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Greville Street Gatherings

Our monthly meetings were suspended because of Covid concerns. We substituted Zoom meetings for a while. I thought we might restart in May and the question now is whether to return to our face-to-face gatherings or continue to rely on Zoom. After a check with our regulars we decided it is probably best to postpone face-to-facers until we are all vaccinated. In the meantime, we have agreed to carry on with Zoom which has the advantage of connecting with friends too far away from Sydney to be at the traditional meetings.

So, our next Zoom meeting will be Sunday May 2nd at 11am. I circulate the Zoom access code to the address list of those who have indicated they want to be notified of meetings. If you would like to be notified and haven't already told me to add your address to the list please let me know. I welcome offers to lead us into subjects of interest. Since our last meeting Peter Melser and I have had a number of discussions on consciousness, and on the contribution of George Lakoff to the way we language experience. Peter has offered to tell us about his interest in this approach as the basis for our meeting this Sunday.

Musings on Experience

During a recent visit to Berrara where we spent a couple of days with Hilary and Peter, Peter introduced me to a large book by George Lakoff and had me read a section which he felt would help me get a better understanding of where he stands on the issue of reality, which indeed it did but I thought it also demonstrated my own position — that one's reality is dependent on the perspective one adopts. Lakoff seems to include my preferred perspective as one of his options, I thought this was later confirmed by reading what Lakoff had to say in this book about phenomenology.

During a dialogue over breakfast on our day of departure Hilary gave an example of occasions when we find the circumstances taking control of the situation, when the occasion is 'in charge' as opposed to my customary perspective which assumes that I, my self, is the controlling aspect. The example she described was of childbirth and how the mother's plan for delivery, good intentions, whatever, are almost invariably superseded when it happens by the demands of the moment. Mother finds that she is the participant but not the controller, she is absorbed in and overwhelmed by what is happening. I found this to be a very helpful and unexpected example of what I am claiming is an optional perspective in everyday awareness, when priority is given to experience over explanation. I then suggested that however unlikely this seems on first consideration, it is possible to adopt a participatory as opposed to a controller perspective in one's everyday doings. I would argue that my everyday doings are, as a consequence of this shift, converted from doing into being.

The significance of Hilary's example for me is that it demonstrates an experience in which experience is 'all'. There have been a few occasions in my life when I found myself dumped into what struck me as ego-free being (Note: not ego-less). The childbirth letting-go example is the clearest expression I have come across. It not only demonstrates that such a perspective is a possibility but that it is also a common experience. Whereas my everyday ego-centric perspective drags in all sorts of explanatory, imaginary and non-immediate concepts and thoughts this natural process is simply what is apprehended free of any input that is other than directly experienced, and, excluding in particular, the reflexive response that the experience is, by definition, qualified by previous events.

Any description is a step away from the realisation of the actual but it is helpful to try to attempt a description of how it feels. How does it feel? I think it best to look upon the necessary adjustment as a shift in the axis of agency. In consciousness, when freed from the known, agency passes from the individual to the undivided, from the ego entity Alan to whatever the occasion presents. It is then seen not as something that I 'do' but as 'what is' in action, simply what is happening. In short: the actualisation of being.

Considering that most mothers have the birthing version of this experience, why is it not given the degree of importance I think it deserves. I will have to enquire into that but I imagine that in the childbirth case it is accompanied by so much discomfort and pain that its positive aspects are overwhelmed, and the post-natal return to the status quo is welcomed as a blessed release.

Being is what I am—life. If that is so why does the 'actual' not prevail. I am reading a book on ageing by Robert Dassaix, *The Time of Our Lives*, on page 107 he refers to the Russian verb *prozen* which translates as 'seeing through to what has been there all along', the first person perspective revealed by the headless approach is a good example. I think the substitution of information for experience to be another way of looking at the question, the replacement of what is apprehended by what is known about what is apprehended. What do I mean by being? If being is simply 'what is', how do I fail to be it? I think the misunderstanding is related to

mistaken identity. I identify primarily with 'what is not', with memory and with 'what might be', my story, imagination thus obscuring, or relegating to the background, the actuality of the moment—NOW. If my individuality is based on what I have been and how I am viewed by others, a sense of self is assumed and understood as an entity rather than as a process and this 'entity' must be defended by my 'self' at all costs. The impersonal perspective of direct experience reveals this construction for what it is, as a non-entity, and with this realisation, all the possible consequences associated with the ending of me come rushing in, particularly with regard to death.

On the matter of death Dessaix seems to go along with Ernest Becker's views that fear of death is universal and inevitable. I think that is only true from the point of view of the entrenched assumption of self. He gives a description of the slime mould, a single celled blob that moves with a purpose, builds networks of pathways, solves problems, searches for food, forages and spawns and yet there is no 'it', (no self), no self as we understand it, no me entity, but is nevertheless a self-organising system, which as he then observes, is a good description of what he really is himself.

Back to Lakoff. I have been listening to some of his talks on You Tube and he is very impressive. As I listen to him unravelling the operation of the brain, how the various components work together, how we interpret what has been discovered and how much we have yet to discover I feel myself drawn into a sense of the overwhelming importance of knowledge and a gradual diminution of the value of experience. It is as though information is progressively painting out being. Hence my present research into participatory engagement with reality and, in particular, what first nation philosophy has to offer. There is an interesting Australian example of this explanation of our drift into an exclusively reason based perspective in the work of the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner, in particular his essay *White Man got no Dreaming* on which I have added a note later in this issue.

Alan Mann

Red is for Danger - A story BY Margot Mann

I bumped into Kirsty at the supermarket the other day. Well I didn't exactly bump into her because I shot out of sight behind a product display when I heard her speak to the woman at the check-out. That's when I knew for sure it was her: the low, musical voice unaffected by the passage of time was the real give-away. I was surprised to see that she was still in the carpark when I got there and I didn't plan to approach her, but then she looked up and saw me. We exchanged hugs and glad cries, and in the next awkward pause, decided we could spare half an hour for a coffee. She was wearing a high-necked blouse and her hair was quite long and loose, so I couldn't see the scar. With our lattes in front us (Kirsty ordered a double shot), we talked a bit about our respective families and exclaimed at the smallness of the world, that we should meet in a supermarket after all these years, but neither of us spoke about the time in our lives when we were really close. Not friends exactly, but close. In fact if I remember correctly, I don't think I liked her much but I loved her house and especially the garden. I used to go there every day after school while my mother worked before Josh was born. They lived a few doors down from us in Fothergill Street in a big old house with wrap around verandas and very old trees on a block which was obviously a fraction of its original size. Ancient

camellias and azaleas leaned against each other in their struggle for light and there were a few patchy hydrangeas, but any flowerbeds were long overgrown and grass and weed seeds blew into neighbours' gardens.

It was a perfect playground for a couple of eight year olds: we had a special secret place behind the old shed where we kept our little bottles of chemicals – that's what we called them but they were just coloured liquids. Every afternoon after school until I walked the short distance to my home at five, we would rush to our secret place and enter a different world, each of us keen to show the other our latest find. Occasionally Kirsty and I would speak to each other in the school yard, especially if one of us had made a spectacular discovery for our game, but we really didn't have much to do with each other during school hours because although we were the same age, we were in different groups.

At first we were simply engrossed in seeing how many different colours we could make and in finding tiny bottles of different shapes and sizes. We did experiments with berries, flower petals, different coloured chinks – anything that would give us colour. We were alchemists in the magic space behind the old shed, grinding, adding water, squeezing, grating and mixing. We may have even cast spells, I can't remember now. I do remember the first occasion that we lit a small fire and stewed some purple berries in an old saucepan. The resultant sticky brilliance was so spectacular that we sat back on our haunches and I could see at once that Kirsty and I had the same thought; we needed to put these beautiful colours to some use. It was all very well to have a large rainbow collection, but that part of the fun was beginning to pall and we now had to refine our ideas and move to the next stage of the game. We looked at each other and burst out laughing.

A couple of days later, Kirsty sidled up to me in the schoolyard, and after making sure no one was watching, she slowly uncurled her fingers to reveal some small scarlet berries. I had barely time to see them before she whipped her hand away and sauntered off. After school that day, with barely suppressed excitement, we strolled nonchalantly down to the old shed. Even Kirsty's mother, who mostly didn't concern herself with our welfare, sensed that there was something in the wind and said, "What mischief are you two up to?" but she didn't wait for an answer.

We used half a box of matches getting a small fire going and then we tipped the red berries into the old saucepan, added a small amount of water and waited for the mixture to boil and the berries to soften. We looked at each other. Kirsty spoke first. "Do you want to taste it?" she asked, and then added, "what if we're poisoned?" This aspect of the game was definitely a drawback and we sat there for a couple of minutes, taking it in turns to absent-mindedly stir the mixture. "I know," Kirsty said suddenly, "let's give some to Boofy and see what happens." Boofy was the family dog, a big ancient golden labrador who wouldn't hurt a fly but who had the reputation of eating without too much discrimination, even for a labrador. We must have convinced ourselves that this would be a good idea because Kirsty disappeared and returned a few minutes later dragging a reluctant Boofy by the collar. "Come on Boofs," she said to the dog, "here's something yummy to eat." The dog obligingly licked the spoon Kirsty proffered

and we sat down to await developments, if any. After what was probably a minute, but seemed much longer, the dog began to shake. After another minute, he began to froth at the mouth. I think we were screaming at this point, I don't really remember, but I do remember Kirsty, her face stony with fear, running to get her mother. Halfway to the house, she slipped on wet grass and as she fell, a broken branch scraped her neck and the wound bled profusely.

I didn't go to Kirsty's house after that. It was nearly the end of the year and I went to after-school care for the last few weeks of school. Perhaps it was my mother who told me that the vet said that Boofy must have eaten something poisonous and was lucky to be alive.

Researching in the Information Age

I probably do not need to warn anyone of the dangers of the internet, smartphones, and social media apps. like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Most people are familiar with the scam phone calls purporting to be from Microsoft, NBN, or some government department such as the ATO. These are not only examples of disinformation and theft by persons anxious to get hold of your bank card details or steal your identity, they are also forms of harassment, that are dangerous to mental health and feelings of wellbeing.

There is an online government site which allows you to report these activities, (scamwatch.gov.au). You can also, have your name recorded on the "do not call" register, but for some reason the overseas callers are still able to reach you and to harass you with seeming impunity. I am at a loss to know why the Government does not take more active steps to stop this menacing activity. When last I questioned government officials about it, they said that there was nothing they could do. Sophisticated hacking is a way of life, the inference being we have "to live with it".

If you have young children, adolescents, young adults or parents who are, for want of a better word "free thinkers", you need to inform them that ignorance is not the same as innocence. Some might even argue that the moment someone is born into present day society, the word "innocence" is lost. If you feel you know better, then consider the following examples.

Child rearing involves a period of maturation (i.e. slow evolving physical and mental growth). But perusal of modern school curriculums, especially in the area of early childhood education shows that children are being influenced with concepts and behavioural patterns far beyond their capacity to understand or evaluate them.

In topics like "the family unit" children are asked whether they have a mother and father, or two mothers, or two fathers, or a combination of these alternatives. The intellectual justification is that modern society is complex, and no one should feel excluded because of personal choices. Children as young as five and six do not understand concepts like exclusion, victimization, or what is meant by personal choices.

Years ago, young girls who were entranced by the games boys played, were labelled "tomboys". Similarly, boys often dressed as witches, supermen and child carers. This was all part of maturation. No one could have seen the day when adults would label such behaviour as being indicative of "gender preference".

Recently, this misguided attempt to interfere with Nature has reached astonishing proportions. It has been widely reported in the press that the terms "mother and father" should be replaced by "persons". Married couples are "partnerships" and breast feeding is to be replaced with "chest feeder" so that males do not feel excluded from the role of "motherhood".

Now let's move on to the question of smart phones, mobiles, or whatever you wish to call them. Young people live on their mobiles. They are constantly texting, or interacting with information. When adolescence approaches, this texting can evolve into sharing intimate pictures with friends. These friends (often without moral guidelines) share nude pictures, and before they know it, the pictures are circulated far and wide. Not only does this signal to other young people that this behaviour is acceptable, but those not wishing to engage in the activity are dropped from the peer group or meant to feel isolated and alone. Human behaviour is such that everyone wants to "belong". It is, for better or worse, one of the most basic instincts.

Those not "belonging" to the "in-group culture" are frequently the subject of bullying and exclusion. But that is by no means the worst of it. Once sexual imagery is captured and sent via Facebook, Twitter, or other social media, the person sending the message loses control of it. Copyright rests with the owners of social media. You cannot erase it once the image, or text, or rumour is sent.

If you read the messages sent with your Google connection, or other browsers, you will find that when you click the box "I accept the terms and conditions", you will be horrified at just how much privacy and individual freedom you have surrendered.

Let's take it one step further. Let us suppose that the cashless society becomes a reality. Governments will know not only how you spend your money, and how much you spend, but from that information they can work out what tax they can reasonably expect you to pay. Furthermore, they can sell the information to retail distributors, or anyone else who might have a vested interest in manipulating you. From the information - such as the number of times you visit your doctor or a hospital, they will be able to estimate your state of health and whether or not they should build more nursing homes or legislate for more liberal laws governing euthanasia.

All this may sound perfectly reasonable. I've heard people say that governments already know everything about us anyway. But I can't help questioning how close we are to Orwell's "1984". I can't help wondering whether modern education is just a sophisticated form of brainwashing and that the transformation of society and its values will not end in peace and prosperity, but in tears and ashes.

Next issue, I would like to present to you some facts and figures about modern warfare and the astronomical sums being spent to create weapons of mass destruction. In the meantime, may I suggest that those folk who have access to YouTube do a little research of their own. There you will find arguments of all colours and persuasion and it might be a good time to think about these issues for yourself. Tomorrow may be too late.

Trisha English.



met(')alogue

Sitting flat on page or screen
 poised in two dimensions
 or flying through the air
 as drawn from there
 and said out loud
 in three – or, with time, four
 Such words
 slanting agreeably or disagreeably
 still lack dimensionality
 still lack intentionality
 Empty plates
 Empty boxes
 Unless we choose
 in effect
 to energetically fill them
 as we wish them used
 As, let's say, self-reflexively
 all-inclusively
 transparadoxically
 transformationally
 fervently
 kindly
 more
 As a swirling discussion
 of forces, energies, forms

between this of mind
 and that of heart
 A log
 between the seen
 and an unseeable sea
 In a bridge of feeling
 subtle worlds wide
 In a tunnel deep
 to some unknown inside
 Of frames, of flux
 to be lit
 Yes ~ No
 Lit
 But not, like, gaslit
 More just a flame
 a licking
 lambent or vehement
 that lights itself
 quite by itself
 separates
 recombines
 Burning as a book of life
 not just tall-worded stories

Mal Mitchell

Touching the Sublime

(In the last issue I repeated Jack Geddes article in which he described his experiences during a tank battle during the Normandy campaign. An extraordinary awakening under fire which led to his interest in the sort of examples he writes about in this article, which is another reprint from the archive, this one from November 2001).

Do infants touch the sublime prior to becoming self conscious? Do they lose a sense of wonder, of eternity, and of things being ever-present? Do they bring these senses with them into the world, to lose them too soon? Do they experience a vision inspired by the wonderful newly presented world of colour and beauty? Such a vision as we might expect someone born blind to experience if their vision was suddenly restored.

The poet Henry Vaughan, referred to those early days when he “Shin’d in his Angel Infancy”. He recalls in shadows of eternity:

*When on some gilded cloud or flower
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity.*

All those who love the poetry of William Wordsworth will know the ‘vision splendid’ in his poem *Intimations of Immortality*:

*Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy.
But he beholds the light and whence it flows
He sees it in his joy.
The Youth, who daily, farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature’s Priest.
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended:
At length the Man perceives it die away.
And fade into the light of common day. (2)*

But nearly lost for ever for us, were surely the greatest of all writing in the English language concerning this infant vision, the *Centuries of Meditation*, by the Welsh mystic and poet, the Reverend Thomas Traherne (3), a seventeenth century contemporary of Henry Vaughan. His original Folios of writings, were discovered only in 1895 on a second-hand book barrow in Farringdon Road, London.

Will you see the Infancy of this sublime and celestial greatness? Those pure and Virgin Apprehensions I had from the Womb, and that Divine Light wherewith I was born, are the best unto this day, wherein I can see the Universe ... All Time was Eternity and a Perpetual Sabbath. Is it not strange, that an Infant should be Heir of the World, and see those Mysteries which the Books of the Learned never unfold.

The Corn was Orient and Immortal Wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sewn. I thought it had stood from Everlasting to Everlasting. The Dust and the Stones of the Street were as Precious as Gold. The Gates were at first the End of the World, the Green Trees when I saw them first through one of the Gates Transported and Ravished me, their sweetness and their Beauty made my Heart to leap, and almost mad with extasie, they were such strange and Wonderful Things: The Men! O what Venerable and Reverend Creatures did the Aged seem. Immortal Cherubims! And young Men Glittering and Sparkling Angels and Maids, strange Seraphick Pieces of Life and Beauty. Boys and Girls tumbling in the Street, and Playing were moving Jewels. I knew not that they were Born or should Die-.....”.

However, Traherne, in his sadly rather short lifetime, also left us his adult vision, which he thought was a return to his lost infant vision but further enriched by his adult experience:

So that with much adoe I was corrupted, and made to learn the Dirty Devices of this World, which I now unlearn and become as it were a little Child, that I may enter into the Kingdom of God.

The message of Thomas Traherne, so fortunately regained, is that the sublime is everywhere about us and that we should awake each morning knowing that we are, each single one of us, heirs to the whole world, so gloriously created. (Traherne’s Doctrine of Felicity).

Behind the mundane world the mystic and the poet, the writer, the painter, the great composer, the architect and indeed the nature lover, at times perceives a world of infinite wonder, permeated by love and beauty which he or she knows with absolute certainty is not a world that has been invented personally, but is eternally there, as solid as a rock, only more so! - a reality, never to be capable of adequate description, even by such poets as John Milton or Dante Alighieri.

Plato discovered this, over two thousand years ago, when he included love and beauty in his world of fixed and eternal ideas(4). If survival is simply a matter of tooth and claw, as the behaviourists and reductionists would have us think, then this other world is useless to our survival. In a broader sense, if we are not to self-destruct, we need increasingly to reach for this experience, and bring this sublime world down into our lives. This would surely have more relevance for our survival than a possibly useless quest to find the ultimate equation to explain all phenomena. Whence cometh this love and this beauty and our yearning for it? When did the truly sublime enter this world of ours and why? Was it before the coming of the dinosaurs? It must have been! For it is surely timeless.

Nature Mysticism

This is not the mysticism of the cell of St Theresa, St John of the Cross or other saints. The cell for this mysticism is much vaster, the living cathedral of nature, unspoiled wilderness and green pastures.

In addition to the creative arts of mankind, there is a world of wonder to be found amidst the scenery of living plants and creatures, away from suburban streets, factories, brick houses and noise. The beauty of Earth’s scenery, often, seems to exceed its component parts, and to strike suddenly silently and inexplicably into the human heart. Every lover, painter and poet knows this.

At night too, we should often look upward to the moon and the stars, which have their own strange beauty. Do you remember John Masefield's poem on the moonlight that turns everything to silver? Do you remember what Lorenzo said to his beloved Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*? (5)

Sit, Jessica Look how the floor of heaven Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.

There not the smallest orb which thou beholdst

But in his motion like an angel sings,

Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubims

Such harmony is in immortal souls,

Finally, I quote the great Hindu poet, Sir Rabindranath Tagore (7). He said that at the time of this experience he was standing on a verandah in Calcutta and watching the sun rise above the trees:

"As I was watching it, suddenly, in a moment, a veil seemed to be lifted from my eyes. I found the world wrapt in an inexpressible glory with waves of joy and beauty bursting and breaking on all sides. The thick shroud of sorrow that lay on my heart in many folds, pierced through and through by the light of the world which was everywhere radiant That very day, the poem known as The Fountain Awakened from the Dream flowed on like a fountain itself. When it was finished, still the curtain did not fall on that strange vision of beauty and joy There was nothing and none whom I did not love at that moment. I stood on that verandah and watched the coolies as they tramped down the road. Their movements, their forms, their countenances, seemed to be strangely wonderful to me, as if they were all moving like waves in the great ocean of the world When one young man placed his hand upon the shoulder of another and passed laughingly by, it was an event to me.. I seemed to witness, in the wholeness of my vision, the movements of the body of all humanity and to feel the beat of the music and the rhythm of a mystic dance."

Jack Geddes



The Dreaming

*White man got no dreaming,
Him go 'nother way.
White man, him go different.
Him got road belong himself.*

I recently become aware that first nations people see the world somewhat differently. Whereas I, and most of the people I know, default to a third person perspective, the traditional Aborigines seem to have a more participatory outlook, what we might call the first-person view. Here is the famous quote from Douglas Harding followed by an extract from Stanner's book *White Man Got No Dreaming*.

Douglas Harding: "To realize this instantaneous Now, to live in the present moment, taking no thought for to-morrow or yesterday - must be my first concern. And my second must be to find in this Now all my to-morrows and yesterdays."

*W.E.H. Stanner: Consider a few of the contrasts (between the first Australians and the colonisers). We are deeply interested in futurity. We try to foresee, forestall and control it by every means from astrology and saving to investment and insurance: the Aborigines are scarcely concerned with it at all; it is not a problem for them. Their 'future' differentiates itself only as a kind of extended present, whose principle is to be continuously at one with the past. This is the essence of the set of doctrines I have called *The Dreaming*.*

In Brentyn Ramm's latest paper *The Technology of Awakening: Experiments in Zen Phenomenology* he writes: In the history of Zen, when asked 'what is the Tao?' Zen master Yichu replied by opening his arms to the scene (Daoyuan 2016, p. 183).

I hadn't come across that before reading the paper but it almost exactly the same response as I was given by an Aboriginal guide when I asked if he could explain 'The Dreaming'. We were in the Northern Territory, at one of the famous gorges. *Alan Mann*

<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/3/192>

CASE 25, Dongshans "No-Knowing Face"

Xuefeng was about to leave Dongshan. Shan said, "Where are you going?"
 "Returning to the mountains."
 "When you came here, what road did you take?"
 "From Flying-Ape Mountains "
 "Today, toward what road will you go?"
 "Flying-Ape Mountains."
 "There is a single person not going to Flying-Ape Mountains. Son, do you know him?"
 "No knowing."
 "Why 'no knowing'?"
 "They have no face."
 "Son, already there's 'no knowing.' How do you know 'no face'?"
 Feng had no words.
 On behalf of others, Xutang said, "No use seeing with one's eyes."

The Record of Empty Hall: One Hundred Classic Koans, by Xutang Zhiyu. Translated with Commentary by Dosho Port.

"The discoveries of behavioural science show that the human body is more sophisticated than we have ever imagined. Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly clear that the body houses many different forms of intelligence or ways of knowing. And this whole body cognition or way of knowing can be very powerful and useful." - Kevin Flanagan, in *Everyday Genius*

Christopher Ash

From the Krishnamurti New Zealand Newsletter

What is your relationship with those clouds, full of evening light, or with those silent trees? Do look, sir, at those clouds and the tree as though you were looking for the first time. Look at them without thought interfering, or wandering off. Look at them without naming them as a cloud, or a tree. Just look with your heart and eyes. They are of the earth as we are!

J. Krishnamurti Meeting Life, Ch.18

From the Infinite potential Website:

[Infinite Potential | THE LIFE & IDEAS OF DAVID BOHM](#)

Undivided Wholeness in Flowing Movement

As a child Bohm had a fragile nature. He liked to wander in the mountains and streams around Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania where he grew up. One day when out with a group of friends Bohm was forced to cross a rapidly flowing stream by means of steppingstones, hopping from one stone to another. The stones were far apart and rather small and Bohm felt apprehensive. Bohm realized he had to jump from one stone to another without stopping in between. One had to be in a state of continuous movement while pivoting on one rock while moving to the next. This experience made a deep early impression on the young Bohm which he said profoundly influenced his work in physics. In those moments when crossing the stream, **he realized that consciousness is flowing movement, moment to moment awareness and not mapped out.** This theme has recurred time and again in his work.