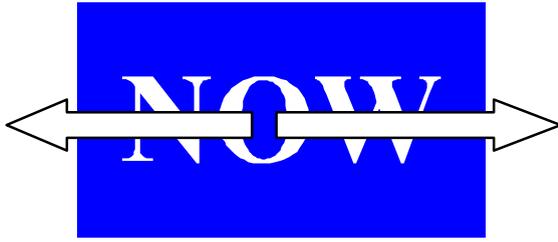


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Next Greville Street Meeting – Saturday 6 April

This is one of our periodic single-issue NOWletters. It is an autobiographical note which Dave Knowles put together recently for friends and family. He sent me a copy and I asked him if I could reprint a version of it in the NOWletter because I imagine it will resonate with many readers as it did with me. He agreed to this suggestion and proposed that I retain the comments I made on the original copy he emailed to me. My comments are prefaced by 'Alan' and highlighted in grey to distinguish from Dave's work. Dave is a friend I stumbled on when a subscriber to the Australian *Consciousness Magazine* in the early 1990's. There was an email conference associated with the magazine of which Dave was the coordinator and I discovered that we had much in common. He has had a satisfying career in IT systems & networks which has funded his travel. Born in the UK he has spent most of his life elsewhere, first in Canada, then in South Africa and he is now well settled in Canberra with his wife Christine - their daughters and their families are located in Sydney and Melbourne. I am, as far as I know, the only member of the Traherne Association in Australia, by an extraordinary coincidence I discovered a few years ago that Dave's sister Jane who lives in Leominster was the secretary of the association which is based in nearby Hereford. This is not Dave's first contribution to the NOWletter and he is also a regular participant in the Greville Street meetings. Dave is willing to respond to queries on his "autobiographical thread."

Krishnamurti Australia: Trisha English let us know about the plans to make available the Mary Zimbalist Memoirs of her time with Krishnamurti. Details are available at:

www.inthepresenceofk.org

TAT Conference : Date, Time, Place, Cost: **April 13-14, 2013, 8 AM Saturday through Sunday afternoon. Penn Scenic View 180-acre conference facility in Rockwood, PA , 100 per person (\$60 for students) - includes lodging and meals**

Registration due by April 8th *For More Information:* A detailed schedule is available at: www.tatfoundation.org Or call: (609) 414-3676 Or email: events@tatfoundation.org

Mary Adams Australian Tour. Sydney 12-14th April, Melbourne 17-18th April, Perth 19-20th April <http://enlightennext.com/australia/regional-groups/sydney/>

Yearning to Awake:
an autobiographical thread

David C. Knowles

Prologue

The feeling of unreality is coming over me again. I have come with my friends in the Leek Cyclists Club to this cafe where we are stopping for lunch. I am talking to the person behind the counter when the feeling comes and I start to freeze up as I cannot determine whether this world is the real one or whether I am going to wake into the real one. Will the person notice I have great difficulty speaking my order as if I am not sure he is there? And why, when I turn back to the table, should I speak to my friends when in a moment they may disappear and I will be left in some other reality behaving like an idiot, speaking to some non-existent cyclists in a non-existent cafe? Do I need to worry about whether people are noticing me behaving peculiarly or are they all figments of my dream anyway? This is ridiculous, “I am here”; “No you’re not, you’ll wake in a moment” ... the shuttle goes on in my head until thankfully it fades somehow and I am left with *this* reality; at least I can now act again in this only remaining world as normally as I did before and apparently like anyone else.

But what was that glimpse? Was it to be taken seriously or was it an intimation of some future insanity? Can I really wake up out of this world?

Alan. I think I know what you mean or at least I have a sense of it. The questioning of whether this novel perspective is true or whether my everyday supposed reality is the real McCoy.

I decided that next time the feeling arose I would let it; I would allow myself to wake into ... what? I would not fight it; I would let the great experiment happen. However, with this determination ready, the feeling never came again and a part of me was bitterly disappointed while another part was very very relieved.

Alan. I have a similarly regret about a missed opportunity on almost the same lines.

When I look back now from early old age at this youthful experience, I not only wonder at the gall with which I proposed such an experiment, but I recognise the start of an important thread that has run throughout my life — the idea that the normal view of what we take to be reality is not the only one available to us, that we could learn to see the world in a fresh and vivid way, one that may even reveal something new “behind the veil” if only we could find the technique to employ.

Alan. My openings, whilst dissolving the rigid separation of self and other, carried a sense that this is the overlooked actuality and always the case in spite of my customary ignorance. The 'always the case' aspect meant no attempt to sustain in the experiencing of it but also surprise when it ended.

Looking on Reality

What is it that has called you so suddenly out of nothingness to enjoy for a brief while a spectacle which remains quite indifferent to you? The conditions for your existence are as old as the rocks. For thousands of years men have striven and suffered and begotten and women have brought forth in pain. A hundred years ago, perhaps, another man—or woman—sat on this spot; like you he gazed with awe and yearning in his heart at the dying of the glaciers. Like you he was begotten of man and born of woman. He felt pain and brief joy as you do. *Was* he someone else? Was it not you yourself? What is this Self of yours?

Erwin Schrödinger

Alan. Yes it was me, is me in fact. I like that one Dave.

Who am I? And what is out there? I used to lie in bed thinking about this, thinking that I am looking out from a pair of eyes, that I am behind the surface of my eyeballs and nobody else is. Nobody else can ever be, in fact if there is anyone else ever looking out from a pair of eyeballs then it must be me and there can never be anyone else than me. So either I exist (always) or nothing exists. This all struck me as so obvious I could not understand why no-one else could follow me. They just made rude remarks about solipsism (those that responded at all) and how it was a discredited idea that no one held any more.

But it wasn't solipsism I was on about; that they should so tritely label this disturbing idea just showed that they were making no attempt to grapple with the idea that I was struggling to express. That there was something very special about being "I", that "I" was at the heart of it, that without "I" there was no self, no perceiver and therefore nothing.

Is this then to say that reality depends on me? Surely this is solipsism. But I don't think this is it; this is the meaning that we slide into if we cannot hold on to the great idea, the awful idea. It is that reality depends on the self, the Self; and I, the I looking out, the only one to myself, is the everyone to mySelf. I am part of the Self, and the Self pre-exists to look out on the world it perceives. And when I ask "Who am I?" the answer comes back that I am the Self, other portions of which are manifest in the people around me. And not only the people?

Alan. I think that is what my friend Thomas saw and which led to his apparently paradoxical view that he was the sole heir of the whole world and nevertheless went on in his next sentence to add that it was even more exciting because there were the other people in the world who were sole heirs as well as him.

So there was a tremendous thrill when I encountered the expression:

As the dewdrop slips into the shining sea.

It expressed the sense of I so perfectly, the dewdrop is the self, the shining sea is the Self. In the transient life I can only experience the self but this is because I cannot see widely or far enough.

In the same way that solipsism is a pathetic sliding away from the truth about the Self, so re-incarnation is a pathetic sliding away from the truth about the emergence of new dewdrops from the shining sea.

Alan. Excellent point!

From my current viewpoint I would now express what I struggled with here differently, in a way put to me first by Max Velmans in his *Understanding Consciousness*:

Whatever the full truth of this may be, who can doubt that our bodies and our experience are an integral part of the universe? And who can doubt that each one of us has a unique, conscious perspective of the larger universe of which we are a part? In this sense, we participate in a process whereby the universe observes itself — and the universe becomes both the subject and the object of experience. Consciousness and matter are intertwined in mind. Through the evolution of matter, consciousness is given *form*. And through consciousness, the material universe is *real-ised*.

Alan. Very well put, Max!

What a breath-taking idea! That we are a part of the universe that enables it to be self-conscious.

Self-consciousness, in its customary sense of an unnatural and unpleasant over-sensitiveness to the gaze of others was something I suffered from in my teenage years such that I found ways of trying to hide my face in lecture theatres, of finding seats where not many, if any, people could look at me — any way of avoiding that sense that I was about to flush with embarrassment and that I could do nothing to avert its slow but sure onset. It was many years, it seems, before this left me, and it crippled my social life and confidence in the meantime. What connection it has, if any, to the thread of yearning to awake, I cannot, for the moment, discern.

Alan. That's an interesting question and I can strongly identify with that sort of shrinking in myself and it is still there to some extent though awareness of its upcoming allows some sort of selfconsciousness management. In my case it is definitely a result of too strongly identifying with what I think you and the rest of the world see here.

Waking Up

One conclusion was forced upon my mind at that time, and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence, but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness. ... No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded.

William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience

The American at Cambridge

It was with excitement that I gradually discovered that others had this sense that there was more to consciousness than that we took for granted (how could we *ever* take such a thing *for granted*?) and that others had tried various ways of breaching “the filmiest of screens.”

The first I remember is “the American at Cambridge” — I cannot recall his name but he was sitting in the Common Room of Churchill College, Cambridge one evening when I arrived in 1965. After a while, he suddenly asked the room in general, “Does anyone know where I can get some LSD?” No one answered him and gradually all left the room except the American and me. I was curious

and asked him about his experiences with this drug. What stuck in my memory was his description of looking at an orange under LSD. He described seeing it as he had never seen an orange before: it was more vivid than any orange he had previously seen: the first description I had heard of an object revealed to an awakened consciousness. I was fascinated but not to the extent of wanting to repeat his experiment: drugs were something I wanted nothing to do with as a racing cyclist. But he was an intriguing fellow, describing his experiments with autosuggestion, which I would later put to good use, and the first person to tell me of Gurdjieff, urging me to acquire P. D. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching*, an account of Gurdjieff's teachings by one of his main followers.

Alan. My, experience of intensified experiences of the sort described by your American fellow student were through the trial of Goldtop mushrooms somewhere in northern NSW. Again, the wider view and increased sensitivity to colour, sound and so on. I felt the deeper reality to which I'd been admitted by the drug was not attributable to the drug itself. The drug was a doorway or catalyst. I determined to get to this aspect of myself without any artificial aids.

Gurdjieff

As Gurdjieff's main message was that "Man is Asleep" but could learn to awake, the American had correctly diagnosed the focus of my curiosity.

Though I bought the book whilst at Cambridge it was many years before I read it completely and even more before I made contact with a Gurdjieff group.

Cycling

Meanwhile, my life as a fit racing cyclist brought me new ways of looking at the world and seemed to expose another facet of reality.

As I went for long rides through the beautiful landscape of the Peak District my view on the world seemed to be truer and richer the harder my muscles worked and the longer I was out on the road. It was as if my worldly cares dropped away and my calmer mind looked out through clearer eyeballs at the rolling terrain with its wide horizons. Moreover, after a weekend of riding, my mind at school was sharper and focused as the body relaxed and recovered. And the fitter I became, so my confidence grew.

So a fit body became my platform in the world, from which I could conduct further experiments.

Autosuggestion

One of these was an experiment with autosuggestion, for two weeks every night I told myself I would be "relaxed, poised, and confident" at a lecture I would be presenting to the faculty at the Observatories in Cambridge. Very successful and very strange: I gave my lecture, feeling myself perched on my own shoulder, observing my relaxed body quietly breathing and listening to my words being spoken, *knowing* that my vehicle was performing well and highly self-aware — in the positive sense of Gurdjieff's "self-remembering", not the crippling self-consciousness I described earlier.

Alan. I think self-remembering is as a good a description as any if we agree on what is meant by the word self in this context. There is a diagram in a book by

Bennet of a double pointed arrow which illustrates, in my view, exactly what Douglas meant by 'two-way looking'.

Epiphanies

Another experiment was accidentally discovered — that of being open to receive what I now know as “epiphanies”.

What is happening when the world seems to shift and a fresh view of it is suddenly and briefly granted? I will never be able to tell if such perceptions occur to you and if they take the same form as mine. Here’s one:

Cross-country skiing through stark Canadian woodland in late winter. Nothing but white snow, blue sky, black trunks of (apparently) dead trees. Sudden realisation that the wood I am skiing through is not dead, it is *alive*, waiting to burst into fresh life come springtime and if I could flip from now to a view of it as it will be then, I would be amazed. And then it’s as if I *can* see these two views—I stop, breathe deeply and with my ski pole write ‘this is the Tao’ in a snow bank before skiing on. The world looks fresher to me and I feel strangely relaxed and *integrated*.

James Joyce called these vivid perceptions ‘epiphanies’:

... his conception of art as an ‘epiphany’, a sudden illumination if not a divine revelation, a slight but definite insight into other lives, a fragmentary clue to the meaning of life as a whole (Levin 19xx, p.12)

and some people think of his great book *Ulysses* as a progression of epiphanies. Here’s a couple from *Ulysses*:

He turned his face over a shoulder, rere regardant. Moving through the air high spars of a threemaster, her sails brailed up on the crosstrees, homing, upstream, silently moving, a silent ship.

What spectacle confronted them when they, first the host, then the guest, emerged silently, doubly dark, from obscurity by a passage from the rere of the house into the penumbra of the garden?

The heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit.

Alan. That's very interesting. I wonder if his 'rere' is the same as my crazy demo of the 'Cape of Eternity'?

Epiphanies are personal, the couple above, though written by Joyce, engage me indirectly too as they echo in my experience and excite in their vividness of description but they may not do so for you. Maybe we’ve all encountered a tree seen freshly, vividly, perhaps against a memorable skyscape, seeming to speak of deeper things to us.

Alan. Oh indeed, tree trunks are particularly eloquent in my case.

They can be highly personal, even idiosyncratic, things. What about this fragment of a verse from Bob Dylan’s *Sign on the Window*:

My best friend said, “Now didn’ I warn ya,
Brighton girls are like the moon,
Brighton girls are like the moon.”

Can I explain to you what makes this an epiphany to me? I could talk of the blues piano, the anguish in the voice of lost opportunities suddenly realised,

the awful feeling (his? mine?) that this loss can never be made good, but I doubt that this would convey my feeling to you.

But does this matter? Your epiphanies are vivid for you and what they speak of, or hint at, is particular to you. What matters, as I see it, is that we can learn to live our lives in such a way that epiphanies, rich insights are offered to us spontaneously, unpredictably, just for the effort of acknowledging that they may happen and learning to move through life with a certain *poise*, a readiness for these insights to break on the senses.

Alan. Very good point.

And why just *insights*? Why not insounds, insmells, intastes, intouches?

Alan. We knew a friend of Donald called Rome Warren who said our focus on experiences masks our *inperiences*.

Consciousness

Another fortuitous accident was encountering in *New Scientist* an advertisement for an about-to-be-released new journal: *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. So I became a subscriber and met, through its pages and later in person, Francisco Varela.

Phenomenology

When I look back I think it was Francisco Varela who first convinced me (in *The Embodied Mind*) that the philosophical school of *Phenomenology* was something worth looking into. Varela was introducing Cognitive Science and Human Experience in his widely praised book. I had already been hooked on his style by articles in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* and found *The Embodied Mind* richly suggestive in its explorations of a science of consciousness. Varela ended up recommending a three-pronged approach: cognitive science itself combined with Buddhist mindfulness/awareness training and the embodied phenomenological insights of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who Varela was inspired by. This whole approach spoke to me strongly because I was already attracted to the Gurdjieff Work in mindfulness and was trying to wake fully into a vivid perception of the world by practising the Gurdjieff technique of “self-remembering.” In this quest I did not need convincing of the importance of embodiment as many of my pleasures in life came from my physical fitness as a racing and touring cyclist in a beautiful part of England: The Peak District. Long days spent cycling vigorously over the moors and descending helter-skelter into the valleys transported me into another state: one where I felt intensely awake to the beauty I moved through and the world seemed revealed in epiphanic richness to me as the perspectives shifted with my movement through it. Compared to this, normal life did seem more like a “waking sleep” as Gurdjieff stated and the vigorous use of the body to waken into an intense tasting of the world out there was a marvellous discovery which I employed as much as possible.

From what I could deduce of Varela’s debt to Merleau-Ponty, it seemed to be to fully acknowledge the living in our body and enjoying the fruits of our senses in such a way that the world became more vividly alive and enjoyable to us and freighted with previously unappreciated significance. This seemed very similar to me to my feelings after a long day in the saddle moving through the Peak

District. So I wanted more ways to explore this “waking-up” besides cycling and any other way I could think of to make myself susceptible to epiphanies. As Merleau-Ponty was one of the key figures of the philosophical movement of Phenomenology, I thought it would well repay my time to investigate this discipline further. I considered I could approach Phenomenology as a scientific discipline, get the textbooks, study the methodology and attain the fruits with considerably less effort. Initial exposure to its central injunction to set the common-sense view of the world aside, “bracket it” and see the world afresh made sense to me and became connected in my mind with other ways in which the world, by various accidents made itself fresh to my vision and gave me the feeling I had been given a privileged view “behind the scenes” so to speak. These I styled to myself as “epiphanies” and I collected them for a while, both mine and those I encountered in literature as I have already described.

I thought, with a handy philosophical methodology at my disposal I could shift aside the veils of the world that would somehow enable me to enjoy a transcendental view of the world, indeed the phenomenological epoché was also known as the “transcendental reduction”. I guess I viewed this as living in a continually induced epiphany – another way of responding to Gurdjieff’s injunction to “wake up.”

I had picked up enough hints to the phenomenological method that its injunction to bracket or set aside the common view of the world (the natural attitude) such that one could “get back to the things themselves” by adopting the phenomenological attitude made sense to me in the light of my other experiences. It would surely now be just a matter of deeper reading and more structured practice and a new richer state of consciousness and vision would be mine for the taking.

Alan. As an aside, I am reading for the umpteenth time Heidegger's *Discourse on Thinking*. He was on to this although he buried his insights in impenetrable language. His methodology involves releasement and openness at the same time. Releasement toward things and ideas (neither yes-ing or no-ing) and openness to the unknown. Very dialogue-like. And I think Gebser realised this as we've mentioned with his waring and verition.

But I was to be frustrated and bitterly disappointed!

I plunged into the *Cambridge Companion to Husserl* only to fairly quickly find that whatever attracted me to Husserl’s thought was not thought important enough to explore by the academic philosophers who contributed to the *Companion*. In fact it was worse than that, their dense explanations were difficult or impossible to follow and seemed to bear no relation to what had attracted me in the first place. I closed the book in frustration. Other books on phenomenology I explored occasionally revealed other “hints and guesses” but without giving me the technique I was looking for. By some other accident I came across an extremely helpful article by Fred Hanna in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* that gave some background into this major difficulty and which seemed to leave Hanna in the same position as me: frustrated in the attempted development of a promisingly rich methodology. I’ll quote from one of Fred’s e-mails to me:

Please allow me to be candid, Dave. The esoteric, ivory tower ambience that is associated with academic phenomenology has grown wearisome to me and it seems that most professional philosophers want little to do with phenomenology being associated with mysticism or anything transpersonal such as Hinduism, or Buddhism. It is as if associating Husserl with such subjects somehow cheapens phenomenology. Thus, I would have to say, with some sadness, that the line of inquiry begun in this article ... — i.e., elucidating the phenomenological method in a transpersonal context--appears to have died on the vine.

You can see from this that both Fred & I had latched onto the assumption that phenomenological method promised to be yet another transpersonal discipline in the repertoire that Ken Wilber promoted so well in his books, though Wilber himself makes scant reference to it (in *Eye to Eye*) and then not in any promotional way. He certainly does not notice Husserl's discussion of the transcendent. Fred's statement of the assumption was:

The purpose of Husserl's phenomenology was to experientially investigate the essence of any and all phenomena and to disclose the mysteries of consciousness and being. As a result of this method, both Husserl and Heidegger were spontaneously delivered into realms that are clearly transpersonal in nature

Alan. Oh, so Heidegger was here already. I should have known.

Not clear to phenomenologists however. They have enough difficulty describing the three reductions that are the heart of the phenomenological method. First, there is the psychological reduction or epoché which brackets the natural attitude. Then the eidetic reduction with its imaginative variations to render clearer the essence of what we perceive. And finally the transcendental reduction, the most mysterious of all which reveals for us consciousness itself and the operation of the transcendental ego. That was easy to say but Husserl spent his whole life trying to clarify his methods.

Maurice Merleau Ponty says this in his introduction to *The Phenomenology of Perception*:

The best formulation of the reduction is probably that given by Eugen Fink, Husserl's assistant, when he spoke of 'wonder' in the face of the world. Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical.

What synchronicity at work. I am compiling a list of quotations dealing with *the step backward*.

That's a lovely depiction but it's hardly a clearly described technique. As Maurice Natanson says in his *Edmund Husserl: Philosopher of Infinite Tasks*:

There have been almost as many interpretations of the phenomenological reduction as there have been expositions. ...we may recognise three large claims that have been made about the reduction: it is ambiguous; it is philosophically obscure; and it is ultimately unattainable. It may well be, of course, that only the most diligent travellers will persist, but then phenomenology is not for everybody.

It might also be remembered that disadvantages sometimes carry with them unexpected resources. The philosophical obscurity of the reduction demands of the inquirer that he perform the reduction as *his*, that *he* orient himself within its confines. The turn to *self*-responsibility is a gift of what otherwise might be considered philosophical isolation. Within the orientation he must find for himself, the investigator is free to further, if not complete, the transformation of phenomenological reduction into philosophy.

What a challenge! So you can see why the exploration of phenomenology seems to be my koan — to endlessly struggle with. The positive, for me is the constant cross-reference between my glimmers of what the epoché is and all the other hints & guesses I've encountered — epiphany, the Gurdjieff Work, the mystery of our embodiment and looking through the Self's eyeballs.

Reading

You will have gathered from what I have written so far that reading is a large part of my life. You would be correct: there is so much of the world's wisdom out there to be tasted, just for the effort of opening a book, that how could one refuse? Particular memories are of being ensconced in a comfortable armchair in Leek working my way through the *Larousse Encyclopaedia of Astronomy* from cover to cover; indulging one of my Australian work-free periods by retiring to the comfort of the members' lounge of the National Gallery with a new copy of Ken Wilber's *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* and a new propelling pencil to annotate it excitedly. The delicious sense of discovering artistic genius in reading Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, which caused me to vow I would never read anything second-rate again (a difficult vow to keep!); the excited trepidation with which I opened James Joyce's *Ulysses* for the first time. And this persists — so many of my own ideas come from exploring and tussling with what I read, adapting it to my own experiences, where needed.

For Art is another opening on awakening and what an enjoyable way to accept the gift.

Alan. And at this point I can thank you for the various reading assignments you have given me from time to time, all of which have assisted my own passage.

Red Halos

One epiphany comes strongly to mind: in California for a Control Data computer course with my family, Christine got out of the car with Amy and Jane and they set off down the road hand-in-hand. As I got out of the car to follow, a low sun picked them out, causing three halos of glowing red hair to shine in front of me. Awestruck, I thought: "This is my family!" and I felt blessed.

Reactions to Religion

It might occur to the reader to wonder why I never seemed to have discovered an awakening in religion, which others appear to find a valid Way.

My earliest encounter was at St Luke's Church Sunday School in Leek. Once I discovered cycling for pleasure and joined Leek Cyclists Club, the world

revealed in Sunday School seemed less vivid and real than that of the Derbyshire dales and moors and the Cheshire plains and it was with great relief that I overheard my father explain to the leader of the Sunday School that they would see much less of David now that he had joined the Cycling Club. So, Sundays became closely associated with first club runs, later races. I was growing up a scientist, too; how could I possibly believe the outlandish claims made by religion, which seemed to require no validation of any kind that I could see? I remember saying to myself later that only one of two possible claims could be true: either that all religions were equally true in some way, or that none of them were, the first pointing to transpersonal thought or the Baha'i Faith, the second to atheism — all of which I was to explore at some point.

I had one last fling with religion by encountering the Baha'i Faith in South Africa and being impressed by the integrity of its people and what they were trying to do in that country, and swayed by their view that all religions were equal I decided to join them for a trial. A trial, which I found, I could not sustain despite the poetry of their scriptures and their dedication. I still could not swallow what I was asked to believe just as before in the case of Christianity.

Alan. I have much the same response to organised religion which I recently heard described by an Anglican cleric as a mask imposed on God by man. However, whilst I don't participate I have a lot of sympathy for practitioners as, in many cases, they are responding in their way to what drives me. It is tempting for the majority to hand over the enquiry to those who claim to know.

The Transpersonal

I was introduced to the transpersonal by Ken Wilber's *No Boundary*, the set book by Sandy Plummer for her counselling course which Christine brought home, correctly deducing that this would prove fascinating to me. It seemed to offer me a path to the spiritual, the transcendent, without involving religion.

Ken Wilber, in turn, led me to Jean Gebser and his master work *The Ever-Present Origin* and his idea that our consciousness was evolving in ways that would effectively ultimately answer my desire to see the world afresh

When we go to Gebser we have to deal with his idiosyncratic vocabulary. He asks:

This brings us to the turn toward the whole and diaphaneity in recent philosophy. Where are we to find such aperspectival indications in philosophy? First in Heidegger's changed position, and second in certain results of Husserl's phenomenology. Besides Bergson, Husserl is undoubtedly the most decisive thinker of the preceding generation. The phenomenological philosophy founded by Husserl ... proceeds descriptively, and its essential object consists of the essential interconnections which are gradually envisaged via intuition.

This suggests to me that Gebser's "concretion of spirituality" and "waring" are connected with Husserl's "transcendental phenomenology" in some way.

According to Gebser:

Transparency (diaphaneity) is the form of manifestation (epiphany) of the spiritual.

Integral reality is the world's transparency, a perceiving of the world as truth: a mutual perceiving and imparting of truth of the world and of man and of all that transluces both.

Alan. Most valuable material here Dave. Another of my half-baked current projects, as Margot can confirm, is *transparency*. The notion of becoming progressively less opaque with age, and perhaps as a result of this enquiry, and finally opening to or becoming transparent to whatever we call it.

While the Australian Transpersonal Association turned out to be a big disappointment to me, Gebser's ideas have taken deep root somewhere in me and their re-validation of Husserl keep me struggling with my koan to this day. They lurk within, validating my quest and honouring the readiness for epiphany.

They also render Dawkins' and others' preaching of Atheism ultimately shallow and unsatisfactory despite its superficial appeal to many, including me.

Alan. Yes, I have a soft spot for Dawkins in spite of his determination to wade in only up to his ankles.

So I don't see this thread of Yearning to Awake as a religious quest, more an esoteric science with mystical overtones. The idea of the Universe as conscious with me part of it does after all have the imprimatur of David Bohm, a distinguished physicist which is reassuring for me despite the irony of the word imprimatur denoting the sanction of the Roman Catholic Church!

And so I continue to use the term transpersonal as an umbrella for all these searchings, including the encounter with The School of Philosophy in Johannesburg (which promoted Ouspensky's teachings after his split with Gurdjieff) and Robert de Ropp's *The Master Game: Pathways to Higher Consciousness Beyond the Drug Experience* — the only text book I know of in this field.

Alan. I didn't know The School of Philosophy was an offshoot of the Gurdjieffian teachings.

I have to say something about Douglas Harding's "Headlessness" teachings as propounded in his *On Having No Head: Zen and the Rediscovery of the Obvious* and other books mainly because my good friend Alan Mann's enthusiasm for Harding's work and the view that Harding's experiments are a practical way of achieving that alternate view of the world that I aspire to. Unfortunately they do not work for me and I find Harding's position perverse in many ways, though lately I find my acceptance of the Velman's idea of my participation in the Universe's self-consciousness a bridge to Harding's ideas and Alan's point of view. I have to honour the work of Alan's regular "Headless" meetings as the only forum I can join in for my awakening quest. It was there I presented a workshop on the Fascinations and Frustrations of Phenomenology, which uncovered new aspects for me.

My Men's Group always provides a receptive and supporting audience for my exploration of these ideas also.

Alan also introduced me to the works of Thomas Traherne, the 17th century English mystic, who seemed to be able to see the world afresh and wanted to convince everyone he met that this was also possible for them. Traherne's

writings, when I lay aside the overt Christian background, seem to me like a vivid epiphany or how I assume Husserl came to see the world as he practised his new Phenomenology. Another confirmation that we can 'bracket' the normal view to expose a rich vivid one.

Alan. It is great to be a fellow passenger on your journey, Dave and, with regard to Douglas, I've recently done some re-thinking about your objection to headlessness as actual as opposed to metaphorical. We recently met some people who run seminars on our use of and the relevance and application of metaphor to our everyday doings. I am currently trying to put this approach together in the headless context. Another running project I'll try out on you later. I gave it a trial run on the headless Skype conference last weekend. It was not greeted with enthusiasm but I hadn't and still haven't thought it through.

Other Experiences

There are a few other experiences scattered through my life that in retrospect seem to connect in some way to the thread I am exploring. I often wonder how living with my mother in her state of schizophrenia has influenced me as I grew. The clearest and strongest learning was from my father in his attempt to keep everything in my sister's and my world as normal as possible and to insist that the outside world respect my mother and treat her just as any other person. So I grew up knowing I was loved by both parents and seeing my father as an honourable man. What my mother thought, I didn't really know but I think I tried to empathise with others' thoughts through the experience of living with her. Though, even though I wonder if her situation will ever belatedly affect me negatively in my life, I have come to the tentative conclusion that living with her and with my own temporary over self-consciousness has had positive effects overall. In this it is similar to living through a bout of anxiety in my 50s which I eventually came to see as living with an early-warning system that could be helpful, if heeded.

Lead-in to the Transpersonal

I remember reading my first book by Abraham Maslow: *Toward a Psychology of Being*, excitedly opening it in our Volkswagen van on a bleak November day in Assiniboine Park, Winnipeg in the 1970s with a looming sky heralding the coming of the long, severe Manitoban winter. I forgot the looming winter in the excitement of reading about peak experiences and richer ways of being and finding that there were positive sciences like humanistic psychology, which I had not up to this time encountered. This was to be a rich foundation for my later explorations of the transpersonal with the aid of Ken Wilber and my adoption of the word 'transpersonal' to describe all those explorations of what could take us beyond the usual limits of personal growth into what others could possibly call the transcendent, the mystical, or the metaphysical.

Tucson 2000

When I read in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* that Francisco Varela was to present a workshop at the Consciousness Conference in Tucson, Arizona in 2000 I immediately wanted to attend though at that point I could not see how. But all difficulties resolved, work and family commitments dealt with creatively and, with the blessing of my family, I set off on the adventure. It was an

unusual experience attending a major conference in a foreign country by myself but settling into the enjoyment of Varela's workshop, and the excitement of the plenary sessions and meeting new friends quickly dispelled any strangeness and Spanish Vicente, Canadian Charles, American Don and myself enjoyed many private workshops over fine food and wine, one in particular out at the Tucson Desert Museum. Some points of view I could not readily accept, but which sparked off my own variants, often in another direction. I did not take to the workshop on shamanic travelling but was intrigued by the recounting of ayahuasca experiences.

The Computer and Narcotisation

Information Technology and the computer has been my career and our ticket to explore the world and a pleasurable challenging way to earn a living but I have been aware of its capability to trap my consciousness in its fascination, much like TV did earlier. As I came to explore the transpersonal and particularly after I had read Julian Jaynes' *The Emergence of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (at a Transpersonal Conference!) I explored the idea that the transpersonal awakening and the narcotisation of the computer were at opposite ends of a consciousness spectrum with normal 'waking sleep' somewhere in the middle. I enjoyed exploring this more in the light of my experience and the ideas eventually were the basis of my Master's thesis in counseling *Finding IT and Losing the Self*. The creation of this was the first formal development of some of my consciousness ideas extrapolating beyond my reading and I enjoyed the process very much indeed.

Alan. That's something of a warning, a repeat warning. I remember you let me read your thesis shortly after we met.

My stroke and Brain Hemispheres

In October 2002 while out on the back deck attempting some construction work, I had a stroke and couldn't get to my feet, being very aware of feeling like the 'control wires' had been cut between my brain and my limbs. The experience sensitised me to the matter of brain hemispheres as it occurred in the right parietal lobe and so left untouched the main language centres in the left hemisphere a matter of great relief to my family and me. This experience also made the later reading of Iain McGilchrist's *The Master and his Emissary* about the brain hemispheres and their roles playing out in Western Culture a personal investigation in many ways as so much of McGilchrist's evidence was drawn from people who had suffered damage to one hemisphere and in many ways was vivid to me. Both at the time and in retrospect the stroke was an extremely interesting experience despite its negative potential, fortunately not fully realised. Subsequent TIAs also, one in particular in which I knew in advance was not going to be able to express in words my fully formed thought — it was like being able to see the workings of the brain. I can also see where I play out the balance of the hemispheres in daily life — overemphasis on the left when I get into categorisation (as in my synopses and in studying ITIL) and use of the right in appreciation of poetry and music and the delight in physical activity and the pleasures of family life. An ironic result of the stroke, but disturbing, was a suspicion that my empathic understanding of others might be impaired in some way, yet for me the recovery phase seemed to mark for me a start of a reduction of Christine's empathic understanding of me. Many times, I remember, almost pleading for her to see the "real me" inside and to

understand what I was feeling. I explain this now by the known stress of being a carer now made more complicated in that that the person to be cared for might have “something wrong with their brain” and all that this could imply. The deep irony for me is that I felt there were only physical after-effects for me, my mind was essentially the same except for an increase in anxiety whereas others had reduced empathy in their interactions with me. This is the most painful and long-lasting result of my stroke even though an indirect one.

Alan. That's interesting Dave. I don't quite follow you. The one thing I noticed after the stroke was that you were milder in relationship. That whereas you used to bash me around a bit, philosophically speaking, after the stroke you were less critical, more passive than was good for me.

TIAs are still a factor of life now, in fact these updates are being done while recovering from yet another one and trying to establish what causes them. They add another level of precariousness to life which should in turn make the appreciation of it more important and the great privilege given to us in living and being conscious at all which was echoed on a recent trip to Japan where we saw the following sign outside a temple in Kyoto:

Let us discover the significance of birth and the joy of living.

Beautiful and not unrelated to this thread!

Where Do I Stand Today?

The burning question! Well first I must honour Rilke's injunction to live the question deeply though we cannot see the answer. This writing has been most helpful too in that I truly want those people I love and respect to know a little of what is in my mind and to challenge me on it too if they choose. (I like deep discussion.)

I have accepted the finding of a method as my koan — another way of living the question. And it is with some satisfaction that I find many of the aspects of the thread I have discussed are still open to me for further exploration: readiness for epiphany, explorations of consciousness, looking (repeatedly) at phenomenology, the platform of my body, the insights of philosophy and art, the re-exploration of old favourites (Gebser, De Ropp?). New aspects are opening up too: the role of a grandfather is a new delight: the observing of new intelligence emerging, the opportunities to play with and understand this new person — what wonder!

Truly the setting aside of our normal view of the world reveals so much that is wondrous and conducive to awe. And awe is the gateway to the sublime, n'est-ce pas?

Alan. Yes indeed. And speaking of gateways that reminds me, the inscription on the tablet on the moon gate at Lou Guan Tai reads "If you look from here you will see clearly".

Looking at Gebser again makes me consider the possibility that all my hints & glimmers of an awakened state could just be presentiments of Gebser's postulated fifth structure of consciousness: the Integral, which he suggests is to follow on from the Archaic, the Magic, the Mythic, and the current Mental structure. If this is so, however, it puts me in a passive position, as opposed to the active work towards awakening called for by Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, and de

Ropp. It does, however, reassure me that I can continue to aspire towards what appears as an awakened state to the current Mental consciousness even if my volitional work fails to bear fruit. I still need to strive to stay open to presentiment though; to keep the vehicle in a good state of tune, so to speak and this is a pleasurable discipline, working the body and staying wide open to experience. What a way to Really Live!

The other real learning from this thread is how much the desire to “wake-up” has run as a theme through my life and the possibility of being a part of the universe’s consciousness is a delicious idea to play with and bounce off other ideas like “That thou art” and the “Atman is the Brahman” and “discovering the significance of birth.”

My recent reading of Marguerite Yourcenor’s *Memoirs of Hadrian* (inspired by a new U3A course *Enjoying Literature*) has pointed out to me that the exploring and describing *threads* of my own life ought to be considerably easier than Yourcenor’s skilful recreation of the thoughts and ideas of a man she never knew and who lived centuries ago! Ah! But there lies the task; I have to slowly and painfully develop the skill, which she was so gifted with.

Today I am also developing something that is a large departure for me in the last year from the habits and skills I had honed from 16 to 66. I am speaking of the purchase of a new very different bike for me: a Giant Cross City 3 with flat handlebars, upright position, no clip-in pedals and 27 gears. My former road-racing bike with dropped handlebars, low crouched position, firmly clipped-in pedals and merely 12 closely spaced ratios had become increasingly uncomfortable for me to ride with back, neck, and shoulder pain and I had crashed off it a few times being unable to unclip fast enough with one near miss in traffic. All this caused me to lose enjoyment for a sport and recreation that had been part of my life for 50 years and had contributed greatly to my view of myself, my self-confidence and my well-being both physical and mental. So I came somewhat reluctantly to the awareness that I needed a “vicar’s bike”, as I thought of it, to regain any enjoyment of riding again and to swallow the pride of being a super-fit racing cyclist and accomplished mountain climber and let it go. So my daughter, Jane and her friend gave advice and I bought the new bike. As I started to ride it I suppressed the occasional thought of “How the mighty are fallen” and started to enjoy just riding again in casual clothes and ordinary running shoes and the pleasant precision of the unfamiliar gears. And, though I cannot stomp up hills as I used to, I do now return from a ride with that pleasant feeling of tired muscles and contented mind that I always appreciated. Maybe this is a good example of an adaptation to an aging body that I may be called upon to make many times in the future!

Alan. I don't know if I've mentioned this before. I was telling my son-in-law Bernard, another serious cyclist like you, that the experience of getting on my bike and pedalling off regenerates a feeling of liberation, escape. That is because it was my passport out of the misery of an unhappy home-life with a nagging stepmother. Away and over the moors.

And in March 2012, for the first time, I took the Giant on a cross-country single-track trail at Jindabyne for the first time, something I never contemplated on the Allen or any previous racing bike. And though I hardly navigated it with the speed and élan of my son-in-law, Matt, I enjoyed it and

found the value of a 30 tooth chainring for the first time! So maybe new pleasures even lie in store with age?

Exploring the World

When I first thought of Christine as a future life partner I had thought of having to choose between a life of exploring the world or of settled married life thinking of them as irreconcilable poles. It was with delight then that I found that Christine was happy to emigrate with me to Canada and explore new lands together, reconciling these poles. And in our life together with Amy & Jane as a family we have continued to explore together, living successively in Canada, South Africa and Australia besides the 40 countries we have visited between us, 20 of them together. Seeing new countries with a fresh eye is a wonderful experience as what may be ordinary in the natives' eyes is likely to strike us with the vividness of epiphany, clearing our vision from its usual acceptance. Many of my epiphanic moments have arisen as a result of being in a "foreign land", for example:

- The vast snowscape of the Petawawa plains under a vividly clear blue winter sky (Ontario)
- The Columbia icefields rearing up against the horizon driving up the Banff-Jasper highway (Alberta)
- A heron startling us with its take-off in front of us canoeing in the Algonquin Park (Ontario)
- A herd of wildebeest shimmering like a mirage in the distance on the Etosha Pan (Namibia)

Mindfulness Meditation

Through a friend of Christine's I have become freshly exposed to Mindfulness Meditation, which I have encountered in passing before due to my old cycling friend Ken Corden and his recommendation of a Jon Kabat-Zinn Guided Mindfulness Meditation course on 4 CDs which I have. As I refamiliarise myself with the discipline I consider that this may be the answer to my koan of a phenomenological discipline which I have discussed above. And it's quite well-defined with courses offered and plenty of practitioners in Canberra. Why have I overlooked this obvious way of making oneself more open to epiphany?

In response to Alan's comment, "Does the word mindfulness really do the job? Is the aim mind-fullness or mind-freeness?" I think he may be right here – there is a spin-off of mindfulness known as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, which talks more of something like mind-freeness in some contexts.

Injunction to self, "Get weaving, David!"

Maybe the whole project of Yearning to Awake is in fact one of becoming mindful?

Alan. Somewhere recently you told me you were reading Susan Blackmore. I enkindled the short book you mentioned and I'm reading it now. I also found her book Zen and Consciousness in the Willoughby library. I was surprised to find it included what is virtually a chapter on headlessness. After describing how she came upon it when asked to try the pointing finger business by a

fellow trumper on a walk in the Mendip Hills and finding this aware transparency at centre she said she lost it. This I think Is an example of a great misunderstanding. The notion that 'I got it' is the inside out version of 'It got me'.

I appreciate you sharing this with us Dave, your input to my exploration over the years has been invaluable.