

## **CONTENTS**

<b>EDITORIAL</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ARTICLES</b>	<b>4</b>
Hearts and minds: rivals or estranged lovers?	4
Religion and the supernatural in war and peace: from ponerology to regeneration	7
Just follow the heart	12
Universalism: the heart of Christianity	15
Spiritualist art: an introduction	18
Hearts, minds, IQ and EQ	21
Musings of a madman	22
Researching the AHT database	25
<b>LETTERS</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>REPORTS</b>	<b>27</b>
A report on the year 2021–22 from the Chair and Vice Chair	27
Treasurer’s report	30
The Alister Hardy Trust in action, August 2021–July 2022	31
Director of Communications	32
Oxford and Cotswold Group Report	33
South East Wales Group Report	34
<b>POEMS</b>	<b>35</b>
Becoming	35
The Heart Speaks	35
<b>BOOK REVIEWS</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>NOTICES</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>EVENTS</b>	<b>40</b>

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at  
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following the guidelines  
on the back page**



## EDITORIAL

### Omens and evidence

As we go to press the International Panel on Climate Change has released more evidence of global warming and the heightened risk that the world will go beyond 1.5 degrees C. Do we need any more wake-up calls? It seems that some still prefer to deny what is happening or merely despair of changing anything. Both those attitudes are dangerous, and all of us, wherever we are, need to take action now. Preserving our planetary home is a spiritual act and we must act together or face extinction ourselves.

### Both hearts and minds

When I chose the theme for this issue I had in mind that the colour green relates to the heart chakra in the Hindu healing tradition. I also recalled a phrase used in Quaker Faith and Practice “Come to meeting for worship with heart and mind prepared.” Achieving a balance between thinking and feeling, and not being overly dominated by one or the other, appears to be an essential skill in navigating the rough seas of human life.

There is something else significant about the heart, now being rediscovered in some therapeutic circles, namely that the heart is more likely to be the true “seat of consciousness” in the body than the brain. This is being spoken about as the *intelligence of the heart* (cf Hema Vyas’ recent presentation to the Scientific and Medical Network) rather than merely calling the heart a second brain. We still have a long way to go to get beyond the highly brain-centred medical model that currently prevails, but the signs are at least promising.

Once again our contributors have risen to the challenge of this theme and submitted some creative pieces, such as Michael Shearer’s “Just follow the heart” and Keith Beasley on IQ and EQ. Ken Davies relates a fascinating personal journey of finding a balance between heart and mind, rationality and spirituality.

Exploring the dark side of the emotions generated by nation states, Janet Mackinnon

charts a course through the muddy waters of war, politics and religion. Along with pieces on Spiritualist art (Ann Bridge Davies) and Universalism in Christianity (Ken Vincent), we have a strong mix of head and heart to interest readers. My thanks to all contributors again.

Our next issue will highlight the theme of Working with our Ancestors. As ever, you can submit a piece on this theme or on whatever is engaging you now (see guidelines on the back page).

### Changes in the Alister Hardy Trust

Among the reports in this issue is a summary of the new strategy for the Trust from the Chair and Vice-Chair. I encourage all members to read this and let the Trust know your views on how we should sustain our activities in future, not least publications like *De Numine* and events for members and the public.

I’d like to give my thanks to Andy Burns, who has resigned as Hon Secretary, for his five years’ service to the AHT and four years as Chair of the AHS before that. Many thanks also to Tanya Garland, Mark Fox and John Franklin, who are stepping down as Trustees. We owe so much to John over many years, and his history of the Alister Hardy Society and Trust is a fascinating read. Copies are still available (see page 38).

### Greg Barker

I was very sad to hear of the untimely death of Greg Barker, former Director of the RERC, in February. We send our sincere condolences to Greg’s family, and hope to publish an obituary in our next issue.

Rhonda Riachi



## ARTICLES

### Hearts and minds: rivals or estranged lovers?

**We are all aware of the potential for conflict between what the heart and the mind tell us. We are familiar with the experience of foreboding when a planned course of action conflicts with a gut feeling. We have a feeling deep inside that something will go wrong. We work through the facts and reasoning again and, more often than not, give way to reason. Mind has triumphed.**

The reverse can also be true. The sudden compulsion to go back home after starting a journey to discover a state of crisis, or the whim which leads to some moment of serendipity. The literature is replete with instances where gut feelings prove right.

Academia tends to be suspicious of gut feelings and seeks to eliminate them. Rigorous evidence and reasoning are employed to this end. The heart is to be brought under the control of mind. However, there is a general acknowledgement that the mind can be fallible, and that it could sometimes be wise to follow the heart – but by empirical and logical means-seeking more evidence. I suspect that this can lead to a time-consuming wild goose chase, especially in spiritual matters. The issue is not clear-cut and needs to be kept constantly under review.

Spiritual experiences therefore pose a problem, as the following examples from my own experience demonstrate. The first was when I had fallen ill and experienced a short series of vivid dreams. Feelings of deep comfort and a sense of impending discovery accompanied the sharp memories of flamboyant visual imagery. They defied rational interpretation but felt so deeply meaningful that I felt compelled to record them and obtained some literature about dreams and their interpretation.

Interpretations via Freud<sup>1</sup> and Jung<sup>2</sup> were incomplete and unsatisfying. One mystically oriented book<sup>3</sup> worked particularly well for me. It allowed for consistent interpretations which resonated. I have used it ever since, but at the time it caused discomfort.

How could this be? Surely this was the domain of cranks and fraudsters playing to an audience of gullible fools. Fortunately, I had a thorough understanding of Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance which helped me relieve the discomfort. I would view my dream work as a kind of hobby, suspending 'mind' as a kind of experiment. It would be a casual adjunct to serious pursuits, a kind of respite from the pressures of day-to-day life.

During the year that followed there was a series of twenty-two dreams. They were giving me guidance in my everyday life, without interfering with the processes of Mind. There was no doubt left in even my sceptical mind that I was being alerted to my need for a closer relation with the earth and the universe...a need for spirituality.

This attitude allowed me to tackle an outrageously unscientific but emotionally satisfying guide to a theory of Celtic shamanism. I had bought the book by mistake<sup>4</sup>, thinking it would throw some light on the concept of hegemony, but that need not concern us here. Indeed, it is worth mentioning that there is no evidence that the Celts ever practiced shamanism, which is also associated with hunting cultures, which predated the Celtic era by thousands of years.

This shamanic adventure required me to create a circle of stones and to sit within it with a stock of stones beside me. I was required to use stones to represent people of importance in my life, creating small, overlapping circles within the big one. I was to dwell upon the meanings people had for me, and to try to organise the meanings into a picture of my own values. It became clear that my life was incredibly complicated. I was a slave to a myriad of meanings and needed to simplify things.

Enjoying the experiences, I created time and opportunities to complete the course of exercises, which took about a year. It was accompanied by a renewed interest in ancient artefacts. Time was spent on a bronze age

mound, visiting nearby caves where ancient bones had been found.

Iron Age hillforts became regular haunts, where I soaked in the atmosphere, but also gained interesting factual insights into ancient people. Their intelligentsia were accomplished astronomers who had invented both solar and lunar calendars, both accurate.<sup>5</sup>

The experiences were enjoyable, I wanted to pursue this new hobby, and thought about how I might set about it. To embark on a formal course of study or disciplined reading would defeat the purpose. I had stumbled on dream analysis and shamanism by chance, I decided to allow chance its head. I would try things that just happened my way. I would become, not a seeker, but a finder.

It was an event at a Pembroke hotel that convinced me of the benefits of an open mind. I had been to Pembroke but once before, a fleeting visit on a coasting vessel to tranship a small consignment of high explosive to a cargo liner bound for the Persian Gulf anchored in the bay.

I had, however sailed up and down the Bristol Channel on many occasions, and had often seen, from seaward, the ancient church at St. Govan's head, wedged into its rocky crevice in the cliff face. I arrived at the hotel a couple of hours before dinner, and decided to take a look at the church, driving down the trackway to park my car, before scrambling down the cliff to the ruin.

Sitting in its quiet, I took in the majesty of the seascape before me, reminded of those magical views at sea in times that seemed an eternity away, yet just like yesterday. I realised that since my encounter with shamanism, I felt closer to nature. The sea and the clouds, and even the scree beneath my feet seemed to speak to me. Soaked in that feeling of wonder, I made my way back to the hotel and a good dinner.

After dinner I meandered towards the bar, planning to have a nightcap and a good night's sleep, ready for my meeting the following day. The hotel had a downstairs ballroom, and I could hear the hubbub of voices coming up the stairway. It transpired that there was a Psychic Fayre taking place. My heart was telling me here

was an opportunity not to be missed. My mind was telling me not to be silly, but I descended the stairs and somewhat tongue-in-cheek, paid the fiver requested for entrance.

I had no idea what to expect and was bemused by the little stalls offering natural medicines, crystals, tarot readings and a host of other things I still believed to be somewhat cranky. This was surely a step too far! I was about to leave when the organiser invited us to take our seats for a psychic workshop.

He told us a little about what is meant by being psychic, saying that psychism was a gift we all had at some level. To demonstrate, he invited us to exchange something with the person next to us and to sit in silence holding it for a few minutes. The young woman next to me took a ring from her finger and pressed it into my palm. I gave her my wristwatch.

Within about a minute, I was overwhelmed by a great sense of love. It was a warm, benign feeling of great comfort, rather like the sensation that accompanied some of my dreams. We were invited to share our reactions with the group, and I reported my experience.

What was even more astounding was the young woman's report. She said that she had experienced an overwhelming sense of the sea. She could not say whether she felt she was in the sea or on it. It was simply a great benign sensation of being enveloped by the sea, as if a part of it.

I left feeling that I had learned not to be dismissive of things psychic. I was tempted to seek something to read about psychic phenomena but remembered my resolution to rely on chance encounters. Besides, was not the topic shot through with dubious practise and fraud. I remember feeling free to take it or leave it. Nevertheless, that one event was enough to open my mind that little bit more,

My philosophy led to many chance encounters. I became more adventurous and explored things I would formerly have avoided like the plague. Distant viewing brought some success, but opportunities to expand my abilities proved incompatible with my philosophy of trusting to chance.

I tried Reflexology with beneficial results, and took up meditation which I still practice, benefiting greatly<sup>6</sup>. I explored many ancient teachings, picking up a host of useful insights<sup>7</sup>. A chance encounter led to Reiki, and a satisfying way of benefiting others.

It was at my son's funeral that it came home to me how much I had changed. I had fought grief when my parents died two and twelve years before. Now I found myself accepting my son's passing with an overwhelming serenity. His thirty-two years with us was a cause for celebration, not grief.

Reflecting on this, I realized that serenity had become a permanent feature of my life. The beauty of the night sky, the glistening dew on the ivy, or the sight of the wood anemones turning their faces to follow the sun's path through day; these things brought a joy to my heart that once was inconceivable.

Meanwhile, rational thought seemed unimpaired. I became more competent in my work and went on to write several articles and five books. So, what had happened?

It is my belief that heart and mind had quietly come into balance, as if two natural partners had fallen in love with each other. They had found the secret of working together. Spirituality is, I believe, a state of constantly improving one's relationship with all that is, both within ourselves and without. Over twenty-five years there had been a quiet realignment within me.

I had already noticed certain watershed moments in my development, a feeling of having come out of something and to meet something new and exciting. Without striving, I had somehow allowed the emergence of another stage of balance, that feeling in the heart of

being in touch with everything, including my own mind. Two estranged lovers, unable to properly function without each other.

**Ken Davies**

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<sup>4</sup> Matthews. John, (1991) *The Celtic Shaman: A Handbook*. Element Books.

<sup>5</sup> Green, Miranda, (1995), *The Celtic World*. Routledge, London.

<sup>6</sup> Le Shan, Lawrence, (1974). *How to Meditate*. Thorson's.

<sup>7</sup> Readings: Too many to list here, but include Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Judaism

**Dr W Ken Davies** has published many articles on academic and social issues in specialist journals and magazines. He published his first novel 'Chasing the Tide' in 2016. Ken lost his eldest son to heart failure in 2000 and became a widower in 2021.

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## Religion and the supernatural in war and peace: from ponerology to regeneration



Image: A 2022 World's Indigenous Peoples' Day poster depicting the struggle of Crimean Muslim Tatars against Russia's annexation of their homeland in 2014 and 2022 invasion of Ukraine, symbolised by the double-headed eagle.(1) (Image credit: Crimean Tatar Information Centre)

Although Russian culture, art and literature hold a lifelong fascination for me, my interest in Eastern Europe really began in 1982 during a visit to Berlin. A decade later, I worked for a year in what was then Czechoslovakia, and in the mid-1990s was introduced to the remarkable Marian Wenzel and Helen Walasek of Bosnia Herzegovina Heritage Rescue. The former Yugoslavia's emergence from communism led to rapid dissolution which, unlike the peaceful division that created the Czech Republic and Slovakia, was marked by violent inter-ethnic and religious conflict, primarily affecting Bosnia, Herzegovina, and neighbouring areas of Croatia. Through BHHR Marian (who died in 2002) and Helen worked tirelessly and courageously to support cultural and humanitarian missions. Notably, they highlighted the relationships between the destruction of ethno-religious heritage and what became known as 'ethnic-cleansing' primarily directed against Bosnian Muslims by Serbian militia. (2,3,4,5)

### Geopolitics and Religion in a Post-Truth Era

The late 20<sup>th</sup> century Balkan 'religious culture wars' had far-reaching consequences, fuelling global Islamic extremism as well as American Samuel Huntington's influential 'Clash of

Civilizations' thesis.(6) This asserted that cultural and religious identities would form the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War era, with a central 'West verses the Rest' (a phrase coined by British sociologist Stuart Hall) cleavage. Over thirty years on from the collapse of the so-called Eastern Bloc, Russia's war against Ukraine appears to fulfil the clash of civilisations hypothesis, with religion widely cited as playing a foundational role in the conflict.(7) However, by the time of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 there was also general recognition of a geopolitical era defined by 'post-truth' politics and 'alternative facts' by many in the West, as well as 'the Rest'.(8) *The Post-truth Era* is a 2004 book by US author Ralph Keyes whose title anticipates a genuinely international cultural phenomenon, extending from the 1990s to the present, in which religion has often been pivotal.

*In 2004 a Siberian shaman, Toizin Bergenov, was hired by deputies in the Russian дума to purge the parliament of evil spirits drawn by the negative energy of angry debates....*

So begins a web article entitled *Communism in an Enchanted World: Supernatural Politics in Stalin's Russia and Mao's China* by Stephen Smith of All Souls College Oxford. Smith goes on: "Visiting Russia and China in the late 1990s and early

2000s, one could not but be struck by the revival of formal religion and by the explosion of cults and occult phenomena...” He continues: “The Indian historian, Dipesh Chakrabarty, has argued that when seeking to understand subaltern politics outside the West, scholars need to resist the ‘logic of secular-rational calculations inherent in the modern conception of the political’, and instead stretch that conception to include ‘the agency of gods, spirits, and other supernatural beings.’ This is the starting point” for Smith’s project, and also for mine in the following discussion.(9)

Whilst ‘Subaltern Studies’ most often refers to the study of non-elites in postcolonial South Asia, the term has a wider application which is relevant to both the Russian annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine.(10) The initial focus here, however, is the use of religion and supernatural agency as mechanisms whereby political leaders and elites, particularly in Russia, but also in Europe and the United States, manipulate and mobilise various forms of militant ethno-religious nationalism.(11) This phenomenon led directly to genocide during the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and is identified with the Bosnian-Serb war criminal Radovan Karadžić (currently serving a life prison sentence in Britain). It is also a feature of contemporary Russian polity, notably in the apocalyptic geopolitics of Vladimir Putin, his secular and spiritual advisers. Bosnia and Russia are used below as case studies for reflecting on the existing and potential roles of religion and ideology in war and peace. The discussion concludes with reference to ‘ponerology,’ a branch of theology dealing with the nature of evil, and its application to the study of politics by the Polish psychiatrist - a profession he shared with Karadžić - Andrzej Łobaczewski.(12) Also discussed is the relevance of a sustainable development paradigm shift to the creation of a just peace for Ukraine.(13)

#### **Radovan Karadžić and “the Banality of Evil”**

*It is inherent in our entire [Western] philosophical tradition that we cannot conceive of a ‘radical evil’...*  
(Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*)

*The deeds were monstrous, but the doer – at least the very effective one now on trial – was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous.*

The above quotations from Hannah Arendt, political philosopher and Holocaust survivor, are taken from an *Aeon* essay by Thomas White.(14) He argues that there is ambiguity in Arendt’s understanding of evil, reflected in the two concepts of ‘radical evil’ (from 1951) and the ‘banality of evil’ from her 1963 report on the trial of Nazi Adolf Eichmann. Similarly, the career of Radovan Karadžić – psychiatrist, politician and poet – raises questions about whether evil is radical, banal, metaphysical, or perhaps all three.(15) I tend to favour the evil trinity and suggest the former president of Republika Srpska provided willing agency for this. Karadžić also combines the qualities of shapeshifter and trickster, avoiding capture for his war crimes by posing as New Age healer Dr Dragan David Dabić. Now imprisoned on the Isle of Wight, Karadžić was indicted by an International Criminal Tribunal, and remains infamous as the ‘Butcher of Bosnia,’ a prime mover in the Srebrenica massacre of some 8,000 Bosniak Muslim men and boys.(16,17,18) Like certain other facilitators of genocide, he seemed to possess the dual ability to channel evil whilst at the same time convincing others, including some religious leaders, of his near saintliness as a peacemaker.(19) Thus, a year before the Srebrenica massacre, the Greek Orthodox Church reportedly declared him “one of the most prominent sons of our Lord Jesus Christ working for peace.”(15,20) This semi-canonization of the living anticipates the Russian Orthodox Church’s spiritual support for Vladimir Putin.

#### **Vladimir Putin and “A People of the End”**

*Russian people, in accordance with their metaphysical nature and vocation in the world, are a people of the End* (Nikolai Berdyaev in *The Russian Idea*, 1947)

This quotation is taken from the introduction to a very helpful open access book entitled *Shapes of the Apocalypse: Arts and Philosophy in Slavic Thought* edited by Andrea Oppo. (21). Berdyaev seems to be one of the Russian president’s



favourite philosophers and is cited as an important influence on his, arguably, increasingly millenarian worldview.(22) Ironically, in embarking on a stated mission to “de-Nazify” Ukraine through, in his words, a “special military operation,” Putin himself has increasingly provoked comparison with Hitler. The central thesis of a 2005 book by David Reddles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation*, also invites parallels with the cult of Putin in Russia.(23) However, in the context of Russia’s war on Ukraine, it is the president’s secular and spiritual entourage, notably Security Council deputy chairman Dmitry Medvedev, who have ramped up the apocalyptic rhetoric, a curated selection of which is available from *Religiolog*.(24)

A range of commentators have deconstructed this blatant propaganda to better understand who the target audiences are. The Russian film maker and journalist Mikhail Fishman suggests the belligerent tirades are primarily intended for domestic consumption.(25) Others note that the ‘holy war rhetoric’ appeals to the US Christian Right and international conspiracy movements; whilst a third interpretation locates the Russian invocation of End Times within a broader global apocalyptic zeitgeist. (26,27) The American historian Timothy Snyder is among those who find a potentially genocidal religious and political ideology within the propaganda based on the concept of a ‘Russian World,’ which the leader of the Ukrainian Catholic Church described as “the evil that has come to our land.”(28,29)

### **Peace: From Ponerology to Regeneration**

*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.* United States President John F Kennedy, 1961

Although Kennedy, along with many others, misattributed this famous quotation to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Irish philosopher Edmund Burke, the US president’s usage had especial resonance during this period of the Cold War, including the 1961 Berlin Crisis.(30) Whilst Burke and Kennedy espoused in different ways religious and political values associated with the European Enlightenment, the writing of Polish psychiatrist Andrzej Łobaczewski (1921-2008) draws on his

experience of Nazism and the Soviet Union, especially Stalinism.(12) A 2021 British Psychological Society article by Dr Steve Taylor of Leeds Beckett University on *The Problem of Pathocracy* (a term coined by Łobaczewski) generated considerable interest.(31) Pathocracy is a system of government ‘wherein a small pathological minority takes control...’ However, it can be argued that certain political (and other controlling) systems contribute to pathological values and behaviours. Łobaczewski also popularised the term ‘political ponerology;’ the latter word associated with the 19<sup>th</sup> century German Lutheran leader Karl Immanuel Nitzsch to describe the study of evil in the contexts of “the nature of evil, the origin of evil, and evil in relation to the Divine Government.”(32)

*Reaching a Just and Lasting Peace in Ukraine* is a statement from ‘The Science and Ethics of Happiness Study Group’ hosted by the Vatican City, but not mandated by any particular organisation, which appeared on the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network website in June 2022.(33) One of the prime movers in this initiative is the American economist Jeffrey Sachs, widely regarded as one of the world’s leading advocates for sustainable development.(34) However, the peace plan has not met with broad approval and a subsequent petition, entitled ‘To All Who Care about Humanity and the Planet’s Future,’ based on some of its recommendations, has also failed to attract wide support, notwithstanding some high profile and well-regarded signatories.(35) Indeed, most progressive commentators have been openly hostile to the initiative.(36) The difficulty of sustaining a pacifist response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was explored by BBC Radio 4’s *Moral Maze* programme in March 2023.(37) Pacifism in this context, I would argue, is not grounded in ponerology and fails to sufficiently acknowledge the crime of aggression and other war crimes, again including destruction of cultural heritage, perpetrated by the Putin regime against the Ukrainian nation. Another problem may be that a paradigm shift (of the kind described by Christian and Interfaith theologian Hans Kung) in the very concept of sustainable development is necessary to overcome prevalent apocalyptic worldviews.(40)

## Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Ukraine's 'Civic Spirit'

In *The Zelensky Effect*, a new book reviewed by Serhii Plokhyy for *The Washington Post*, the renowned Ukrainian American historian praises the authors' analysis of the dialectical relationship between Ukraine's leader and people, highlighting an "inclusive national identity which crosses linguistic, ethnic and religious lines." (41, 42) Elsewhere this has been called a 'Civic Spirit' and President Zelenskyy, a native Russian speaker from a Jewish family, is widely regarded as its representation. (43) In a speech to the European Council in October 2022, during the Czech Presidency, he recalled Václav Havel's vision of unity for Europe. (44) Havel was a Czech statesman, poet, playwright and former dissident who, as leader of 'Civic Forum' is identified above all with the peaceful 'Velvet Revolution' that led to the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and, ultimately, the Soviet Union. A recent issue of *The Ecological Citizen* (open access journal) has drawn attention to the relevance of Havel's life and work to contemporary existential crises. (45) He recognised that environmental concerns had played a key role in 'Soviet End Times' and was prescient about their future importance. Also, like Zelensky, Havel understood the significance of NATO enlargement for peace in Europe. (46)

Another 2022 World's Indigenous Peoples' Day poster depicting Crimean Tatars caring for their environment during peace time.

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## Endnote

My narrative began over thirty years ago, and periodically resumes for me. This happened in 2019 at the Religious Experience Research Centre Conference in Lampeter when I met a Ukrainian scholar, Taras Dzyubanskyy, from UWTSD's Interfaith Professional Doctorate programme. Wales has important connections to Ukraine, including the present Counsel General, Mick Antoniwi, who represents the country's civic spirit here in the UK.

Janet Mackinnon



(Image credit: Crimean Tatar Information Centre)

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## Just follow the heart

**I saw this printed on a T-shirt recently. I took it to mean that the most appropriate way to behave (especially spiritually) is to take our emotions as our primary guide. This is currently a very fashionable attitude. Clearly the emotional or affective aspect of our experience and functioning is an essential part of our humanity. A deficiency here is liable to result in a lack of empathy. But also an emphasis on our personal feelings can produce someone who is obsessed with themselves and determined to get their own way. This is plainly not a simple matter.**

However, our understanding of the nature and role in our lives of affective experience is poorly understood, despite considerable attention. Academically, the subject is rather a mess. How many emotions are there? How do they function? Are there types of affective experience? If so, what are they? What's the key difference, if any, between the two apparently major types, emotions and feelings, and all the other words used here: moods, passions, attitudes, obsessions, gut feelings, intuitions and so on.

This messy situation is, if anything, even worse in popular culture. Some emotions are commonly confused. It is now commonplace to hear jealousy & envy muddled, despite the facts that they mean quite different things & the experience of them is also very different. Envy is roughly the desire for something that someone else has & is akin to greed; whereas jealousy is something like the feeling that someone should stop what they are doing because we feel it disrespects us. Nowadays, often, both of these are jealousy. Again the popular use of the word love as an emotional experience is so diverse that the word is frequently little more than an exaggerated version of the verb 'like.'

Here I will simply begin by offering a distinction between emotion and feeling, and examine one particular type of feeling while keeping an eye on the possible value of the suggested analysis for spiritual matters.

The word 'emotion' has a long history and is derived from the Latin via the French. The most

plausible etymology is that the 'e' prefix means 'out' or 'outside' while the 'motion' component means exactly that and comes from 'motus' in Latin. So, an emotion is movement from outside, an affective state caused by something beyond the individual. Something comes into consciousness which is not selected by that person. We still speak of being 'moved.' They simply find themselves angry or fearful (say); they didn't decide to be in that state. It is possible to decide to have an emotion. We could listen to a person speaking, for example, with a resolution to be impressed or insulted, but such states would seem more like acting & affectation than a genuine emotional state. Emotions do appear to come upon us unbidden, although we may misidentify them.

Furthermore, the emotion may itself cause a motion, an action. This seems to be part of its original usage. So if a person acts out of anger (one of the clearest emotions) it may be said that the anger caused the action rather than the person concerned. The action is the motion, the movement. Clearly, we often speak of a person acting on their fear, for example, directly, to the extent that it seems appropriate to speak of the fear causing the action, running away for example. Thus a "crime of passion" may even be considered a defence in some countries. The individual was "out of their mind", their usual character, when the action occurred. Presumably this is why some trials, more in the past than the present, included a "character reference." They are not the sort of person to do this sort of thing by their own volition.

Perhaps thinking along these lines yields the way of speaking of the onset of romantic love as "falling in love." Not something we are likely to choose to do, who desires a fall? Indeed, the Romans depicted the coming of love as initiated by a blind cherub with manifestly inadequate wings flying around loosing off arrows of love with unpredictable abandon. Our popular imagery of love still includes sometimes a heart pierced by an arrow.

We all know of someone who seems to have made a particularly unfortunate choice of

partner, is gently told so by their more honest friends, yet proceeds under the pressure of what they call love to a relationship which eventually flounders in what seems to be a predictable way.

Thinking along these lines and much influenced by Aristotle's arguments for humans being the "rational animal," it became commonplace in Medieval Europe to consider this type of emotion as animalistic. Animals had this type of emotion and it caused much of their behaviour. Choice was scarcely available to them. Freedom was possible, in this area, by rising above the emotion and making a rational choice. Ideally, being taken over by such emotions could be subdued substantially by developing a rational character, stepping aside and making a decision, not just being pushed about by waves of emotion.

Thus, in medieval table tombs with figures depicted reclined on top, the Knight and his Lady would often be sculpted with an animal beneath their feet. The main explanation for this was to signify that the animalistic power of emotion had been conquered and subdued by the person depicted. However, this idea was often forgotten as the male chose a small lion to show his bravery while the lady had her favourite lapdog. Rather sweet, but somewhat missing the point.

It is not surprising then that a whole repertoire of coping with emotions rather than simply allowing them to dictate our actions has emerged over the centuries; anger management, facing our fears and so on. There is Impulse Therapy which tries to get the individual to be more mindful of the initial coming of the irritation which can so easily grow to anger, or even rage, & to work on reducing or cancelling the initial stimulus. There is what I call Emotional Alchemy, which is the training which presumes that, as all is energy, it is often possible to work on a negative energy liable to damage the individual, and maybe others, to translate it into something more useful or even creative. Working on a cause, for example, or writing as therapy, or painting to get it out and into the world, away from the inner self.

Speaking more personally for a moment, I recall coping with a very painful event and the resulting emotions by going out and chopping wood, dawn to dusk, for three days.

Feelings are different. They are gentler, less overpowering and mostly tell us something about ourselves.

There are lots of different sub-categories of feelings but let's focus on the most common and the most useful. This category I call 'Feelings as Perception.' It is most clear with the simple visual appearance of an object. We come upon an individual object. It has a certain shape and texture, it has certain colours and visual look. All this is perceived. However, there is also what I call its "felt quality," a feeling which shows our reaction to the object in affective terms.

Here's a simple example: Consider two glasses, one an old-fashioned British pint beer glass with many dimples and a handle.



Also, picture a long and slender Champagne glass with a stem, called a flute.



If I look at these glasses I find I have an element of my experience which is a personal feeling

reacting to their individuality. The shape of them as objects. It varies between different people. So, speaking personally and keeping things simple, I would say that the dimpled glass feels rather “jolly”, whereas the slender glass feels somewhat “elegant.”

These experiences don’t fit into any of the major categories of the emotions. They aren’t just a weakened version of one of the emotions. Feelings of perception aren’t emotions at all. They are part of experience of perceiving showing my own particular reaction to the object. They are a felt component of the perception of the glasses. Nor is the experience likely to move in and take over to produce an, possibly undesired, action.

On the rare occasions that I find myself talking to people about the difference between emotions & feelings of perception, I find some people reacting by saying something like, “Yes, of course, that’s obvious, why are you saying this? We all know that.” While others clearly don’t know what the hell I’m talking about. So there is a need to point out this difference for some.

Furthermore, once noticed, this ability can be encouraged and practised. It can be consciously developed and brought to greater attention.

The result is a considerable enrichment of ordinary, everyday experience. Just walking down the street a person may notice and lightly respond to the varied front doors, the lamp-posts, plants, the changing cloud patterns and so on.

Art becomes more vivid. Some art can help to extend the skill as it focuses on this experience. To feel the subtle differences in the geometric paintings of Mondrian, for example, or the powerful vivid colours of Mark Rothko, or the curious objects of Yves Tanguy.

Some practise this naturally, but even here the extension and development of the skill (for so it is) can yield considerable satisfaction in simple experience.

But further, some features of spirituality (such as Zen) emphasise the need to focus down on the ordinary detail of the moment. Attention, attention. This skill can enhance that; time slows, the intensity of ordinary life increases. Of course, it may make buying a pair of shoes rather lengthy.

In addition, noticing the felt quality we experience reveals much about our own self. In seeing how we react in this way, self-knowledge is gently increased. This helps the oldest injunction from the gods in the West: Know Thyself.

Of course, there is much more to say. There are other types of feeling, for example. But, to summarise, just considering the matter suggested here and its impact on spirituality, we should be careful about following the heart if that means just allowing emotions to create our actions, while at least feelings as perception may both make our ordinary life more vivid and yield insights into our self.

**Michael Shearer**



## Universalism: the heart of Christianity

By the middle of the second century, the ink was dry on the books that would become the New Testament. The newly discovered Gospel of Thomas (about half of which is included in Matthew, Mark, and Luke) didn't make the cut (Patterson, 2014, 215-216.) The Gospel of John barely made it (Dungan, 1999, 23-25); notably, the contemporary scholars of the Jesus Seminar saw almost nothing of the historical Jesus in the Gospel of John (Funk, et al, 1993, 11, 20).

Concurrent with this major milestone in early Christianity, Christian scholars began writing "theology." Four basic Christian theologies emerged:

### 1) Good works

"Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in Heaven." (Matthew 7:21 NRSV) Augustine added that, in addition, you must be a Christian to go to Heaven. In 1965, Vatican II revised that slightly, saying that good works were all that were required since Jesus had died for everyone. So now Jews, Hindus, and even Protestants who are good can go to heaven, but the only certain forgiveness is in the Catholic Church (Hick, 1993, 82-84). When I was 12 years old (in 1955), a Catholic friend kindly told me and another Protestant friend, "not to worry," because if we were good people on earth, we were destined only for the "top level of Hell" which was sort of like Earth!

### 2) Salvation by faith alone

"No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6 NRSV) This was the theology espoused by Martin Luther and is commonly known in the U.S. as, "Jesus Saves."

### 3) Predestination

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet, not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father." (Matthew 10:29) This is the theology espoused by John Calvin. This is no longer in favour, but it is impossible to overstate its huge impact on religion and culture in



The Good Shepherd, Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome (Wikimedia Commons)

Western Europe and North America! The UK had to endure religious wars and the dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell and his son, but its roots are deep into the whole of British Colonial/US history.

### 4) Universalism

"And I, when I am lifted up from earth, will draw all people to myself." (John 12:32) This is the theology that God saves everyone either immediately or eventually. It was first espoused by St. Clement of Alexandria in the 2nd century and his pupil, Origen. In Universalism, God is a loving father who disciplines us but never abandons us (Vincent, 2019, 92-93, 163-172).

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What proof do we have that one of these theologies is true except by playing, "duelling Bible verses"? Not to worry: I've got DATA!

For the past 150 years my academic colleagues and I have gone all over the world to analyze how human beings experience God. Whatever their religion (or lack of it), about 40-65% surveyed in the UK, US, Europe, China, India, Japan, Turkey, Iran, Africa, and Latin America (Rankin, 2008)

231-239), they tell us they experience God as LIGHT, God as SPIRIT, and God as LOVE.

A minority of people tell us they experience God in human form, much like the Angel of the Lord in the Hebrew Bible. Usually these divine beings are Saviours who can keep you out of hell or get you out of hell (Jesus, Mary, Krishna, Khuan Yin, Amida Buddha). As any student of comparative religion knows, the "saints," "angels," and "jinn" of the West are the same as the "small g" gods of the East and in ancient times.

Here are some examples from my near-death experience cases:

"An absolute white Light that is God-all loving. The unification of us with our Creator."  
(Vincent, 1994, p. 27)

"I left my body, and I was surrounded by God. It didn't feel male or female, young or old, just me. I was surrounded by Love ... I looked down at the little girl in bed ... Later when I realized it was me, I was back in my body." (Vincent, 1994, p. 21)

"It is something which becomes you and you become it. I could say, "I was peace; I was love." It was the brightness ... It was part of me."  
(Vincent, 1994, p. 29)

"The light was in me and between the molecules, the cells in my body. He was in me - I was in him ... I knew all things. I saw all things. I was all things. But not me; Jesus had this. As long as I was "in Him," and he was "in me," I had this power, this glory (for lack of a better word)." (Vincent 1994, p. 57)

Our research indicates that, of the four basic Christian theologies, Universalism's image of God matches that of people the world over who, in transpersonal experiences and mystical experiences of God, tell of a God of unconditional love who would not condemn anyone to eternal hell. In short, Universalism "wins" when explaining how real people experience God. Admittedly, although the "idea" of Universalism is well, "universal," many researchers of religious/spiritual experience don't know the origins of the theology behind it. In Christian history, a minority of Universalists (like Hosea

Ballou) believed that there was no hell. However, the majority of Universalists from Clement of Alexandria in the 2nd century and his pupil Origen down to the present day have believed that hell exists but is not permanent. In other words, all people will be saved immediately or eventually.

Our data from thousands of research cases from near-death experiences, death-bed visions, after-death communications, and mystical experiences tell us that most people are "first round draft choices." Also, folks get out of hell quickly if they call out to God or (in the West) Jesus as this example shows:

"God, I am not ready, please help me. I remember when I screamed (this) an arm shot out of the sky and grabbed my hand and at the last second I was kept from falling off the end of the funnel, the lights flashing; and the heat was really something." (Greyson and Bush, 1992, p.100)

In this negative experience, the person is told that she will be in "limbo" for a long time, but a long time is not forever:

"It was not peaceful, much baggage, much unfinished business. All things are connected. You are not your body, you are a soul; mine was in limbo. I knew I would be in limbo for a long time. I had a life review and was sent to the void." (Vincent 1994, p. 119)

Here are two examples of people being given tours of the afterlife:

The eighteenth century physician and preacher Dr George De Benneville died of a "consumption-like illness" but revived at his wake. He told of being given a tour of the afterlife by two angels and that he saw people being taken out of hell and up to heaven when they had repented. (The full text of his autobiographical experience is in Vincent, 2019, 103-116.)

Another example is the near-death experience of the psychiatrist Dr George Ritchie who was dead for 7 minutes and was given a tour of heaven and hell by Jesus himself. In all of the levels of hell, there were beings of light waiting to assist the lost souls (Ritchie, 1998, 28-46).



Folks sometimes have after-death communications from people who say they are in hell but who later appear to their loved ones and say that their time in hell “is over” (Guggenheim, 1996, 239-242, and Haraldsson, 2012, 100-101).

Is all this religious experience true? We do not have PROOF that God communicates with humans or that there is life after death, but we do have evidence for it. I, personally, find the evidence compelling. The Society for Psychical Research (founded in 1882) did much of the early research into afterlife. In 1969, Sir Alister Hardy founded the Religious Experience Research Unit (now Centre) which now has accumulated over 6,000 cases of religious/spiritual experiences.

At the dawn of the 21st century, Titus Rivas, et.al, published *The Self Does Not Die* (2016) presenting over a hundred cases in which the near-death experiencer returned with verifiable information. More recently, Evelyn Elsaesser and her colleagues completed a study of 1,004 after-death communications; many of these cases are evidential (Elsaesser, 2020).

I myself have recently completed a study of 1,600 after-death communications in which I found 20.1% were evidential (Vincent, 2022).

Jesus got it right when he called God, “Our Father,” - a loving father who will not give up on us until we are all “safely home!”

One thing that Universalism has taught me is the humbling thought that God loves each and every person on the planet as much as God loves me. In the end, the end, God will save the “Lost Sheep” (Matthew 18:10-14) and the “Prodigal Son” (Luke 15:11-32). That to me is the heart of Christianity.

**Dr Ken R Vincent**

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## Spiritualist art: an introduction

*In May 1852, his [John Murray Spear's] hand was seized with the compulsion to draw. He said he had "never had any taste for drawing" and "never drew the first thing in his life," but he gave his hand a pen to do its will. [...] soon he began other spontaneous, abstract, and automatic drawings, "very singular, and sometimes beautiful diagrams [sic] of things which he and no one else on earth... ever saw, or heard of before."*<sup>1</sup>

**Art produced under the religious banner of Spiritualism was first known to have been made in 1852. Non-artist, American healer, and Universalist minister John Murray Spear (1804-1887) in his frenzy to receive messages from God feverishly created the first cited Spiritualist art by surrendering his body to what he believed to be the hand of his spiritual Father<sup>2</sup>. Spear's action tells us that those who followed the religious practice of Spiritualism, a recognised religion since 1848, with a belief culture dependent on the supposition that all humans survive death in the form of a spirit, can gain the ability to manifest art without the skills of an artist.**

Spiritualism's inauguration was in Hydesville, New York State, after a series of supernatural happenings in a wooden cottage belonging to the Fox family<sup>3</sup>. Whilst a belief in some form of supernatural existence had been credited to human life since the beginning of time, it was here that belief in the immortality of the soul or spirit between the two worlds was given some credibility as the Fox children communicated with a deceased pedlar through knockings (similar to Morse code) within the wooden frame of their cottage. This supernatural, and yet also natural, communication of seemingly unknown information between these worlds, appeared to be conclusive evidence of a form of the continuous existence of the human soul.

Spiritualism is an officially recognised religion with churches and educational centres worldwide.<sup>4</sup> It has ministers who are trained to take marriage, funeral and naming ceremonies. It is a religion that embodies the idea of life after

death, in the form of a spirit, which can communicate with the living.<sup>5</sup> It has principles of belief that its members follow. Its overriding philosophy, known as the Seven Principles of Spiritualism, was reported to have been spoken by the then-deceased philanthropist Robert Owen (1771-1858) through the mediumship of Emma Hardinge Britten (1823-1899) in a state of trance.<sup>6</sup> It was these words that later formed the modern principles of Spiritualism in Britain since the beginning of the twentieth century.

The principles of Spiritualism are:

1. The Fatherhood of God.
2. The Brotherhood of Man.
3. The Communion of Spirits and the Ministry of Angels.
4. The Continuous Existence of the Human Soul.
5. Personal Responsibility.
6. Compensation and Retribution Hereafter for all the Good and Evil Deeds done on Earth.
7. Eternal Progress Open to every Living Soul.

Although ten principles were originally noted to have been spoken in trance through Mrs Hardinge Britten in New York, they were replaced by the current principles by the Spiritualist National Union (SNU) in 1901-2. The American Principles of Spiritualism are today nine or ten instead of seven. Interestingly, these statements of faith are very similar to some of the American Principles of Liberty.

These Spiritualist principles are the backbone for the belief culture dependent on the supposition that all humans and animals survive death in the form of a spirit, especially principle four. The spirit is believed to have a thinking consciousness, be housed within the human (or animal) body during life, and exist before physical life, during that life, and after death as an intelligent consciousness in the 'spirit-world'. The spirit is said to have a 'continuous existence' and thus has a presence before human life and after death. Thus the spirit is believed by Spiritualists to be able to communicate with a living incarnate

consciousness as a discarnate consciousness: in the form of spirit-to-spirit thought.

During the late nineteenth century in Britain, Spiritualism was on the fringe of Christian ideals with Christian identity split between the traditional form of 'working class' Spiritualism purporting to give messages from the deceased, and Christian Spiritualism.<sup>7</sup> This was very serious for those who wished to connect with the dead especially since the Witchcraft Act (1735) forbade such 'magical' communications and had not yet been repealed. Thus, Christian Spiritualism was created as an alternative to the nontheistic alternative. Indeed just the thought of a wisp of insanity brought on by communication with the dead (as was hinted to by the first female spirit artists) frightened many women out of the séance rooms.<sup>8</sup> Christian Spiritualism reached out to mainly middle-class Christians who dare not rock the orthodox Christian boat.

Changing, in the twentieth century, to a nondenominational practice, it became a faith that did not require holy images for its worship. It was a religion that relied on the deceased, including supernatural beings such as God and angels, to converse with the living. This is a different form of faith. During the latter part of the nineteenth century having a belief that may not support Christian precedents (especially communication with the deceased) caused some consternation amongst the social classes since Christianity in Britain was the major religion of the nation.

Now, in the twenty-first century, Spiritualism, known by the Church of England (2010) as a 'new' religion even though it had been in existence since 1848, is predominately a practice of transmitting messages from the deceased.<sup>9</sup> Whilst Spiritualist supernaturalism had become an experimental way of finding out what the spirits could do, the 'spiritual' element was also deemed important within its culture to show respect for the deceased. Thus, it was a little more than forty years later in Britain that the religious aspects were defined and Spiritualist principles described.

Spiritualist art plays a major part in that philosophy since it validates a fundamental point of

survival evidence by creating drawings or paintings of aspects of life after death as well as providing evidence of the once living by an artist-medium. This proof may take the form of a portrait of a deceased person; a landscape of where they lived and/or illustrations of their belongings or animals owned by them. The artwork, produced by an artist, or non-artist medium, is made by one unknown to the deceased and so is said by Spiritualists that it is veridical evidence of life beyond death.<sup>10</sup>

Below (left) is an example of a modern evidential portrait of a lady who passed away in the 1970s.



This is a detail of a pastel drawing created by the spirit artist, and known Yorkshire watercolourist, Alan Stuttle. The original image has ten faces that relate to the photograph which was found after the drawing event. The people who were drawn are my mother's grandparents and aunts and uncles, many of whom I did not meet in life. Stuttle's drawing predated my receipt of the photograph (above right). On close inspection, the surprising elements in the portrait are my grand-father's white collar of his Church of England ministry, and a small locket around my great aunt's neck with her hair in the same style as the drawn portrait. He also illustrates the (now cropped) portrait, with the moustache of my great uncle in the bottom right corner.

These portraits of my deceased relations could not have been of anyone else in the family, since this was the largest number of offspring in my mothers' family. Alan Stuttle would not have

known the people in the photograph and so he had created an 'evidential spirit portrait'. That is he, as an artist and spirit medium, had created recognisable spirit portraits of my family without knowing them.

So, why is Spiritualism different? What it is not is a belief in higher, controlling forces (other than 'God' which is the first principle of Spiritualism). It relies on a conviction, through practice and faith, that when a human or animal dies the innermost spirit or personality (the person's consciousness or persona) survives death, and this consciousness can communicate with the living after the death of the physical body. The 'medium' as the person receiving the messages, has the ability, normally from birth, to reiterate the essence of the spirit, in this case, as an art form.

It is this communication with the souls of life beyond death conviction that provides the difference between Spiritualist art and other spiritually inspired religious art including that of Shaker art which predated spirit art.<sup>11</sup> The difference between the two art forms is that the "Gifted images" of Shaker art, although physically created by a willing person, are believed to have been made through the Shaker artist from a 'divine gift-giver to an earthly recipient', and not merely a spirit entity.<sup>12</sup>

It is from my original study of the history of this unusual art form, that I discovered that Spiritualist art is composed of six different categories which created an art movement over 170 years (1852-2022).<sup>13</sup> This began with Spear's involuntary hand and arm happenings to that of voluntary and deliberate portraiture of those deceased and unknown to the artists and yet recognised by the living. The taxonomy of the drawings and paintings is divided by the supernatural methods by which they were created. The classifications are, in chronological order from 1852 to 2022: automatic drawing and painting; trance drawing and painting; psychographic drawings; precipitated paintings; modern evidential portrait drawing and painting, and contemporary spirit art including digital and filmmaking.<sup>14</sup>

It has been from the collation and understanding of how, where, and what the pioneers created

that spirit art was established. Despite some negation (that supernatural communication with the dead may be fraudulent) of the methods used in the making process, there is no doubt that images of the deceased have been made by those who have never met them, and will continue to be made. The creators and receivers of drawings and paintings of the deceased have become markers for a belief that human consciousness can communicate through the living artist medium.

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## Hearts, minds, IQ and EQ

**Way back in 1987 I wrote an article for the Mensa magazine\* that is now acknowledged as the first published use of the term Emotional Quotient - EQ. In it I argued that whilst IQ, intelligence quotient, is a useful trait, it is by no means the only important characteristic for an individual human to possess. Rational intelligence, I suggested, needs to be balanced by an ability to empathise, to have an awareness of one's own feelings and an ability to recognise those of others. The article had been prompted by a number of Mensa gatherings at which it became clear that at least some of the intellectuals who attended had about as much emotional awareness as a lump of granite.**

Fast forward to the 2020s, to a higher education fraternity that is frantically trying to come to terms with a mental health crisis. Has anything really changed? Well yes, at least now enough individuals are aware that there is a problem and are able to raise it up the institutional agenda. But the idea of hearts and minds is still one that, in many cases within universities, is one that will receive, well, a cold shoulder. Whilst some tutors, administrators and others are only too aware of how anxious many students are and, indeed, that a small number are suicidal, others may still harbour the belief that the emotional well-being of students is not part of their academic remit.

Why is this? I would guess it is because those individuals have not been through the sort of emotional intelligence journey that I have. They still see life as black and white, as something rational; feelings are something so difficult to handle, let alone fathom, that they are pushed down, ignored, denied. If one were to research into how such individuals have been brought up, all this would probably not be at all surprising.

From an Alister Hardy perspective, what has any of this that got to do with spiritual experiences? If the idea of heart and mind is difficult for an out-and-out intellectual to grasp, what about mind, body and soul?

My own experience is that awareness of a spiritual dimension to life and an engagement with my own emotional development go very much hand in hand. Conscious commitment to an inner journey and facing personal issues enables both a spiritual dimension to life and emotional intelligence to be developed.

Whatever the prompt or trigger to such personal growth, once embarked on this exploration of a reality beyond the physical, a mind just has to open up to heart and soul... like it or not!

**Keith Beasley**  
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\*Beasley, K. (1987) 'The Emotional Quotient' *Mensa*, p25.

## Musings of a madman

Perhaps we all need to be a little mad...

**It was recently reported in The Tablet<sup>1</sup> that many priests and nuns from non-European countries are having difficulties coping with the highly secularised society of the Netherlands. The same is surely true in this country, and true also of many spiritually minded people.**

“I am certain of nothing but of the heart’s affections and the truth of the imagination” wrote John Keats<sup>2</sup>. But if he were asked to prove it, he would have had problems.

The materialistic, mechanical and reductionist understanding of life and the world around us has become so strong. Probably most of us in the West are consciously or unconsciously affected by this belief system. I became aware of this in a U3A philosophy group recently when we were discussing Rupert Sheldrake’s thoughts about morphic fields and morphic resonance. The group was led by a professor of physics who lived in his conceptual world of ‘things’, things that can be observed, measured and analysed. Many of us felt that he found it difficult to step outside this paradigm and accept that there can be aspects of reality beyond this objective world perceived as being outside us and separate from us. We all live within the paradigms with which we are comfortable. But there are powerful forces in the world today with a vested interest in denying any paradigm which sees life as beyond this particular lens of understanding.

There are fundamental questions to which there are no satisfactory ‘scientific’ answers. The nature of consciousness, and indeed life, are clear examples. I do not see consciousness as being located in any particular part of the brain or body. (How could you ever locate a bit of consciousness, replicate it or put it in the lab and claim “that’s me”?) I feel it makes far more sense to regard consciousness as being ‘non-local’. I like the theory that the brain acts as a filter, to select from a larger reality what is needful for us in this life. I accept that the concepts of morphic fields and morphic resonance can be helpful for a better understanding of who we really are. It seems to me that we are shaped to be who we

are through the energies around us, the subtle energies which cannot be defined or physically measured. It also seems to me that the belief that there is a separate ‘me’ which I call ‘I’ or myself is a fundamental misunderstanding. We are all interconnected. I believe there is a deep sense that we were never born and will never die, because we are all a kind of hologram, an emanation, an expression of the larger whole. Words are so inadequate, and as individuals we know we are more than capable of distorting the big picture. It is the body that is born and dies. I believe that there are genuine experiences which can be classified as psychic phenomena. We have the testimonies of people who have had near-death and out-of-the-body experiences. I believe that people do have religious and spiritual experiences and these experiences can result in happier and more fulfilling lives.

But can I prove these? No, I can’t, because all this is not about ‘things’, separate things ‘out there’ that can be observed and measured. The experiences we are considering are ‘echoes from the heart’. We can show evidence, but we cannot ‘prove’ to the satisfaction of those who have already decided that such phenomena are impossible. Explanations don’t work for those who don’t want to believe or who have not had such experiences, these experiences which appear to be windows into a larger reality, connections with other realities or forms of consciousness. These experiences seem to have no physical explanation and they defy our normal conceptions of space and time. So they can never be put to any physical test. It does seem that for many of us there is a growing consensus of opinion in the primacy of consciousness and that our understanding that the material world in which we are immersed derives from this. There is the Galileo Commission promoted by the Scientific and Medical Network. Max Planck as long ago as 1931 said “I regard consciousness as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative of consciousness.”<sup>3</sup> If this makes sense to us it says a great deal about how little we know and also, in another sense, how much we do know.

We seek to understand consciousness, but perhaps we never will, because we can never properly understand ourselves. It is not possible to stand outside ourselves. Explanations become like mirages. They may look convincing, but when we really look at them they leave only a frustrating and ghostly trail which evaporates into nothing, or like a soap bubble, which when you try to grasp it, it is gone.

Ultimately we are the whole, as the mystics have always said. But this is a big step to take. If we claim this for ourselves we too easily slip back into ego consciousness. The poet Rumi: "There is no reality but God. There is only God"<sup>4</sup>. In other words, nothing can exist on its own separate from the whole. There is only the One. Yet living as we do, the world appears to be a world made up of parts.

People need their God, or gods, because this imagery gives them access to a deeper reality, access to the transcendent, to the 'more than', where the many can symbolise the One. Yet any transcendent vision cannot be commanded or held. It is given, and we need to be cautious when people's enthusiasm for their gods prevents them from properly understanding themselves and who they really are, from understanding others and accepting their shadow side. Religions can indeed divide, and, for some of us, an ignorance of who we are and why we are here can be a safer option when an inadequate sense of the transcendent becomes too powerful or obsessive. We are all different, and all of us are indeed unique. You don't have to be excessively religious to enter the gates of heaven. It is not surprising that pride was regarded as number 1 of the 7 deadly sins, or, as we might say today, the destructiveness of being self (or ego) opinionated, the attitude of 'I know better than you'. The 'no self' doctrine of Buddhist teaching can be very helpful.

And so I come back to my favourite theme. We may all be unique, but we are all part of humanity, part of the living stream of life. Let us be thankful for this. Let us celebrate and be glad, and allow this living stream to lead us forward in whatever way it will. Life is about joy and suffering. There is nothing so good as sharing joy and laughter. But when we have to bear our

cross, as there will inevitably be difficult times for all of us, we hope there will be others to help and comfort us.

'The wind is a wild wind, and a wind that will never die.'<sup>5</sup> I find it sad that the instinct of the Church is so often to be tame, to prefer control and regulation, to avoid risks that can take it beyond its constricting and defined canvass. Religions never start like this, and easily become corrupted. True religion is surely a response to a movement from the heart, where a new awareness enters our emptiness, a sense of a deeper reality, of a power and a presence which in truth was with us all along. Maybe we become aware of this in the sudden appreciation of the beauty of nature, a piece of music that touches out hearts, a helping hand - or even at those times when the world seems to fail us, when we find ourselves bereft, with nowhere to turn. It can be at such moments that the 'so much more' breaks through to place the kindness of its arms around us. Human pride and weakness so often imprisons the Spirit. "The world is too much with us", wrote William Wordsworth in one of his sonnets. Yet God also speaks through the still, small voice. "For I have felt a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused..."<sup>6</sup>

To what extent is the rising tide of materialism, mechanical thinking and self-centred ignorance threatening our connection to the heart today, to a greater and wider reality? There is so much good in the world, yet also so much evil and ignorance that can eat its way into us. Are the storm clouds of our brave new world gathering dark on the horizon? Do they anticipate a tsunami, that will destroy all in its path? Whatever we may think there are certainly big challenges ahead.

Plato tells the story about the prisoners in the cave who are chained since birth to face only the back wall. The light is behind them and comes from beyond the cave entrance. The people see only their silhouette and the silhouettes of those who walk outside the cave. If they only knew where the light is coming from, if they only knew they are seeing only shadows, they would become free. They would wake up, and discover what is truly real.



Perhaps we all need to be a little mad for the world to become a better place. We all need to stretch our horizons. We need to travel from the head to the heart. But let us not leave the head behind. We need a good balance.

**Jonathan Robinson**

## References

1. *The Tablet*, 14 January 2023, page 26
2. John Keats, *Letters* - reply to a friend
3. *The Observer*, 25 January 1931.
4. *The Essential Rumi*. Translations by Coleman Barks with John Moyne, page 114
5. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Ode to the West Wind*
6. William Wordsworth, *Lines above Tintern Abbey*



Forsythia in an Oxford garden (R Riachi)



## Researching the AHT database

### The 'common core' question and ongoing research into accounts of transcendent awareness

“I felt someone was with me, a great warmth and surrounding white light” [4273]  
“There was no diversity, only unity” [4322]  
“A glorious feeling of love... It seemed to be a female presence” [4202]

#### **One can value and celebrate spiritual/religious accounts like the AHT-archived extracts above, but - tables, appendices, references, precision - can it really be appropriate to research them?**

The question of whether spiritual/religious awareness has a common core has been in the background of classic research by William James, Rudolf Otto, Robert Zaehner, Walter Stace and Ninian Smart, and this question continues to puzzle researchers. What has been missing is sufficiently comprehensive yet detailed evidence. Questionnaires have many advantages, but they do not have the validity of first-hand accounts.

Over the past three years I have been researching a dataset which was based on comprehensive, detailed analysis of 60 AHT accounts (selected through a stratified random process). The aim has been to provide closer, evidence-based inferences on the common core question:

- Whether there were patterns or types (like direct transcendence through awe, unity, love and/or a few other, maybe clustered, features; or mediated awareness within the incidence of features of everyday experience, maybe with evidence of convergence towards transcendence beyond)
- What the transcendent awareness seemed to consist of (identifying the ways accounts were very meaningful)
- What the outcomes of transcendent awareness were (whether common consequences like increased morality/ethics;

or a variety of outcomes; or a challenge to the pragmatism of 'outcome' itself through descriptions of indelibility)

Unlike previous research into the archive, the dataset retained the link of each item of evidence to its account of origin. Also, each account was thoroughly analysed three times: by two independent researchers (in the 'blind' stage), who came together (the 'joint' stage) to discuss their blind stage differences. There were over ten such researchers, and to make the analysis less subjective they were rotated so that no one person predominated. They followed written guidelines drawn up by a core team of a further four people, including myself. There were also two related projects: a satellite analysis of a further 82 numinous and/or unitive accounts from the AHT archive, and a comparative interpretation I carried out with a professor from the University of Hyderabad of thirteen (non-AHT) accounts from India.

The research had been approved by the Economic and Social Research Council and was generously funded by the AHT's predecessor, the Religious Experience Research Centre. This was back in the late 1980s. We produced then the numerical dataset of the interpretations of the meanings; however, the range of resources needed to complete the project satisfactorily was not available at that time.

As the originally recruited, continuous researcher I have, since then, always felt a responsibility to complete the project when possible. Over the past three years the time has come. I am now in the position of being able to talk about the provisional results. Completion is aimed for next year.

**Geoffrey Ahern**  
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## LETTERS

Dear Editor,

The 'Hearts and Minds' theme for the Spring issue of De Numine brought back a moment from the past.

The husband of a close friend, who regularly expressed his strongly held atheistic views, challenged me to defend religious beliefs. I said something about love being at the core of all religions, placing my hand over my heart. "It all comes from here", I said, to which he replied, "What happens then when someone has a heart transplant?"

Hearing recently from my friend that her husband is in the early stages of dementia, I remembered his comment. It did make me wonder about human perception of the association between our hearts and the emotion of love. When the heart stops beating, we cease to exist here on earth, but does the love also come to an end?

**Anne Drysdale**

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Dear Editor,

I would like to thank Dr Peter Fenwick, Dr Young-hae Chi and everyone who organized the Oxford Humans Death Forum on Zoom on 11th November 2022, a wonderful opportunity to hear a talk from an eminent researcher into Near Death Experiences.

One participant raised a very important point, however. She asked how one combats the hostility of certain scientists to the paranormal. I was reminded in particular of Harvard Professor of Psychology Steven Pinker, who has more than once referred on the BBC to what he calls 'paranormal woo-woo', as if the idea had been a constant irritant to him throughout his professional career. 'Scientism' persists among such academics, regardless of the wealth of testimony over thousands of years that contradicts their assumptions. Such testimony comes not only from OBE's and NDE's, but from prophets, saints, mystics, mesmerists, psychics and mediums. So I am not entirely convinced by Dr Fenwick's answer that reading the vast quantities of personal experiences available will

do the trick, even supposing the stubborn materialists of this world were willing to take up the challenge.

According to the editorial of a French magazine, Science & NDE (April 2016), one anthropological study concluded that we are more likely to find mediums, sensitives and psychics among those who have developed a strong altruistic attitude of mind, following a series of intense emotional trials. The researchers surmised that this empathy assists in the development of intuitive and paranormal abilities. As we know, that same quality is often attained by those who have undergone NDEs. There are probably numerous 'realities' interpenetrating each other but operating at different frequencies. A key factor may be that one's access to higher frequencies than the 'reality' accessible to the average person's perception is only possible once sufficient levels of altruism, patience and courage have been attained. I would be interested to hear other readers' views.

**Marion Browne**

## REPORTS

### The Alister Hardy Trust: assessing past, present and future

#### A report on the year 2021–22 from the Chair and Vice Chair

Since the lifting of the constraints of the pandemic, the Trustees have addressed some key matters relating to the present state and future of the Alister Hardy Trust. What follows is a condensed version of the report presented at the AGM in December 2022.

#### Financial context, present and future

The ongoing work of the Trust and its dissemination are dependent on its financial sustainability and the effective allocation of limited resources to achieve its charitable Objects. It is therefore good to report a surplus of £6,566 at the end of the financial year August 2021 to July 2022. This follows five consecutive years of deficit, in part cushioned by two legacies, but nevertheless amounting to a net loss of some £24,000 over the period 2016-21.

The Trust has two principal, recurrent sources of income: investment income (this year, £10,542) and membership subscriptions (this year, £2,923). Without the income from investments, built up over the past ten years, the Trust would be able to achieve very little. Even with the unsettled markets, the investments at the end of July 2022 were valued at £330,044.

The principal costs in 2021–22 have been:

£4,633 Work on the Archive at Lampeter (see further below)

£3,748 *De Numine* (editing, production and circulation)

£2,843 Administration (membership and communications)

The overall costs of the Trust would be far higher without the generous time, in most instances given voluntarily by Trustees and Officers.

After successive years of deficit, the Trustees have adopted the following financial principles:

1. There will be an ongoing Strategy and Business Plan for the Alister Hardy Trust [AHT] covering at least three years. This will be reviewed annually, and fully revised at the beginning of the third year in readiness for the ensuing three-year period.
2. AHT will ensure that it works within its resources, achieving at least a net balance between recurrent income and expenditure each year.
3. AHT will contain the costs of administration, member benefits and governance to a minimum, aiming to make available not less than two thirds of recurrent income to fulfil its stated Objects.
4. Income from fund raising, donations and bequests will be placed in a designated fund, to be used to further the Objects of AHT within the ongoing Strategy and Business Plan. Such income will not be used to meet recurrent administrative costs set out in 3 above.
5. Grants for specific projects or objects will be placed in a reserved fund, and used exclusively for that purpose.

#### The Alister Hardy Trust Archive and Book Collection at Lampeter

Assessing the present state of the Archive and Book Collection at Lampeter was a priority before work on forward strategy. This process was constrained by the closure of the library at Lampeter during the pandemic, and further affected by the death of the part-time Collections Librarian. By stages, the records and contents of the archive have been reviewed, assessed, and sorted into categories.

Effectively the Trust has five categories of archives:

1. The principal collection of accounts of religious and spiritual experiences, which represent about half the overall archive.
2. An archive of research projects and related research activities undertaken by either RERU or RERC since the establishment of the RERU in 1969.
3. An archive related specifically to Sir Alister Hardy both before and after 1969.
4. Records of the activities of RERC, the AHT and the Alister Hardy Society – each forming a subcategory.
5. Administrative, governance and financial records.

After initial sorting of the archive, it has been possible since June 2022 to begin the process of reviewing and sorting the contents of individual archive boxes. These contents are often diverse and unsorted. Among them have been found original accounts of religious and spiritual experiences either displaced from the main sequence, or still uncatalogued. In examining a sample of the original accounts of religious and spiritual experiences it was a matter of surprise to find that there were discrepancies in the transcriptions available through the online database. There is also concern about the conservation of all these accounts, mostly stored in inappropriate document wallets or plastic pockets, and held together by rusting steel staples and paper clips.

It had become clear to the Trustees by November 2021 that the scale of work required on the Archive represented a significant capital project. In May 2022 a possible source of funding was identified, and an application submitted through a third party, the Center for Mind and Culture, Boston MA. The outcome is awaited. Should the application fail, the Trustees have agreed to spend a more modest capital sum from the investment portfolio to address the essential work as soon as possible.

The funding application made through the Center for Mind and Culture also includes the upgrading and improvement of the outdated online database of accounts of religious and spiritual

experiences contained in the Archive. Again, should funding not be forthcoming, the Trustees have made contingency plans to upgrade and improve the existing database.

### **Preparing a Strategy for 2023-27**

In setting a framework for future strategy, the Trust has the responsibility and priority

- to care for the inherited Archive, and especially the unique collection of accounts of religious and spiritual experiences submitted voluntarily by a wide range of people from the UK and further afield since the late 1960s;
- to upgrade and maintain the online database, which includes searchable transcripts of all the accounts of religious and spiritual experiences, as a core research resource for those working in this field.

In order to ensure effective use of the inherited Archive and online database, there is also priority

- to seek to engage with researchers active in the study of religious and spiritual experiences, especially those of younger generations to carry the torch forward in future decades, but also including non-specialist ‘citizen scientists’;
- to disseminate the outcomes of study and investigation in a range of contexts: research, education and broader public engagement at a range of different levels from child to adult, specialist and interested party.

To achieve maximum impact and to serve as a starting point for raising new funds, we also see the need to refresh and raise the public profile of AHT.

All this amounts to a big task that needs the support of the whole Trust – all Members, and not just Trustees or officers. At this stage we have to tackle this challenge while also sustaining the ongoing activity of the Trust, all within a very small overall budget of around £15,000 per annum. The demands also require us to review the effectiveness and efficiency of our own

operation, governance and communications with members, which at the moment take up a substantial portion of our recurrent funds. We also need to review levels of subscription, which have remained unchanged since 2006, and to encourage voluntary donations.

Work on the Strategic Plan was completed before a plan for implementation: it was important to ensure that money was not the primary driver of strategy. The related Business Plan sets out a sustainable way forward, the order in which stages of implementation can be undertaken, and a provisional outline budget. In November 2022, the Trustees accepted the texts of the Strategic Plan and the Business Plan as working documents. They offer a basis for detailed discussion of each section, which will then lead to revision, refinement, redrafting and final adoption.

### **Taking heart for the future**

Among the materials found in unsorted folders in the Archive was a letter written to the Trustees by Sir Alister Hardy in April 1985, just a few weeks before his death. He despaired that the Religious Experience Research Centre had ‘no

premises and no research going on’. Sir Alister had generously made over the Templeton Prize money to the RERC, but he was concerned that it should be spent prudently to support research rather than on a building or a fund-raising campaign.

In a year when there have been insufficient funds to engage any staff to look after the Trust’s Archive and Book Collection in Lampeter or to offer support to the Director of the RERC, and no funds to support any research initiative, we could also despair. It is going to be a tough road to tread, with difficult decisions to make. But the Trustees have the resolve, with the support of the Members, to see this through, and to sustain Sir Alister’s vision and tenacity. In tackling the backlog of care of the Archive, and in drawing up drafts of the Strategic Plan and the related Business Plan, we have made a significant start.

*Leslie Francis, Chair  
John Harper, Vice Chair*

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## Treasurer's report

### The Accounts for the Alister Hardy Trust for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> July 2022

As is usual for the Spring edition of *De Numine*, I write a brief summary of the financial situation of the Trust for the financial year which ended last July – this is particularly for those who were unable to attend our Zoom AGM. This has been another active year, largely owing to the generous bequests received over the past few years. We are, naturally, very grateful for legacies as they do, in fact, provide our main source of income: it is of course sad that we were unable to thank these generous donors when they were alive. Our investments, under the guidance of our stockbroker, have provided us with our main income, together with the income from our members. Last year the capital appreciation of our portfolio was, exceptional, but this year has lost some £18,000 but as the investment

advertisements always make clear the value of investments can always go down. Our income from investments is slightly up on last year and well above that which could be achieved in any conventional bank account. This year the market has particularly been affected by the war in Ukraine and the large downturn of activity in China owing to Covid -19. In order to preserve our capital as far as possible we are not making any significant new commitments other than on the work preserving and updating our archive both of Accounts of Religious Experience and of the Trust in general. It should be noted that with regard to income and expenditure we have made a small surplus.

I set out below a short summary of the accounts – a full set of accounts is available on request for those who wish to receive them. Just let me have your name, address or email and I'll send a copy.

<u>Income</u> (including investment income £10,542 and subscriptions £2,923)	£19,166
<u>Expenditure</u> (including work on the archive at £4,388, various honoraria, and expenses associated with activity on the part of volunteers and trustees)	£12,600
<u>Net surplus</u>	<u>£6,566</u>
<u>Fixed Assets</u> : Tangible assets (mainly books and works of art)	£50,520
<u>Current assets</u> : Bank accounts and invested funds	£357,200
<u>Total assets less current liabilities</u> : (portfolio depreciation was £18,815)	<u>£406,350</u>

The accounts were unanimously approved by the Trustees at the Virtual AGM (Zoom) held on the 16th November, 2022.

**Dr David Greenwood, Honorary Treasurer,  
January 2023.**  
d.greenwood@uwtsd.ac.uk

## The Alister Hardy Trust in action, August 2021–July 2022

Although the Trustees have been engaged with major strategic issues, the usual activities of the AHT have continued alongside, and must be celebrated.

Our two principal academics, based at University of Wales Trinity St David [UWTSD] and Bishop Grosseteste University [BGU] in Lincoln, continue their work related to the Trust's mission, but with only minimal funding or in an honorary capacity.

Bettina Schmidt, as Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre, UWTSD, has contributed to postgraduate teaching and supervision. In the absence of a Collections Librarian, she has kept a watching brief over the RERC office in the library by dealing with correspondence and permissions for access to the online database of accounts of religious and spiritual experiences in the Archive. She has also overseen the preparation and online publication of this year's issue of *The Journal for the Study of Religious Experience*, with editorial assistance from Jack Hunter. Her own research on health and spiritual experiences has broadened to include the study of spiritual experiences during the pandemic.

Jeff Astley, as Alister Hardy Professor at BGU, has continued to expand the 'Select Bibliography of Areas in the Study of Religious and Spiritual Experiences', and to update the online web resources, *Research Materials and Publications* and *Teaching Materials and Publications*. He has also continued to analyse data in the Trust's Archive for its relevance to the development of new frameworks for data collection and analysis of religious and spiritual experiences; to source additional references for a literature review of categorisation schemes for RSEs in the areas of *General Classifications of RSEs, Instruments Related to Specific Categories of RSE* and *Instruments for Distinguishing Spiritual from Religious Subjects/Experiences*; and to identify a range of other texts reporting useful *Instruments for Measuring Other Variables in their Relationship to RSEs*.

It is good to report the inauguration of the World Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU)

at BGU in April 2022. Co-directed by Julian Stern and Leslie Francis, the unit has already gathered a body of distinguished and experienced researchers. While not specifically focused on issues central to the Trust's mission, it offers a broadly based research network in religion and education, and consequent opportunities for collaboration and dissemination. That network includes Jeff Astley, three Trustees (Leslie Francis, Tania ap Siôn and John Harper), and Geoffrey Ahern, who undertook important work as a research fellow of the Religious Experience Research Centre in Oxford in the later 1980s, work to which he is now returning.

The Trust has been able to continue to provide funding for Rhonda Riachi and Billie Krstovic, the two editors of *De Numine*, who so successfully manage the whole process of editing and production of the two issues each year; and for Marianne Rankin, the Trust's long-serving Director of Communications who, in addition to her usual duties in arranging events and promoting the Trust's mission, has undertaken membership administration this year.

In the emergence from the constraints of the pandemic, there has been a cautious resumption of events in person. The Trust's Members' Day was held online in October 2021, but planning took place during the year for a Members' Day in Oxford (and online) in October 2022, which is reported elsewhere in this issue of *De Numine*. The major in-person event this year (also with online attendance) was the Annual Conference of the RERC at Lampeter in early July 2022. This was a special year, since the oldest component of UWTSD – St David's College, Lampeter – was celebrating the 200th anniversary of its foundation. With grants from the Trust, the Learned Society of Wales and UWTSD, and the generosity of the speakers, it was possible to offer this as a free event. The keynote speaker was Dr Rowan Williams, Lord Williams of Oystermouth, a patron of the Trust. It was a stimulating day, with excellent papers and perceptive comments and questions from the large body of participants.

*Leslie Francis, Chair; John Harper, Vice chair*

## Director of Communications

### Report from Director of Communications and Membership Administrator – Spring 2023

#### Membership

There are now about 250 AHT members. Most new members are joining to gain access to the RERC Archive, so it is definitely an attraction for scholars, as well as those interested in spiritual experiences more generally. Various studies are being undertaken by a range of students worldwide. Long-standing members enjoy De Numine and meeting like-minded folk at our events. Holding Zoom meetings suits many as there is no need to travel – which is particularly welcome in winter and with strikes disrupting journeys.

#### Members' Day 2022

There is no real substitute for in-person gatherings however, and Members' Day 2022 was much appreciated by all – three speakers, eight helpers and thirteen attendees. I gave the annual Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture on the subject of my PhD, *Is Altruism a Principal Fruit of Spiritual Experience? An Exploration of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre Archive*. This will be uploaded onto the AHT website.

Dr Wendy Dossett, former Director of the RERC, now Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Chester, gave a fascinating talk on *Addiction: A spiritual malady? Some Reflections on Twelve Step and Buddhist Approaches*. Rhonda Riachi, editor of this journal, told us about *The Spirit and the Word: Editing De Numine*. This was a hybrid meeting, with a free online option for those unable to attend.

#### Events

Andy Burns and I, with help from Mike Rush are planning a couple of Zoom events this year and

Members Day, we hope, will be held in Oxford again. We will announce further details in due course, but details of the first event are below:

**April 1st 2023, 11.00 – 12.30.** Zoom presentation by David Lorimer of his book of poems *Better Light a Candle*, which is reviewed in this issue. David is a visionary polymath who is also Programme Director of the Scientific and Medical Network, Editor of *Paradigm Explorer* and Chair of the Galileo Commission.

I have invited David to give us a presentation of his poetry on Zoom. David will introduce some of his poems, and as we listen to him reading them, we will be able to enjoy his specially-chosen slides. This is an event with a difference, a profound yet relaxing experience.

At David's request, the event is free of charge, but with the suggestion of a donation to Cross Border House, Poland:  
<https://thecrossborderhouse.com/>  
- run by Paul and Amber Kieniewicz.

This is a shelter for Ukrainian refugees, where they are cared for as they continue to endure the many impacts of the war and to prepare for life afterwards. Your contribution assures this objective, and your donations will go directly and exclusively to The Cross Border House.

#### News

I continue to alert AHT members to events led by the Scientific and Medical Network, the Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, the Society for Psychical Research and other like-minded groups. Please let me know if you would like to join my mailing list.

**Marianne Rankin**

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## Oxford and Cotswold Group Report

### Meditation led by Paul Trafford, Saturday 4 February 2023

12 members of the Alistair Hardy Society gathered for an introduction Middle Way meditation by Paul Trafford. Middle Way is a Buddhist practice that has become especially popular in Thailand; Paul's mother was originally from Thailand and this is how he came to receive the practice. He had previously introduced the meditation technique to Oxford University Computing Services about 15 years previously, when he and Beth were colleagues.

Paul remarked that to be characteristically "Thai" means that it's not exclusive; he made a comparison with food – a good curry can be eaten by anyone!

Paul provided rationale for this particular technique, by relating that as a Bodhisattva (before his Enlightenment), the Buddha had practised very strenuously for six years, but without (ultimate) success. He had been striving with extreme ascetic practices to no avail. Then a couple of reflections prompted him to change his direction.

The first was hearing the sound of a stringed instrument (perhaps a harp?). If the string is either too tight or too loose, then the sound is distorted. The tension needs to be in between for the right sound to be made. The second episode was a recollection from his childhood, when he was perhaps 7 or 8 years old. He was sitting quietly under a (rose-apple) tree and spontaneously fell into a deep meditative state. The Buddha recalled that it was a pleasant experience and was prompted to ask himself, "Why am I afraid of that pleasant experience?"

On this basis, he pursued a middle path, which is commonly known as the avoidance of two extremes: asceticism and indulgence. However, in this tradition there is also a subtler sense, which may be indicated by contemplating what we mean by "middle way", with the emphasis on way as a path.

Paul invited the group to consider making a journey from Oxford to Scotland. One could take a 'middle' way by avoiding mountain peaks and

river beds, but merely following that instruction would mean one could meander anywhere and not reach the destination. On the other hand, one might find a route, like a motorway, that neither ascends to mountain peaks nor descends to river beds. That too can be said to be a "middle way" that avoids extremes.

Then Paul indicated that this latter sense applies literally to the Middle Way meditation in that the path of practice is through the centre of the body, which was the location where meditators place their attention.

The instructions were in the form of a guided meditation on CD, led by an English monk, Venerable Dr Nicholas (*Thanissaro bhikkhu*). Paul added that the meditation is also known as *Dhammakaya* meditation, where *Dhamma* is one limb of the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha) and can mean 'teachings' or Norm or Truth; and *kaya* means body.

The instructions lasted for a little under 20 minutes followed by a period of silence, which was meant to be for 10 minutes followed by music to signal a conclusion to the practice. However, Paul had a bit of technical difficulty and the music never commenced! Hence, after perhaps 20 minutes, Paul concluded the practice himself, encouraging everyone to note and retain any positive feelings at the centre.

Afterwards, a few members shared their experiences. One member of the group stated that they didn't think they could meditate, but now they found that they could with the help of a certain visualisation. There was an opportunity to ask questions, but there were none. Rhonda suggested this appeared to indicate contentment.

**Neil adds:** As guided in the introduction, we all relaxed our bodies and with eyes closed tried to empty our minds of the chatter and dialogue that always seems to fill them. For twenty to thirty blissful minutes I enjoyed peace and silence, a wonderful and restorative experience.

**Neil Hancox**

## South East Wales Group Report

14th December 2022

Despite the icy weather, seven of us met to approach the question: 'Through your reading material, have you ever felt that a spiritual event lay at the crux of the book? Ken Price talked about "The Alchemist" by the Brazilian writer (from a Catholic Jesuit tradition), Paulo Coelho. It especially resonated with Ken's personal experience. He writes:

*In 1986 while walking the Camino to Santiago, Paolo had a spiritual awakening. The following year he considered writing about his experience on his pilgrimage. The book he wrote was "The Pilgrimage", but it was his second book, "The Alchemist" that spoke even more deeply to me.*

*The central character in the story is an Andalusian shepherd boy who has a recurring dream which prompts him to undertake a transformative mystical trek to the pyramids of Egypt in search of treasure. His quest combines magic, mysticism and the transformative effect of adversity on the human soul while learning to read "the Language of the world," omens along life's path (eg. synchronicities).*

*The book took two weeks to write. Paolo explained that he was able to write at this pace because the story was already written in his soul.*

**Mary Cook and Ken Price**

15th March 2023

### Music: the art-form through Time

Before giving my talk, I felt I must tell the group about our robin. I have been feeding him through the winter and he had begun to demand food if he felt neglected. He would come when called! Then while my daughter and I were sitting on our bench, Robin appeared, and sat on a large stone three feet away, fluffed himself up, looked us directly in the eye, then began to sing – loud at first, but then, with his throat-feathers vibrating, his song changed in pitch so as to be barely audible. This continued for a few minutes. We had never been serenaded by a robin before! What a treat! Pure timeless music! We felt his trust, and his love! (Isn't there a resonance with the spiritual here?)

### Music as integral to my spiritual life

Once begun to formulate my talk, I realised how very much was involved, and how difficult it would be to stay on track. I was amazed how many of my experiences of the spiritual were directly connected with music. The very first was many years before I was born when a Spiritualist music teacher told my mother that she would have a daughter who would be well known for playing the cello. Yes, maybe locally, but this

prophecy was completely unknown to me till well into my teaching career, when after my mother's death, I treated myself to a cello! Violin and piano had been my instruments.

Did sensitivity to the Spiritual run in families? I wondered! How does one research that? Through my life many doors would open. How much, for instance, are we in control? How much of our life is in fact our own? Is Spirit in control? Maybe, but we would need to submit! But for this meeting we didn't pursue these unknown depths. Perhaps next time.

After the talk, and members were asked to present the music that was special to each, there proved to be too much, so we look forward to June's meeting in order to tie up loose ends – or in a subject as fluid as this, perhaps there will be no end! The meeting closed with my daughter's rendition on our cello of the *Ashokan Farewell*, then a touch of Bach by me to close.

This morning, Robin appeared in the magnolia tree where he has a good view of me. But today, there were two! So for the robins, 'Time Springs Eternal'. Long may their music and that of their progeny charm our ears!

**Mary Cook**

## POEMS

### Becoming

I

I swing in the hammock...  
The hammock and I become still.

I sink into the Earth.  
It opens, takes me in.  
Covers me over,  
consoles and protects me.

II

I fly in the hammock...  
Hammock and I become a bird,  
fly over the sea, fly to the Island.

Bird and the Island become one.

It sings in the sunshine,  
it sings to our sadness.  
It sings to our happiness,  
and to the darkness.

It sings and sings and sings...

**Porto de Galinhas, Brazil.**  
**© Dennis Evans**  
dennis.poetry1@gmail.com

Dennis Evans is a poet, writer, teacher and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. His poetry has been published in the UK & abroad.

### The Heart Speaks

*Le coeur a ses raisons  
que la raison ne connaît point*

*(the heart has its reasons  
of which reason is utterly unaware)*

*Blaise Pascal*

The mind  
Weighs,  
Ponders,  
Plans,  
Worries,  
Doubts and fears,  
Even decides, but  
Swaying back and forth

While the heart  
Has its own reasons  
To calm the vacillating mind,  
Suffusing the depths  
To reach the still centre,  
Then scattering doubt,  
Clearly feeling  
Love  
Welling up,  
Overflowing  
Into life  
Together.

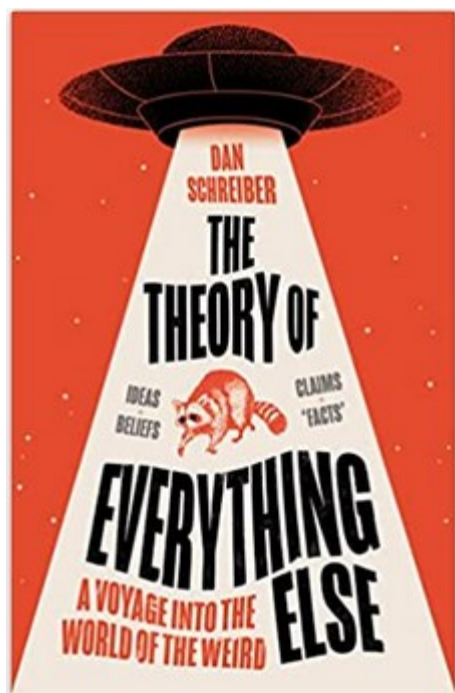
**David Lorimer**

David Lorimer's new edition of poems, *Better Light a Candle*, will feature in a webinar on 1st April with Marianne Rankin (see Events)

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Dan Schreiber, *The Theory of Everything Else: A Voyage into the World of the Weird*. London: HarperCollins, 2022. 356 pp. ISBN: 978-0-00-851897-4 £16.99**

Sir Alister Hardy was refreshingly ‘different.’ A look at his life story reveals this at every turn. Take his interest in telepathy, for example; one originally fuelled by a Mrs Wedgewood’s apparently paranormal knowledge of what he’d been doing on the day he went to see her (‘Oh what have you been doing?’ Mrs Wedgewood is said to have exclaimed. ‘I see a large pink square in front of you...’ Incredibly, and apparently completely unbeknownst to Mrs Wedgewood, Hardy had been painting white cardboard with vivid pink distemper that very morning as part of an experiment in hiding ships from the enemy during the first world war). In 1950 he would declare to the Bodley Club at Merton College Oxford (during a talk about monsters) that nothing would please him more than somebody finding something in Loch Ness. Later still, his interest in ESP was to find full expression in actual psychical experimentation, with his experiments at Caxton Hall in 1967 still ranking as among the best in the history of the field. ‘Different’, then, at various points; and different again in positing that our capacity for religious experiences is one that has actually aided our evolution.



An experiment on a somewhat related note, and one that I’m sure would have pleased Hardy (maybe it did) was one that took place in late January 1971 (alas, the exact date has been lost to time): one which must rank as amongst the oddest on record. On two separate dates during this period whilst travelling to and from the moon astronaut Edgar Mitchell concentrated on a symbol and a random number whilst back on earth two of his friends (coincidentally also called Ed) attempted to visualise what he was trying to telepathically send them. Upon his return to earth, Mitchell and his co-experimenters compared notes and found they’d achieved a ‘hit’ rate of under 10%. This percentage sounds disappointingly low although Mitchell concluded that it was ‘statistically significant’ (and this despite the fact that, thanks to a launch delay, his friends had been attempting to ‘receive’ his psychical transmissions 45 minutes before he sent them).

If the sheer oddity, the sheer difference, of this episode appeals to you then you’ll love Dan Schreiber’s *The Theory of Everything Else* because it’s absolutely chock full of them (including, in chapter twenty-five, a discussion of the success or otherwise of the three Eds’ cislunar space ESP experiment). Did you know, for example, that the inventor of PCR tests, Kary Mullis, claimed once to have encountered a talking, glowing raccoon one night whilst walking the few feet to the outhouse of his countryside Californian cabin? Or that the allegedly reincarnated Tibetan abbot Tuesday Lobsang Rampa, much talked about and admired in the 1960s and 70s as medicine man, mystic and guru, was actually a plumber from Plympton, Devon, named Cyril Henry Hoskin? Or that - as a result of an experiment in alternate history - it has been calculated that it would have taken 5,682,646 curious time travellers to have travelled to (and hence sunk under their own combined weight) the ill-fated Titanic? Or that Ringo Starr’s grandmother, dubbed the ‘voodoo queen of Liverpool’, once tried to exorcise her grandson because he was

left-handed? Or that there's a surgeon in Japan who carries out operations to alter the palm lines of - presumably private - patients so that they can receive more upbeat readings from palmists? Stick a pin in Dan Schreiber's entertaining miscellany of the weird and the wonderful and you're bound to connect with something like this. Across every fact-packed chapter - actually, he prefers 'fact' to fact - he's like a kid let loose in a Fortean sweetshop. His book is subtitled 'A Voyage into the World of the Weird' and it's apt because that's exactly what it is.

A brave voyager, then, Schreiber. A different one too. Yet there's no real depth to the sea that he sails, nor any really sustained attempt to go under the surface to tease out what such oddities and eccentricities might be telling us about the nature of the ocean itself. Indeed, the nearest he gets to this is the observation that '[p]eople are strange', together with the reminder that we're all 'a multitude of realities.' There's no discussion of how any of what he reveals might be disclosing levels of reality occluded by the mundane and the everyday, nor any attempt to force any kind of paradigm shift on skeptical readers. Instead he just lets everything drift out there: a flotsam and jetsam

of weirdness released by a cheerfully bemused author to bob along on an engaging and immensely readable tide over 356 (occasionally illustrated) pages.

The dustjacket reveals that the London-based Schreiber 'has no idea what he believes anymore.' Perhaps this is because of his own paradigm shift or because exposure to too much weirdness can do this to a writer. Regardless, his book is never less than thought-provoking and left me wanting to know more at pretty much every point. Which brings me to the one real weakness here (aside from rather too many typos). Above a somewhat thin bibliography there's a website address for those in search of more information but no actually printed references. Whilst the paper-saving is to be admired the fact that my interest was piqued so often made me keenly aware of the lack of any notes and references to rifle through - a shortcoming that left me feeling high and dry when what I really wanted to do was to sail on and on.

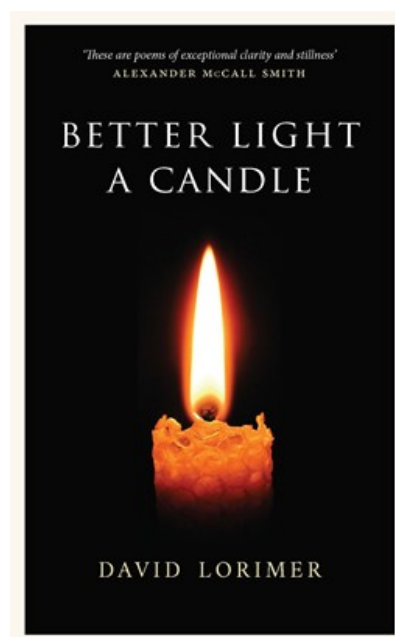
**Mark Fox**

Mark Fox is an independent writer, speaker and researcher. For more, go to [www.markfox.co.uk](http://www.markfox.co.uk)

**David Lorimer, *Better Light a Candle*. Edinburgh: The Foundry, 2022. 86pp. ISBN 979 10 415 0569 2. £10.**

David Lorimer, a familiar figure to AHT members, has a hugely wide-ranging CV. He is a prolific author and editor; Fellow of the International Futures Forum; Creative Member of the Club of Budapest; Founder of Character Education Scotland; Programme Director of the Scientific and Medical Network; Editor of *Paradigm Explorer* since 1986 and Chair of the Galileo Commission. Yet in the preface to this book, David draws our attention to the way in which poetry can embody the poet's core philosophy and outlook in just a few pages and indeed this slim volume of poetry offers 'a distillation' of his rich life experience.

Although the poems were mostly written over the last eight years, they offer his reflection on 'life's polarities, on light and darkness, hope and



despair, love and fear, healing and wounding, gain and loss, spring and autumn, unfolding and refolding, opening and closing, birth, death and rebirth, remembering and forgetting, fire and water, time and the timeless, breathing in and breathing out, the flow, the rhythm and the cycles of life.'

Each poem is a gem, encapsulating a moment, an emotion, a thought, a vista; which then leads the reader onwards, embracing life in all its fullness. Underlying all is the affirming spiritual power of Love. The best way to show the beauty of the verse is to give an example,

#### ESSENCE

To see and to be seen  
To hear and to be heard  
To open and to be opened

To be touched and to touch  
To be loved and to love,  
This  
Is the fruit of light distilled,  
The woven texture,  
The feel,  
The taste,  
The priceless currency  
Of life  
Together.

The book can be purchased online as an e-book or printed from Lulu at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com)

**Marianne Rankin**

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### ***Exploration into Spirit...***

### ***The History of the first 50 years of the Religious Experience Research Unit***

**by John Franklin**

John Franklin's third edition of the History of the Religious Experience Research Centre and Alister Hardy Trust brings the story up to the end of 2019 and concludes with the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the RERU in 1969 by Sir Alister Hardy.

John, an AHT Trustee, served as Secretary of the former Alister Hardy Society and also led the AHS London Group for over 30 years. His history is an invaluable account, recording the

key moments and people involved in the evolution of the RERC in the fifty years since the earliest days.

The book can be ordered at £12 (including P&P) from: Dr David Greenwood  
Field Cottage  
Lower Welson  
Eardisley  
Herefordshire  
HR3 6NB  
Email: [D.Greenwood@uwtsd.ac.uk](mailto:D.Greenwood@uwtsd.ac.uk)

## NOTICES

### Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies

**2023 marks the 70th Anniversary of the CFPSS and they are celebrating with an anniversary tour and a Conference in October.**

Join Matt Arnold, Editor of The Christian Parapsychologist, and Jo Arnold, General Secretary of the CFPSS, as they travel around the UK. Matt will speak on various aspects of the paranormal in the Bible. Jo will introduce the work and mission of the CFPSS. Full dates will be published shortly, and if you would like to host an event on the tour, get in touch:

**Email:** [gensec@churchesfellowship.co.uk](mailto:gensec@churchesfellowship.co.uk)

**Post:**

Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, Office 8,  
The Creative Suite, Mill 3,  
Pleasley Vale Business Park,  
Mansfield,  
Nottinghamshire NG19 8RL,  
United Kingdom  
<https://www.churchesfellowship.co.uk/>

### Scientific and Medical Network 50th anniversary

The SMN will celebrate 50 years this July with a special event both online and in person. The SMN's events programme is very varied with international presenters, and most events are open to non-members (some also free).

Like *De Numine*, the SMN journal *Paradigm Explorer* is available online as well as by post. Find out more at <https://scientificandmedical.net>

### QFAS Conference 2023, 21 to 23 April 2023: What's next and how do we prepare for it?

The Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies will hold its first in-person event since the start of the pandemic at the lovely Charney Manor, Oxfordshire, with plenary sessions available online via Zoom. Speakers include AHT members Roger Straughan and Dr Mark Fox. Programme and further info at <https://quakerafterlifestudies.wordpress.com/>

Residential places cost £295, including all meals and two nights' accommodation. Contact Fee Berry on [caliandris@gmail.com](mailto:caliandris@gmail.com) by 10 April.

To participate online (cost £10) book by 19 April on Eventbrite at <https://bit.ly/42obmlR>

### Living out of joy, dying into love

**Glenthorne Quaker Centre, Grasmere  
Monday 5 to Friday 9 June 2023  
Led by Rhonda Riachi**

We'll explore personal testimony in the new QAFS anthology, *The Life That Never Ends*, and share uplifting accounts from other times and texts, including international scientific research.

<https://glenthorne.org/events/>

### PG Certificate in Psychospiritual Care

- Practical and accessible training in psychologically informed spiritual care for health and social care professionals ;
- Taught by Oxford Health NHS Trust in partnership with Oxford Brookes University over three semesters via a series of study days and supported personal study;
- Level 7 (60 credits) starts September 2023.

Email: [guy.harrison@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk](mailto:guy.harrison@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk)

## EVENTS

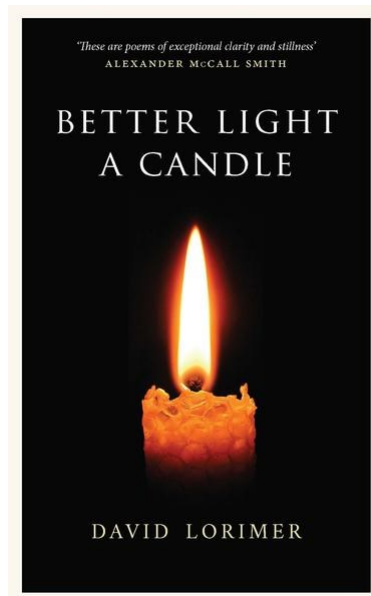
### The Alister Hardy Trust



Welcomes you to an online Zoom event  
**April 1st 2023, 11.00am to 12.30pm**

### David Lorimer

Presenting poems from



David Lorimer is a visionary polymath who is Programme Director of the Scientific and Medical Network, Editor of *Paradigm Explorer* and Chair of the Galileo Commission.

The event is free, but we invite donations to a centre for Ukrainian refugees, run by Paul and Amber Kieniewicz.

Cross Border House, Poland <https://thecrossborderhouse.com/>

Please **RSVP** to Mike Rush: [mikerush@virginmedia.com](mailto:mikerush@virginmedia.com) by 30 March who will forward a Zoom invitation nearer to the time.