps fitting to end with wonder. For this the shared founding experience of the spiritual, the philosophic, and the poetic—the spiritual epiphany of welcoming, the philosophical *thaumazein* ("the wonder at what is") of questioning, the poetic shudder of imagining ..."

Which leaves me to accept all my intimations of awakening as my way of perceiving the world, delighting in it, and maybe finding something sacred in it.

Dave Knowles

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Whitehead on Infinitude

(Extract from Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead by Lucien Price. Page 160, Whitehead is talking to the author, I think the initial reference is to Plato, the book is on loan so I'm unable to check. Alan)

..."But wasn't that often his method; to take the infinite, which he alone was capable of tackling, and reduce it to a finite form which average mortals, 'the educated man of ancient Athens,' as you once said, could understand?" "This relationship between the infinite and the finite is what I was coming to. Our minds are finite, and yet even in these circumstances of finitude we are surrounded by possibilities that are infinite, and the purpose of human life is to grasp as much as we can out of that infinitude. I wish I could convey this sense I have of the infinity of the possibilities that confront humanity, the limitless variations of choice, the possibility of novel and untried combinations, the happy turns of experiment, the endless horizons opening out. As long as we experiment, as long as we keep this possibility of progressiveness, we and our societies are alive ; when we lose them, both we and our societies are dead, no matter how externally active we and they may be, no matter how materially prosperous they and we may appear. And nothing is easier to lose than this element of novelty. It is the living principle in thought, which keeps all alive."

"How much validity do you give that sense of oneness which we sometimes have—that sense of our individuality being merged into the all? One is anxious not to talk moonshine about this, the more if, like me, he is neither a metaphysician nor a psychologist. And yet I know that those moments are so memorable, the sense of it is so strong, that years later, ten, perhaps, one can reach back into it as if it were

only yesterday or today and create out of it something living and new." "Mysticism," said Whitehead, "leads us to try to create out of the mystical experience something that will save it, or at least save the memory of it. Words don't convey it except feebly; we are aware of having been in communication with infinitude and we know that no finite form we can give can convey it"

"Music," I ventured, "may come nearer it than words. Infinitudes of Human Experience. Sometimes, during a good performance of the very greatest music one has a sense that he is in the presence of infinitude somewhat similar to what the composer must have felt when he was having to choose between one concept and another in the hope of expressing it. The definite concepts are there, in tones or phrases, but all around them hover the infinitudes of possibility—the other ways in which this vastness might have been expressed."

"Out of this effort to save the mystical experience," said Whitehead, "in the hope of creating a form which will preserve the experience for ourselves and possibly for others, comes clarification—in a thought or perhaps an art-form; and that clarification is then turned into some form of action. . . . Mysticism, clarification, action; I have never put it in that form before; but that is the order in which I would state it." He said that a static quality appeared in the Buddhist religion as evidenced by the history of India and China, that their rate of advance retarded or stopped, and that since the year 1800 B.C. very little change had come in China until modern times, except minor ones in small living arrangements. He was illustrating how subtle a possession dynamic thought is, and how easy it is to lose.

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Feedback from Barry Hora

Alan, Just sharing some thoughts I had this morning just prior to meditating at our group meditation meeting. Early in the meditation with closed-eyes focusing on my breath and at the same time trying to be aware of all my senses I happened to look this way (inwardly) observing a very clear “no thing” and I can not find words to describe the experience.

To say it was one of those “aha” moments would be putting time factor in place and down- grading the experience.

The thoughts that started the process: -

Process and silence are the two sides of the one coin.

The process of looking inward at the content of the self, silence may be reviewed at that point and it is then an infinite process—silence.

Barry Hora

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Feedback from Graeme Wilkins

Thanks for the latest Nowletter... some wonderful contributions..Jeff Carreira has certainly had some extra-ordinary experiences...and is Sam DeBrito one of the Harding “brethren”?..I wonder if any letters to the editor were received?..Robert Penny’s “Oh Me oh My” says it all, but why?

Yvonne lent me a book recently “When Nietzsche Wept” by Irvin D Yalom (Professor of Psychiatry in Stanford Uni)...it is a semi fictional work involving a doctor and Nietzsche with a friend of the doctors’ one Sig. Freud.. A good read ...Rather than trying to remember it all (read some time back) here is the comment I posted to “Goodreads”:

This is an engaging, well written, semi fictional novel of the physiological and psychological torments of the philosopher and a doctor in Vienna in the late nineteenth century. The threads between philosophy and the beginnings of psychiatry,(with a young, "unformed" Freud within the mix of men), and, strong "earthbound" women ultimately force the necessary catharsis to eventually heal both men in finding "friend-ship" through cleansing tears.

The tussle between the clinical doctor and the mind trapped Nietzsche using a method of "chimney sweeping" (verbal therapy) is the highlight of the book which looks at "disconnected" loneliness and "connected" alone-ness and where your liberation can be my liberation..

Nietzsche's famous quoting of "amor fati" which roughly translates as ' choose

your fate, love your fate' allows for acceptance of "what is" to lead to balance and friendship.

Well, make of that what you will...not a theoretical treatise..it was an interesting diversion from other literary pursuits

At the gym today with my “music” player: what turned up on “shuffle” but Douglas and Catherine..great stuff about the UCR (united cellular republic) and “being stuck”..which bring us round to your concerns regarding the Greville Street get-togethers.

Please continue. It is great to get together with all our friends ..however quite understand if this is becoming a burden..after 23-4 years you both deserve to say enough is enough...

However if you both can see your way to continuing..then... Yes, a theme is important..remembering the one and only Krishnamurti dialogue meeting at Summer Hill..the theme was “The Turning Point” ...there was some pre-work (reading K’s words) required which the “educated” participants had done and which led to a meaningful dialogue.

This method of approach may not suit all our friends however maybe this can be canvassed in early March. Sunday would be preferred however if others see Saturday as preferable then no worries from here. *Graeme Wilkins*

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[The Myth of The Awakened State by Colin Drake](#)

There seems to be a myth that an awakened being should be always in a state of complete equanimity, rather like a ‘stone buddha’. This was reinforced, for me, by my family members in the following circumstances. Firstly, by my sister who had not seen me for years but had been receiving my emails, so that when we met she judged my behaviour by her conception of a ‘perfect being’. This caused her to continually criticize my behaviour when I exhibited natural human states such as irritation or exasperation. Secondly, by my son when we were playing golf and I expressed my frustration at the state of the greens, which had been heavily sanded

and made putting well nigh impossible. I expressed my dissatisfaction and commented that it was 'hardly worth even lining the putts up' whereupon he countered with 'you spend so much time meditating and yet you still get upset ...'. Finally, yesterday, my wife and a friend were in the campervan and she was inexpertly attempting to help me reverse out of a tight situation. When I expressed my disapproval the friend commented that this was hardly the action of a buddha which my wife reinforced by saying 'yes it's all bullshit!' Now, if by this she had meant that the idea that an awakened being wouldn't criticize another is bullshit, I would agree with her. However, she seemed to be indicating the reverse, that if you criticize another this indicates that you aren't 'awake', which may actually well have been the case in this incident ... see last paragraph.

Other instances spring to mind, such as a friend criticizing me for walking out of a very violent movie, rather than accepting it with equanimity. For more on this see 'Detachment or Engagement?' in *The Happiness That Needs Nothing*. So a word of warning, to all of you who have 'awakened' and are thinking of 'coming out' so as to help others by providing your unique set of pointers (to awakening), you must be prepared for the brickbats that will be hurled at you. Luckily they will be of virtually no 'weight' as you won't take them personally (for you will have discovered that there is, in truth, no 'separate person') but it's still not pleasant. Actually they provide an ideal opportunity to test whether you are still 'awake', for if you find them painful then you have probably nodded off and need to reawaken, which can be easily done by noticing that they are just ephemeral objects appearing in the Pure Awareness that you 'are'.

Actually if you look at accounts of historical 'awakened beings' you will find many accounts of them being angry, upset, critical etc. Ramakrishna springs to mind as a wonderfully liberated being who vividly expressed all emotions - joy, delight, anger, grief etc. So awakening does not make one immune to the seemingly 'negative' emotions, but it does mean that they arise and subside quite spontaneously without any clinging to them. Awakening can have other wonderful outcomes such as:

Transcending all existential angst about the future and fate of the body/mind.

The end of all needless suffering caused by identifying oneself as an object.

No longer regarding 'others' as objects and thus not labelling them.

Not taking criticism personally as there is no 'person'.

No longer seeing the world through the murky filter of the small self.

Fearlessness – living spontaneously without fear running in the mind as a background program.

As well as these, there are those already given in *Beyond The Separate Self*:

Compassion. Once one sees that, at the deepest level, one is pure Awareness it follows that this is the case for all sentient beings. At this level there is truly no separation between oneself and any other being, and this naturally leads to compassion.

Discrimination between the 'real' and the 'unreal'. This level of pure Awareness is classified as the 'real' in that it is constant, unchanging and unaffected by any 'thing', Whereas the level of manifestation, of things, is classified as 'unreal' in that it is always changing and is governed by the laws of cause and effect. Once one becomes completely identified with pure Awareness then this becomes obvious and no discrimination is needed.

Love of God and one's fellow man. The word God means consciousness which has two states, at rest (pure Awareness), and in motion (manifestation). In this there is truly no separation as the essence (and the ground of) of all that exists, is consciousness, and true love is only present where there is no separation; in fact true love is 'no separation'... The Christian idea that 'god is Love' points to this, and love of one's fellow man naturally follows on from the realization of no separation.

Contentment, and remaining fundamentally unaffected by external circumstances. Pure Awareness is always in this condition, and thus complete identification with Awareness naturally leads to this... So irritations, upsets, anger etc., arise in this and subside back into this leaving it unaffected.

The degree to which these manifest depends on how established one is in 'awakening' – that is how much one flip/flops between the 'awakened' and 'asleep' states. Their expression will vary depending on character and personality which are unique for each of us. The point is that there is no fixed model for the behaviour of an 'awakened' being and thus, up to a point, one cannot use this to judge their

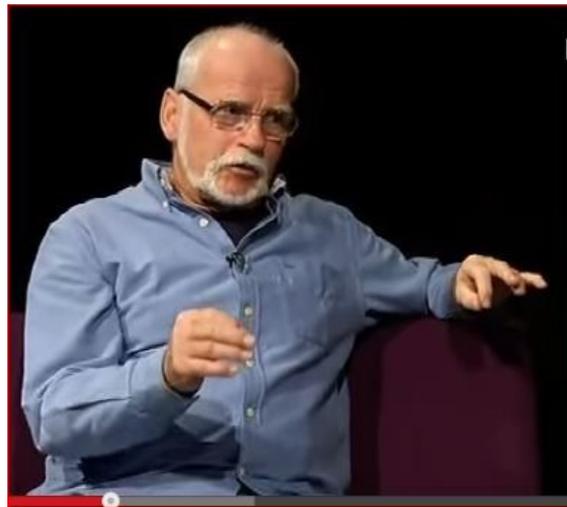
degree of 'awakening'. Also this means that any attempt to mimic the behaviour of any such being, in the hope that this will induce some degree (or appearance) of 'awakening' is futile.

One final point is that I have never claimed to be totally 'awakened' as I am still subject to the occasional flip/flop. Luckily this always produces unnecessary mental suffering which is used as a trigger to reawaken, a strategy I encourage all of my readers to employ. Either by immediately seeing that one is aware of this suffering which is just an object that has appeared in this Awareness, and that at the essential level one is this Awareness; or by reinvestigating this momentary experience, as given in the appendix, which again reveals that one is Awareness itself.

Colin Drake

Conscious TV interview of Colin Drake can be found at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ey_ECAtfdS4 Interview Conscious TV with Iain McNay



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Greville street Meetings for 2015

April 19th – Heidegger and Harding – Philosophy as experiential v. theoretical. Alan Mann

May 17th – Philosophy of the Implicit – Christopher McLean.

June 7th – Levinas–Shaking hands with Eternity – Peter Melser

July (?) – Meditation–What is it? (Or something on those lines)

August – August is a blank as Margot and I will be away in the first half of the month.

October (?) – Cloud of the Impossible – John O'Neill...Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement. On the book by Catherine Keller. November and December to be advised.

Grandchildren Speak: Sabrina, Ella, Lauren & Lewis

I asked our four grandchildren whose ages range from 13 to 18 what they consider to be the most important issues they face and gave them a couple of days to think about it. The following, in no particular order, is what they came up with:

- World-wide equality for women.
- Global fresh-water resources.
- Wisdom. (The getting of and its application)
- Equality and fairness.
- Animal welfare.
- Global warming.

I will now ask them how they think we should go about addressing these matters.

Alan Mann



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A Warning from Robert Penny

Anyhow Alan, my last point is better expressed this way, with respect to the points I've been making about Douglas's work: The truest view of any object is the most comprehensive, involving the most aspects of it. Douglas's books and essays and other publications demonstrate that the headless way is open ended; it is as far-teaching as one cares to make it. But a precautionary note is echoed throughout his books. The precautionary note of his that I've selected here is taken from Douglas's essay *Bankei* in his brilliant book of essays, *The Turning Point*, his last book of essays, compiled by him when he was in his 90's.

Robert Penny

"It is clear that to suppress our habitual conceptualising and do away with ideas is both impossible and absurd, and if we think we are succeeding we are dupes of one of the sillier concepts. Demonising concepts as unnatural and uncalled for as demonising feelings and sensations and percepts. The Universe is served up with generous helpings of all these vitamins, so to speak, and one needs a *balanced* diet. What one has to guard against is misplacing the items on the menu, as if one were spreading marmalade on one's fried plaice, or mixing caviar with one's mustard. One's No-mind belongs right here where one is (and is not) at Centre, while one's Mind (along with the notion of the Unborn, etc, etc.,) is an outflowing or emanation of this Centre into region after region, everything arriving and flourishing in its proper station. And this central No-mind or No-thing is one's ultimate refuge. To hang onto any idea (the nobler and profounder the more seductive) just won't do. It's literally for letting go of. Only it's ineffable Origin, its nameless, featureless unchanging Source, will never let us down."

Douglas Harding