



Issue 93 – October 2003

Meetings (10.30am - 3rd Sunday)

81 Greville Street , Chatswood

Next Meeting – 16 November 2003

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Editors Note,

Thanks to this month's contributors. Please note the October meeting at Greville Street is cancelled, Margot and I will be away. Things return to normal in November with the usual meeting on the third Sunday, 16th.

Additions to the website. I have added Eric Best's sermon [You Are the Light of the World](#) to the *Traherne Poems and Articles* page and George Schloss's correspondence, [Letters to Carl and Anne](#) to the *Harding Articles* page. I am now progressively adding poems to the *Traherne Poems and Articles* page.

Correction and apology to Joan Tollifson

The final paragraph on page 3 of [Enjoying the Perfection of Imperfection](#) should read: "But none of this has to be a problem. We do what we can to relieve pain, to improve physical functioning, to change oppressive social conditions: aspirin, acupuncture, surgery, wheelchair ramps, legislation, consciousness raising, whatever. But perhaps it can be done without expectations, **without** attachment to our personal ideas of how everything should be, without idealism and blame, with more openness and compassion. As we rest in what's actually happening, we discover the complete perfection of imperfect existence".

I printed ' with attachment' by mistake. Joan thinks you would have all worked out that I' d got it wrong!

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.

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The Importance of Worldview for Wellbeing from Alex Reichel

“...may He give you the power through His Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong...” St. Paul to the Ephesians 3:16

This paper is headed by a short phrase from St. Paul. Not only has Rene Girard's theory of mimetic desire reinstated the traditional canon of Western literature but he has shown that the JUDEOCHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES have uncovered the hidden mechanisms of human culture "hidden from the foundations of the world". Hence their capital importance in the psychological and anthropological wellbeing of the human prospect, not only for the West but the entire world. In seeing this I have no hesitation in quoting St. Paul's rather convoluted sentence in full. He is kneeling before the Father praying that "Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have the strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; until knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God" (Eph:3:1619). Now this sentence contains many mystery words but I will draw attention to just a few.

The expression "the breadth and the length, the height and the depth" is an expression from Stoic philosophy which means the totality of the cosmos. The verb "to grasp" is also a technical word from Greek philosophy. Thus to grasp this totality requires strength and empowerment from a reality known as the anointed one of God. This implies that this hidden self, the heart, has the capacity to receive certain live-in realities, not only from society but also from the transcendent. Girard insists that we are interindividual persons, being incapable of integration of ourselves. Incidentally the JudeoChristian scriptures use the word "power" rather than "energy". This latter term only occurs once or twice in those scriptures where a Greek influence is discerned; viz. the Septuagint.

The hidden self has then the capacity to take on board entities which can make it co-terminous with the cosmos and beyond. But it can be otherwise: there can be education and its opposite, ignorance. We can thus picture the human self waxing from hiddenness to manifestation in the world, from subjectivity to objectivity. We can thus talk of the subjective self, the objective self and the process of development from the one to the other. St. Paul's text also opens up for the self a mystical awareness beyond knowledge and attained through love. But let us concentrate on knowledge, that essential human good which is the object of education. I will have recourse first to a simple metaphor.

In the Foreword¹ to a recent book, Jean Houston tells the remarkable story of an encounter which she and her father had with the famous ventriloquist, Edgar Bergin. Jack Houston was a comedy writer and a friend of Bergin's. When he and Jean arrived at Bergin's hotel suite they found the door open. They entered quietly and then could hear an animated conversation taking place in part of the room between Edgar Bergin and his ventriloquist's dummy, Charlie McCarthy. They were amazed to find that Edgar Bergin was asking Charlie McCarthy deep and ultimate questions like "What is the meaning of life?", "What is the nature of love?", "Is there any truth to be found?" and similar questions. Charlie was answering with a stream of timeless wisdom, pouring out of his endlessly clacking wooden lips. The dummy was expounding knowledge that could only have come from a lifetime of deep involvement with these eternal mysteries. After a considerable time Jack Houston coughed to gain attention and a red-faced Edgar Bergin turned around to greet his visitors.

"Hello, Jack, Hi, Jean. I see you caught us."

"Yeah, Ed", said Jack, "What in the world were you rehearsing?"

"No rehearsal, Jack.", Bergin replied, I was talking to Charlie. He's the wisest person I know."

"But, Ed, that's your voice and your mind coming out of that cockeyed block of wood."

"Yes, Jack I suppose it is," Bergin answered quietly, "and yet, when he answers me, I have no idea where it's coming from or what he's going to say next. It is so much more than I know."

This story illustrates an important distinction to be made between subject and object in any discussion of the self. Self-consciousness is an understanding of oneself as both subject and object. The self sees itself as subject and objectivises itself as part of the whole, the totality of 'the world'. Thus a formal identity between the self and the world exists as flowing from reflection on the structure of the self. If this self reflection and recognition does not occur we have pathology. Charlie McCarthy is thus a metaphor for Edgar Bergin's objectivised self but significantly under Bergin's complete control. Pathology can enter the process of integration of the self in a thousand ways, across a spectrum from false objectivity (as with Klaus Marin's Mephisto², an actor who was a non person when not

¹ Abraham, R; McKenna T; Sheldrake, R; "Dialogues at the Edge of the West", Bear & Co, Santa Fe, 1992

² Mann, Klaus; "Mephisto; Roman Einer Karriere", Rowohlt, Hamburg, 1981.

performing) to the unreachable subjectivity of extreme psychosis. We leave aside questions of pathology, to look at the phenomenon of self integration in terms of the worldview context from which it emerges.

We need at first to consider a given worldview and for this purpose I have chosen the Christian worldview with which I am more familiar. The thesis of this paper is that there are some widespread worldviews which are inimical to the proper development of the self. There is a charming practice among Irish mothers and fathers to refer to one another as ‘himself’ and ‘herself’ respectively. This is, in part, a recognition of the god-like or goddesslike character of one’s partner. It is the objectivised self which has the potential to be ‘lived in’ by other vibrant entities, in whatever terms, Jungian or otherwise, such entities are conceived. Edgar Bergin’s art was called ventriloquism since the voice sounds were thought to originate in the belly. Ventriloquism is probably a trick performed with the voice box and vocal chords, but the story of Edgar Bergin and Charley McCarthy reminded me of Jesus’ cry to those attending the Feast of Tabernacles:

“If any man is thirsty let him come to me.. Let the man drink who believes in me, for as scripture says, from his belly shall flow rivers of living water”.

*He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believe in him were to receive for there was no Spirit as yet since Jesus had not been glorified.*³

The belly, the heart, one’s innermost parts, have traditionally been regarded as the seat of spiritual experience, although the word or the voice has a similar role in several traditions. Thus in the experience of “ecstasy”, which has very little to do with “ecstasy” as it is currently understood, one may stand apart, so to speak, from oneself and hear oneself speaking in strange languages for example, or otherwise observe oneself exercising a gift of healing for another person or hear oneself uttering gifts of wisdom. Word or Logos has a central role in some mystical regimes.

The extreme delicacy and indeed the paradoxical nature of the self as objectivised subject is captured by St. Paul, when he says: I live, not I, but Christ lives in me⁴ or again, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me⁵. As someone has said, we are called upon in this age to live our lives ‘mythically and in depth’. Since discovering the work of Rene Girard who knows that the Passion of Christ brought an end to the power of myth, I prefer to say now ‘spiritually and in depth’ (where depth here refers to ‘fleshing out in the body’). We can no longer understand or control our worlds in the terms of our education and training. Indeed we now see that the very notion of CONTROL has emerged from the scientific and technological world view based on a kind of idealism which called for a strict separation of subject from object; the I versus the IT; the mind versus the mechanical world. To live spiritually and in depth is to have the self embedded in the objective world; the I together with the objectivised THOU.

It would be hard to find anyone today who did not know that the whole world is ailing; but many still in CONTROL mode try to bootstrap themselves back to health or wellbeing. There is a remarkably prophetic poem published by T.S. Eliot in 1944, the “*Four Quartets*”. The following passage is from the quartet called ‘Dry Salvages’. To understand some obscure words we need to know that ‘to haruspicate’ is to divine the will of the gods by inspecting the entrails of animals, ‘sortilege’ is divination by drawing lots and ‘to scry’ is to resort to crystal gazing. The following is the extract from “*Dry Salvages*”:

*“To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,
To report the behaviour of the sea monster,
Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,
Observe disease in signatures, evoke
Biography from the wrinkles of the palm
And tragedy from fingers; release omens
By sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable
With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams
Or barbituric acids, or dissect
The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors -
To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams; all these are usual
Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:
And always will be, some of them especially
When there is distress of nations and perplexity
Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgeware Road.
Men’s curiosity searches past and future*

³ John 7:37-39

⁴ Galatians 2:20

⁵ Philippians 4:13

*And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint –
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.*⁶

The poem points up the importance of “keeping our heads” in this time of global perplexity rather than to grasp at chimeras. Perhaps rather, our heads need to be surrendered to a higher power in order that we might think more clearly.

Selflessness and self surrender refer to the “caving in” of the ‘I’, (I becomes C, the cave of the heart) in order to be receptive to the OTHER or the THOU. According to St. John: He must increase, I must decrease”.⁷

Worldviews

From the point of view of an external observer a worldview is a view of the world held by a subject. For the subject, of course it may be part of the objective self. Subjectivity is thus the principal keynote of its scientific description. To gain access to it any human scientist or professional therapist is in much the same position as the medical symptomologist, illustrated in the following Burmese proverb:

*‘Despite the strides that science makes,
None can tell my belly aches
Unless I tell the doctor so
Even he would never know’*⁸

Recognising that there is a lowest common denominator in the multiplicity of human experience, this little aphorism, nevertheless, throws into sharp relief the basic problem of religiology, which has worldview as its formal object. Note that religiology is quite distinct from sociology which has human society as its formal object and also from anthropology which studies human culture. By any method laying claim to the title scientific, how does one come to grips with the subjective realm of inner experience? What is it like to be a Sufi? or a Hindu? or a Zen Buddhist? Is there a difference, discernible by some scientific method, between a Christian who exercises the charisms of the Holy Spirit and one who doesn't? Is there a religiology of grace?; of peak experiences?; of altered states of consciousness? How does the worldview arise within the consciousness of a mentally disturbed person whereby he believes himself to be Napoleon or the Cosmic Wizard of the Universe?

We can describe *worldview* then as a conceptual model of reality to which a certain assent has been given; that is, a belief structure. Every person approaches the world with a worldview. This worldview may be consciously expressed or inchoate, perhaps even coded in primary process. Worldview underlies every person's receptivity to or construction.. of knowledge of the world. There is no such thing as a non-believing person. The critically important question is then ‘Is there a basis in reality for the worldview in which one believes?’ and “What are the criteria for establishing this basis in reality?” My position in regard to these questions is essentially an ethical position, viz. inasmuch as one's worldview is a matter of choice, one ought to be chosen which fosters the full flowering of the human person, enabling him or her to actualise all his or her human potential. For many today, mental disturbance and many other problems of human failure can be sheeted home to an inadequate worldview, a foreshortening of vision which actually inhibits this flowering of the human person.

There is another tenet of my worldview which also has an ethical basis; the human mind has a natural aptitude to know what is true and it can never be totally devoid of truth. Thus, even in the most bizarre expressions of mental contents there can be discerned elements of reality which can be built on as a basis for communication. This is nowhere more striking than in the work of John Weir Perry⁹, who is able to discern patterns of meaning leading to healing within the chaotic utterances of severely psychotic persons. As L. Mehl has written: Insanity is anxiety produced deconstruction through which an organised worldview is separated into its various constituents. It can serve as an unexpected opportunity for the deconstruction-reconstruction process”.¹⁰

Without access to worldview as such, any attempt by the human sciences to come to grips with the existential realities of human behaviour will be futile. Inasmuch as the human sciences employ models, paradigms, assumptions,

⁶ Eliot, T.S. "Four Quartets", Faber, London, 1979

⁷ John 3:30

⁸ Maung Myint Thein: *Burmese Proverbs Explained in Verse*, Hu Loong Lithographer Pty. Ltd. Singapore.

⁹ John Weir Perry; "The Far Side of Madness", Spring Publications, Dallas, Texas, 1989.

¹⁰ Mehl, L; "Mind and Matter", Mindbody Press, Berkeley, 1986, p.150..

presuppositions, and ideologies in their descriptions of human behaviour their products will be essentially reductionistic and therefore false since the descriptions will be given in terms of something the phenomenon is not, i.e. in terms of difference. For example, a Durkheimian social analysis of the religious practices of Irish peasants is just a game; a Freudian analysis of the practice in some Moslem countries of clitoridectomy is just a game. Without sympathetic access to the respective worldviews of such groups there will be no real understanding of the social expression. The "game" process is endemic in the history, philosophy and social studies of science; but then science itself may be just a game. I am reminded of Chesterton's bon mot: "*The only way to be an entomologist is to be an insect*".

There are, of course, observable characteristics of coherent worldviews when such worldviews are coherently expressed. The religious studies scholar, Ninian Smart,¹¹ proposes a seven dimensional scheme whereby worldviews can be characterised. These are:

1. *The Practical and Ritual Dimension* - the public observance, the colourful, the photographable;
2. *The Experiential and Emotional Dimension* - the seminal events of consciousness, eg. the visions of Muhammad, the enlightenment of the Buddha etc., the experience of the numinous etc.
3. *The Narrative or Mythic Dimension* - the story side of the worldview, some prehistorical, eg. creation myths, myths about death and suffering - and others historical, eg. the crucifixion of Jesus, the recognised scriptures etc. There is usually a cosmology.
4. *The Doctrinal and Philosophical Dimension* - which engages the teachers of the worldview. Indeed some worldviews take their entire thrust from philosophical myths and cosmologies, eg. the Schools of Athens, the scientific and technological worldview, the worldview of the Marxist state, and so on.
5. *The Ethical and Legal Dimension* - the law which a tradition or subtradition incorporates into its fabric, eg. the Torah in Judaism, the Shari'a in Islam etc. which prescribe conduct for the whole society.
6. *The Social and Institutional Dimension* - organisations, congregations, academies of science, politburos, hierarchies etc.
7. *The Material Dimension* - buildings, works of art, icons, temples, sacred places etc.

As examples of coherent worldviews we might mention Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Marxist State, Nationalism, Scientism, Eclecticism, "Ockerism" (this one endemic to Australia), Secularism, Animism, Spiritism, etc. Some of these have proved to be inadequate in the objective sense and some are proving to be inadequate for the full flourishing of the human person. In a time of rapid change and perplexity, of course, any worldview may be sorely tested in the subjective sense, but some actually prevent the proper development of the objective self even in full coherence. One of these is the scientific and technological worldview which I perceive as rapidly degenerating and not only because notions of subjective reality are foreign to it. Based as it is on Democritean atomism, mechanicism, and empiricism, it can produce no insights into the experienced realities of soul and spirit and their objective manifestations.

The degenerate and fragmented worldviews we encounter amongst marginalised people in Western industrial society are genuine worldviews nevertheless and they can often be discerned and understood by referring to the characteristics described by Ninian Smart. These same characteristics can be deployed in reconstruction of an inadequate worldview in the direction of wholeness. They can be employed as fore-projects in the hermeneutic approach to understanding which involves genuine dialogue. The therapist is merely a catalyst for the removal of obstacles to healing which is accomplished through the healing propensities inherent in the whole person; a unity of body-soul-spirit. An adequate worldview can be developed if one has access to the person's history, life experiences, education and so on. The development can be accomplished through shared experience, rituals, laughter and the winning of trust. When trust has been gained the deployment of Era III medicine¹² in the context of love can be most beneficial.

The critically important insight concerns the vision of the self within the experienced worldview. Self evaluation may vary across a wide spectrum from extreme self abasement to extreme delusions of grandeur. With growth of an integrating worldview the vision of the self also develops. However there is no objective science which can grasp the quality of reality which worldview presents to those that hold it in the world. Real and humanly liberating knowledge of the self will occur when subject and object are seen to constitute the same reality. There is both continuity and contiguity of "outside" and "inside". By looking "objectively" without, the self discerns a quality of being similar to what it discerns when looking "subjectively" within, i.e. the activity of knowing must share common structures with the source of the activity, viz. the object known. The "outside" world of things consisting of "matter" and "form" (i.e.

¹¹ Smart, Ninian; "World Religions", Cambridge U.P. 1989.

¹² Dossey, Larry; "Era III Medicine: The Next Frontier", ReVision, Vol 14, No.3,1992.

‘knowability’) correspond to the intuition that there is psychic matter “inside” capable of being informed by the same principle of knowability. For example, the perception of harmony and discord, order and chaos outside is similarly characterised in the inner psychic substance and vice-versa.

Inasmuch as external or internal reality is configured as a unity of parts and wholes, the wholes being greater than the sum of the parts, the reality inside or outside consists of parts configuring into the whole, also greater than the sum of the parts; the activities and passivities of the human person inside are mirrored in the activities and passivities of external nature; the propensities and potentialities inside are realised outside, and so on. A vast number of properties and qualities of the real may be similarly discerned and ramified.

There already exist epistemologies and posited ontologies stemming from worldviews in which the programme outlined above is at least partially realised, eg. the essential interconnectedness of all things, the cosmos “outside” and enlightenment “inside” is effected by certain Eastern or Middle Eastern worldviews in practice, eg. Zen Buddhism, the ‘Lila’ of Hinduism and “Wisdom”, the everlasting feminine in Judaism, and so on. Their programmes are no less disciplined than other sciences, perhaps even more so. In the Christian worldview, of course, nature is caught up into the transcendent and reconfigured in a mode involving new elements entirely. As Raissa Maritain has remarked: ‘Man is an animal who feeds on transcendentals’.

Although there is a qualitative sameness of inside and outside realities in the purely natural order, the reality inside is clearly supraphysical, immaterial and incompositive. This opens up the realm of symbolic presentation, particularly metaphoric processes, given that knowability in things is never comprehensive, even when (or particularly when) mathematical structures are placed on them from “inside”. The ramifications of such symbols are enormous, eg. intelligence is like sunlight, willing and bidding like an army commander, peace like the tranquility of ordered nature and so on.

It is by such qualitative continuity that worldviews, even faulty ones, arise in subjects, and without access to this qualitative unity, no worldview can be understood by an objective observer. Objective reality must include the subjective domain or we are stuck with social scientific relativism, ie. to interpret reality from the point of view of what it is not. (© 1999 Prof. Alex Reichel The Academy of the Word)

Alex Reichel

Experts and Uncertainty from Michael Potts

Knowledge appears in many diverse forms, whether as practices, ways of understanding, practical skills or theoretical ideas. It can be considered to exist in two main categories, subjective which depends upon personal experience, and objective, considered to be independent and impartial. But all knowledge is socially constructed and is therefore not completely objective. Knowledge is a product of society and changes as society changes, for example the idea that the sun orbits the earth or that the earth is flat are truths that have long been abandoned. Elements such as the mass media question and probe established knowledge structures and along with education, provide access to alternative knowledge systems allowing individuals to question what they are told.

Expertise equates to power through legitimised knowledge, accredited by society’s institutional authorities which are recognised by the state and by fellow professionals. Experts rely on the sanctioning, belief and protection of their knowledge. This is recognized through their education, qualifications and experience and is organized through power structures that exclude the uninitiated while elevating the initiated to a socially recognised position as expert. Traditionally, experts such as doctors or priests have relied on a monopoly of their areas of expertise. One method to ensure exclusivity is the use of language, for example the use of Latin for specialized jargon in the medical sphere or when it was used by the priesthood before the bible was translated into English. This control has receded as an increasing diversity of knowledge has become more easily available, such as alternative medical therapies and ‘new age’ beliefs. But there has always been uncertainty and experts still maintain their elite structures which are slow to change and continue to exert their influence. Where a decline of trust in traditional experts can be traced, for example the questioning of scientific experts over GMO’s, it can be argued that the vacuum is being filled by new types of experts to provide the yearned for certainty, for example, the emergence of religious fundamentalism, from far right Christians in the USA to their Islamic equivalents in the middle east.

Absolute truths are no longer held as valid in science. The certainty of Newtonian mechanics is now regarded as an approximation since the development of relativity and the current investigations into quantum theories. According to Karl Popper nothing can be absolutely certain. In the medical field this can be seen in the variety of opinions offered regarding the MMR vaccine, weighing up the dangers of the diseases it is designed to protect against with the possibility of the actual vaccine causing harm to the patient. In this context conventional medicine is seen by some as a

problem rather than a solution, where cures can cause other problems. Respect for authority of medical science has declined creating a corresponding decline in trust. New and imported knowledges have emerged, such as acupuncture, and trust in doctors has decreased but they, as recognized experts, still have significant power which is embedded in the social structures. Although a challenge may be growing, the new forms of knowledge do not necessarily have legitimacy and authority to replace more traditional knowledge systems. The establishment of the Royal Society created a community of gentlemen, an elite, and a sense of objectivity, recognised by the power structure of the state. This provided socially sanctioned authority which grew out of mutual acceptance behind the closed doors of the gentlemen's club. The gentlemen became professionals and experts accountable to their own community and values. Through scientific methods grounded in experimentation, measurable results and predictable outcomes, laws have been developed which have become accepted truths claiming accuracy and reliability. Anything falling outside this realm, considered objective and therefore impartial, is dismissed as invalid, such as homeopathy with its reliance on an holistic approach to the individual including the placebo effect. But Kuhn showed that accepted sets of assumptions, laws and methods, or paradigms, can be replaced (Kuhn,1962). These 'revolutions' occur as a result of periods of dramatic social change which create opportunities to question what has previously been unquestioned, for example during the upheaval of the industrial revolution knowledge that the world was created in six days became challenged by Darwin's theory of evolution.

Rather than being discovered, knowledge is created, or socially constructed, and is therefore influenced by the society that produces it. Power is used in the production and describing of knowledge and meanings are produced through discourse. Foucault showed that scientific discourse, a set of ideas, statements and practices, actually creates conditions, for example the hysterical woman of the late 19th century was a category created and defined, given authority and recognition by official agencies (Goldblatt,2000). Even the language used in discourse is value laden, for example gender bias in medical textbooks describing how a woman's eggs 'degenerate' and are 'shed' while a man's sperm 'falls away' and is 'released' (Martin,1999). Keller insists that 'objective' science is blind to these assumed values, for example reason and mind are considered masculine while feeling and nature is considered feminine (Fox Keller,1984). This is apparent in patriarchal structures such as the gentleman's club, which perpetuate a male point of view and is one area where experts are being challenged. Medical knowledge is practised, that is a professional activity that follows an accepted set of rules and expectations. It relies on tradition, authority linked to the past and not questioned. This tradition uses the master-apprentice system as defined in the Hippocratic Oath which limits its questioning and enquiring scope making it still a male dominated institution. Areas of strong belief are protected from scepticism by the structure. As the structure settles and becomes comfortable with itself it may not react to new developments or changes in society. This can lead to a 'revolution' or upheaval that cracks the facade allowing innovation of ideas and practices, sometimes questioning core beliefs as happened with creationism. These upheavals then settle down and adopt structures that settle, only to be questioned or challenged at some time in the future as seen with current debates over the validity of homeopathy. Knowledge is never separate from social developments, therefore neither are experts.

The value of knowledge depends on it fulfilling the needs of society and its authority depends on how society views the knowledge system. Faith in the certainties of religious experts was challenged by scientific knowledge, for example the theory of evolution. But faith in scientific experts is currently being questioned, one example being the debate over GMO's. Psychological and emotional comfort is not provided by science alone. Religious knowledge is based on revealed truths rather than something discovered or rationalised. Traditional religious knowledge is being challenged in three main ways according to the secularisation thesis. Firstly, functions performed by organized religion are being taken over by the state, for example education and more recently marriage ceremonies. Secondly, organized religion is failing to compete for people's time with an increase in diversity of possible leisure activities. Thirdly, there has been a decline in the authority of religious thinking as other forms of knowledge, such as science, gain popularity. A substantive definition of religious knowledge, as described by Weber, where the focus is on content, would see society becoming disenchanted with the mysterious role of religion as science answers more questions (Weber,1904/1930). Alternatively, as Durkheim explains, a functional definition concentrates on purpose (Durkheim,1912/1965). Here the role of religion is to provide a common bond in a moral community, especially during periods of social change and uncertainty. The forms may change but the purpose and requirements remain. Individuals require the world to make sense, to be ordered. Rituals are symbolic means of ordering the world, or an expression of the desire to have a meaning and purpose to life. Berger described religion as providing a protective shield against meaninglessness (Berger,1967). It covers everything and provides guidelines as well as meanings, for example when dealing with one's inevitable death. It allows us to conceive of the cosmos in relation to our individual lives by creating a meaningful order out of what would otherwise be chaos.

Traditional organized religion in the UK may seem to be in decline if Sunday church attendance figures are reviewed but orthodox Christianity may have been replaced by other religious forms (Bruce,1995). Religion itself is still an important aspect of people's lives but its forms may have become more diverse, such as Buddhism or reinterpreted ancient beliefs. A recent challenge to the Church of England has been the role of women. The patriarchal structure has

been infiltrated by the sanctioning of women into the priesthood. Interpretative evidence suggests women, for example through the experience of childbirth, experience a more spiritual dimension to the world than men, a realisation of the interconnectedness between everything (Knott, 1994). This point of view may, in time, mirror structural changes within the interpretation of religious knowledge. The view of the 'experts' may change. Perhaps the current controversy over the appointment of homosexual priests in the Anglican church sheds light on the difference of social norms between western societies and those in Africa. The experts in each community are reacting to the constituency in which they live. Belief adapts to changing social conditions. The need for religion, or the spiritual, sacred aspects of life is not diminishing but is taking new forms, providing alternative experts in which faith can be placed.

The greater diversity of knowledge that occurs as society changes brings more freedom of choice, greater agency, but also greater uncertainty and a questioning of experts and traditional, previously unquestioned, knowledge structures. This process challenges the acknowledged experts and their structures to either change or to lose their position of power in the society of which they are a part, as that society reaches out to alternatives that have not been sanctioned by the established structure.

Michael Potts

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(This essay was written as part of The Open University level 1 course 'An Introduction to the Social Sciences: Understanding Social Change'. I picked it up from an email conference I'm privileged to listen in on. After over fifteen years as a computer programmer Michael decided he needed a change and enrolled last September on the above course intending to complete a degree in Sociology which would have taken over six years. Fortunately he was recently made redundant. The financial payoff encouraged him to successfully apply for a full time place at Reading University. He starts this October, studying Politics and Sociology. He has still to figure out to what end. Ed.)

'Now' from Ingram Smith

We talk of the Now as though there exists in that perception a way or the way through to REALITY. Is it our trust that the eternal present holds the essence of being? 'That our immediate awareness (this portion of existence that I am momentarily aware of) is the entrance to the essence of LIFE, of BEING?'

To put this differently:

What is the state of the mind (my mind) now? What am I aware of NOW? And, may I ask, what is your present consciousness? What is happening? What is awareness and of what is it aware?

Is Now only an idea? or a vast silence, complete emptiness, an immense presence in which all emerges----- what might be named CREATION?

Another approach. The civilization we now endure, or enjoy has evolved through Time and human effort and while it has produced great physical comfort and entertainment (for the privileged) it is actually failing as we go on killing the natural world and ourselves while we continue talking about what we can or may be able to do.

Has creation anything to do with me, my action, with effort, will or wilfulness, with predetermined, self-directed expenditures of ENERGY?

Does it make any sense to have and to hold an end, a goal in mind, an intended future to be realized (made real) through Time?

So what is this 'Now' we are contemplating?

Is it being utterly simple? Does it mean staying awake, silent, empty, listening—seeing only? Once speculation ceases, thought vaporises like clouds changing and disappearing into a clear sky, that abiding, ever-present, spaceless, all-pervading essence of creation?
Why talk, why Dialogue, about Now?

Ingram Smith

Letters

Chatswood, 23 September 2003

Dear Alan,

I enjoyed the article by Joan Tollifson (Enjoying the Perfection of Imperfection) in the last Nowletter.

I'm glad someone has said that meditation (or whatever you want to call it) doesn't need to have a particular position or clothing – that it can happen any place any time. And I'm pleased I've been reminded of the way babies or animals simply aren't aware of physical imperfections which, of course, are only imperfections because we construct them as such. Like most good writers, or speakers, she has told us what we already know.

The article made sense to me and, most importantly, it was clear and easy to read.
Thanks for including it.

Halcyon Evans

Joan Tollifson's new book *Awake in the Heartland - The Ecstasy of What Is*

Is it possible to be a mindless, swooning bhakti devoted to the rain, the traffic, the wind in the leaves, the utter simplicity of bare awareness? (p113)

This autobiographical account of her life is presented to us as an exploration into the possibility of happiness. It opens with the author's move to a noisy, polluted midwestern city, Chicago, a choice made against the alternative of retiring to a peaceful retreat centre in the country. As she points out, this is a perfect metaphor for her message – finding truth – and discovering it here in the middle of our daily activities, not as the result of escaping to some idealized environment or via some elaborate process.

Joan's story takes the reader through her life in relationship with friends, neighbours, teachers and her struggle with addictions of various kinds. She points out that the 'search for truth' can also be understood as a form of addiction. These sub-stories are interspersed with descriptions of the natural world, gently reminding the reader that 'this is it'. She is so frank about her own struggles and so perceptive in identifying the temptations and self-delusion of the search that I found her speaking for me many times as I read her book. It is, in a way, a contemporary Pilgrim's Progress, not progress towards some transcendent otherness but a progressive uncovering of what is ever the case.

She bravely exposes her uncertainties as well as her certainty and thereby reveals them both as part of the flow.

Before attempting this personal response I asked myself four questions: what is the aim of the book? what distinguishes it from other books in the present outpouring? does it deal with the 'How' of what it proposes? And does the book achieve its aim?

What is the aim of the book? In the author's words: *It's not about finding an answer. It's about that aliveness that can't be objectified or grasped..... We hear about transcendental experiences, Kundalini explosions, ultimate attainments and final breakthroughs, and we long to have what we have heard described. We get lost in the complexity, the promises, the search. I'm not opposed to any of those things if you enjoy them. But they aren't any more spiritual than a seat on a city bus at rush hour. What I'm talking about is fully present right now, right here in Chicago, or wherever you happen to be at this very moment.*

I am very sympathetic to that approach and the above words could be used to summarize the collection of material I've assembled on the Capacitie website to which I'm now happy to add some of Joan's work. It's about awakening to being, a recovery of the life we tend to lose in living.

What distinguishes it from others in the present outpouring of books of this genre?

It is intensely personal and the ordinariness of this very personal story provides the emphasis which enables Joan to unveil the extraordinary in her life which is the life of every person; the extra ordinary which is simply the ordinary veiled by habitual ignorance or overlooking what is here. To put it another way, the personal is experienced to the point where the impersonal is no longer excluded. As Andrew Cohen pointed out to us a few years ago in Rishikesh, when we finally come upon the impersonal, we find it to be the most truly personal. By which I assume he meant that we discover what we really are.

Does it deal with the 'How' of what is proposed? It's all very well to talk about liberation, happiness and so forth but the libraries are full to overflowing with descriptions and explanations, not to mention the religions of the world, which provide us with belief systems as an alternative to actually experiencing what they claim to be on about.

In her opening remarks Joan says: This book is about stepping into the unknown. As far as I'm concerned, real spirituality is about having no answers at all. It is about living without formulas, without conclusions, without beliefs, without comforting ideas, without saviours. It has nothing to do with being a perfect person or having everything neatly resolved. It isn't about arriving anywhere, other than where you are now.

So how do you arrive at exactly where you already are? An absurd question but many of us have set out on such crazy journeys and Joan, interpreting her own journey, shows that our persistence in such folly merely emphasizes that we are in love with our journey rather than content to be – to be in love. The how of it is clearly presented throughout the book. There is a danger that what Joan is asking us to share is so obvious and accessible that we might not recognize it as a 'how' at all and dismiss it with , 'so what, there's nothing here I don't know about already?'. Which, if I understand her, is the point. It is not about knowing but about seeing and being. My explanations, descriptions, interpretations and beliefs are what prevent me from 'enjoying the world aright' – from awakening.

It is a pity that a book as rich in content as this doesn't run to a couple of extra pages of index to help readers return to issues of particular interest to us. I suppose the argument is that the book must be taken as a whole, but the whole from the reader's perspective is at one level the sum of its parts. I would like to return to such 'parts' as the illusion of enlightenment as a personal acquisition, choice, nothing, the key to transformation, simplicity, guru dependency, meaning, perfection and belief just to mention a few of the subjects she covers, without endless page-turning. There are references to and quotations by many people whose work has appeared in the Newsletter and it would be helpful to pinpoint Joan's connections to these people as well as their wise words, through index entries.

The book opens with an anecdote which, for me, captures both the essence of the book and what I believe to be at the heart of things.

One day at the post office in Oakland, I saw a little girl, who was maybe four or five years old, in line with her mother. The little girl was totally alive, looking at everything with amazement. She ran to the wastebasket in the corner and gazed down into it as if into a sea of jewels. She was ecstatic. The mother kept pulling the girl back, telling her to stop this and stop that. Every other word the mother said was "stop" or "don't."

Finally they are up at the window, and at the next window there is another mother who has a little baby in a basket sitting on the floor beside her. The first little girl stands beside the basket, and the baby and the girl gaze unabashedly into one another's eyes with total absorption. The mother of the little girl again pulls her back. As they leave, the little girl waves goodbye to the baby as if to her dearest friend.

It was such a clear display of the unobstructed love, wonder, and awareness that is naturally here, and the process of human socialization which trains us to pull back from this aliveness, to stop looking, to stop being ecstatic, to close down. We learn to shut down and to live more and more in a mental world of ideas, so that by the time we are adults we are uncomfortable looking for too long into a stranger's eyes. And it would never occur to us to run up to a wastebasket and actually see what's inside it as something we'd never seen before, with curiosity and interest. Because by the time we're adults, we think we know what's in there. We've got a word for it. It's garbage. We don't see it any more. And we don't see one another, or the love between us, because we're afraid of it. We've learned that a person who would look with wonder into a public wastebasket, or too long into a stranger's eyes, is a crazy person, a mad person. We're afraid to be in love, except in the allowable, relatively safe confines of romantic relationships, or perhaps in rare moments of communion with babies and very young children. For the most part, we're cool, detached, afraid of the natural ecstasy of being.

Our lives feel empty. We long for the spontaneity, joy, and wonder that we seem to have lost. We take workshops and consume mind-altering substances to regain it. We undertake rigorous meditation practices and throw ourselves at the feet of exotic gurus. We run up enormous visa bills, looking for what is simplest and most ordinary, for what is always already here.

When we finally "get it," we get nothing at all. We have not arrived at some fascinating foreign place. We're exactly where we always have been - right here. Here is all there is. But when we're looking for something else, we don't see how extraordinary here actually is. We're preoccupied.

Here and now is alive. It's the only thing that actually is. In the clear light of present awareness, whatever appears is vibrant, beautiful, sacred. The vibrancy, the beauty is in the awareness, in the presence, not in the object.

Yes, and the joy of it is that if I am awake to what is going on, the wonder in the situation Joan describes also encompasses me as beholder. We all have such experiences on a daily basis, it is endless, it is called life. I was wakened this morning by the liquid notes of a Shrike Thrush and the rat-tat-tating of its beak on the window as it tried to drive its reflection off its territory. First the beautiful bird call and the tapping, just sounds and listening, but followed almost

immediately by switch-off into explanation of what is happening as I have now written it here. A mini-dismissal of life which sets the scene for the day.

In answer to my final question, Joan has obviously achieved her aims. This is the book I would offer to the people who wonder what I am on about, especially those who see the spiritual as confined to its expression in formal religious systems and recoil accordingly. As I put her book down after reading it for the second time I felt as though I'd had a great conversation with myself. Interesting, well-written, a good read with a permanent place on my shelf for future reference. I'll end with her concluding sentences:

This awakening is absolutely simple. There is literally nothing to it. It is what is, just as it is.

Alan Mann

P.S. from Margot

I like this book. It's one of the few books of its kind that I have ever finished, mostly because I was interested in Joan's story, which she uses to illustrate her philosophy. And she writes well - a big plus and a nice change from some of the rubbish penned by would-be gurus I've dipped into.

She doesn't tell me how to live my life, so much as show me how she has lived her's: her very personal account is endearingly honest and reveals a real person, unlike some others of the genre, who offer nothing of themselves as people, but seem to think they know what I need to do.

Besides, her philosophy is so attractively simple – this is it, enjoy it (or not.)

Margot Mann

Where do you get it?

Ordering Information

Because Joan Tollifson's book *Awake in the Heartland* is a self-published, print-on-demand book, it will not have the distribution and publicity afforded by a traditional publisher. Most bookstores will not stock it, so it will not be on display everywhere. All review and promotional copies are sent out at the author's expense. This book will depend largely on word of mouth to make itself known to prospective readers.

[Awake in the Heartland](#) is a 252 page paperback and costs \$19 (US)

You will probably get the quickest service and the lowest price by ordering directly from Trafford, the publisher. You can order on-line through the website (www.trafford.com), or call toll-free (US & Canada only) at 1-866638-6884. (There is a direct link to the Trafford site from the "Books" page at www.joantollifson.com Trafford can handle international orders.)

People in the US can order single copies from Joan for \$23. That includes priority mail postage and handling. Send a check or money order made out to Joan Tollifson to 2000 W. Morse Ave, #406, Chicago, IL 60645. If you would like her to sign it, please let her know. I am sending information to Australian bookstores but don't hold your breath.

Eventually, the book will be available on amazon, bn.com, and other online book stores. You can also go to your local bookstore and have them special order copies for you. Tell them it is a print-on-demand publication, ISBN # 1-55395-630-3. Some independent bookstores may carry the book, especially in Chicago and the Bay Area, and if you asked an independent bookstore in your local area to carry it, maybe they would. (Generally, bookstores will not stock print-on-demand books because they cannot be returned to the publisher if they don't sell, but independent booksellers may make exceptions if they like the book and believe they can sell it.)

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Suggest you ring to confirm meeting times during October as most some coordinators will be away.				
<i>LOCATION</i>	<i>DAY</i>	<i>MEETING PLACE</i>	<i>TIME & CONTACT</i>	Phone Nos.
Dialogue Sydney City	Third Saturday	Theosophical Society Level 2, 484 Kent St., City	2.30pm Terry O'Brien	02 9949 8379
Dialogue Chatswood	Third Sunday	81 Greville St. (off Fullers Rd) Chatswood	10.30 am Alan & Margot Mann	02 9419 7394
Dialogue Clontarf	Fourth Sunday	New venue To be advised	11am Terry O'Brien	02 9949 8379
Dialogue Nowra	First Saturday	The Tea Club, Berry Street, Opposite Roxy Cinema	4-6pm –Riche Riche du Plessis	4423 4774
Dialogue Nowra	Third Sunday	3/117 Berry Street Nowra	10.30 am Riche du Plessis	4423 4774