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Issue 72 –April 2001

**THERE WILL NOT BE A GREVILLE ST. MEETING IN APRIL DUE TO EASTER**

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Editor's note

We didn't get much of a response to the proposal to extend our connections by linking up with the Transpersonal Email conference so that is in abeyance. Dave Knowles will keep us informed of progress. Maybe we will report conference happenings in the Nowletter so that anyone interested can follow up on particular issues under discussion.

Thank you for keeping up the supply of articles. For the first time in our history I am holding-over material because the 12 pages are filled. Keep it up! You will remember that we are confined to 12 pages because of postage limitations. Approximately one third of readers are taking delivery by email.

**Subscriptions: Postal \$12 per annum, Email – Free**

**The Nowletter appears between 10 and 12 times every year and is a vehicle for news and views about awakening to what is really going on. Contributions from readers are considered the most valuable content so please think about letting me have your thoughts, experiences, discoveries and any responses to what you read here.**

### **Mind your Language! By John Wren-Lewis**

Susan Blackmore maintains throughout her book *Dying to Live: Science and the Near Death Experience* (Harper Collins 1993), that she has no intention of debunking the spiritual significance of Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) when she explains them in terms of brain-functioning—and I believe her, but I doubt if most readers will. In fact when her book first came out, Phillip Adams was delighted to have her on his radio programme because her book casts real doubt on some of the most famous NDE stories that seem like evidence of life after death, and a leading NDE researcher refused to take part in discussion with her on the programme, I suspect for precisely the same reason. Susan comes across as a debunker despite her contrary intentions, and since I happen to agree with almost everything she says, I've been trying to figure out why.

The answer, I've finally decided, lies in the language she uses. This conveys what I can only call a depressive or down-putting feeling which for most readers is likely to cancel out her protestations about fully accepting the mystical message of NDE reports. I'm not talking about her literary style in any ordinary sense, which is delightfully clear and warm. I'm talking about that hidden content of language which poets use (though only a few of the very great ones like Blake have even begun to understand it), which preachers and journalists and political orators often *abuse*, and which scientists in their everyday work try to pretend isn't there. I can best illustrate what I mean by contrasting two possible alternative ways of describing my own NDE (to which, incidentally, Susan refers in her final chapter):

1. "The Poetic Way": As I came round, I found myself emerging from a kind of heavenly space that was no mere vacancy, but an infinite Aliveness which was also peace past understanding; moreover that peace has remained with me at the back of my consciousness ever since, for many years now, as the ground of my personal awareness in each instant, transforming all experience with the absolute knowledge that the hairs of my head are all numbered no matter what befalls. I know myself moment by moment as "Eternity, John Wren-Lewis", and everything I experience, even so-called nasty experience, is shot through with the living fact of Eternity's love for the productions of time.
2. "The Scientific Way": When the patient regained consciousness, the endorphin-levels in his brain were abnormally high, and this has somehow altered his brain's modeling-programme ever since, making him much less anxious about the future, even about the prospect of eventual dying.

The trouble with the first of those accounts is that it's not much use to a working physiologist. The trouble with the second is not only that it leaves out the depth of the feeling involved, but also, more important, that it subtly conveys the implication that things like endorphins, brains and information-processing programmes are factually real and solid while things like eternity, heaven and the divine love for John Wren-Lewis are 'only imagination'—when in fact all so-called physical things and events are as much products of imagination as the others. Now Susan in theory knows this very well: when she explains NDE visions of 'heaven at the end of the tunnel' or of meeting lost loved-ones as models constructed by the endorphin-flooded brain when its sensory input is cut off and its cells are firing abnormally because of anoxia, she is quick to add that the solid physical world we think we perceive in normal waking life is also a model which is being continuously constructed by the brain, and made to seem real by precisely the same processes as virtual realities are constructed and made to seem real. What she fails to allow for is the fact that the very use of phrases like 'models constructed by the brain' imply that 'brain' is something more real than the models, when in fact that is only the way of speaking that happens to be useful in studying brains scientifically. For purposes of actual living, phrases like 'heaven where my loved ones are still living' could be, and I think are, not just equally valid but more valid.

The materialist who says 'Ultimately human experience is only a modeling-process in the brain' couldn't be wrong, because the brain is itself a model produced by modeling processes in the brain. If any statement at all is to be made along these lines, it would have to be more like 'Ultimately there is only modeling', which might be better put as 'Ultimately there is only Consciousness'—not 'my' consciousness constructing models of an external universe, but Consciousness-as-such constructing 'me' as a kind of centre, along with a universe of space and time which 'I' perceive to contain other similar foci of Consciousness with whom 'I' communicate, as well as God knows what else. The capital 'C' is a hint of the fact that even this kind of statement won't really do, because the word 'consciousness', like the word 'modeling', implies a living activity, yet leaves out the quality of that aliveness: to try to get that quality in, we need expressions like 'I am one with the One who creates continually'. The point about mystical experiences, of which NDEs are just a special case, is that they are experiential, felt realisations of that implied fact, which for most of life gets ignored. From the physiologist's point of view they may be 'produced' by endorphins in the brain, but that in no way means that Reality is any less marvellous than is suggested by, say, the magnificent opening passages of

the Book of Genesis in which the One creates the world and finds it good: the endorphin-flooded brain is simply one way in which the One Reality experiences the marvel.

Susan's argument towards the close of the book is that when modern cognitive psychology discovers that all our experience is modeling, it points logically to Buddha's discovery under the bodhi-tree that isolated suffering selfhood is an illusion—and I would agree entirely. Where it seems to me that her case falls short is in failing to convey what it was about the Buddha's discovery which gave rise to legends about all the gods of the universe coming to bow down to him in gratitude for this enlightenment, when no-one I've yet met has ever felt that way about cognitive psychologists nor, I regret to say, about Susan's book. I'm absolutely with her in wanting to dissociate near-death research from airy-fairy theories about tunnels as transitions to other worlds, or about reincarnation, or about Beings of Light sending people back with World Missions and such like, but the reason I'm with her on this is that I actually know since my NDE that the world of everyday is not 'merely material'. It is a Wonder that contains all the marvels that the airy-fairy theories are trying, inadequately, to express. The trouble with all reductive explanations, even gentle ones like Susan's, is that their tone effectively throws out the baby of marvel with the bathwater of nonsense that comes from trying to describe the marvel too literally. Given this alternative, people who know in their bones that there is something much more than the ordinary round of 'birth, copulation and death' will hang on to the nonsense for dear life, and they're right!

My own experience of the marvel in and since the NDE leaves me literally agnostic about whether Eternity will find some way of continuing to play the personal game called John Wren-Lewis after the body which bears that name has died. My inclination is to think that enough will be enough both from Eternity's point of view and Planet Earth's, but the Infinite Eternal isn't governed by what I or anyone else can believe or doubt. What I know is that in the process of body-dying, the personal consciousness called John Wren-Lewis de-focuses, as it were, into Eternal Infinite Aliveness where 'before' and 'after' have no meaning, and as John now I find this prospect neither frightening nor offensive, because I've been there and it's indescribably wonderful.

Words fail in trying to say anything about it, but it's the absolute opposite of loss. The best I can manage in trying to describe it is to say that it embraces and includes the value of all J W-L's actual and possible 'achievements' and relationships without the limitations of time and space. That, I feel sure, is what the finite brains of some NDE-ers are struggling to visualise when they conjure up all-forgiving life reviews and meetings with 'lost loved ones' which so conspicuously lack any of the all-too-human characteristics that make real-life loved-ones such a bore at times! And as for life in time before death, all the resources of Eternity are available to each of us at every instant as the ordinary natural Ground of our personal being, and this includes all the value of 'spirit guides', 'wisdom from the other Side', patron saints, angels, archangels and all the company of heaven, without the Monty Python silliness that inevitably results from the finite mind's attempts to imagine such things concretely.

*John Wren-Lewis*

*(This article appears on Dr Charles Tart's web page—Parapsychology, Transpersonal Psychology and Consciousness—at <http://www.paradigm-sys.com/cttart/>. And a reminder that we published Susan Blackmore's paper Waking from the Meme Dream as a full issue—No.45 in June 98. Ed.)*

### **An Open Letter to the Next World Saviour**

From Hugh Garsden *This article first appeared in Consciousness Magazine.*

The following is intended mostly for serious consideration. It assumes the existence of a being who is about to emerge as a world saviour; with some kind of superhuman power or knowledge, such that they cannot be dismissed lightly.

Dear 'Whoever'

As you prepare for the task that lies ahead of you, I have been considering some of the obstacles and difficulties that you will face when you make yourself known. Some are not new, but they may warrant discussion in the context of the 21st century. I wonder how much you know about these times and the people who inhabit them, and how you plan to handle, for instance, the following issues.

## WHO YOU ARE

Most people on this Earth have their own idea of what the Saviour will be like, consequently you will be faced with 5 billion different expectations of who you will be. Some of these are grouped according to various religions and ideologies. They are varied, and often extremely rigid and contradictory. Will you be associated with a religion? If yes, you may alienate the followers of all other religions. Some will even denounce you as the devil—the opposite of the saviour you claim to be. Assuming you have come into the world in the normal way, you will be part of a culture and a race. Will you be Asian, Caucasian, Chinese, Indian ...? Will you be Zimbabwean, Canadian, Sri Lankan, Swedish...? Will you be white, red, black, yellow? Given that you will have to be one of these; it is certain that you are going to disappoint, or even alienate, those who expect something different. Similarly, you will have some kind of style, personality, or essence. Will you be a kindly, chaste, non-threatening holy one, a political and social revolutionary, a wrathful judge and redeemer, or an erudite wise-person? Will you be old or young? Male or female? Which of these; or something else, will satisfy our expectations of you? Will you be perfect? Many will expect you to be, according to their own definition. However, at the same time you will have to be human, and sympathetic to the human condition, you will have to be "one of us".

In today' s world, attitudes are very important. We like those with the same attitudes as us, and we can be intolerant and scornful of those who are different. To get us all onside you will have to satisfy everybody's pet obsessions and their causes. You will have to support abortion, oppose abortion, be left-wing, be right-wing, be vegetarian, politically correct; a traditionalist, a feminist, an environmentalist, a materialist, a post-modernist. You' ll have to be for law and order, and for freedom, be conservative, be liberal... If you have charm or charisma perhaps that will win us over, but human beings are extremely judgemental, stereotyping and categorising. Often, based on the slightest observation, they are likely to decide they don' t like you, and you' ll have a hard time winning them over after that. Can you be all things to all people? If not, can you still be a world saviour?

## YOUR LIFE - PAST AND PRESENT

Assuming you do come into the world in the normal fashion, you will have a past, a history, a childhood, a family, events and experiences that have brought you to where you are. Whether you like it or not, we will want to know all about these. You will be the most famous person of our times, even more famous than Madonna. We will want to know your life story. Investigative journalists will start digging. TV presenters and writers will want interviews. Your relatives and friends will be hounded for stories and information about your private life. Books will be written. Publishers will chase exclusive rights to your works. Womens magazines will be fascinated with your romantic relationships, if any. Tom Hanks will play you in a movie. We will want to know what shoes you wear, books you read, food you eat, and merchandisers will make full use of that ('The Saviour saves in Reebok!') All of these will occur without your permission, unless you are able to stop it. And does it matter? That' s up to you. Unless you have skeletons in the cupboard, these issues will probably be more a nuisance than a danger.

## QUESTIONS AND ARGUMENTS

People like to engage in endless debates about the most grandiose and trivial of matters. It is a technique used to avoid actually doing anything, and it ties up one' s intellectual and ideological opponents. These tricks will be tried on you. Firstly, we will spend so much time arguing that nothing you want of us will ever get done. Secondly, whatever you want us to do or understand will have to be explained to our satisfaction, down to the minutest detail. We will argue endlessly about what you REALLY meant, and we' ll end up with different ideas which you will have to correct. Any contradictions or inconsistencies in your teaching will be seized upon and questioned, and could be used to discredit you. You will need a cast-iron, incontrovertible presentation that satisfies everybody. Scientists will want proof. Mystics will want revelation. New-agers will want workshops. Regardless of what you want to say, expect it to be side-tracked by us asking questions, from the most important to the most ludicrous. "What is the meaning of life?"; "What is the true religion"; "Why is there evil in the world?"; "Is there life on other planets?"... Down to whether rap music is evil and if margarine is better than butter. Since you are the world saviour, you must have an answer for everything and advice for everybody on every topic.

## MIRACLES

If you have arrived to benefit us, will you end war, murder, rape, pollution, starvation, AIDS, and all our other troubles? To allow these to continue while you are here, and certainly after you have gone, is going to seem a little uncaring. If you have obvious powers, you will be asked to end our troubles

anyway. If you don't have the power, you cannot be a world saviour. In fact, you will be expected to usher in a paradise on Earth, that is, according to everyone's personal idea of it. You will also be asked to save people individually -- mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually. You will be expected to understand everything about everybody and immediately intuit what is wrong with me and what my own special problems are. Expect relatives of those who have died tragically or unnecessarily to come to you begging for the deceased to be resurrected. People will beg you for favours and help, and may be completely deserving of it. Can you help us all? If not, can you explain why not, and why her and not me?

#### MEDIA

The media exerts a great deal of control in this world. Human beings are easily swayed by image and impression: and the media manipulates what impressions and images they get. Interviews on television and in the newspapers can be edited and interpreted. Reports can be suppressed and invented. Positive and negative opinions can be created. Through these mechanisms the media can favour and disfavour, exalt or destroy. You will need some way of getting your message through so that you'll be honestly represented as the person, or whatever it is, that you are.

You can try publishing your own books, videos, World Wide Web site etc., but the mass media will still dominate. People want quick, easy generalisations for the 6 o'clock news. You will need to take media-management and image-management lessons just like our politicians. For example, you will need to know how to construct and present a "soundbite". Can you express your teachings in 10 seconds? Perhaps you could do "infotainment" programs. They're currently a popular way of receiving information.

Ultimately, only those who have direct contact with you will get the message as you intend it. Perhaps telepathy will be necessary for the rest of us.

#### THREATS

Your mere presence here will be a great threat to those who oppose you or who oppose any change in the status quo. Some may perceive that your presence will cause social unrest, or will cause religions to fall, or governments to lose office. If you are opposed to material wealth, the stock market may crash. You may even intend some of these. Either way, you will be under attack from those who are threatened. They will try to discredit you through ridicule, scandal, rumour. They will try to kill you. They will use threats against others to force you into submission. They may even threaten to harm themselves. If you wish to protect yourself and others you will need absolute power, and if you have that, you will be criticised for having it (doesn't absolute power corrupt absolutely?).

#### CONCLUSION

All I am doing here, apart from alerting you to these issues (which, with your Omniscience, you probably know already), is to question how you'll deal with them. I am not saying that there aren't lots of us who will be on your side, and glad that you are here. But to be for everyone, for the world, is a difficult task. We are diverse, and we have our "us" and "them" mentality. We also seem to like destroying anything that's life-enhancing, positive, and genuine. That could make it doubly hard for you. In many ways we are still very tribal and primitive. You will have to find some way of dealing with the concerns I've raised. Perhaps you already have. I wish you luck.

Finally, for myself, I hope that whoever you are and whatever you do it'll be totally unexpected.

*Hugh Garsden*

#### **Facts & Fallacies – follow up**

*There are two further contributions to this exchange and to save space, time and to help the flow I have interspersed comment as immediate feedback to my correspondents:*

Letter from Ann Faraday

Dear Alan,

Thank you for sharing details of your peak experiences and headless experiments. You shouldn't be coy about using words to express your vision, even if they do sometimes distort the meaning. If you're not a poet, dramatist or artist, what else can you do, especially if your interest is Dialogue? As you know, John Wren-Lewis and I have been engaged in the "intolerable wrestling with words and meanings" for almost a decade now as we attempt to communicate as specifically as possible the felt-sense of eternity-consciousness and no-self in everyday life. So chin up, Alan, and press on!

I'm glad you've claimed ownership of your fallacies, and don't intend them to be a definitive, universal list of alleged distractions along the mystic way. But I still need to know more specifically what practical difference these beliefs or fallacies made to your own spiritual quest? I'm not interested in

the time wasted or all the headaches suffered while thinking about them in your armchair; the mental knots are still clearly visible in the list appearing in Issue 69 of the NOWletter. I'm interested to know how these fallacies held you back, damaged your life or devalued your mystical experiences. I note that they didn't prevent you from attending and benefiting from Douglas Harding's 1990 workshop. So, in the interests of clearer communication between us, and of updating our dialogue for the benefit of readers, please allow me just one more ( I promise) personalization as a guide to where I see us standing at the moment:

'I, Alan, used to believe that enlightenment depended on grace; that my glimpses weren't the 'real thing;' that spiritual practices might actually hinder my progress; that my ego would be totally transcended; that I should be experiencing ecstasies; that something was missing from my daily life; and that enlightenment was some kind of personal attainment. These beliefs and expectations have hindered my spiritual progress in the following direct and concrete ways.....(e.g. I gave up all spiritual practice; I tried to kill my ego; I went into psychotherapy; I took up ecstatic dancing; I ignored the marvel of everyday life; I regarded my mystical experiences as some kind of low-level enlightenment which led me to....??')

*No, I don't think I suffered from the beliefs you outline above. Krishnamurti was a good antidote to any tendency to get swept off my feet by the fanciful. I just saw, from time to time, that there was a broader perspective and I became very interested in getting to the bottom of what it meant.*

Please reply with concrete evidence to support your claims, and leave intellectual rationalization where it belongs - in the armchair.

*Well, I'm not sure I can add to what I've already said in previous notes. Encountering the obstacles has not been at all as catastrophic as you seem to imply. I see them as simply part of the process. The consequences are that I involve myself in situations which enable the expression of all points of view, for example; the Nowletter and Dialogue. I am suspicious of certainty and I'm much more interested in impersonal fellowship (whatever that might be) than enlightenment, whatever that might be.*

Just as I thought I was starting to understand your situation, you land me with another impossible proposition - and before breakfast too! Please explain how 'any attempt to transcend the lower by becoming the higher, on a full-time as opposed to a part time basis (is just one more third-person example of ) greed and ambition.'" Who are these greedy people, and what exactly are they up to? Should I be concerned?

*I went back and read the paragraph you refer to and can't understand why you don't understand what I said. I just meant it was Fred up to his usual antics. What cause for concern?*

I'm off to mail this letter now before I burn another dinner! Cheerio!

Anne Faraday

#### Letter from Lucian Loren-Rymaszewski

Alan

I was surprised to hear that most of the reactions to your "Fact or Fallacy?" piece were not overwhelmingly positive. When I read it, I thought it was one of the most helpful lists of ideas on the subject and I believe it deserves to be more widely read. (By the way transpersonal and personal are in the wrong columns?) (*Will be fixed.*)

Following are my somewhat disjointed comments on some of the fallacies.

1. Inaccessibility. You are saying that Seeing comes not by grace, but through shifting your perspective. Is this true? Seeing sometimes seems to come spontaneously, which is all that "grace" really means. One of the cornerstones of the Headless Way is that this First Nature or Awareness is always available through an act of will. However, it seems that many people who have initially had some success with the experiments find that they don't always seem to work for them (*Yes, on both counts. I didn't mean to imply it was either or, I think it is a matter of both. But your comment made me wonder whether it should always be described as 'grace' irrespective of spontaneity?*)

3. Impotence. I would group this with number one, because it is about our ability to do something in order to See. *I take your point but I feel there is a need to distinguish between "it can't be got at" and "I can't do anything".*

Firstly, I don't think you are implying that ALL spiritual practices are worthwhile. Any practices that reinforce the idea that First Nature is something I will realize at some future time should be excluded. They may possibly have some benefits in their own right, such as better health, personal development,

entertainment etc. However, these should be seen for what they are, and not as having much if anything to do with seeing our First Nature. *(Yes, that's better)*

Secondly, I'm not sure I completely understand your wording. Are you saying that we can act as First Nature, even when initially acting as second nature? Is the following another way of putting what you are saying? First Nature is present here, now. It is only being obscured by second nature. However, this is not really the case, because second nature is just a masquerade of First Nature, with no independent reality. *(Yes, that's closer)* The thought that I am being blocked by second nature is actually just second nature continuing to block First Nature. (Some might say a desperate attempt by the ego to continue its imaginary existence, but I question whether characterising the second nature process as always bad and sneaky is helpful). When second nature sees this, the imaginary block ends. This leads to:

6. Something missing. First Nature can never be divided. First Nature is Awareness. Because Awareness in its entirety is here now, even my confused second nature state of mind is already First Nature. Is this what you mean? *(Yes, what is – is it!)*

I feel forced to accept this. But despite all my other comments since I am always identifying as second nature, I often do feel that I am missing something in comparison to those who say they no longer do. *(Yes, that's it too – is it not?)*

2. Continuity. Firstly, I think this is an important point because not everyone knows that even for many "realized" people the realization can be intermittent, or fade. But this does seem to be partly in contradiction to the insight that "there is nothing missing". This point could be misleading if it leads us to believe that awareness is something we had in the past, and something we will have again in the future. We remember particular experiences as being awareness, *(I call this - becoming stuck in my truth)* and project the image of our partial memory as something we desire to get in the future. In so doing, we are likely to overlook our present awareness. *(Yes)*

7. No personal enlightenment.

As a comment on this point, I would like to question Gary's contention:

Quote from p.6, issue No. 70

*"I meant to say also that I could choose at any moment to relate to a dreamer but there is an insight that stops me from entering their self-caused world of suffering it takes a tremendous amount of concentrated energy and it will cause me to suffer unnecessarily. This is not an intelligent thing to do. If this sounds very harsh it is if one is totally identified with one's self-concept. However, the opposite is not possible. A person who is totally identified with his or her self-image cannot have a relationship with someone who is not interested in the self. The energy and commitment that is needed to sustain a relationship based on images will not be forthcoming by the one coming from 'inner freedom'. I believe that K also made similar statements ie that it was possible for someone who is 'egoless' to have a relationship with someone who was a searcher but not the other way around."*

Quote ends.

I think that Gary is wrong. It seems to me that if I am in relationship to someone who is suffering I have some responsibility to help them. Of course it may be too much trouble. But if say "I am not suffering because I am above it all, and can do nothing to help if they don't become like me" I am just kidding myself. I would just be creating an image of myself as "an enlightened person", in other words creating an interest in my self in order to avoid the unpleasant task of dealing with the other person's suffering. Dealing with it and truly being aware of "what is now" means first of all acknowledging their suffering, and trying to understand it. Dealing with it might mean helping someone disidentify, but most people aren't ready for that. They feel pain and don't want what seems like someone else's abstract or incomprehensible ideas forced on them. I'm not usually ready for it myself, and pretending I'm too disidentified to be able to care's just another sign that I'm not really "coming from inner freedom". I'm just identifying with the desire not to "suffer unnecessarily". There are plenty of other "lesser" things I can do to help, the first being to listen, try to understand and be patient. If I see that I am not separate from someone else, it means dealing with their suffering in a similar way to how I deal with my own hunger, desire or pain, or with tidying up the mess in my room. I wouldn't fast just because I thought my stomach was unenlightened and should practise detachment from its hunger.

Also you may have heard of the practice of "assuming all other beings as enlightened". I believe it deserves to be practised occasionally by people who think they are the enlightened ones. I often find that "unenlightened" people have much better insights into reality than I find in the writings of the

"enlightened". Krishnamurti evidently by his personal actions and words caused quite a number of people considerable suffering, and when questioned about it reportedly would say nothing except "I have no ego". To me this is one of several things about Krishnamurti that shows such a lack of self-knowledge that doubt is thrown on whether his entire teaching has any worth at all.

*Lucian Loren-Rymaszewski*

*(Thanks for the feedback on this one. I appreciate your help in bringing errors of fact and expression to my attention. I will give it a good grooming in the hope of making it presentable if not (always) acceptable. Ed.)*

### **Clay Jar**

Inside this clay jar there are meadows and groves and the One who made them.

Inside this jar there are seven oceans and innumerable stars, acid to test gold, and a patient appraiser of jewels.

Inside this jar the music of eternity, and a spring flows from the source of all waters.

Kabir says: Listen, friend! My beloved Master lives inside.

*Kabir (1440-1518)*

### **A few thoughts on 'free will'.**

I vaguely recall a saying that went something along the lines of 'heresy is usually found not in what is affirmed but in what is denied'. Exponents of Advaita frequently deny free will. Indeed, some argue that the notion of a willing self is a fundamental obstacle to enlightenment. The belief that free will is an illusion is called determinism. While remaining open minded about the actual truth of this matter, (what else could one be on an issue that has kept professional philosophers employed for over two hundred years?) I have strong feelings of disquiet about determinist positions particularly when they are presented in a somewhat cavalier fashion as being self-evident after only cursory thought. Having plumbed the depths of my memory to peer through the smoky haze of my undergraduate days studying philosophy, here is some of my thinking on the issue:

**I** Determinism is the belief that our sense of being in control of our actions is an illusion. It has a number of different arguments. But the most common one - causal determinism - is based on the paradigm of classical (Newtonian) physics: all acts, intentional or otherwise, have their cause in immediately prior events, in a causal chain that goes back to the big bang. In summary:

- 1) All actions are caused
- 2) Therefore my actions are caused
- 3) Therefore the notion of agency is an illusion.

Causal determinism arises out of the world of classical physics and mechanism and is based on a metaphysical notion of law: things conform to universal laws that precede them. Objects 'X' and 'Y' function in accordance to a set of universal laws. Object 'X' interacts with object 'Y' which subsequently exhibits a change of state 'Z'. We say that X causes Y to do Z in accordance with the relevant governing laws. So, the movement of one billiard ball can be determined by knowledge of the velocity and direction of the ball that hits it. If you know the relevant facts about the objects, and you know the relevant laws concerning their motion, you can accurately predict the outcome. Back in determinism's heyday, it was argued that in principle, if we knew all the laws governing the universe, and we had a complete and accurate snapshot of the universe as it is now, we could map its entire history, including the lives of each individual person, from the beginning to the end!

**II** I will return to the notion of universal law later, but first I want to raise the question of whether human behaviours, which involve mental acts, are the same kind of events as the motions of objects and thus whether the term 'cause' when used of mental acts, is referring to the same thing as when it is used of physical interactions.

If you were looking for your glasses, and your wife says that they are on the book shelf, and, as a consequence, you go to the book shelf, quite a different kind of causality is involved: information. What is it that your wife's information shares in common with a force acting on a billiard ball? To generalise from the determinism of classical physics to a determinism that includes mental acts, you must first establish that information and forces are, in some relevant way, the same kind of thing.



Because determinists assume just that, it is appropriate to refer to their theory as ‘*metaphysical* determinism’.

(Some might want to jump in here with an appeal to computers: “does not information cause computers to act in predetermined ways?” I would argue no, it is not information that acts on computers but the machine code instructions into which the signs that are information to us are encoded. This machine code has as much semantic value to a computer as the inky markings we call print has to a book: it only acquires meaning when a sentient organism who understands, or seeks to understand, the text views it. [It goes without sayings that there are many real philosophers out there who may wish to argue the contrary.]

**III** Let’s now briefly take a closer look at mental acts and the related notion of ‘free will’. Whether or not our actions turn out to be determined, and thus the term ‘free will’ turns out to be a misnomer, I believe that the term is pointing to something significant, something we may wish to preserve.

The term ‘free will’ alludes to actions that are intentional or volitional, rather than unintentional or non-volitional. This contrast can be clearly recognised in comparing, for example, a muscle twitch and moving a piece in a game of chess. Perhaps volitional action can be understood as behaviour that involves my centre of psychological organisation rather than the myriad of peripheral, or pre-personal activities of my organism.

Because our choices always occur within the context of a world of ‘givens’, this freedom is best described as ‘*finite* freedom’. For example, a volitional act will be ‘holonic’, i.e., it will both be influenced by sub-volitional factors (e.g., a chess move can be influenced by tiredness) and influence these factors (e.g. the intention to move a chess piece will cause the particular muscle movements required to fulfil the intention).

I believe that the distinction between volitional and non-volitional acts is a necessary one. For instance, our systems of justice would collapse without this distinction. A volitional act cannot be cut adrift from the actor’s intentions; non - volitional acts are unintentional. Mostly, we know when our behaviour is or is not volitional. Blinking is (mostly) non- volitional. A psychotic act may not be volitional [or its intentionality may be mistaken: I attack my wife thinking that I am attacking a demon-“for God’s sake, why would I want to hurt *my wife*?”]. An addictive craving or severe pain is not volitional: but could lead to volitional acts. Were I thus to seek relief from [non-volitional] suffering by way of an illegal action, I could still be prosecuted for that action but my suffering may be seen as a mitigating circumstance.

Intentional acts and unintentional acts appear to require different kinds of explanations. Unlike the actions of say, rocks, human behaviour is goal focussed. Intentional acts are usually explained in terms of reasons and motives, i.e., psychological ‘causes’ that involve intended future outcomes. To understand my behaviour, you do not examine my brain, you ask me questions:

I am walking to the shops.

Why? (Is it because I am being caused to go to the shops by some external agency?)

No: I am going in order to buy some milk.

Why am I buying some milk? (Is it because I have a craving for milk that is forcing me to buy it against my will?)

No: it is because we are having a guest over for afternoon tea, etc, etc.

Unintentional acts, on the other hand, are usually explained in terms that do not involve reasons, such as biological causation. These are non-teleological, involving more mechanistic style explanations that look for the reasons for an event in the events that immediately preceded it. The loss of intentionality is not a quality of enlightenment but of madness.

Because humans inhabit the physical and biological, as well as the mental and spiritual, dimensions, we are engaged in both intentional and unintentional processes. There are real differences between these intentional and unintentional actions, which are in danger of being blurred by the belief that everything is determined. Our freedom, to some extent, is a product of our ability to act intentionally.

**IV** Earlier, I argued that the notion of universal laws was essential to the determinist view. The idea here was that the universe operates according to laws; i.e., the laws of physics etc prescribe the behaviour of physical existents.

But there may be another way of understanding the laws of the physical universe: instead of seeing laws as pre-existing realities, it could equally be argued that laws are better understood as generalisations that humans invent to explain how things behave in accordance with their own nature in interaction with other things behaving according to their nature. While washing the dishes I drop a crystal glass and it shatters on the floor. I drop a rubber ball on the same floor and it does not shatter; rather, it bounces back. Two similar actions, two very different outcomes. Why the difference? The

significant difference between the two events is due to the nature, or structure, of the two objects. The cause of the glass breaking was not some external law, but its own inherent nature when placed under a certain condition [colliding with a hard floor]. Rather than *prescriptions*, laws are *descriptions*, and descriptions do not cause the things they describe.

Now it has been argued by Plotinus and other philosophers that matter is alienated Spirit—it is Spirit at its most denatured. If Spirit is freedom, then matter—the subject of the ‘hard’ sciences, is the least free, the least volitional. But even here, I am led to believe that hard ‘causality’ only seems to be uncontroversial at certain levels, such as the atomic and above. When investigating the cosmos at sub-atomic levels, the deterministic paradigm runs into difficulties.

And humans? Clearly, as physical beings we do what physical objects do as generalised in our scientific laws of physics, and the same principle applies to us as biological beings behaving like biological beings. But we are also, significantly, mental and spiritual beings whose actions are intentional and, in that respect, free. Different kinds of things behave in different ways: rocks behave unfreely, organisms with more freedom, and intentional (psychological) beings with greater freedom again. But in none of these cases need we say that their actions are prescribed and thus necessary.

Anyway, to me, this feels more consonant with a non-dual approach that sees nature, not as conforming to the laws of a cosmically disassociated deity but as a complex and diverse expression of the God in whom ‘we live, move and have our being’.

**V** So far I have pointed out some difficulties for determinism; I do not believe for a second that I have proven it to be wrong. It could be that our sense of finite freedom is illusory and we are all part of a vast causal network. If this were true, however, we would be violating a very central sense of what is involved in being human. The sense of volition is quite primitive. I remember back to when I was about six years of age, listening to a news report about children who received a light sentence for a crime because of their age. I thought, ‘that is wrong, I’m younger than them and I know I’m responsible for my actions’. Clearly, the context of this sense would have been somewhat primitive, (oriented to external, rather than internal standards) but the sense of responsibility was still very strong.

My feeling is that if we see ‘volition’ as a mistake, we will be untrue to our sense of sin and estrangement, and trivialise or make incomprehensible some of the greatest literature our species has produced. Sin is not just about what I do, but what I *will* to do and involves the will’s distortion (from willingness to wilfulness or willessness). A full sense of sin lies not in betraying some external code but in the betrayal of ourselves—betraying what we hold most dear (e.g., loved ones, our country, our faith). It also presumes volition. This is the essence of tragedy. It is part of our greatness. My experience as a psychologist confirms what we have known as a species for millennia: the anguish of guilt is not salved by the shifting of blame. Rather, healing is achieved by a realistic appreciation of our human finitude, the acknowledgement of responsibility and the acceptance of forgiveness.

**VI** Yet despite the primitiveness of our sense of volition, the mystical traditions hold that our pre-reflexive awareness is more primitive still. In fact, it *is* us. So your sense of volition can be the object of your awareness. This is where Advaita comes in. In saying that free will is an illusion, they are encouraging you to cease identifying with your volitional nature and, rather, be aware of it. And because you are no longer identifying with it, it appears to just happen and do its own thing, along with everything else.

But when they say that it is an illusion, I believe they are mistaken. They are confusing a higher order with a lower order, or they are letting a higher order repress a lower order. From a perspective of resting in awareness, everything can appear as the free play of the Spirit. If we are to see all our acts as the play of the Spirit, it is the play of the spirit *in, through and as* you, an intentional being. It might be truer to say that according to transpersonal traditions, growth is about dropping one’s identification with the self, rather than blurring real distinctions within the self.

To distinguish volitional from non-volitional behaviours is necessary for a mature appreciation of what it is to be human. To the extent that our acts are intentional we can say that we are free. Nevertheless, there are degrees of freedom. The greater freedom lies in our true nature, the free Spirit that plays our being. Spiritual growth involves, through the transcendence and embrace of that which is lower, first claiming one’s finite freedom (as a mature ego) but then claiming infinite freedom (as Spirit).

*Eric Best.*

PS. The argument introduced in the second paragraph of part 4 was lifted from <http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/swartz/freewill1.htm>. Read the original - it is argued much more convincingly than I have managed here!

### **A Question For William**

When the following poem arrived I asked the author for a few words by way of introduction to which he replied:

John Wren-Lewis's "Adam, Eve and Agatha Christie: Detective Stories as Post-Darwinian Myths of Original Sin," Nowletter 69 had me feeling somewhat uneasy – particularly as regards unmasking. Was Blake a Gnostic? Are Blake and Krishnamurti in the same boat? This is a sort of response—hopefully not more unmasking!

#### A Question For William.

Dearly beloved William Blake,  
Nobody thinks you were a fake,  
Nobody thinks you were on the take,  
But could it be you made the mistake  
Of being a drastic, Gnostic?

Just how is the Gnostic any better,  
What makes his holy water, wetter?  
What is the difference of his fetter,  
To his law and to his letter  
From the Annabaptist, Baptist?

Here I certainly imply no shame,  
But does not your very highest aim,  
Have concealed within its frame  
The source of a quite different game  
Of religion trying to dispel, gospel?

*David Allan*

### **Bishop Goodhew**

*Under the heading 'A good man departs with a timely warning' Chris McGillion wrote an article in the Sydney Morning Herald following the retirement of Bishop Harry Goodhew which included the following:*

Before an audience whose members represented many faiths and none, he explained why he continues to hold the Christian faith: "I do not believe," he said, "that either you or I are the chance products of blind and meaningless processes, processes that - by a myriad of chances and through a labyrinth of purposeless meanderings - have produced creatures like ourselves who find themselves burdened with an insistent moral consciousness, and are inspired by irrepressible aspirations for meaning and values, for goodness, truth, justice and love, things which, if the materialist's view of reality is really to be taken seriously, must in the last analysis be considered to be wholly delusional."

It is precisely these "delusions", Goodhew pointed out, that define us as human and appear to be a fundamental requisite of our wellbeing. So they cannot be delusions at all, he argued, but must be intimations of the transcendent in the experienced world.

Not everybody will agree with this but can anyone point to a bishop, of any church, who could articulate a more succinct case for his beliefs?

**Meetings Sydney**

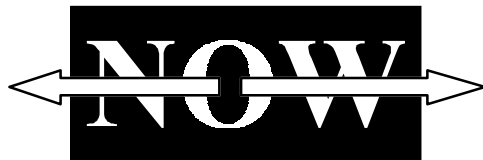
Academy of the Word Seminar Programme –  
Under St Peter’s, Devonshire St., Surry Hills  
Second Tuesdays 6.15pm - Healing & Well-being  
Fourth Tuesdays 6.15pm - State of the World  
Dr Alex Reichel (02) 9310 4504

**Nowra** - Call Riche 4423 4774

1. Dialogue Group meets the first Saturday of the month from 4-6pm  
The Tea Club, Berry Street, Nowra - Opposite Roxy Cinema -
2. Also - 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday. At 11am 3/117 Berry st., Nowra

**Greville St. Meetings and  
Nowletter gap.**

**There will not be a Greville St.,  
meeting on Easter Sunday (April  
15). The next will be on May 20<sup>th</sup>.  
There will no meetings at Greville  
Street in June and July when  
Alan & Margot will be travelling.  
There will also be a two-month  
gap in Nowletters (June & July).**



**If unable to deliver please return to:  
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**DIALOGUE MEETINGS SYDNEY AREA**

<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>DAY OF MONTH</b>	<b>MEETING PLACE</b>	<b>TIME &amp; CONTACT</b>	<b>Phone Nos.</b>
City	Third Saturday	Theosophical Society Level 2, 484 Kent St., City	2.30pm Terry O'Brien	02 9949 8379
Chatswood	Third Sunday	81 Greville St. (off Fullers Rd) Chatswood	10.30 am Alan & Margot Mann	02 9419 7394
Clontarf	Fourth Sunday	49 Peronne Avenue Clontarf	11am Terry O'Brien	02 9949 8379

