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Please note suggested word limits for submissions.

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The Editor

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South East Wales Group members
June Boyce-Tillman images from the internet

EDITORIAL

My last *De Numine*, and the quality of submissions has never been so high – well not since the Spring anyway! I would like to thank all the people who sent in lovely emails saying how much they liked the Spring issue. The golden cover was mentioned in most of these, so thanks too to Kevin the printer who sourced the gold. Last but not least I would like to thank my colleague Jean Matthews for a fifteen year collaboration which has been hugely enjoyable as well as challenging, I think for us both. Not only has she been essential for me as someone to confer with, her skills with IT and graphic design have been key in the excellent presentation of the Journal.

I want to welcome Rhonda Riachi who will be taking over from me as editor in Spring 2020, and wish her well, I hope she enjoys her time as editor of *De Numine* as much as I have. Jean Matthews will be staying on, which in my opinion will be a great help to Rhonda as she finds her feet (although with her professional experience she should catch sight of them early on). Rhonda has edited and produced newsletters for various organisations over the years, including the Association for Learning Technology (1993-2007). She was a member of the JISC Scholarly Communications Committee (2005-07), and has served on steering groups for academic journals, and as a reviewer. Currently Rhonda manages the website of the Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies and is closely involved in AHT as convener of the Oxford and Cotswold Group.

John Franklin's swan song mirrors mine, the final updated edition of his book *Exploration into Spirit*, takes us up to this anniversary year. The book, on the history of the Trust, is an invaluable reference work, and *De Numine*, especially this year's golden editions, would have been the poorer without John's book by my side.

We have an extended articles section which I think reflects the essence and breadth of the field of study now encompassing Religious Experience, from the subjective nature of experience to the appraisal of it as a phenomenon. Dr Jack Hunter gives us a cornucopia of accounts of RE, from the RERC archive and elsewhere, which demonstrate a connection with the natural world, Eleonore Bruyere describes her own experience with trees, then a voice from the Amazon sends us a wakeup call which made me cry. Please take heed of Raoni Metuktire's words. The balance for this roller-coaster through spirituality and the natural world is John Osborn's scholarly treatise on NDEs, demonstrating the business end of the scale so to speak – a meticulously argued and referenced appraisal of NDEs and related phenomena which I am delighted to print in the same issue as John Franklin's tribute to him in 'Remembering Friends'.

John Osborn, in spite of his thorough investigation of the theoretical underpinnings of Religious Experience research, has concluded that attempts to capture the essence of it in theoretical or philosophical propositions leaves these as [mere] elaborations: 'necessary but secondary; servant, not master' (p.20). I concur, and I would like to leave you with this description of an encounter with a mermaid, to my mind a perfect metaphor for the difficulties of trying to pin down the elusive glimpses of spiritual reality we are granted if we are lucky:

She had been caught up in the Nets of a fishing boat, which mistook her at first for a school of Herring, so vast and glinting was she. They hauled her aboard, all silver and shining, but no sooner had they done so, than she burst the Net and sprang out again.

[*The Mermaid and Mrs Hancock*, Imogen Hermes, 2018]

Patricia Murphy

Religious Experience and Ecological Participation: Animism, Nature Connectedness and Fairies

This article is based on the introduction to Dr Jack Hunter's edited collection of essays, *Greening the Paranormal: Exploring the Ecology of Extraordinary Experience* (Hunter, 2019).

In some respects it is quite surprising that Sir Alister Hardy (1896-1985), the founder of the Religious Experience Research Centre, was a biologist. We might expect such a centre to have been established by a psychologist, sociologist or anthropologist perhaps, or some other researcher from the 'soft' social sciences, but not from the so-called 'hard sciences' (though admittedly biology could be called the softest of the hard sciences). In other ways, however, it is quite unsurprising. Historian of Religion Bron Taylor, for instance, in his book on nature and spirituality, has convincingly shown how a form of spirituality, which he terms 'Dark Green Religion,' often arises from participatory interaction with the natural world, whether as a scientist, as an ecological activist, or in the pursuit of other activities in the great outdoors such as hunting, hiking or surfing. Taylor explains that this form of spirituality, which emerges from the land itself, is 'generally deep ecological, biocentric, or ecocentric, considering all species to be intrinsically valuable ... apart from their usefulness to human beings' (Taylor, 2010, p. 13).

Many (though by no means all) of those whom Taylor gathers together in his book came to their respective moral, ethical and spiritual positions through what could be described as peak, mystical, religious or paranormal experiences in nature. Aldo Leopold, for example, widely regarded as the father of modern wildlife conservation, experienced a radical transformation of perspective following an encounter with a wolf he had shot while working as a wilderness warden. Leopold had been responsible for culling wolves and bears in national parks in the U.S., a task he had not thought twice about until he eventually came face to face with one of his victims. He relates:

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes – something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view (Leopold, 1949)

Leopold's cognitive shift – from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric perspective – echoes one of William James' criteria for genuine religious experience – that it should produce 'moral fruits' in the experiencer (James, 2004/1902). Leopold's encounter with the wolf and the green fire transformed his consciousness. Alister Hardy's own transformative experience occurred much earlier in his life, when he was a young boy exploring the Nottinghamshire countryside. In his autobiographical notes, Hardy wrote:

There is no doubt that as a boy I was becoming what might be described as a nature mystic. Somehow, I felt the presence of something which was beyond and yet in a way part of all the things that thrilled me – the wildflowers, and indeed the insects too. I will now record something ... [that] I have never told anyone before, but now that I am in my 88th year I think I can admit it. Just occasionally when I was sure that no one could see me, I became so overcome with the glory of the natural scene, that for a moment or two I fell on my knees in prayer – not prayer asking for anything, but thanking God, who felt very real to me, for the glories of his Kingdom and for allowing me to feel them. It was always by the running waterside that I did this, perhaps in front of a great foam of meadowsweet or purple loosestrife

(Alister Hardy, as cited in Hay, 2013).

A connection between transformative religious and mystical experience and the natural world has long been recognised in scholarly literature on religion exemplified by Paul Marshall's comprehensive survey of the field in 2005. Indeed, one of the major categories of mystical experience proposed by the scholar of mysticism W. T. Stace (1886-1967) – *extrovertive* mystical experience – specifically refers to mystical experiences that are either initiated by, or which transfigure, the natural landscape, revealing an underlying unity and the inter-connectedness of all phenomena:

The extrovertive mystic with his physical senses continues to perceive the same world of trees and hills and tables and chairs as the rest of us. But he sees these objects transfigured in such manner that the Unity shines through them ... the extrovertive experience is sensory-intellectual in so far as it still perceives physical objects but is nonsensuous and nonintellectual in so far as it perceives them as 'all one' (Stace, 1960, p. 15).

Many of the accounts in the Alister Hardy archive refer to 'extrovertive' experiences of transcendence and connection to the natural world. The following are just a few particularly vivid descriptions of self-reported religious experiences initiated through interaction with landscape and ecology:

As I watched, suddenly the whole countryside changed and everything in it, without exception, simply glowed with numinous light – it seemed no longer to be lit by the sun but by its own internal radiance. Sunlight was not reflected from it, but I myself and everything else seemed to have become light – which now inter-penetrated and shone through our previously dense physical forms ... The whole scene shone with an extraordinary golden glow, which included the sky and the atmosphere itself.

RERC Reference: 100003, Male, no details.

As we conversed the situation became unreal. The plants and shrubs and the three pine trees in a copse ... became unreal. And yet they were more real than I had ever seen them in the three and a half years I had lived there. Instead of merging into a general familiar pattern, each item of plant, shrub and tree, stood out singularly, vivid, vibrant ... The whole area became something on its own, apart from the rest. The whole area became something I had never seen before. I became filled with a feeling of elation and well-being such as I have never before or since experienced ... I felt that I had seen Nature as it really is.

RERC Reference: 002780, Male, 1941.

My mother and I were walking on a stretch of land ... known locally as 'the moors.' As the sun declined and the slight chill of evening came on, a pearly mist formed over the ground ... Here and there just the very tallest harebells appeared above the mist. I had a great love of these exquisitely formed flowers, and stood lost in wonder at the sight. Suddenly I seemed to see the mist as a shimmering gossamer tissue and the harebells, appearing here and there, seemed to shine with a brilliant fire. Somehow I understood that this was the living tissue of life itself, in which that which we call consciousness was embedded, appearing here and there as a shining focus of energy in the more diffused whole. In that moment I knew that I had my own special place, as had all other things, animate and so-called inanimate, and that we were all part of this universal tissue which was both fragile yet immensely strong, and utterly good and beneficent. The vision has never left me. It is as clear today as fifty years ago, and with it the same intense feeling of love of the world and the certainty of ultimate good. It gave me then a strong, clear sense of identity which has withstood many vicissitudes, and an affinity with plants, birds, animals, even insects, and people too, which has often been commented upon.

(RERC Reference: 003039, Female, 1922)

Religious Experiences in nature may also take the form of a 'sudden flash' of animistic insight. Graham Harvey defines animism as the recognition that 'the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others' (Harvey, 2005, p. xi). The following example took place in April 1917, during the First World War, while the author was serving in the army:

While spending an afternoon hour alone in my hilltop wood, a mood of depression had come down. We were due to move in a few days ... After supper in the mess I felt restless. I wondered if the full moon

shining down from a cloudless sky had anything to do with my mood. A walk by the canal might make it easier to sleep. I walked eastward for about two miles along the towpath and then turned about. The nearer I drew to the village, the more alive the surroundings seemed to become. It was as if something which had been dormant when I was in the wood were coming alive. I must have drifted into an exalted state. The moon, when I looked up at it, seemed to have become personalised and observant, as if it were aware of my presence on the towpath. A sweet scent pervaded the air. Early shoots were breaking from the sticky buds of the balsam poplars which bordered the canal; their pleasant resinous odour conveyed good-will. The slowly moving waters of the canal, which was winding its unhurried way from the battlefields to the sea, acquired a 'numen' which endorsed the intimations of the burgeoning trees. The river conveyed that it had seen me before in other places and knew something about me. It was now concerned with my return to the village ... A feeling that I was being absorbed into the living surroundings gained in intensity and was working up to a climax. Something was going to happen. Then it happened. The experience lasted, I should say, about thirty seconds and seemed to come out of the sky in which were resounding majestic harmonies. The thought, 'that is the music of the spheres' was immediately followed by a glimpse of luminous bodies – meteors or stars – circulating in predestined courses emitting both light and music. (RERC Reference: 000035, Male, 1917)

Other accounts further demonstrate an overlap between religious experience and elements of shamanistic communication, especially in relation to the issue of interspecies communication. The following account from the archive suggests a form of therapeutic communication between humans and elm trees:

Some 12 years ago I used to have four tall Elm Trees on our garden lawn; they grew forming a square. I was strongly drawn to these trees and used to stroke the trunks and talk to them especially when I felt depressed or ill. I always felt their response through a strong vibration through my hands then through my whole body. This convinced me that I am One with All Beings; the same life force which flows through my body flows through all vegetation, animals, birds, fish, minerals, under the ground or sea, even the very stones we walk on. Every animate and inanimate thing is held together with atoms which are of the whole 'Divine Being'. (RERC Reference: 002384, Female, 1960*)

With these extraordinary experiences we are entering the territory that German theologian Rudolf Otto called the *numinous* – the non-dogmatic, non-rational, experiential, essence of religion (Otto, 1958). Famously, Otto made a distinction between two polarities of the numinous – the *mysterium fascinans* – the element of the numinous that is fascinating, beautiful, and draws us in – and the *mysterium tremendum* – the terrifying, repulsive and yet awe-inspiring end of the numinous spectrum. The accounts of mystical experiences recounted above would certainly fall into the category of the *mysterium fascinans*, but many people also report darker and/or stranger experiences that, in the Western idiom, are often referred to as 'paranormal.'

Examples of such stranger, though undoubtedly related, experiences can be found in their multitudes in the recently published *Fairy Census 2014-2017* (Young, 2018). The census collects together 500 contemporary self-submitted accounts of encounters with fairies collected between November 2014 and November 2017. It is of interest to note that of these 500 accounts 97 reportedly took place 'in the garden' and 94 took place 'in woodland.' This is not quite the place to explore the connection between gardening and fairy encounters in detail, but suffice to say that such experiences share similarities with the RERC experiences recounted above. See for example:

* [It is noteworthy that many of the accounts in the RERC archive are about experiences from decades before; many are accompanied by declarations that they 'never told a soul' before. (Ed.)]

I was sitting underneath the willow tree in the back garden and felt an electrical tingle. Turning to look over my shoulder I saw five small figures, very human like but much smaller ... They were dressed in brown to dark green clothes – somewhat like tights with sturdy boots and smock like tops, their faces were more angular than human faces and very sun weathered in appearance. We looked at each other for a short period of time – there was an unspoken exchange of understanding (very hard to articulate) and then they marched off underneath a bush.

Fairy Census, §78, England (Lincolnshire). Male; 1980s (Young, 2018, p. 64).

... one afternoon in May, I was sitting out in my garden. The rhododendrons were in flower and it was a hot bright sunny day. I was very comfortable and content to listen to the birds and just relax. Unexpectedly I became aware of the golden outline of a figure down at the bottom of my garden. I say outline because it was not solid, but looked as though just its outline had been drawn with golden ink. The figure shimmered and had tall wings, but mostly it was transparent, like a rough sketch. It was about three foot tall and rose up in the air a little way before descending; it did this several times. Then I saw a second winged figure, very much smaller. This was also golden, but I remember seeing a flash of blue and green. My first thought was that it was a dragonfly, but on closer observation I saw that it flew quite differently and its shape was not that of an insect but a small human-like figure.

Fairy Census, §190, Wales (Rhondda). Female; 2000s (Young, 2018, p. 143).

It is commonly reported that the kinds of ecstatic and paranormal experiences collected in the RERC archives, and in documents such as the *Fairy Census*, as well as other forms of extraordinary experience, often give rise to a renewed vision of the Earth and an enhanced sense of connection to the natural world, both physically and spiritually. Harvard psychiatrist John Mack's (1929-2004) work on the alien abduction phenomenon, for example, highlighted the frequent centrality of the eco-crisis theme in many abduction experience narratives. Summarising the prevalence of ecological themes in the abduction narratives he investigated, Mack writes:

It seems impossible to avoid the observation that the alien abduction phenomenon is occurring in the context of a planetary ecological crisis that is reaching critical proportions and that information about this situation is often powerfully conveyed by the alien beings to the experiencers. (Mack 1995, pp. 434-435)

Individuals who claim to have had contact with extra-terrestrial intelligences, therefore, may go on to develop a closer relationship to their terrestrial ecology, and to experience a new sense of their place in the cosmos following their experience. Again, this echoes William James' emphasis on the 'moral fruits' of religious experience. Similarly, Ring & Valarino (2006) have noted parallel effects amongst Near-Death Experiencers, who often develop a 'heightened sensitivity to the ecological health of the planet' (p. 125) following their experience. Changing patterns of behaviour and worldview have also been noted following other forms of extraordinary experience, for example: 'lifetime experience with psychedelics in particular may ... contribute to people's pro-environmental behavior by changing their self-construal in terms of an incorporation of the natural world' (Forstmann & Sagioglou, 2017). At face value, then, there appears to be a connection between anomalous and extraordinary experiences of various kinds and the development of ecological consciousness that warrants further investigation, especially in this time of ecological collapse and climate change.

One possible line of enquiry could be to conduct ethnographic research on spirituality and religious experience amongst practitioners of ecological regeneration. As an in-road into this arena, I conducted an informal online survey of permaculture practitioners to uncover possible connections between practical engagement with ecology and extraordinary experience. This is not the place to go into a full examination of what the survey found (see Hunter, 2018), but suffice to say here that the perceived connections between permaculture – a design process inspired by observations of natural systems – and extraordinary experience recounted by my survey respondents point towards an interesting correlation between *interacting* with the natural world (through observation of ecosystems, the

practical tending of gardens, and so on) and *extraordinary experiences* (feelings of connectedness to nature, communication with plants and animals, etc.). Through fostering a closer relationship with our ecology through community gardening projects, or other forms of hands-on engagement with the living world, we may, also open ourselves up to extraordinary experiences in nature, thus reinforcing our desire to interact with the natural world. The work of Botelho *et al.* (2016) would seem to support this suggestion. In their study of Brazilian agroforestry (which is a combination of agriculture and forestry techniques designed to promote biodiversity while also generating large crop yields) they found that:

... through the adoption and collaborative development of the agroforestry system, farmers have begun to conduct intense observations of the environment in relation to plants, animals, water, and soil and to shape and renew the use of traditional knowledge in their production methods. Furthermore, because the farmers now verbalize their reflections and exchange their observations and knowledge with others, they are internalizing the idea that a profound change is occurring in their conceptions of nature. This process is similar to the process that deep ecologists describe as a metaphysical reconfiguration of the self and the ecosystem (Botelho *et al.*, 2016, p. 218)

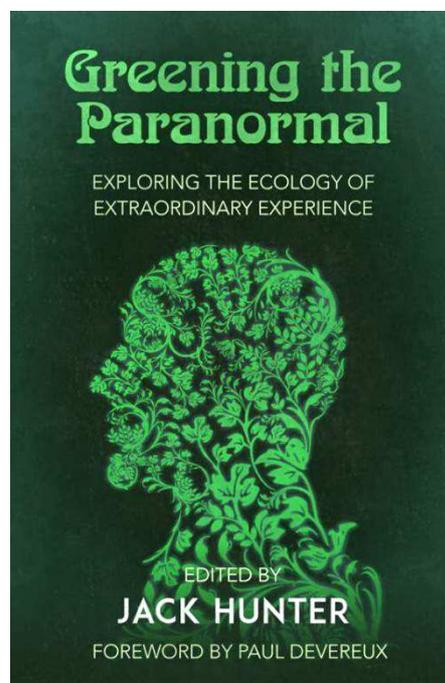
One of the most exciting aspects of this line of research – of trying to understand the spiritual and experiential motivations of those engaged in ecological regeneration – is the potential for practical application to real-world problems. Climate change, ecological collapse, species loss, pollution, and so on, are among the biggest problems facing contemporary societies. They are also most commonly thought of as problems for the ‘hard sciences’ to tackle, usually with technology. The ‘soft’ and social sciences, on the other hand, are often thought to have little to offer in terms of practical responses. But, if we can learn more about the role of human interaction with the natural world in the modulation of extraordinary experiences – which themselves, as a feedback loop, also lead to a desire to re-engage with nature – then perhaps we can develop new approaches to rebuilding a more sustainable relationship with our natural environment based on experiential and empathetic engagement with nature. The ‘soft’ study of religious experience may have an important role to play in shaping humanity’s response to the ecological crisis. In this way we might begin to reverse some of the damage caused by our perceived detachment from nature and develop what Mark A. Schroll has called ‘transpersonal ecosophical consciousness’ – ‘an ecstatic visionary philosophy of ecological harmony’ (Schroll, 2018, p. 37).

Jack Hunter

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Below is an excerpt from Eleanore Bruere’s article ‘Oneness.’ which I hope will appear in Spring 2020. I felt the passage about trees was particularly relevant to Jack Hunter’s article. (Ed.)

It all started with the book *The Hidden Life of Trees* by Peter Wohlleben that I had casually picked up at Waterstone’s. Before reading this book, trees were passive greenery around me, I had admired them, felt grateful for their beauty but walked on without another thought. I must say here that I had forever felt disconnected from things somehow and that something crucial was passing me by, but this book stopped me on my tracks. As I read that trees communicated with one another through scent, as we do with language a whole world opened up before me. It was mesmerising. I learned about the family life of our trees, of their care for one another, how they welcome hundreds of friendly species while repelling those who harm them through hastily fabricated chemical substances. Trees inhabited our planet before we came along and they have been our neighbours, helping us to breathe, to read, to sit

at our tables, to admire art inspired by them. They have inspired countless authors and artists, notably for me *Sixteen Trees of the Somme* by the Norwegian author Lars Mytting, and *Forest Therapy* by Sarah Ivens, and the art of Gustav Klimt. I was especially taken by Klimt's 'The Kiss' for the first time while viewing the painting *in situ*. I noticed that the couple seemed to be propelled upwards through a garden in full bloom like two golden tree trunks frozen in an immortal embrace.

I am just skimming the surface here as to what trees have offered us in the past and will continue to do for us in the future. The Wood Wide Web became alive for me, as I became alive to it, in a profound sense of oneness with these beautiful, generous, ingenious species that share this planet with us all. I became conscious of what was around me in a way that I had not experienced before. This feeling was reinforced after reading an excerpt from Douglas E. Harding's book on meditation, entitled *On Having No Head*, which offers us the possibility of experiencing the world in a new way. The idea is that as you look around you, you picture the world as your head. A different kind of awareness jumps at you when you surrender your head to the world. As you forget about your head you open up to the world and the world joins you, *becomes you*. You are still aware of individual objects, like trees and flowers, and of people and dogs around you, but each are somehow connected to you for the world is no longer blocked off from you by your head. I tried looking at the trees along the Green, leaving my head behind, and I was overwhelmed by a feeling of oneness with them. It was pure magic, I became the particular tree I was looking at, and the tree became me, I then felt a bit sad for not having been able to see beyond my 'me' barrier for all those years now gone by. When I experienced this feeling of having the world around me as my head, I had the most marvellous feeling of finally being deeply connected and in oneness with my world. Now I greet my tall silent friends with smiles and thanks just for being there. They are not always silent, as they have the ability to transform themselves into marvellous musical instruments as the wind plays soothing symphonies among their leaves.

Ordinarily, I think that we tend to perceive ourselves as separate from the world, as if it was out there somewhere out of reach. We can easily feel alienated or alone, not knowing how to move on out of a deep sense of separation where we can feel overwhelmed and insignificant as we sit there on the side-lines as a spectator in a great cosmic musical. But when you experience yourself as having no head, or having the world as your head, all of this changes. Well hopefully anyway!

According to the Perennial Philosophy all creation is interconnected although everything appears to be separate. In fact there are no separate entities as each is an inherent part of the 'That art Thou'; as Leibniz explains, each ocean wave appears to be a separate 'thing' but waves are in fact passing expressions of the ocean. Each wave is one with the ocean. The Perennial Philosophy advocates that consciousness and the material world, the 'inner' and 'outer', are one and the same, that the Supreme Being, Divine Presence, or the Kingdom of God is within us as well as outside of us all.

Eleanore Bruyere



We, the peoples of the Amazon, are full of fear. Soon you will be too

Raoni Metuktire

You destroy our lands, poison the planet and sow death, because you are lost. And soon it will be too late to change.

For many years we, the indigenous leaders and peoples of the Amazon, have been warning you, our brothers who have brought so much damage to our forests. What you are doing will change the whole world and will destroy our home – and it will destroy your home too.

We have set aside our divided history to come together. Only a generation ago, many of our tribes were fighting each other, but now we are together, fighting together against our common enemy. And that common enemy is you, the non-indigenous peoples who have invaded our lands and are now burning even those small parts of the forests where we live that you have left for us.



Forest fires in Altamira, Pará state, Brazil. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

We call on you to stop what you are doing, to stop the destruction, to stop your attack on the spirits of the Earth. When you cut down the trees you assault the spirits of our ancestors. When you dig for minerals you impale the heart of the Earth. And when you pour poisons on the land and into the rivers – chemicals from agriculture and mercury from gold mines – you weaken the spirits, the plants, the animals and the land itself. When you weaken the land like that, it starts to die. If the land dies, if our Earth dies, then none of us will be able to live, and we too will all die.

Why do you do this? You say it is for development – but what kind of development takes away the richness of the forest and replaces it with just one kind of plant or one kind of animal? Where the spirits once gave us everything we needed for a happy life – all of our food, our houses, our medicines – now there is only soya or cattle. Who is this development for? Only a few people live on the farm lands; they cannot support many people and they are barren.

So why do you do this? We can see that it is so that some of you can get a great deal of money. In the Kayapó language we call your money *piu caprim*, 'sad leaves', because it is a dead and useless thing, and it brings only harm and sadness.

When your money comes into our communities it often causes big problems, driving our people apart. And we can see that it does the same thing in your cities, where what you call rich people live isolated from everyone else, afraid that other people will come to take their *piu caprim* away from them. Meanwhile other people starve or live in misery because they don't have enough money to get food for themselves and their children.

But those rich people will die, as we all will die. And when their spirits are separated from their bodies their spirits will be sad and they will suffer, because while they are alive they have made so many other people suffer instead of helping them, instead of making sure that everyone else has enough to eat before they feed themselves, which is our way, the way of the Kayapó, the way of indigenous people.

You have to change the way you live because you are lost, you have lost your way. Where you are going is only the way of destruction and of death. To live you must respect the world, the trees, the plants, the animals, the rivers and even the very earth itself. Because all of these things have spirits, all of these things are spirits, and without the spirits the Earth will die, the rain will stop and the food plants will wither and die too.

We all breathe this one air, we all drink the same water. We live on this one planet. We need to protect the Earth. If we don't, the big winds will come and destroy the forest.

Then you will feel the fear that we feel.

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Raoni Metuktire is an environmentalist and chief of the indigenous Brazilian Kayapó people

Near-Death Experiences, Naturalistic or Transcendental?

This article was written by a lifelong member, Revd John Osborn, who sadly died this year (see Remembering Friends, page 61). It is a scholarly and exhaustive work on the nature (sic) of NDEs. We are very grateful to his daughter Jessica for sending it to us. Ed

Introduction

It will be the contention of this essay that a framework which allows for transcendence offers a better explanation for Near-Death Experiences than does, or ever will, a purely naturalistic framework.

We shall begin by distinguishing between an *experience* and an *account* of that experience, and considering some important consequences of that. We shall then compare Near-death Experiences (NDEs) with what Mark Fox terms Crisis Experiences (CEs) and Non-Crisis Experiences (non-CEs) (Fox 2003, 247), and examine what effect this has on the reductionist view that NDE phenomena can be accounted for by physical changes in the brain during the dying process. We shall identify, in particular, a sense of breakthrough to a wider reality as being common to all these kinds of experiences

We shall then consider the effects of NDEs and other experiences on the subsequent lives of experiencers, where this evidence is available. Following that we shall consider to what extent we can attribute any objectivity to NDEs, and give some brief consideration to two models of the human, and how we might usefully apply them in this context.

Following that, we shall consider the function of narrative and imagery in the way NDEs affect us, and conclude by proposing, as a hypothesis, a transcendent framework for NDEs, amongst other Religious Experiences, as offering a better working explanation of these phenomena than can purely naturalistic accounts.

Experiences and Accounts of Experiences

First we need to establish the distinction between an *experience* and an *account* of that experience. In his exploration of the RERC archives, Mark Fox (2003, 345) quotes Robert Kastenbaum (Kastenbaum, 1984, 24f) as emphasising that the account is all that we have, indeed, all that we can ever have. Fox quotes Kastenbaum further as saying that the account of the experience can be further elaborated, as the experiencer reflects back on the experience itself, or, more correctly, perhaps, on his memory of his own account, as he further interprets it to himself. Even an initial account, given as soon as possible after resuscitation, must be clothed in whatever cultural imagery lies to hand. What we have, therefore can never be an account of a raw experience in itself, even though the experiencer retains in himself that sense of ineffability, and indeed, of a greater reality; we have, at best, an immediate, but culturally influenced, account, and in due course a revised account, which may be elaborated by the experiencer's own later interpretative elements.

Carol Zaleski, in her admirable study of accounts of NDEs from the earliest times until now, entitled *Other World Journeys* (1987), clearly demonstrates the extent to which they reflect the cultural background and assumptions of their time. In her thematic treatment of mediaeval accounts: (*Otherworld Journeys*, 1987, part II), the overwhelming difference that strikes the reader is that there is a much greater emphasis on Hell and Purgatory than in more modern accounts; these visions of Hell and Purgatory and visions of Paradise are often set beside one another in the one narrative, as might be expected in a period which produced Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Thus a clear imperative is set before those who hear the story, to examine their life and amend it where necessary. It is not necessary, or even desirable, for everyone to undergo such an experience, but it is incumbent on all who hear the

story to take its lessons seriously, and live accordingly. The experiencers are sent back to tell their story with a clear didactic purpose (1987, 75-77), and even in classical times Er in Plato's *Republic* was forbidden to drink the water of the river of Forgetfulness so that he might instruct his hearers (tr. Lindsay 1935, 325). Even then was it necessary to take the imagery literally; for example in an introduction to *The Purgatory of St Patrick* it is said of the Knight Owen that he saw things 'as if in a corporeal form and likeness' simply because he was himself a corporeal and mortal man (Zaleski, 1987, 90). This is a valuable observation; it is too easy to believe that earlier generations were more literalist than was in fact the case; imagery could be understood to play a full part in trying to convey the ineffable, then as now.

In more recent narratives, except for a minority of negative experiences, there is clearly a much stronger emphasis on love, light, goodness and joy. There is still, of course, the point of no return, as the experiencer is sent back, or sometimes chooses to come back, to complete their mission in life, although in the more modern cases, their experience results in conversion of their own life rather than serving as a warning to others of their need for change. Again, we shall return to this theme of conversion of life in due course.

That memory can lead us far astray is abundantly evident from recent studies of 'False Memory Syndrome'. Fox refers to a mild form of this (*op. cit.*, 198), quoting Loftus and Ketcham (1991, 20) thus:

Truth and Reality, when seen through the filter of our memories, are not objective facts but subjective, interpretive realities. (Loftus and Ketcham, 1991, 20)

An extreme version of False Memory Syndrome has been the subject of study and discussion for some twenty years now, notably by clinical psychologist Dr Michael Yapko, especially in the area of childhood sexual abuse, supposedly recalled by the recovery of repressed memories (Yapko, 1994, *passim*, with 23 suggestions for further reading). This is an area perhaps rather far from our present context, but it does serve as a vital reminder of the tricks suggestion can play with our memory. We need to add that caveat to our understanding of the interpretive filter mentioned in the quotation above. Interviewers, like therapists, must take care that they do not unwittingly feed suggestions of any kind to the experiencer being interviewed, lest this distort the experiencer's own narrative, and indeed become a part of his own later recollection of his experience. Fox has a more extended treatment of this whole area (2003, 195ff), in which he quotes Moody (1977, 131f) as confessing to having 'led them on a bit'. Later researchers will be far more conscious of the need for rigorous avoidance of suggestion, and thus of possible false memory, when interviewing NDEers; more recent studies are in that respect to be preferred.

Clearly this effect will be minimised where an interview takes place immediately after the event, as in Penny Sartori's excellent piece of research, one of five mentioned by Paul Badham in *De Numine* (Spring 2007, p.4-5), However, it may well apply to some of the earlier NDEs from the Alister Hardy archive referred to by Fox when comparing NDEs with both CEs and non-CEs (Fox, *op. cit.*, ch 6), to which exercise, with all these caveats in mind, we shall now turn.

Near-death and Other Experiences

Modern Research into NDEs began with Raymond Moody with his book *Life After Life* (Moody, 1975). It has proceeded apace since then, and shows no signs of abating, witness those five PhD theses highlighted by Paul Badham in *De Numine*. Works by Ring (1980, 1984), Sabom (1982), Grey (1985), and Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick (1995) have become standard references in the field; Susan Blackmore (1993) is perhaps foremost amongst those who have attempted a purely naturalistic explanation. But

it is only recently that a thorough comparison of NDEs with other kinds of Religious Experience has been made, notably by Fox (2003, ch 6), using the accounts to be found in the RERC archive in Lampeter.

Moody had identified 15 characteristics of NDEs, not all of which are present in any one experience (1975, Fox, 2003, 15f); Ring (1980, 1984) and Grey (1985) preferred a group of 5 more general characteristics (Fox, *op. cit.*, 101). Sogyal Rinpoche (1992, 321), in a Tibetan Buddhist context, has a list of 6. (These sets of characteristics are listed in an Appendix by way of example) Fox lists some others (2003, 101). What Fox did in his research on the Alister Hardy archive was to establish that these characteristics, generally speaking, are as common in CE and non-CE experiences as in NDEs, with the exception of the border or limit, where experiencers find they must turn back and continue their lives, and the life review. Fox remarks (326): 'Whilst this fact has certainly been noted within near-death studies, receiving comment in the evolving studies of Ring, Grey and the Fenwicks, the RERC study has demonstrated vividly, quantitatively and conclusively that the parallels and similarities are striking indeed'. He further suggests that NDEs might better be regarded as a subclass of Religious Experiences in general, distinguished only by those two particular characteristics of the border, or limit, and the life review. He suggests that the Ring 5-stage model, being more general, might well be more appropriate, but might yet 'need to be further trimmed if it is to do justice to NDErs' reports'. One is reminded here of Sir Alister Hardy's attempt to classify the first 3000 experiences that came into the RERC archive (Hardy, 1979, 25ff); this did not really work, and we may well find ourselves falling back on something much more general, such as 'an experience of a sense of breakthrough to a larger reality than that we normally encounter in our everyday lives', my own variation of the original Hardy question.

The extent of this commonality between NDEs and other kinds of Religious Experience, both CE and non-CE, has the consequence that any neuroscientific explanation of them as the result of the dying process immediately fails, at least for the present. Quoting Fox (2003, 326), 'it is now clear that any neuroscientific model which is offered to account for each specific feature of the NDE must also be sufficient to explain testimonies containing a large variety of NDE elements which arise from situations where there is no threat to life – either real or perceived – at all'. Again, this 'raises all sorts of questions regarding the likelihood that persons resting, meditating or sleeping can suddenly and apparently inexplicably experience endorphin dumps, temporal lobe seizures, anoxia and changes in the visual cortex sufficient to create experiences involving feelings of peace, journeys through darkness and encounters with bright lights'. These phenomena, Fox asserts 'psychological analysis must also explain, if it is to present neuroscientific models sufficient to explain near-death experiences which occur in situations where death is, in fact, very far away'. The search for purely naturalistic explanations will no doubt continue, and so it should; we are all prone to believe what we want to believe, on both sides of the argument, and a good dose of sceptical cold water can do nothing but good. Meanwhile, until some rather more convincing cold water emerges from the neuroscientific side of the argument, taking into account those phenomena common to NDEs and both CE and non-CE experiences, we can safely set light to it and pursue other avenues, in which, of course the human brain will still have its necessary part to play.

The Effects of NDEs.

We shall consider two related categories of effects; conversion of life and removal of the fear of death. In this context we should note Paul Badham's remark (Badham, 2007, 4), drawn from a PhD thesis by Dr Jan Hatanaka, 'that life transformations which typically follow a classic NDE do not happen in the same way to people who come close to death without having one'.

In Kenneth Ring's *Heading Toward Omega* (1984), in particular, we find a shift of emphasis precisely to the effects of NDEs. Fox quotes Ring thus (Fox, 2003, 37), 'As NDErs "mature" following their experience, the nature of that seed experience – its meaning, if you like – becomes increasingly manifest.' And again, 'We were observing the garden, as it were, just after seeding. But now ... we can see more clearly just what has been sown' (Ring, 1984, 27f). His conclusion was that an NDE 'is essentially a spiritual experience that serves as a catalyst for spiritual awakening and development' (1984, 51, in Fox, 2003, 38). Of course the narrative of the NDE itself may well become modified as the NDEr realises more and more the effects of the experience in their own life; and so we have here a gain in understanding to balance the apparent loss of immediacy as a narrative develops. Perhaps the ideal would be to hear an immediate narrative for purposes of corroboration, especially of visual perceptions while seemingly out of the body, followed much later on by the narrative as developed more reflectively. One thing, however, will usually not change, that is the *noetic* quality of the experience; any transcendental insights into ultimate reality that experiencers may claim may well have passed, but, in both earlier and later narratives, experiencers will feel that they know that they have known.

Sogyal Rinpoche (1992, 29f) remarks, 'A close encounter with death can bring a real awakening, a transformation in our whole approach to life'. He remarks further (*op. cit.*, 325), 'in near-death experience, the mind is momentarily released from the body, and goes through a number of experiences akin to those of the mental body in the *bardo* (or stage) of becoming'.

This will serve to illustrate the capacity of Tibetan Buddhism to interpret NDEs within its own tradition; a similar capacity will be found amongst other mainstream faith traditions. For Christianity, for instance, we have in the Fourth Gospel (Jn, 8, 51 RSV), 'if anyone keeps my (Jesus') word, he will never see death', which, for William Temple (1945, 146), is to be interpreted as 'he shall not *notice* death'; he adds (147) 'It may truly be said that such a man will not 'experience' death, because, though it happen to him, it will matter no more to him than the fall of a leaf from a tree under which he might be reading a book'. Jesus does not here say that such a man will not 'taste' of death, as his hearers misinterpret him in the verse following, just that it will be, as some modern accounts claim, as simple as moving into another room.

Sogyal illustrates his remark quoted above with two accounts, one recorded by Ring, and one by Grey:

1. I was transformed from a man who was lost and wandering aimlessly, with no goal in life other than a desire for material wealth, to someone who had a deep motivation, a purpose in life, a definite direction, and an overpowering conviction that there would be a reward at the end of life. My interest in material wealth and greed for possessions were replaced by a thirst for spiritual understanding and a passionate desire to see world conditions improve. (Ring, 1985, 99).
2. The things that I felt slowly were a very heightened sense of love, the ability to communicate love, the ability to find joy and pleasures in the smallest and most insignificant things about me ... I developed a great compassion for people that were ill and facing death and I wanted so much to let them know, to somehow make them aware that the dying process was nothing more than an extension of one's life. (Grey, 1985, 97).

These two examples illustrate the considerable number of similar accounts extant; in particular, they illustrate very well those two effects: of the elimination of the fear of death and conversion of life. For comparison, a further selection, but this time of CE and non-CE accounts, is to be found in Fox (*op. cit.*, 280ff). where he states that in 42 out of 91 testimonies it was reported that lives had been changed, and that fear of death had either vanished or been much reduced, thus further reinforcing the striking similarities between NDEs and both CEs and non-CEs.

It is thus abundantly clear that there are enough accounts to illustrate the general theme that these experiences result in a conversion of life, at least in the view of the experiencer, even those experiences which are a mixture of the negative and positive, as for instance some of the mediaeval accounts quoted by Zaleski (1987). By demonstrating a kind of carrot-and-stick effect, they do appear to have that same result. Certainly, that was their didactic purpose when told to others.

In a small study of the NDE phenomenon in Japan, Ornella Corrazza (2006, ch4) while confirming that although NDE accounts are culturally conditioned their general features occur across the cultural divide: in two out of her three case studies, her respondents recount that their life is as yet incomplete, and that they must return. The first, Mrs O, although there was no explicit life review, came to realise that she had first to become a Tai Chi master for the benefit of others, and secondly to care for her mother-in-law; she said 'I became much less worried about events in my life. I realised that this was also the cause of my frequent stomach aches. I understood that we all have a mission in life'. In the second case, there is no explicit reference to such matters, but in the third a 41-year-old professional musician, who, feeling himself being drawn into a golden wall of light, thought to himself 'but "I have done nothing in this life!"'. There is no record in this study of whether, or how, he changed his life, but an intention is perhaps implied. Thus, even in this small study, although these accounts are, as ever, coloured by their cultural context, this aspect of conversion of life can be shown.

Subjectivity and Objectivity

We have already observed that we can never get back to any Religious Experience, whether NDE or not, in its pristine state; all we have is an account of it, which may itself have become modified after reflection and the passage of time. Nonetheless we can all agree that *something*, whether naturalistic or of a transcendental nature, takes place to give rise to the narrative. That, at least, is a piece of objectivity, but it fails to take us very far. The commonality of NDEs' features across cultures and times, let alone within the set of modern western NDEs, may seem to lend a kind of objectivity, but that may simply arise from the similarity of the basic stuff of the human mind across those different cultures, and, because of the difficulty of getting behind the various descriptive accounts, that is as uncertain as any other possible explanation. Ring (1984) does demonstrate a kind of quasi-objectivity in observing positive changes in the lives of NDEers, rather than merely relying on their own testimonies, but if we are going to have more concrete objectivity, it must come from somewhere else.

Thus the problem with accounts of NDEs is precisely their subjectivity, especially those that are narrated some time after the event. Even those that are narrated immediately after the event, or as soon as possible after resuscitation, will be clothed in the cultural imagery available to the experiencer. What we lack in most accounts, going back to antiquity, is valid and undeniable corroborative evidence to lend objectivity, first of all to the experiences themselves, and then to any conclusions we might legitimately draw from them. That they agree with received doctrine for those who are members of a faith community, or are well enough acquainted with one, will not do, since that received doctrine would itself have played a part in providing the imagery in which the experience is dressed, and the argument would immediately be circular. Often they do not altogether reflect received doctrine, even if clothed in imagery derived from a particular tradition, but that is a matter for a separate study.

Fortunately one reasonably common characteristic of NDEs, and indeed of many CEs and non-CEs, is the out-of-body (OBE) aspect of the experience. The greatest hope of corroboration, in this context, will lie in independent witness of the accounts by NDEers while actually experiencing a sense of being out of their body, and apparently observing, for instance, their own resuscitation process, including details which could not have been observed from where their body lay. There have been many such

accounts, best summarised perhaps by Fox (2003, 319): 'In addition to asking them (i.e, NDEers) for descriptions of their resuscitation procedures and then checking them off against medical records as Michael Sabom has done, other researchers such as Paul Badham and Peter Fenwick have attempted in recent years to locate distinctive designs in high locations around operating theatres in the hopes that NDEers, whilst out of the body, will "remote view" and identify them correctly'. He adds that: 'Most controversially of all, we also recall Kenneth Ring's research with blind NDEers.' 'Most controversially' because on the one hand, if authenticated, the evidence that even those born congenitally blind could see very well while supposedly out of their body would have far-reaching consequences, but on the other hand, as Fox argues (2003, ch 5), their testimony is not corroborated 'beyond reasonable doubt'. This is not in any way to impugn the integrity of the NDEers themselves, nor is it to doubt the entirely laudable research efforts of, in this case, Ring and Cooper (1997); it is simply to point to the difficulty of finding sufficient *totally independent* corroborative evidence to render what is implied by these accounts to be beyond all reasonable doubt. The accounts are in many instances very persuasive, but they lack that final objectivity which we are currently seeking.

It is all the more important, therefore, to note Paul Badham's comment (2007,4f) on Penny Sartori's recent research, that 'while people who have an NDE while they are being resuscitated can give a reasonably accurate account of how they were resuscitated, people who do not have the distinctive NDE experience are quite unable to describe the resuscitation procedures. This is a very important finding in that it suggests real observation takes place during an NDE and this is backed up by the distinctive knowledge acquired in at least two of her cases, which could not have been acquired by normal means'. This suggests that we may now at last have the level of objectivity we need.

In this piece of research, of those five NDEers reported to have experienced an OBE (2006, 201f), none observed the various symbols placed in the room to try to test the reality of the OBE, although they did describe accurately the resuscitation process (unlike non-NDEers, who could not). One did, however, describe the appearance of a physiotherapist through a door which could not have been seen from the bed where the patient lay. This seems to be equally good evidence, and suggests that relevance, rather than geography, is, unsurprisingly perhaps, a better criterion in these acute cases for what is observed and what is not. Non-observance of the various less relevant symbols need not necessarily detract, therefore, from the objectivity of this kind of evidence.

Such objectivity does not of itself, of course, establish objectivity for the other, subjective, elements of the NDE, but it surely lends credence to them as real events in their own right, in whatever cultural clothing they may be presented. Sartori's research is very recent, and it is too soon to know whether it will withstand any forthcoming naturalistic challenge; but if so, it will have confirmed those earlier claims of Ring (1980, 1984), Grey (1985) and Sabom (1982) amongst others. For the purposes of this essay we shall proceed as if these results are now well established, and see where that leads us.

Models of the Human

Amongst theoretical models of the human, there are two on which we might consider. The first is the neo-Cartesian view that there is a soul which inhabits our body during our earthly lifetime, and at death is freed to return whence it came; where that might be we shall leave open. This model has a long and honourable history, certainly from Plato onwards in the West, but independently of that, accounts of shamanic otherworld journeys also imply this kind of model. Descartes' influence considerably strengthened and re-focused this stream of thought, but it permeates, for instance, Christian doctrinal and liturgical language both before and after his lifetime. There is also an important related model (cf. Swinburne, 1986) in which the soul is an emergent quality which can mature and separate in due course.

The second model is that of an integrated whole. This finds early expression in the Israelite anthropology of the Old Testament. To quote Edmond Jacob (1958, 157): 'Opposition between body and soul is not to be found in the Old Testament, nor even a trichotomy (body, soul and spirit). Man is a psycho-physical being and psychological functions are so closely bound to his physical nature that they are all localised in bodily organs which themselves only draw their life from the vital force that animates them'. On that vital force, he quotes Genesis ch 2 v 7, which in the RSV translation reads that Yahweh Elohim 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being' (1952, 2). The close relation between, even identification of, breath with spirit is of course constant throughout both Old and New Testaments. St Paul, in his anthropology, does refer to this trichotomy quite explicitly in 1 Thessalonians ch 5 v 23, but he regards this as representing three *aspects* of one unitary whole; to quote Whiteley (1964, 36): 'Thus "heart", "soul" and "flesh" are not typically three constituents which can be combined with others and tied together to make up a complete man. They can each of them be applied alone to the complete man, but they are typically employed under different circumstances', depending on what we are talking about at the time. Whiteley has used the word 'heart', which was regarded as the seat of the will, for 'spirit', and 'flesh' for 'body', but the principle remains intact, and it is clear that St Paul's anthropology does not generally differ substantially from the earlier Hebrew version.

Thus although a great deal of Christian doctrine and liturgy seems to imply a dualist model of the human, it is abundantly clear that this is not a *sine qua non* of a Christian anthropology. Rather it shows that these two models are just that, models, and as such ought not to be forced beyond their proper function. Models, hypotheses, and theories, in all aspects of experimental science, are not strictly about *what is true*, but about *what works*. This pragmatic principle can be applied to our discussion too. An analogy from school physics concerning theories of light will illustrate this; for a considerable time some aspects of the behaviour of light were best accounted for by regarding light as a series of waves, other aspects by regarding it as a series of particles. These models appear mutually contradictory, but they serve their purpose pending a better model which transcends and includes them both. Quantum theory has to some extent done this, although it has of course brought its own difficulties.

Thus it is possible to hold two, or even more, models of the human in tension with one another. Some healers of my acquaintance do this; on the one hand they will talk a great deal about the soul's journey, as if the separate existence of the soul were not in doubt; on the other hand their healing practice, which often includes the use of, or contact with, the body, implies a unitary model. This does not seem to incommode them in any way.

There is a third model, currently espoused by some neuroscientists and neuropsychologists in particular, which is more or less an integrative one, but of course without the aspect of breathing in the 'breath of life', or the 'vital force that animates them', on the grounds that there is no evidence for such an external event, or of its consequences; on the contrary, they claim, this 'life' originates in the activity of the brain. Linda Badham (Badham and Badham, 1984, ch 3) presents that case admirably; in particular she spells out at some length that the human has so much of a unitary nature that it is empirically unreasonable to postulate any element that survives death. Paul Badham, however, in the same work (ch 6 and Postscript), persuasively presents the results of research into NDEs which suggest that there surely is such an element. Perhaps we await a new model which can transcend and include both these apparently contradictory points of view.

There are a number of neuroscientists and neuropsychologists, for instance Damasio (2000), Goldberg (2005), Broks (2003), who, as a result of their experience of brain-damaged patients where the

personality has undergone profound change, are unable to see any possibility of that personality surviving the greater, indeed total, destruction of death: the personality is too much dependent on the brain for that to be so. The personality develops, becomes aware of itself and matures as the brain develops and becomes the repository of the memories and accumulated wisdom that the person acquires, and which define his identity. When the brain dies, that must go. Consciousness therefore arises from the activity of the brain, so that too will die.

Broks, however, whose book is largely anecdotal, but persuasive (like accounts of NDEs), does seem to have a doubt towards the end of his book. It is expressed in the form of a story (2003, 204-225), which is unfortunately too long to repeat here, but it seems to reflect a dissatisfaction with the notion that the brain, of itself, constructs an audience for its own activities. There are questions here too, for example about the mutual relationships of personality, consciousness, and soul: is an emergent soul coterminous with, or even identical with, consciousness? However that may be, we must leave these questions hanging; consciousness studies are still in their relative infancy, but are already too deep to embark upon in this short essay, save to remark that, as it seems with Broks, the current answers do not always satisfy .

In this respect perhaps Carol Zaleski has a clue for us. In her later book (1996, 28f) she writes of Plato: 'To a great extent it is Plato's imagery rather than his doctrine that has recommended him to succeeding generations of religious thinkers. ... The allegory of the cave and the sun, the story of our life in the hollows of the earth, the image of the winged chariot, the myths of memory and forgetting – all are imagistic ways of evoking intimations of a wider life and longings for forgotten truths'. She then quotes an NDE account in which the subject was given a brief but comprehensive vision of what 'everything is all about'. She found herself assenting to that vision with her entire being, saying: 'Ah, yes, this is what I always knew, how could I have forgotten?' But when she returned to life, she was unable ('not allowed') to retain that that knowledge. 'To this day, she has a lingering sense of having been given a glimpse of the whole, and it causes her no little frustration'. That sense of knowing that she has known, as remarked earlier, is that noetic quality to be found so generally in all kinds of religious experience, not just NDEs.

This is a clue for us because it reminds us of the function of our narrative accounts. In practice we live by experience, narrative, metaphor and story. Any preacher knows that stories, especially those with layers of meaning, bring a greater response than academic discussion of doctrine, and good preachers know better than to dissect those stories too much, lest they lose their power. All the mainstream world faiths are full of story, and in that lies their persuasiveness; metaphysics and philosophy follow after, to lend a necessary discipline to our thinking, and sometimes a healthy dose of sceptical cold water, lest again we merely believe what we want to believe. These elaborations and analyses are necessary but secondary; servant, not master.

A Working Hypothesis

It is the metaphor and imagery, then, of accounts of NDEs, amongst other Religious Experiences, which are the operative factors in affecting our lives, and, in pointing beyond themselves, often prompting a metanoia or conversion of life, as we have seen. So let us propose a working hypothesis, in the form of a framework for the phenomena we have been discussing.

Our life here and the three-dimensional world in which we find ourselves, exists within a wider reality of which we are not normally aware. That is because the language and concepts with which we normally work have themselves evolved, over time, within this same three-dimensional world. There is an analogy here with modern cosmology, in that various physical phenomena are apparently best

explained if we consider our three dimensions to exist within a multidimensional universe. The number of dimensions which currently works best is eleven. A feature of this kind of hypothesis is that, while it is impossible to *deduce* a framework of eleven dimensions from the three-dimensional phenomena, it is possible to *postulate* an eleven-dimensional framework which can account for those same phenomena. We can deduce the lower from the higher; we cannot deduce the higher from the lower, only postulate it as a hypothesis, and see if it works. So the hypothesis proposed, which is scarcely new, gains credence from parallel hypotheses in the modern science of physics.

If that unplumbed mystery, humankind, is not in essence limited to our three-dimensional world, but our normal perceptions and understanding are, then our occasional breakthroughs into that wider reality are not so surprising, and certainly not unbelievable. Just as a two-dimensional being on the surface of a sphere (two dimensions existing in three), with no conception of the vertical, could meet strange phenomena which are easily explicable to three-dimensional beings like ourselves, so we, when temporarily freed from our usual limitations, can 'know' what we cannot fathom within those normal limitations. That we 'forget' what we sense we have known in those liminal moments is not surprising either, for we do not have the conceptual equipment for it, only the this-world conditioned metaphor and imagery in which we clothe it, and this can only work by pointing beyond itself, as indeed all poetic imagery does. This unites us with the poetic imagination of a Blake, a Coleridge or an Eliot, and perhaps accounts for why, for instance, Eliot found the fourth, and greatest, of his Four Quartets so hard to finish; how could he express so much that is in itself ineffable?

Under this hypothesis it is also unsurprising that current neuroscience is unable to account for the phenomenon of consciousness, or awareness, since it, too, is ordinarily unable to proceed beyond the limits of our three-dimensional world view, being limited by its own terms of reference. We cannot *deduce* the existence of this wider framework, which is in principle not provable experimentally; but we can *postulate* such a wider framework, and conclude that it does indeed provide a good account of the phenomena we have been discussing.

Conclusion

Thus this simple hypothesis, which is common in essence to the great faiths, but not dependent on any one of them, acts well as an organising principle in accounting for the phenomena under discussion here, namely NDEs and other religious experiences, and their common characteristics. It accounts for that sense of breakthrough, for the sense of ineffability, and for the noetic quality of these experiences; for good measure, it also accounts for those 'intimations of a wider life and longings for forgotten truths', to quote Zaleski again, and provides a fresh orientation of life as lived *sub specie aeternitatis*; hence that metanoia or conversion of life to which these accounts so often bear witness. It explains the phenomenon of 'forgetting' what we know we have known; it does not depend on any one particular model of the human. All that makes it a good working hypothesis, and allows us, therefore, to regard NDEs, with other religious experiences, as transcending our normal everyday life. This does not, of course, exclude the naturalistic description of the brain functions which accompany these phenomena as necessary physical correlates, allowing us the concepts, language and imagery with which to express them as best we may.

This remains a hypothesis of course, but one which fits a good deal better than any naturalistic explanation currently available. It could therefore be considered the best working hypothesis that we have.

John Osborn

Appendix: characteristics of NDEs

A *Moody's 15 characteristics (Fox, 2003, 16)*

- 1 Ineffability
- 2 Hearing the news
- 3 Feelings of peace and quiet
- 4 The noise
- 5 The Dark Tunnel
- 6 Out of the body
- 7 Meeting others
- 8 The being of light
- 9 The review
- 10 The border or limit
- 11 Coming back
- 12 Telling others
- 13 Effects on lives
- 14 New views of death
- 15 Corroboration.

B *Ring and Grey's 5 characteristics (Fox, 2003, 101)*

- 1 Peace and a sense of well-being
- 2 Separation from the body
- 3 Entering the darkness
- 4 Seeing the Light
- 5 Entering the light.

C *Sogyal Rinpoche's 6 characteristics (1992, 321), summarised*

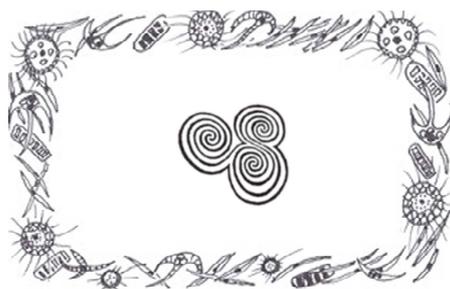
- 1 Peace and well-being
- 2 Noise, and separation from the body
- 3 Darkness
- 4 Light, and a being of light
- 5 Paradisal world of preternatural beauty, and feeling of oneness
- 6 Border or Limit.

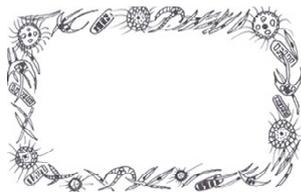
He subsequently comments on effects on lives, and new views of death.

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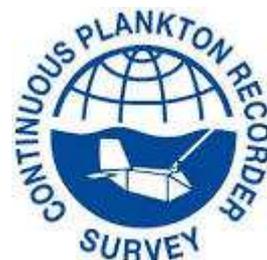
This motif, which appears in both anniversary issues, is a drawing of plankton by Juliet Greenwood. It was inspired by the Continuous Plankton Recorder, invented by Sir Alister, which became operational in 1931 and has been in continuous use since then.

‘Plankton are strongly interconnected with climate and life on Earth.’
Denise Lineberry, NASA Langley Research Center August 2017

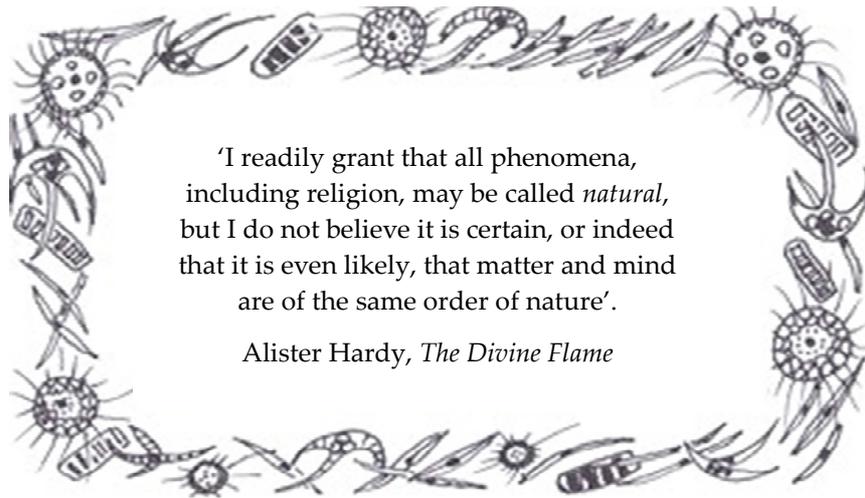
The Sir Alister Hardy Foundation for Ocean Science (SAHFOS) is an international charity that operates the Continuous Plankton Recorder (CPR) Survey. This is a robust and reliable instrument designed to capture plankton samples over huge areas of ocean. The CPR Survey is one of the longest running marine biological monitoring programmes in the world.

For a very informative video about the plankton recorder, see

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGgzoOM2LT0>



**50th Anniversary
of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research
Centre**



**Further Reminiscences of Sir Alister
Hardy and his Legacy**



Sir Alister volunteered at the beginning of the First World War and became an officer in the Northern Cyclists Battalion, patrolling the coast of Lincolnshire. He made a vow that if he lived through the war he would do all he could to reconcile science and religion.

Sir Alister Hardy: A Short Biography

Sir Alister Hardy (1896-1985) was an English zoology professor who became known as an enthusiastic ideas person, motivator, reader and artist. He became internationally recognised for freely crossing discipline boundaries in pursuing marine research dedicated to revealing all aspects of how marine animals live out their lives while interacting with oceanic environments. The British government awarded him a knighthood for winnowing out crucial knowledge about the oceans that allowed his country's fisheries to prosper. He reached a pinnacle of prestige in the scientific community when he became the Linacre Professor of Zoology at Oxford University.

Hardy's interests were too broad to be contained within the realms of zoology and marine research. Late in his career, he became interested in aspects of animal consciousness. The scientific community embraced this change of direction, partly because interest in animal consciousness was growing at the time and partly because research in this area needed encouragement from someone of Hardy's stature.

Then Hardy announced that he was taking another change of direction, this time into research on the character of religious experience. If Hardy had been less well known, his colleagues might have brushed this off as just another hobby or as a topic for casual conversation. Hardy was different. He was a world renowned scientist, he had been knighted, and as the Linacre Professor of Zoology at Oxford, had become an influential spokesman for the life sciences. A few representatives of the scientific and religious communities were intrigued by this development. They acknowledged that people who dedicate themselves to searching for the truth about life should not be discouraged from studying as prominent an aspect of life as religion.

However, large numbers of people in the scientific and religious communities thought otherwise. Some scientists were of the view that Hardy could think anything he wanted to about religion, but was a fool for announcing his new research direction. Others thought Hardy would look like a fool in the future if he launched into lines of research already exhausted in the 1800s, then came up empty-handed in the bright lights of modern media coverage. Some religious leaders pointed out that science is based on doubt while religion is based on belief, meaning that science is the opposite of religion and scientists should not venture out of their own element. Other religious leaders pointed out that Hardy was so entrenched in Darwinian beliefs, he was the worst possible person to even think about research on the character of religious experience.

Having resigned his position as Linacre Professor of Zoology, causing him to lose immediately the fund-raising connections he had developed over the years, Hardy founded the Religious Experience Research Unit (RERU) at Manchester College in Oxford. This was housed in shabby offices in a building scheduled for demolition, then the Unit was evicted. At this point, with strong opposition from powerful scientific and religious leaders, insufficient funds and no offices, it seemed impossible for Hardy to make any headway in his efforts to study the character and significance of religious experience.

He persisted, gaining charitable status for RERU, and found a temporary home for it by renting offices in Oxford. Then he created a new identity for the unit by renaming it the Religious Experience Research Centre (RERC). Having survived this temporary measure, the Centre moved to Westminster College Oxford where it prospered for five rewarding years. Both the administration of the Alister Hardy Society (AHS), formed to support the work of the RERC, and the Research Centre moved to the University of Wales Lampeter. This relocation was completed in 2002.

In attempting to use scientific methods to study religious experiences, Sir Alister focused on hypotheses that fit three criteria. First, each hypothesis chosen for testing must 1) be of significant interest to the general public, 2) reflect on the validity of a widely-held belief about religious experiences, and 3) be amenable to testing by established, systematic methods of science.

Sir Alister chose three hypotheses for testing. They were 1) Marx's 'religion is the opiate of the people' hypothesis, which asserts that those who feel oppressed, such as the poor and unemployed, and under-educated are more likely than the prosperous to report having religious experiences, 2) Freud's 'symptom of neuroses' hypothesis which asserts that mentally ill people are more likely than mentally healthy people to report having religious experiences, and 3) Durkheim's 'social effervescence' hypothesis, which asserts the people who report having religious experiences are mistaken and really are experiencing the excitement generated by their immersion in large, enthusiastic religious gatherings.

Hardy's study rejected all three hypotheses. Prosperous people were more likely than others to report having had religious experiences. Mentally healthy people were more likely than others to report having had religious experiences. People who reported having had a religious experience were usually alone at the time and unable to confuse it with the excitement generated at religious gatherings.

Scientists could not fault Hardy's methodology. Because his study was carried out in the UK, however, they pointed out that his results applied only to British people. Hardy countered by repeating his study in America, which was populated by people from around the world. His results from America were similar to those from the UK. Scientists concerned about sample size also were satisfied that Hardy's results were valid. He had sampled 4,500 people.

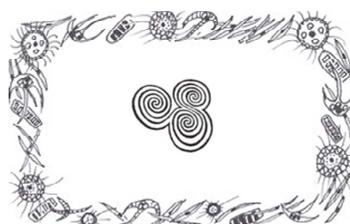
Religious leaders who had doubted that a scientist should have the audacity to invade their territory were elated when they learned of Hardy's results. He had cleared away three major stumbling blocks that had been obstructing broader acceptance of religious beliefs and the authenticity of religious experience.

In 1985, the Templeton Foundation awarded Hardy the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. This award has been widely acclaimed as the 'Nobel Prize in religion'. It has been awarded to Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and other internationally acclaimed individuals. The Templeton Prize is worth nearly \$1 million. It also includes a contract requiring the Templeton Foundation staff to provide three full years of fundraising efforts designed to support a continuation of the award winner's efforts.

Hardy had won. He had accomplished what had once seemed impossible.

Ben Korgen, Ocean Researcher with Sir Alister Hardy

(Reprinted from *De Numine* Autumn 2005)



A memory of Alister Hardy's Friday Evening Discourse at The Royal Institution of Great Britain in November 1969

In the mid-1960s I became a member of the Royal Institution (RI) of Great Britain and began attending their famous Friday Evening Discourses. Readers may have seen the annual RI Christmas lectures broadcast on BBC TV. Discourses were started by Michael Faraday in 1825 and were intended to 'enlighten and entertain'. When I became a member, the tradition was that men wore dinner jackets and the ladies wore evening dresses; this created an atmosphere of a special occasion. By 9.00pm everyone was seated, and as the theatre clock bell rang the speaker would enter the lecture theatre and begin without any introduction. The lectures covered the whole spectrum of the sciences.

I regularly attended the Friday discourses until 1983, when I went to live in Australia. During this time I heard many major scientific figures, including Nobel Prize winners. On Friday 7th November 1969 Alister Hardy delivered the Friday Evening Discourse. He created such a deep impression that I still have a distinctive memory of him. He began by saying that certain dogmas have grown up about science which may be damaging to its spirit. He believed, with Sherrington, Eccles and others, that some mental events may belong to a different order which, in a way not yet understood, is linked with the physical system. He described the scientific method in detail and the danger of being wedded to the dogma of materialism.

He granted that all phenomena, including religion, may be called natural, and that man is part of the evolutionary process; but to assert that matter and mind are of the same order of nature is an unwarranted assumption. Hardy summarised the development of scientific discovery, from different interpretations of 'Darwinism' to the developments in molecular biology, including the discovery of DNA. His position was that although the DNA code may well determine the physical nature of individual organisms, he did not believe this gave a complete account of the evolutionary process.

He next described how, since the Renaissance, the advance of science had liberated us from various mediaeval superstitions. He criticised however, the dogmatism that many exponents of the scientific method had added to it. Hardy asked, why is consciousness, which is the seat of all our values, ignored in the equation of life? Why is the mind-body relationship consistently ignored? Why, until quite recently, has it been almost taboo in scientific circles to talk of extra-sensory perception, telepathy for instance?

Next, he spoke of his concept of theism, ideas of psychology, including Freud's, and the research of anthropologists, including Sir James Frazer's study of indigenous religions. Hardy then referred to the brilliant beginning made in the study of religious experience in the more developed world by two outstanding pioneers at the beginning of the century, Professor Starbuck, and William James who built on Starbuck's work. Hardy commented that the whole tenor of James's study pointed to the reality of man's contact with a power which is beyond the conscious self and which affects his actions.

He next reviewed the writings of several contemporary theologians and writers on the theme of religion, with their assessments of religious beliefs and experiences in modern life. Hardy said that to a naturalist with an open mind who is not tied to dogmas of materialism or theology, it may seem significant that there is an extraordinary similarity in the nature of religion in its simplest form, among whatever people – indigenous or modern – it is found. This factor has a profound effect on all human life.

Hardy referred to his experience as a marine biologist, and the methods used in science to collect evidence. He described the establishment at Manchester College, Oxford, of the new Religious Experience Research Unit, and outlined his ideas for a new and more systematic study of religious experience. A concluding comment was his ambition to establish beyond all reasonable doubt, that one mind can be in contact with another by other than physical means. This would go far to counter the materialistic idea of the mind being no more than an epiphenomenon of the physical brain.

At the end of his discourse the whole audience spontaneously erupted with a most extraordinary display of emotional appreciation, giving him not only a standing ovation but a very prolonged one, even with some cheering. Hardy's was the only RI discourse I ever attended where the speaker was given a standing ovation.

Dr Peter Hardwick



Alister Hardy, by June Boyce-Tillman

I approached Alister Hardy by a circuitous route. I had had spiritual experiences as a child but there was no one with whom to discuss them. In church, despite many readings and hymns concerning them, in the discourse around me they were regarded as a product of a bygone age, so they remained a puzzle to me. My research into the medieval mystics gave me some companionship. I started with Hildegard of Bingen and went on through such figures as Margery Kempe and Mechtild of Magdeburg.

The rationalist attitude to the spiritual experience* is summarised in Hufford and Bucklin (2006). They make the following points (in summary):

- Through much of the 20th century it was assumed that dramatic spiritual experiences, *perceptual* spiritual experiences – visions – are pathological.
- They have been attributed to various psychoses, especially schizophrenia, and to epilepsy, migraine, and toxic states.
- An exception has been made with regard to 'non-Western cultures', based on the belief that these experiences are culturally constructed and could only be 'normal' in a culture that endorses and 'teaches' them.

I wish I had known Sir Alister when I was at Oxford in the 1960s, but I was a musician and he was a scientist. It was much later that I was invited onto the Research Committee of the Trust and found a mass of research that would not only validate my own experience but also compare it with those of others in the contemporary world.

This discovery led to a whole raft of research (Boyce-Tillman 2016) into people's spiritual experiences involving music, showing that music (of all kinds) can act sacramentally as a source of and a channel for the Divine (Brown and Loades 1995 p. 11). The religious experience Archive has provided a rich source of material such as:

As I listened to a Bach fugue, I became aware of a hovering presence. I felt that I was in some kind of trance and my friend had to nudge me hard when the music stopped. At the same time, she said 'Why are you looking so yonderly?' I found it difficult to explain to her that I had been conscious of a presence greater than myself.

Discussions, lectures and meetings of the Trust and the Society have been an important source of affirmation along this journey and enabled me to refine my thinking. Thank you, Sir Alister. I so wish I could have met you.

Revd Professor June Boyce-Tillman

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Hufford DJ, Bucklin MA (2006) 'The spirit of spiritual healing in the United States' In: Koss-Chioino J, Hefner P (eds), *Spiritual transformation and healing: anthropological, theological, neuroscientific, and clinical perspectives*. AltaMira Press, Lanham, pp 25–42

**See Dr Natalie Tobert's anniversary contribution in the Spring issue, pp.35-6. Dr Tobert takes issue with the rationalist approach summarised above. Ed.*

How I got involved with the Alister Hardy Trust – A series of happy accidents

Where shall I begin ...? At the beginning: no, that would be far too long. Let me start at the time I had just taken a change of career (1995). I had recently completed a degree in theology and qualified as a licensed Reader in the Anglican Church. My wife Juliet and I had moved to Ceredigion and were running a small holding of some 12 acres owned, plus 19 acres rented, mainly keeping sheep with some Welsh mountain ponies, as well as a very small herd of Jersey Cattle.

We fairly soon realised that even with the additional rented land there was little prospect of turning a profit (other than with the breeding of Jersey bulls – the only enterprise that didn't actually cost us) and it was necessary to find some additional employment. Having a degree in theology and a higher degree in a branch of science I wrote to Trinity College Carmarthen and Lampeter University (as it was then known) to enquire if there was the possibility of teaching a course on religion and science. No reply from Trinity College but an immediate positive response from Lampeter. Within a couple of months I had the offer to teach a foundation course as well as to undertake cataloguing some of the collections in the Founders' Library. Some of these had been unclassified for a very long time, and a basic entry needed to be established as soon as possible to meet a short-term financial grant.

Thus began my involvement with Lampeter University. The teaching was part-time and a bit sporadic, apart from a year's course entitled *Science and the Arts – a Challenge to Christianity* which I taught at Trinity College (under Greg Barker who was acting Head of Theology). The College had, by now, merged with Lampeter, so, when I saw an advertisement for a part-time job in the theology department, I applied and was granted an interview. I then received a phone call from Professor Paul Badham to say that the interviewing panel thought that I would be more suited to a post that had not been advertised. This was the post of Administrator for the Alister Hardy Trust and Society, and the Religious Experience Research Centre of which Paul was Director.



My interest in the actual archive of accounts of religious experience gradually grew from that point over the next seventeen years, and the archive eventually formed a part of the research for my PhD. After deliberating long and hard over a range of subjects, from the theology of Don Cupitt to the work of William Blake, I decided on an examination of the way in which artists, especially during the Romantic Period, endeavoured to portray the numinous.

Looking back over the many years of my varying careers, serendipity seems to have featured strongly, ranging from my involvement with the amenity*/ecology movement in the 1960s which led to a 22 year career with the Civil Service – Ministry of Public Building and Works. Then my sponsorship by that Ministry of my Master's Degree in a branch of mechanical engineering at Manchester University, which led in turn to my post teaching theology and science at degree level; at the time the idea of teaching would not have entered my head. My career trajectory shows just how useful earlier experiences can be in ways that could not have been remotely envisaged at the time. Horace Walpole, in writing of the *Three Princes of Serendip*** , would probably be amazed to find that 'serendipity' is now in general use, as a word to describe the way in which life can follow a number of happy accidents or coincidences. Serendipitous is certainly an adjective that can be applied to my life, especially in relation to the Alister Hardy Trust.

Dr David Greenwood

* 'Amenity is a term that has re-emerged within both public policy and environmental management organisations in response to an increasing emphasis on the human benefits derived from ecosystems.' (Wiley online library accessed 6/8/19. Ed.)

** The first noted use of 'serendipity' in the English language was by Horace Walpole in 1754. In a letter he wrote to his friend Horace Mann, referring to a Persian fairy tale, *The Three Princes of Serendip*. The princes, he told his correspondent, were 'always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things which they were not in quest of'. (information from Wikipedia accessed 6/8/19. Ed.)

Remembering Sir Alister Hardy

It is with fond memories that I recall my first acquaintance with the work of Sir Alister Hardy. This was in September 1998 at the BASR Conference at Lampeter University. There, I first met Marianne Rankin, now Director of Communications for the Alister Hardy Trust, who I am very pleased to say has remained a friend to this day. I had just embarked on studying for my PhD under the supervision of Professor Paul Badham and Dr Peter Fenwick and it was Paul who recommended attending the conference. Marianne talked very enthusiastically about the Alister Hardy Society and I became a member very soon after that.

Indeed, Sir Alister's legacy has been a great influence and help to my own work. When the archives of the Religious Experience Research Centre were relocated from Oxford University to Lampeter, I was privileged to spend many hours there over several months, perusing the hand-written and hard copies of typed accounts with the help of Dr Wendy Dossett, Anne Watkins and Jean Matthews. I was

able to read many accounts of spiritually transformative experiences as well as some accounts of near-death experiences, although the NDE accounts were not then classified as such, having been written prior to the publication of Raymond Moody's book *Life After Life* in 1975.

One hand-written letter which was of particular interest to me had been written to Sir Alister by David Lorimer. In the letter, David discussed the need for an organisation which would be dedicated to researching and studying such subjects as spiritually transformative experiences. A few years after David sent that letter the Scientific and Medical Network was established, and this organisation, like the Alister Hardy Trust, has had a great impact on my work and the work of many others in the field.

Sir Alister's books have also been a great influence; *The Divine Flame* was the first of his books I read, and all of his books have a place in my personal library. It is not only Sir Alister's research that has inspired me but what has flourished as a result of his work, in particular the books using accounts from the Archive written by Dr Mark Fox. The AHT's Occasional Papers, still available in printed form and now all available free online, are an important continuation of this work, along with the publication of *De Numine*. The conferences have always been a great source of inspiration, and an opportunity to meet like-minded people who are eager to discuss such important work. One conference that struck a particular note with me was hosted at Lampeter University in 2002. Peggy Morgan delivered a wonderful keynote paper called *The Fruits of Experience* and many people shed a tear during that talk, myself included. It was followed by a standing ovation.

The local group meetings have also allowed small groups to meet on a monthly basis and I was privileged to convene the Swansea Group meetings between 2010 and 2013. It is fascinating to reflect on how times have changed since Sir Alister began his enquiry into spiritual experience; now his work is more relevant than ever. The RERC Archive of over 6,000 accounts of such experiences have now all been through the arduous process of being digitalised, making the accounts even more accessible in this technological age

It is an honour to contribute to this issue of *De Numine* and I hope the work of Sir Alister continues to have a long and fruitful future.

Dr Penny Sartori

Long path to the light: meeting the AHS in Oxford

In 2002 the BBC broadcast 'The Day I Died', a *Horizon* programme on near-death experiences (NDEs). This featured Dr Peter Fenwick, Dr Sam Parnia, and Dr Pim van Lommel, and the NDE reports of Pam Ryan, Heather Sloan, Gordon Allen and others. This programme inspired me to read more about NDEs, marvelling at reports of amazing, verifiable details of what was going on around the person while they were 'dead', and the life-changing effects that followed. These ordinary people had nothing to gain by sharing their experience and often had much to lose through other people's scepticism or derision. The experiences spoke to me more clearly than did any religious teaching I had received at that point; the 'door to the light' had opened for me.



At that time I had been attending Quaker Meeting in Oxford for around 16 years. I did not know that the Alister Hardy meetings were taking place in Oxford until 2006, when I saw a poster for the local group displayed on the Quaker Meeting notice board. The AHS meeting featured a vicar and a medium, and my husband Rikky and I both attended. We soon joined the Society and attended whenever we could. The perspectives offered at those meetings helped to open the door a little wider, including discussions on healing, reincarnation and instrumental trans-communication.

When Marianne Rankin stepped down from chairing the Oxford and Cotswold group in 2008 I offered to take it on. My main innovation was to move away from posting flyers to all the members and use email instead; it certainly reduced the effort involved, but also meant some people missed out on some news. Gradually my email list grew to about 80 people as I added others who were interested in spiritual matters, but sustaining the meetings and covering the costs was not easy.

When my work/life balance got out of kilter I stepped down from the Oxford group chair. Tania Garland took the group on for about 3 years, hosting smaller monthly meetings with drinks and snacks in her house. When Tania moved to Swanage this small group wanted to continue meeting and had lots of ideas. With support from Beth Crutch and Clare Phillips I agreed to take the chair on again, with meetings kindly hosted by Clare at her house in Kidlington.

We continue to meet on the first Saturday of the month, taking turns to present on different topics and occasionally inviting guest speakers. The group has outgrown Clare's space, so we now meet in a large, bright lounge with adjoining kitchen at a quiet residential block in the centre of Kidlington. And the light just keeps getting brighter...

Rhonda Riachi

Was being RERC Librarian a Job or a Life Changing and Educational Experience?

Over the years I have written several of my recollections about the recent history of RERC *for De Numine*: the transfer to Lampeter of the Administration of the Alister Hardy Society from Watlington and the Archive of accounts from Westminster College, Oxford; memories of our distinguished figures, living and dead; and religious experiences or experiences of religion. I felt I had nothing new to contribute to the compilation of writings to mark the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Research Centre ... unless I looked not at the Centre but at its effect on me.

Regarding my beliefs

Before encountering Alister Hardy and his work there had already been some major changes in my understanding. I have been a Christian for most of my years, and having eventually recovered from the crisis of faith brought about by the challenges of reading Religious Studies; I fully embraced the concept of religious pluralism. Prior to my employment at RERC, I was used to expecting minor miracles in my life and was familiar with the notion of listening to God. Yet, hearing the experiences and God encounters of others really opened my mind to the various ways the Transcendent can reveal its mysteries to us. What is more, being 'attuned' seems to increase the frequency of such events. Whilst working at RERC I adapted my idea of 'what' or 'how' God might be ...

Working at the Religious Experience Research Centre

This was my first exposure to female 'bosses'. Initially I worked under Peggy Morgan and then Wendy Dossett. This seemed to change the working environment completely. Competition was replaced by co-operation; ideas were valued; and good work appreciated. I am indebted to both women for their contributions to my development in the field and in my personal life.

I helped with the transfer to from Oxford to Wales of the Alister Hardy Library, which was a short burst of physical work, made interesting and enticing by the personal stories that accompanied each book, or its author, as the volume was placed on the shelf by myself and entered into the catalogue by Peggy Morgan. Then came my involvement with the Administration. Never has the expression about 'growing into a job' been more apt. I was catapulted from my starting point of knowing little about Sir Hardy and his work. Over the decade I came to learn and understand about the topic and people involved in it. There was history, academic information, familiarity with the various types of experiences and the specific interests of each researcher. All that, plus the very many fascinating and kindly people whom I met, and the travel undertaken for meetings, conferences, book collection and sales, printing etc.

Up to that point I was largely exercising skills I already possessed. I suspect that the talents newly acquired were two:

One was the ability to listen, not so much to the account of the experience being related or presented, but to the grief, anxiety, loss, or illness that sometimes accompanied it. Also to be non-judgemental in the hearing. The other was to talk publicly. Of course we had had those sort of exercises during post-graduate studies (and I dreaded them). I was also teacher trained and had no hesitation in standing in front of a class of pupils, but until that point I had not given presentations or papers. What an exceptionally rich 10 years it was.

And Afterwards

The only problem with a job that is so interesting and fulfilling is that one tends to 'live it'. Almost a decade has passed since I left RERC, and at the time the adage 'When one door closes, another opens' offered no consolation for the loss of such a large part of my life. Ah the benefit of hind-sight. Since that time my transferable skills have enabled me to make valuable contributions to libraries in England, Ireland and the Netherlands. I have also had to develop other interests and abilities to make a living. Facing redundancy again, this time I find myself actually excited at the prospect, wondering what opportunities and challenges will present themselves.

So, this is not so much a memory of RERC, although I have been a part of some momentous changes, as a reflection on my own time as Librarian, and to share my thoughts on how working for the RERC has had positive influences on me and my life, both then, and as I prepare for the next stage of the world of work.

Anne Watkins

Science and Serendipity

A series of happy coincidences led to my time working in the RERC office and my current involvement in *De Numine*.

I had always been interested in the spiritual side of life, and in 2001 I spent a day receiving my first 'attunement' for Reiki healing. This involved spending a lot of time just sitting quietly, 'meditating', as well as receiving healing – and also something extra that seemed quite magical. In the few days that followed I felt very different. Looking back I suppose I might call it 'Love', but it felt more like an absence of anything that would stop me loving, like worry, anger, anxiety, insecurity; and I subsequently realised that this is what healing means.

After this experience I thought I'd like to study Theology. I was working on the check-out at the Co-op in Lampeter at the time and while chatting with one of my customers, discovered that she was head of Theology at the University. I told her of my interest and was invited to go and see her. She suggested that the Religious Experience course would be more suitable ... and so I embarked on the MA course headed by Wendy Dossett.

At a lecture one afternoon I found myself sitting next to Anne Watkins, then Librarian in the RERC office. The lecturer said there were still a lot of accounts of experiences to be added to the archive database. I turned to Anne and whispered 'oh I'd love to do that'. She relayed my message, I had an interview with David Greenwood, and started a temporary job typing the archive accounts, which grew into eleven fruitful and enjoyable years in the RERC office.

Later, again at a lecture I saw someone I recognised from long ago. I had first met Paddy in the nineties, when we twice hosted boys from Belarus who had come for a holiday as part of the Chernobyl Project, which offered holidays to children often horribly affected by radiation. The West Wales project was organised by Paddy's husband Louis, and run from the Ceridwen Centre on their farm. When Paddy took over from Verena Tschudin as editor of *De Numine*, for which I was already doing the typing, it was a chance to develop our friendship, and the start of an interesting, rewarding, and sometime hilarious collaboration that has lasted 15 years. Thanks to the internet we are still collaborating and having fun in the ether somewhere between the UK and Spain, where my husband and I now live.

As archive supervisor in the RERC office, I met students and visiting researchers, introduced them to the archive and showed them how to use it on the computer. This was before we put the database online. Typing and copying the accounts of experiences onto the database was of course fascinating and inspiring, and taught me a lot. There were also many interesting aspects from an objective point of view. The accounts from decades ago were very often told timidly, thankfully, maybe accompanied by comments such as 'I've never told anyone about this'; 'people I told thought I was crazy'; 'I'm so glad to be able to tell someone now'. More recent accounts seemed sometimes to be 'shouting from the roof-tops', even arrogant at times, or asking (once or twice demanding) that their account be published.

The experiences varied, from the mundane (e.g. 'I went to church and felt wonderful when I came out') to the all-out mystical; but I was also fascinated by the many close similarities between the accounts, and repeated themes – light, a feeling of oneness, an all-embracing unconditional love, a different reality, etc. – and I found some experiences which echoed my own.

Out-of-body experiences and near-death experiences were especially similar. Apart from the common themes of the tunnel, bright light and return from the brink, they often shared the same words ('floating', 'ceiling', 'corner'). Another interesting thing about the many NDEs I read was that almost none mentioned a 'life review' – a popular misconception? There were amusing sides to this too – so many people could not spell the word 'psychic', and spelled 'occurred' with only one 'r'. I would notice these idiosyncrasies, as I had to reproduce the writing exactly as it arrived.

The result of reading so many experiences was that I began to have a new conception of the word 'paranormal', as simply 'extraordinary' (both words mean the same thing, literally), or just 'unusual'. Childbirth, for example, is one of the most normal, but one of the most extraordinary and 'magical' experiences – and we don't call childbirth 'paranormal'. Nature is quite wonderful – a wonder – but we tend to see it as normal.

I have yet to mention Sir Alister Hardy. When I was at school someone in an 'R.I.' lesson said that no-one could be a scientist and also religious. I had to retort that my father, a physicist, was also a devout Christian. Religion, or spirituality, and science – since the modern meaning of the word – have usually been seen as mutually exclusive, but Alister Hardy combined the two in a most fruitful way, and was courageous enough to defy his peers, initially losing status and funding. So much continues to be written, to my mind sometimes with little wisdom or understanding, about this dichotomy.

During the last century, and part of the one before, it was widely held that there was an unreconcilable conflict between knowledge and belief. The opinion prevailed among advanced minds that it was time that belief should be replaced increasingly by knowledge; belief that did not itself rest on knowledge was superstition, and as such had to be opposed.

(Albert Einstein, from an address at Princeton Theological Seminary, May 19, 1939)

It seems our curiosity and thirst for certain and definitive knowledge cannot be quelled, but we have begun to realise that there are different ways of approaching that 'knowledge'; that the Truth has various facets, and that we are not entitled to 'play God'.

Jean Matthews

Jenny Jones on Howard Jones

Dr Howard Jones was a regular and prolific contributor to De Numine, and lectured at UWTSO Lampeter under the auspices of the AHS. He died in 2018 and his obituary is on pages 45-47 of issue 64, Spring 2018. I am pleased to include this tribute to Howard from his wife Jenny, which charts Howard's journey from sceptical scientist to the man whose breadth of vision is demonstrated in books and lectures, and in his articles, many of which many have appeared in De Numine. Ed.



Howard was well trained as a scientist to think in terms of experimentation to provide proof of theories in every aspect of life. Religion had always been anathema to him and he, like many others, initially equated religion with spirituality when, in reality, the two can be completely separate or can sit alongside one another happily, depending on how we approach our beliefs. He deplored the

corruption of the Bible by politically-driven leaders from the time it was put together, and felt that it made it difficult for many, including himself, to believe in anything the Bible told us. He spent hours reading many relevant books from what was becoming his extensive library of spiritual and religious research, meeting with some of the authors and others who had not published but had information to impart. Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons looked visibly shocked when they came to our door to 'evangelise' and were invited in for an in-depth discussion of their beliefs! Ours must have been one of the few homes they visited who did not send them away, sometimes with abuse.

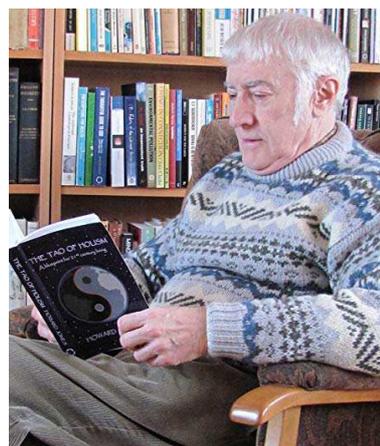
Howard was a natural teacher, believing that it was important to make sure information was made available for people to learn; he was moved, therefore, to write several books on the subjects of philosophy, religion and the afterlife in order to achieve this. In these, he distilled the knowledge he had gained into what he hoped were understandable treatises on our purpose for being here. He also wanted to stimulate others to start thinking about this life, whether or not there was a life in between lives, and if we were being helped in our learning by something greater than ourselves. It is a measure of his gathering passion for his research that the books he wrote covered a massive range of topics and information. He believed this could help people to lead more fulfilling lives, and he once commented to me that he only really wanted to make people happy.

Howard suffered serious health issues for most of his life, and although he had been well aware of my belief in the power of spiritual healing from early on in our relationship, when I suggested to him that he visit a nearby healer who had an excellent reputation, he was sceptical to say the least. But in the true spirit of scientific experimentation, he decided to go along and see if she could alleviate the plethora of symptoms he had. He was amazed at how it made him feel – sleepy, somewhat light-headed and afterwards in quite a lot of pain(!), but later, alleviating a lot of his symptoms. He realised that there must be something happening, but he couldn't explain it.

As always when he didn't understand something, he started to research it, and discovered all sorts of people who had channelled healing down the ages with amazing stories of how successful their work had been. When I manifested the ability to channel healing myself, I think he was bemused more than anything, although accepting; he sincerely did want to understand what it was that made me so passionate about healing and why I could believe in it. He had experienced the effects of healing himself, but he still didn't have actual 'scientific' proof of where the healing energies originated and how they were transferred to the person receiving the healing.

Throughout the whole of this time, however, he remained open-minded; something that a lot of scientists have difficulty with when confronted with the encouraging results of treatments whose origins and methods cannot be verified unequivocally. He discovered that a small number of other scientists were exploring the subject of a power greater than ourselves that had defied explanation for so very long. Through this research, he became aware of Alister Hardy, and the Society as it then was, and this offered him something to use as a sort of 'anchor in a stormy sea'. Here was a scientist, he realised, well-known and well-respected, who was trying to find out as much as possible about what he called religious experience through anecdotes from members of the public. Howard always felt that this description was actually inaccurate because what it was really about was *spiritual* experiences; not everyone in the archive had a religious background. He found the accounts in the archive absolutely fascinating.

The archive fired his imagination, and motivated him to delve further into the subject. He read widely about the ideas and views of philosophers, clerics, scientists as well as others who had experience of these spiritual events. This was not just about healing now but about 'life and death' which spawned thoughts of what purpose we had and questions about whether or not there was a God and how this being could exist, and many other tantalising questions. However, I don't think he would have pursued this course so enthusiastically if it had not been for Sir Alister Hardy's open curiosity and pioneering work in encouraging members of the public to contact him with their anecdotes of the unexplained. At the time, Sir Alister showed great courage in view of his place in a scientific community that openly deplored any spiritual or religious beliefs, and Howard admired him greatly for this. Discovering a scientist involving himself in this type of subject gave Howard a greater passion to do his own research and document his own ideas.



Although Howard accumulated enormous amounts of evidence of a greater power, and life between lives, and much more related to Spirit, he never did acquire the proof that he really desired. Like Sir Alister Hardy, he was still immensely curious until the day he passed back to Spirit himself – they were both dyed-in-the-wool scientists who would always seek to explain everything in a rational way. But, although his aim was to bring science and spirituality together, Howard believed that proof would not be made available to us using the current form of scientific research, or with the current knowledge we have of science. He believed there was a science of Spirit which was very different from the science that has been practised from the start and up to the present time. He was excited by the various forms of quantum science that are now emerging and felt, like many others now, that this was the way forward if we are ever to discover a 'science of Spirit'.

As a footnote, I have been in touch with Howard since he passed, through a trusted medium, and he told me that 'his mind had expanded' more than he could describe and that he was blissfully happy. He also said he would now want to 'adjust' some of the ideas in his books. How exciting it must be for him to have an overview of the true picture now, and I'm sure he has the proof that eluded him in this life!

A Young Explorer

As you will see, this is a personal rather than an academic contribution.

The sixties were a dizzy time to be young. Cold War, nuclear terror, rumours of huge conspiracies, '1984', dire prophecies, Armageddon ... yet eastern meditation was flowing west, flowers had power, hair flowed, love was liberal, war denied, and it was the dawning of the age of Aquarius (my zodiac sign!).

Telepathy, dowsing, radiesthesia, precognition, auras, spirit planes ... uncharted wavelengths, forces, dimensions all around. In my explorations I found Alison Barnard's Centre of Spiritual and Psychological Studies: a wondrous colloquium of philosophers, psychics, spiritualists, historians,

poets, educationists, artists, theologians ... A fascinating assortment, although to me some were cloudy-ethereal beyond reach, while others seemed obsessive with heavy axes to grind, disturbingly eccentric, O.T.T. Whom to trust?

Into this arena one afternoon, at a conference in the Prieuré in Talloires, stepped Sir Alister. He made a unique impression on me. Firstly we were short of scientists in the programme. Well, he most certainly was *that*. Then, well-researched (of course), he spoke of animals ... their remarkable properties and potential (later I read that he felt a crucial difference between animals and humans was merely that the one had tacit and the other explicit knowledge). That struck a chord. I have a high regard for the animal world. He spoke too (as I heard it) of the spiritual element in all creatures, a vital part of evolutionary development and well-being as we move towards the Divine. That struck another strong chord: my own deep feelings of the numinous around me on my life's journey, and my experience of the children I'd begun to teach, and the prayer which starts 'Lord, thou hast made us for Yourself, and knowest that we cannot rest until we rest in Thee'.

He brought Science and Things Spiritual into complementary alliance. In my schooling, subjects had been on separate ladders, and in separate boxes ... despite the presence of Aristotle, Pythagoras, Lucretius and other encyclopaedic ancients in my classical studies. I knew such separation was false and damaging. He exposed the lie, and bridged the gap. He was measured, accessible, credible, and conveyed authority. He placed Important Stuff in a serious zone ... with a twinkle in his eye! I must remember him, I thought.

And so I did, when I alighted on Dr Lyall Watson's *Supernature* in the seventies, and though fully occupied with married life, parenthood, and the challenges of new responsibility at work, I still managed to register rumours from Oxford of Sir Alister's developing work with the 'paranormal'. Then I took up with the Anglican Church, for whose ecumenical breadth and inter-faith relations I held out. RERU came to my notice, and that voice came back again ... I met Edward Robinson in Oxford, established a friendship, and joined up in the early eighties.

Once again, I became part of a rich circuit of conferences: all with that tricky but vital tension between the academic and the experiential, between the cognitive and the affective elements ... and with that critical (in both senses) alliance between science and spirituality.

I have enduring gratitude for what we term our 'Archive': clearly a misnomer, as its contents multiply, and shine with Life. I went cycling on a Sabbatical with *Living the Questions* and a water-bottle – these alone in my saddle-bag. Verena Schudin's and Beth Maxwell's *Seeing the Invisible* is always to hand, and I have shared it with my family; and I also keep Marianne Rankin's *Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experiences* close by.

Through the decades, the Alister Hardy setup has been keeping the Divine Flame alive, and new lamps are lit. Recently I read of the 2019 Templeton winner, a Brazilian theoretical physicist, Professor Marcelo Gleiser, who 'has gained renown for presenting science as a spiritual quest to understand the origins of the universe and of life on earth', and is 'a leading proponent of the view that science, philosophy and spirituality are complementary expressions of humanity's need to embrace mystery and the unknown'. The torch passes, and we run onward.

In front of me, as I write, I have Sir Alister's most moving address written for his acceptance of the Templeton Prize in May 1985, together with his memorable vow of 1914: that if he were to survive

the war he would devote his life to attempting to bring about a reconciliation between evolutionary theory and the spiritual awareness of humanity that would satisfy the intellectual world.

Thank you, good sir, for your steadfast fulfilment of that vow.

I was the 'Young Explorer' of my title, but – much more important – this is also a perfect way to describe Sir Alister, throughout the whole of his long, distinguished life.

Tristram Jenkins



This photo appeared on a 1967 Christmas Card which Sir Alister sent to his old comrades in the 'Cycling Battalion' from his service in WW1, with the message 'still on two wheels as you can see'.

The 50th Anniversary Conference, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, July 2019

‘The Future of the Study of Religious and Spiritual Experience’

The conference took place from 1st to 3rd July in Lampeter, and was attended by about 80 people active in the study of spiritual and religious experience from many parts of the world. Over three days participants enjoyed fascinating keynote speeches, presentations and discussions, through as many as nine panels exploring a very wide variety of topics and contexts, including differences such as faith, culture, gender, age, and sexuality. The panels were:

1. Research at the Religious Experience Research Centre
2. Types of religious experience
3. Dialogic approaches to the ethnographic study and written narratives of spirit mediumship and esoteric or religious phenomena
4. Spiritual experience and health
5. Religious experience in different communities
6. Shamanism and Mysticism
7. Analysing religious and spiritual experience
8. Religious experience from a medical anthropological perspective
9. Religious experience and interfaith

The conference was a wonderful opportunity to look back at the work of the research centre during the past five decades and also look forward to the future. One of the ways we looked back was through a selection of occasional papers published by the RERC which were on display. Given my own interest in the spiritual development of children and young people, I happened to pick up a paper published in May 2000 at the dawn of the new millennium by Dr Eleanor Nesbitt: ‘Children’s Experience of Religion: Issues arising from ethnographic study of 8 – 13 year olds’ perspectives’. During the conference, it became clear to me that two key principles put forward nearly two decades ago by Dr Nesbitt, and doubtless by other scholars in previous years, are as pertinent now as ever. First, researchers need to avoid being caught in their own ideologies and pre-conceptions, and listen actively to what the research subjects themselves are saying from the viewpoint of their own contexts and ‘worlds’. Second, guided by their research subjects, often into unexpected and unprompted places, researchers need to make use of the flexibility afforded by qualitative methodology, in order to supplement quantitative data and undertake a more whole and real study of the subject.



The quadrangle at Lampeter, with the Old Hall on the right

Listening to research subjects

These principles were echoed by the first speaker, Professor Ann Taves, Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California. In her enlightening paper entitled ‘What Counts as Religious Experience’, Professor Taves addressed the question of the extent to which Sir Alister

Hardy's research findings into religious experience can be generalised beyond the UK, given that he appealed for responses in the UK through questions which stemmed from his own understanding of religious experience. As she put it, 'we don't know to what extent the responses genuinely reflected his respondents' understanding of religious experience or were skewed by his prompt'. The prompt was ofcourse Sir Alister's key question: 'Have you ever had a spiritual or religious experience or felt a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday life?' Through her study, which compared Hardy's findings with her own data collected in five countries from East to West, Professor Taves concluded that we do indeed need to use both quantitative and qualitative measures in researching religious experience, and that we need to work with measures that research subjects themselves, as distinct from researchers, understand as meaningful. These two messages were to resonate with several other speakers through the conference.

'Higher Power'?

The question of how research subjects understand the spiritual or religious was picked up by Dr Wendy Dossett, Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Chester, and Principal Investigator of the Higher Power Project, a large research project that uses qualitative methods to explore spirituality among people recovering from addiction in the 12 Step Programme. In her paper



Dr Wendy Dossett giving her presentation in the hall

'Wisdom's Garden and Higher Power in Addiction Recovery', Dr Dossett challenged the programme's promise of 'a spiritual awakening' and argued that 'the casting of addiction recovery as at heart a supernatural or extraordinary religious experience can be unhelpfully exclusive.' She explained that although the role of God has evolved in the 12 step programme since the 1930s to that of a 'Higher Power', such a supernatural power, especially when pre-defined, often lies beyond the reach of addicts in recovery. Dr Dossett also presented data from her project which

shows how varied are people's experiences in recovery, and how they only rarely conform 'precisely to a normative supernatural meta-narrative.' Going forward, she concludes: 'there are pressing pragmatic reasons to challenge the natural-supernatural binary in relation to this experience.'

Altruism, love and William James

However, what is described in the Twelve Step programme as 'a power greater than the self' lies at the heart of the current doctoral studies of Marianne Rankin, Director of Communications at the Alister Hardy Trust. Her paper 'The Fruits of Religious and Spiritual Experience' gave us an insight into her research on the extent to which the archive of religious and spiritual experiences in the RERC supports the hypothesis that a turn from self-centredness to altruism is the dominant category underlying the variety of 'fruits' of those experiences. Like Wendy Dossett and many others at the conference, Marianne was concerned by issues of health and well-being, of social isolation, alienation and depression. She explained how important it would be, in today's self-centred society, to find substantial evidence that some of the deepest experiences have led people, as she says, 'to become more loving and compassionate and behave in an altruistic way.'

The themes of altruism and love were explored further by Professor Jeremy Carrette, Professor of Philosophy, Religion and Culture and Dean for Europe at the University of Kent. In a most thought-provoking keynote lecture in which he presented his paper 'The Mystic Kiss: William James, Love and Attentive Consciousness', Professor Carrette argued that 'love is a specific form of conscious attention that parallels with the contemplative attention of Christian mystical writers'. Exploring different types of attention in such writers, he encouraged us to study the voluntary, our will and willingness, as a spiritually motivating force in the present. We can thereby see the future as a series of consciously present moments, to which we attend with love through what William James called the totality of sensory experiences. Given James' influence on our understanding of human consciousness and religious experience, it was perhaps no coincidence that this philosopher was to re-emerge in the papers of at least five other speakers at the conference: from Anne Morgan researching into conversion experiences and gender, Mara Steenhuisen-Siemonsma presenting her work on spiritual experiences with orbs and Jennifer Uzzell with her study on the varieties of pagan religious experiences, to Paul Marshall, who studied the tradition of James in exploring the metaphysical significance of mystical experiences, and Dr Martin Lockley, Emeritus Professor of Geology at the University of Colorado Denver, who has found Kundalini to be a 'species' of Transformative Spiritual Experience which is at once physical, biological and universal. Concluding his own analysis of James in relation to love, Professor Carrette prompted the vital question: How can we take care of ourselves as well as others in healthy ways, rather than through unhealthy forms of altruism such as self-denial?

Belief and letting go

One healthy and rather different kind of selflessness was presented by Nicole Graham, a PhD student from the University of Kent. She argued that laughter can play a key role in religious experience. We can become awakened through losing the self, at least in terms of mind and body, by embracing laughter, rather than following traditional Western religions in rejecting it as a self-indulgent act. However, letting go of the spiritual self can also be a way of healing, as we learned from Dr Emily Pierini, Honorary Research Fellow at the RERC. She presented her research into therapeutic mediumship and the practice of 'disobsession', the release of spirits affecting the person's well-being. Although Dr Pierini's research was located far away in Brazil in a specific Spiritualist Christian Order, we were to learn later in the conference from researcher Terence Palmer that spirit possession, with its negative influences of discarnate spirits on mental health and even criminal violence, is common in our own society. Dr Pierini argues that in pursuit of effective healing practice, we need to move beyond the category of 'belief' in our analysis of the person being healed, and understand that it is their *experiences* which 'may illuminate the fluid, relational, embodied and lived-through character on the notions involved in the therapeutic process.'

How people experience spirituality outside religious belief systems was the context for Nicole Holt's paper on the 'Perceived effects of spirituality on the health of those who identify as Spiritual but Not Religious' (SBNR). Once again the effectiveness of a mixed-methods approach was highlighted, with quantitative survey data being followed by qualitative case studies to give, as Nicole says, 'a fuller perspective of the phenomena being studied.' Her research reported positive effects of spiritual experience on the physical, mental and spiritual health of her subjects, but more varied effects on their emotional, societal and social health. It was interesting that although all her research subjects identified as SBNR, there was a significant impact of what they termed 'belief' on their health. Without being prompted by pre-conceived definitions, Nicole's subjects also understood spirituality to be about values, connection, self, and deeper awareness and experiences.

Meeting spiritual needs

In her paper 'Exploring the spiritual needs of older people in residential care', PhD researcher from the University of Surrey Olivia Luijnenburg joined Nicole Holt, Professor Ann Taves and Dr Wendy Dossett in identifying the need to define and research spirituality from the subject's point of view. Both Olivia, and Eva Ouwehand in her paper on religious and spiritual experiences in patients with bi-polar disorder, stressed the need for health and social care services to provide for the spiritual needs of their clients, by exploring their spiritual experiences with them and by listening to what they understand by spirituality, not what they *should* understand.

Continuing on the theme of healthcare, healing and well-being, Tish Marrable, senior lecturer in Social Work and Social Care at the University of Sussex, looked further into the ways that contemporary people choose their own spiritual path through her research into the ancient healing practice of shamanism. Like Fabian Graham, who later presented his work on Chinese healing rituals in Singapore and Taiwan, Tish's research focused on the dead, as well as the bereaved and dying. Her paper 'Becoming shamanic – how do people talk about their experiences of finding shamanism as a spiritual practice?' raised important implications for how we understand spiritual connection away from organised religion. In the same panel on Shamanism and Mysticism, Zsusanna Szugyczki, from the University of Szeged, Hungary, took us further from traditional religion and mysticism in her exploration of secularisation, in her paper 'Mysticism – Then and Now.'

Presences for all ages

Bereavement and secularisation were also key themes in the paper given by Adam Powell from Durham University entitled 'The Conditions and Cognitions of Spiritualist Experience'. His team's ground-breaking study into clairaudience among British spiritualists shed new light on Spiritualism from the subjective experiences of its adherents, moving us away from the understanding of the practice by many scholars as 'a product of nineteenth-century empiricism and democratised religiosity, or as an indelible symptom of Western secularisation.' One of the most striking results of the project was that most of the spiritual experiences had happened to respondents in their early childhood. This research provided evidence that supernatural presences are seen, heard or sensed by people from a wide range of age groups and states of health, not just by ill or geriatric subjects, as in the study on religious delusions and hallucinations by psychiatrists Arjan Braam and Annemarie Noort from the Utrecht.



Corner of quadrangle at Lampeter

Subsequent papers on the closing day of the conference brought us firmly back to organised religious faith as the context for spiritual experience. Both PhD students Johnson Elijah Amamnsunu, from the University of Wales Trinity St David, and Julia Kuhlin from Uppsala University, Sweden, informed us further about the effects of religious experience with their research into the positive impacts on social as well as personal well-being in two fast growing faith movements – the Islamic NASFAT and Christian Pentecostalism respectively. However, research with young people in Ireland indicates that they also viewed traditional Christianity more positively as a result of their religious experiences. This finding was described by Leslie Francis, Professor of Religions and Education at the University of Warwick, who drew the conference to a close in his illuminating keynote lecture, 'Exploring the fruit of religious experience within the Greer tradition.'

Into the future

To sum up, this year's RERC conference gave us very valuable insights into the ongoing questions of what causes or prompts religious and spiritual experiences, how these phenomena are sensed and experienced, as well as what effects, both positive and negative, they have on us. However, for me the conference also underlined the challenges of definition, methodology and measurement which continue to perplex those who venture forth into this area of research. These challenges present us with the following key questions for future research:

How can we come to a comprehensive working definition of experiences that are religious and/or spiritual in a way which can be applied across different disciplines, settings and contexts, while respecting the many subjective perceptions of our research subjects, from the young to the elderly? How could such a definition also include awareness and experiences that are not only personal and individual but also shared, as found by researchers such as Alison Robertson in her paper on the 'Co-Construction of BDSM Experience'?

Given the preference throughout the conference for a mixed-method approach to research, how can we best marry quantitative and qualitative methodologies in a way that values flexible qualitative methods with small groups of subjects, such as those promoted by James Murphy from Canterbury Christ Church University in his presentation of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Alongside both of these questions stands the ongoing issue of measurement. Is it possible to develop a single framework to measure both religious and spiritual experiences which are subjective, while also measuring scientifically the effectiveness of, for example, religious healing, as Professor Simon Dein asked at the conference; or the effects of belief systems on biodynamic farming, as shown by Dr Julia Wright? In order to ensure the necessary rigour for validating and generalising our research, should we use one or a combination of the various measures presented at the conference, for example a 'blank page' grounded approach starting from the research subject, leading to models such as Nicole Holt's Spiritual Health Effects Model (SHEM), or James Murphy's 'Meanings Systems'? Or should we use a pre-conceived framework that, drawing on Jennifer Uzzell's research, re-evaluates James' term 'transcendence' as an indicator of 'genuine' religious experience, rather than relying on what the researcher accepts as valid, with all the ethical issues this raises? Perhaps we need a set of indicators that is broad enough to acknowledge the spiritual and secular as well as religious, for instance the Inventory of Non-ordinary Experiences (INOE) presented by Anne Taves, or Wesley's category of Intense Experiences (IEs) as evaluated by Marianne Rankin in her paper, thereby returning us nearer to the wishes of Alister Hardy, who wanted Religious and Spiritual Experiences to be accepted as a natural part of human consciousness.

However our paths of research converge or diverge, I am sure we can look forward to many more years of great work by the Religious Experience Research Centre, as it continues to bring us all together and weave a rich and colourful tapestry of so many essential studies on religious and spiritual experiences.

Mark Seed





Presenters Ann Morgan, Marianne Rankin, Professor Bettina Schmidt and Dr Wendy Dossett

Report on the Conference by the Organiser, Professor Schmidt

The success of the Anniversary Conference demonstrated the growing interest in the study of religious experience. We had around 80 participants, half of them staying on campus and the other half as day delegates. Thanks to the support of the Alister Hardy Trust we were able to invite three keynote speakers. Professor Ann Taves, Santa Barbara, California, the former President of the American Academic of Religion, gave the Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture in which she looked back at the RERC China project, and looked into the future of her own research funded by the Templeton Foundation. Professor Jeremy Carrette, Kent University gave the second keynote lecture in which he looked at William James and put him into context with the work of Alister Hardy and the RERC. Professor Leslie Francis, Warwick University and chairman of the AHT gave the third keynote lecture in which he put forward the proposal for a second Alister Hardy database.

In addition to these three keynotes lectures we selected 27 individual papers from the submissions received. The contributors chosen were divided into 7 panels that were distributed across the three days. Among the speakers were scholars (junior and senior) as well as research students, mainly from the UK but also overseas. Of special interest to AHT members will be that Marianne Rankin presented her PhD work (Warwick) at the conference, as well as Mara Steenhuisen-Siemonsma, one of my PhD students who recently joined the Alister Hardy Trust. Anne Morgan, who is a student on the MRes Religious Experience programme and recipient of the Alister Hardy bursary, also gave a paper about her dissertation. Other MRes students attended.

At the conference dinner, Peggy Morgan, former director of RERC, Tom Farley, grandson of Sir Alister Hardy and new AHT Trustee, and Professor Medwin Hughes, the VC of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David said a few words of welcome. During the conference, participants took the opportunity to visit the RERC office as well as to look at the display of paintings in the Sheikh Khalifa building. A few stayed on for another day and continued working in the Centre.



Dr Tom Farley (Sir Alister's grandson) speaking at the celebratory reception dinner

Overall it was a very successful event that highlighted the work of the RERC and the legacy of Sir Alister Hardy. I am very grateful for all the help in preparing for the conference and during the event. My thanks go in particular to Sneha Roy and Wemimo Jaiyesimi, two doctoral students who were looking after the admin side; Tom Pitchford, Jonathan Andrews and Anne Watkins who showed participants the research centre; and to the colleagues and friends who chaired panels. Without your help the conference would not have been such a success.

Professor Bettina Schmidt

Some Personal reflections from the RERC 50th Anniversary Conference



The Chapel, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

The conference was a well organised, informative and inspiring event with stimulating lectures delivered by Professor Ann Taves, Professor Jeremy Carrette and Professor Leslie Francis (current chair of the AHT). These were supported by many other presentations delivered by doctoral students and others whose work, or areas of research, are examining the effects of religious experiences.

Amongst these were lectures given by Marianne Rankin and Dr Wendy Dossett who are both well known to Members and have contributed so much to the the RERC and Trust.

I was privileged to chair the first session on day two of the conference and hear talks from two doctoral researchers, who both delivered fascinating and informative lectures about areas that are not so well documented in the study of religious experiences (REs). The first by Mara Steenhuisen concerned the effect of orbs* and how they might trigger religious experiences. Mara is from the Netherlands but studying for her PhD at Lampeter under Professor Schmidt. The second talk was by Nicole Graham who is researching for her PhD at the University of Kent and her topic was laughter and how this is largely discouraged in many mainstream religions, but may also be a trigger for religious experiences. Both lectures were inspiring given the fact that their subject matters are not so widely researched, and I look forward to hearing the conclusions they reach in their studies. I wish Mara and Nicole well as they progress towards their PhDs.



Peggy Morgan speaking about the RERC at the reception dinner

I particularly enjoyed the celebratory evening meal at which the Vice Chancellor Medwin Hughes spoke. We were also treated to some personal reflections by Peggy Morgan (former Director of the RERC) and Dr Tom Farley (the grandson of Sir Alister Hardy). In addition the Hardy family had loaned many personal items which were on display in the library, and I personally found these to be of particular interest, giving a real insight in to Hardy's life and career.

It was a pleasure to be in Lampeter again after so many years, visiting the campus where I studied for my MA. I was able to catch up with many old friends and enjoy this part of South Wales after a long absence. May I conclude by adding my own thanks to Professor Schmidt and everyone who helped make the conference such a smooth-running and inspirational event. It was a real tribute to the ongoing legacy of Sir Alister Hardy.

Andy Burns

**Orbs are highly debated phenomena in paranormal circles. Some people believe that seeing orbs of light is visible evidence of spirits. However, many researchers doubt whether orbs are ghosts at all.*

<https://paranormal.lovetoknow.com/>

It has been argued that they are caused by the back-scatter of light by unfocused particles, also called near-camera reflection, but orbs are often witnessed or photographed at locations where some form of paranormal activity has reportedly taken place.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/>

RERC Anniversary Conference, July 2019

Professor Bettina Schmidt organised an excellent conference in Lampeter, with three eminent keynote speakers and a wide range of papers on fascinating aspects of Religious and Spiritual Experience research. I was invited to contribute and it was an honour to speak about my PhD research into 'The Fruits of Experience in the RERC Archive'.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the event, for me like for so many of us there, was that it offered a wonderful opportunity to catch up with old friends and colleagues in the familiar surroundings of the Lampeter campus. There was an excellent turn-out. People came from far and wide – former Chairs from the old Alister Hardy Society days, former and current Directors and people who had been involved with the Trust over many years. We all enjoyed the exhibition on Sir Alister Hardy and his life organised by Thomas Pitchford and Jonathan Andrew in the RERC office as well as the art displayed in the Sheikh Khalifa Building.

We looked back and we looked to the future, celebrating the enormous range of research, past and present, in the field of Religious and Spiritual Experience studies and in particular the role played by the Alister Hardy Trust and its Archive.

Marianne Rankin

Special Anniversary Members Day October 2019

Saturday 19th October, 10.30am – 4.30pm

Venue: Oxford Quaker Meeting House, 43 St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3LW
(Tel: 01865 557373 Email: office@oxfordquakers.org)

10.30 am Registration and Welcome at 11.00 am

11.15 am 2019 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture by Dr Rupert Sheldrake: *Ways to Go Beyond and Why They Work: Science and Spiritual Practices*

1.00 pm Lunch bring your own lunch, buy sandwiches nearby or enjoy local venues (tea/coffee provided)

2.00 pm Lecture by Dr Mark Fox: *Researching in the RERC Archive*

2.45 pm *Memories of Sir Alister Hardy* from family, friends and those inspired by his work

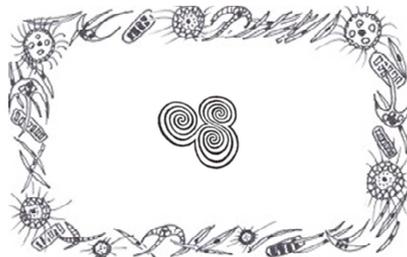
4.00 pm Celebratory Reception

4.30 pm Close

Cost: £25; AHT members £20; students £5

Further information from Marianne Rankin:

marianne.rankin@studyspiritualexperiences.org Tel: 07714 032643



REPORTS

Report from the Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre, Lampeter

The Religious Experience Research Centre, Lampeter, has been extremely busy in 2019. One highlight was the 50th anniversary conference on the Future of the Study of Religious Experience on 1-3 July 2019 in Lampeter [see above for reports on this event].

The success of the Conference, and the expansion of the UWTSO study programmes in the subject demonstrate the growing interest in the field. The new undergraduate module on spiritual and religious experience that I offered earlier this year has proved very popular; the MA module 'Religious Experience Today' is offered on various programmes within the Faculty, and the Master by Research

(MRes) in Religious Experience saw its first graduation at this year's ceremony (Elle Lois Moorhead-Hughes, also a member of the AHT). Another student on the MRes Study of Religions, who worked on a topic allied to religious experience, also graduated in July and decided to continue with a PhD which will be closely linked to the study of religious experience. There are currently 10 students on the MRes Religious Experience programme, most of them already in part 2 (dissertation). Two of them have submitted and are awaiting the outcome of the examination and two more are preparing to submit later this year. Unfortunately, two other students decided to withdraw due to health or other personal reasons; they will be awarded a Postgraduate Certificate, as they finished part 1 of the degree.

Another area of RERC activities is publication. Thomas Pitchford is currently working on the fifth issue of the online Journal for the Study of Religious Experience. This reflects the history of the study of religious experience as well as new directions. One highlight is the article by Marcus Braybrooke which is based on his Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture in 2018. Among the other articles is one by Martin Lockley which refers to the database, and one by Simon Dein representing the growing field of medical anthropology. The next issue will be organised by two guest-editors, Mike West and Jeremy Duff. Meanwhile the work on our next edited volume continues, co-edited by Jeff Leonardi, honorary research fellow at the RERC, and myself. The manuscript is submitted and already copy-edited. We are now waiting for the proofs. The publisher (Equinox) has already announced it on the website with a publication date of February 2020. I am currently considering what to do with the papers of this year's conference (more in my next report).

The other main activity for RERC is cataloguing the academic library of Linda and Paul Badham, kindly gifted to us in 2018. This falls mainly to Thomas Pitchford, while Jonathan Edwards is incorporating the lost accounts submitted to the archive which he found during his inventory. While his contract has been extended for an extra three months, it is not clear yet whether he will manage to incorporate all accounts. As we will have to operate without an archivist when Jonathan goes we will not be able to add new accounts to the database from October onwards. We will, of course, continue to enable access to members on receipt of a signed confidentiality form from Thomas Pitchford, who will send an ID and password for online access. Thomas can also help with any questions about our online material (e.g., the occasional papers and the journal), and the library.

In my next report I will give an update on plans for the 2020 conference. It will be smaller than this year's, probably only the keynote lecture and the presentation of three papers. I have already approached a potential keynote speaker, Professor Jane Shaw, principal of the Harris Manchester College at Oxford where Alister Hardy founded the research centre.

It has not been an easy year due to the many problems that Higher Education Institutes in the UK are currently facing. But be assured that the Religious Experience Research Centre continues its work and will remain active. Our activities increase the visibility of the study of religious and spiritual experience in general, as well as that of RERC.

Professor Bettina Schmidt

Report from the Director of Communications

Members and Activities Group

This year Andy Burns and I have focused on preparing for the special Anniversary Members Day on the 19th October. A major task has been designing the leaflet for this and co-organising and ensuring maximum publicity for the event. Members have already begun to register, so we hope for a good turn-out.

As Dr Rupert Sheldrake gave the first Annual Memorial Lecture in 1987, he has been invited to give the 50th Anniversary Lecture. He will speak on *Ways to Go Beyond and Why They Work: Science and Spiritual Practices*. Both of his latest books, on which his lecture will be based, were reviewed in the Spring 2019 issue of *De Numine*, pp. 71-2

In the afternoon, Dr Mark Fox will speak on his research in the RERC Archive, which has resulted in three major books. After that we will hear from members of Sir Alister's family and others sharing their memories and paying tribute to our founder. We will conclude the afternoon with a celebratory reception. There will be a bookstall selling works by the speakers, books bequeathed to the AHT by the late Rodney Reeves, and copies of the Anniversary issues of *De Numine*.

Further information from Marianne Rankin, and see page 50 for details.

De Numine

What a wonderful journal Spring 2019 *De Numine* was! The invitation to members to contribute memories and photos resulted in a gorgeous, golden, lavishly illustrated issue with wide-ranging contributions from family, friends and others closely involved with the AHT. It was absolutely fascinating to read how people had been inspired by Sir Alister Hardy and his research. Each contribution told a unique story of the impact of his work and its legacy in their lives. This is truly a journal to treasure and many congratulations and thanks are due to Patricia Murphy and Jean Matthews for their vision and hard work.

I am very much looking forward to reading this second special issue. Extra copies are available as gifts for friends and anyone interested in the AHT – a bargain at £2.50 – and both Spring and Autumn editions will be available on the book stall at Members Day

DoC Activities

Talks

In November 2018 I spoke at the 2018 CANA (Christians Awakening to a New Awareness) conference, *WE ARE ALL ONE, Towards Universal Spirituality: Journeying with Christianity*. Everyone received a copy of the AHT brochure and almost every hand went up in a positive response to the Hardy Question.

Publications

The Institute for Theological Partnerships (ITP) at Winchester University recently published *Death, The Gateway to Life, An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Near-Death Experiences* edited by Dr Shirley Firth and Joanna Wilson. The book is based on papers given at the 2016 conference hosted by the ITP and the Scientific and Medical Network at Winchester, entitled *Is Heaven for Real? Significant implications of Near-Death Experiences*. The AHT was represented by Professor Paul Badham, Tanya Garland and myself.

This wide-ranging collection of papers focused on questions of meaning raised by studies of NDEs, including explorations of non-local consciousness by Dr Pim van Lommel, of universal mind by David Lorimer and of non-dual consciousness by Dr Peter Fenwick. I focused on the link between NDEs and Religious and Spiritual Experiences (RSEs), Paul Badham on the implications of NDE studies for Christians and Christian Theology, and Tanya gave an account of her NDE.

Two copies of *Block 4, Experiences of Module A227 Exploring Religion: places, practices, texts and experiences* by Marion Bowman (block convenor), Paul-François Tremlett and Hugh Beattie, have been sent to the AHT by The Open University. This was in gratitude for my furnishing them with a photograph of Sir Alister Hardy, the first illustration in the book. I have sent one copy to Thomas Pitchford for the RERC library.

Reflection

The 50th Anniversary has offered us a chance to reflect on what has been achieved during half a century of research in terms of lectures, conferences and publications on the academic side. In parallel, a wide range of events has been organised nationally and locally for supporters of the Hardy project, enabling people to meet and to share experiences. The AHT has welcomed many eminent speakers, and gatherings large and small have facilitated the meeting, and sharing of experiences, of like-minded folk. People from all over the world are joining the AHT, mainly to gain access to our unique RERC Archive. We have much to be proud of and the future promises further exciting developments.

Marianne Rankin



Local Group Reports

Bangor and North Wales group

Dr Keith Beasley, the prime mover in the Bangor and the North Wales Group, has moved to Bristol to take up a post there, so there will be no more reports from North Wales. We wish him well for the future, and for his ongoing commitment to the Evolution of Consciousness:

see website – www.consciousevolution.today



Oxford & Cotswolds Group

The Oxford and Cotswold Group meets on the first Saturday of each month in Kidlington, 10.30 till 12.30, for informal presentations, discussion and light refreshments. The group is open to AHT members and non-members. There is no charge, but we request a small donation to cover our costs.

Forthcoming presentations Autumn 2019:

5 October: Clare Phillips on Cranio-sacral therapy

2 November: Paul Trafford on 'Thursday's Lotus: The Life and Work of Fuengsin Trafford'

7 December: Eleonore Bruyere on Art and spirituality

If you would like to attend, please email alister.hardy.oxford@gmail.com or contact Rhonda Riachi on 07533 248659 so we can send you directions to the venue.

Rhonda Riachi

South East Wales Group

21st May. Annual Outing: to Dewstow Gardens, Caerwent, 21st May 2019



The Gardens and Grottoes, which incidentally have some well preserved Roman ruins, are ideal for a wander through outer and inner landscapes, with paths weaving through decorative beds, tunnels, grottoes and streams to pools with fountains, all in a sylvan setting. The gardens were created in the late nineteenth century by Squire Henry Oakley, whose passions were breeding Shire horses and cultivating ferns and tropical plants. Most of the gardens were filled in and lost after the Second World War, but excavation since 2000 has once more revealed something of the vision of their original creator.

The early chill and cloud were soon replaced with warm spring sunshine as the group began their exploration of the grounds. Some members found time for a short individual meditation overlooking the fountain and rock pools, where swallows darted and skimmed effortlessly over the water's surface. Small group discussions ranged from the Zen aspect of spending time in the gardens to the acoustics of the subterranean tunnels and grottoes for musical performance. There was openness to inspiration from the surroundings, with the changing spring sunlight provided plenty of variety for photographs. This also recalled for one of us a dream about inner light.

After the sensory diversity of the gardens – the colour, scent, touch and sound – it was natural for the group to retire to explore taste in the tea rooms.

Although maybe one of the lesser known attractions in the area, Dewstow Gardens & Grottoes had plenty to interest the group. From the surface gardens and ponds, with their interconnecting landscaped paths, to the mystery of the subterranean world of tunnels and grottoes, we found the experience quite different from anywhere we've visited before. As the website describes, this is a garden 'the likes of which is not known to exist anywhere else'.

Ken Price

20th June. Talk by Ken Davies: 'Beyond Science'

Ken's talk explored a lay member's thoughts about building bridges between science and religion. Four points at which scientists seem to be staring across narrow straits were raised in the context of questions about spirituality:

- 1) Kevin Nelson has examined the neurology of the near-death experience. He identifies the correlates between neural activity and eight commonly reported features. However, the only holistic theory to develop the theme does so in terms of our tendency to draw on existing internal belief systems to join the dots. Ken speculates that the roots of spirituality may be found within dark energy and mass.
- 2) Three exemplary experiments in Quantum Physics reveal intriguing interactions between human DNA and subatomic particles which appear to have the capacity to influence each other's behavior.
- 3) At a cellular level, Bruce Lipton shows how the environment influences DNA. Receptor proteins can read energy fields including those of our thoughts. Thus our belief systems influence our biology, posing serious issues for beliefs about the nature/nurture debate.
- 4) The anthropologist Jeremy Narby has conducted a lifelong study of shamanism, the epistemology of anthropology, and DNA. He sees scope for interaction between traditional and modern approaches to medicine in this context.

In conclusion, Ken argued for a change of attitude to allow greater interaction between scholastic disciplines, and co-operation with a new emergent metaphysics of where we, the lay people of AHT, may play a part.

Ken Davies

The next **Llantarnam Abbey Gathering** will be 4th–6th October 2019; the theme will be ‘Discovering Connections’.

For a booking form and programme please see the Alister Hardy Trust website:

www.studyspiritualexperiences.org

For more information contact Mary Cook: maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk +44 (0)7794 294432



LETTERS

Dear Editor,

Readers may like to know that the 2018 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture, ‘Meeting in the Cave of the Heart: The importance of religious experience to theology and interspirituality’, reported in the Spring issue of *De Numine*, has now been published in an edited version by its author, Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke. This is the first of four papers in the latest issue of the RERC Lampeter’s online *Journal for the Study of Spiritual Experience*. Marcus relates how Sir Alister Hardy had inspired him, and tells of his own personal approach to the study of religious experience.

See <https://rerc-journal.tsd.ac.uk/index.php/religiousexp>

Hard copies, I am told, can be obtained on application to: Thomas Pitchford, The Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, University of Wales Trinity Saint David Lampeter Campus, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED.

I would like to congratulate Patricia and Jean on a simply splendid special Anniversary Spring issue of *De Numine* – most attractively presented and fascinating to read!

I understand, Patricia, that you will be retiring as Editor after publication of this, second, special Anniversary edition of the Journal – may I be among the first to thank you so very much for all your work in improving, extending and making the Journal what it is today! May you have a very happy, well deserved, retirement!

With best wishes,

John Franklin

A Letter from Tanya Garland to Rob Abrahamsen in response to his critique (Spring 2019, page 70) of the account of her experience (Autumn 2018, page 26)

Dear Rob Abrahamsen,

Thank you for your response to the account of my experience back in 1972. I am sorry about your being confused concerning the place of my experience. I was at my home in Ghana when I read the article about the war time atrocities and I was back in Dorset at home when I had the experience and little vision. Our home at the time had been the school at Churchknowle and was still called the School House, but was no longer a school of course although the main room was still as it was when a school.

But to reply to your main concerns and confusion I offer this as a clarification. At the time of any disaster, of course all one's feelings and compassion are foremost for those killed or suffering and the intense feelings of horror would be foremost with any decent person. However, one's faith in the good can remain crushed by such events in the past and the fear and horror left behind the disasters can still have power to overwhelm the fact that there are also very positive, creative, beautiful and loving people and happenings taking place around us as well. I do not feel the need to defend what my experience was or the lesson I took from it. I think my piece and the message to me was clear. It helped me anyway to change my focus and know that there was love from a loving God and to see both the bad and the good in the world. I know a little about trauma and how sufferers experience flash backs, but for healing to take place, a sufferer will also come to acknowledge that life can be good again, without forgetting.

You raise a very valid point though which is that one can seem insensitive to suffering if one states that life is good. You appear to see my learning to take in the good with the evil, as be-belittling the terrible cruelty done to others, which no one would wish to do ... and I would certainly join in the voices wanting to always remember those who died and suffered, 'Lest we forget.' I will point out however, that you added the word 'just' to the quote from my experience which makes the words sound more flippant than they were, and gives the impression that my words were actively trivialising the atrocity ('So am I to think it was "just something that happened" one evening (around prayer time as it happens) "in the fullness of time"? Instead of feeling horror at the suffering inflicted ...')

Those words also contained a reference to time which was of interest to me. As I have said above, when such things as man's inhuman treatment of others or a natural disaster is taking place, of course survivors and those present would be giving their whole attention and actions to help relieve the suffering as much as possible. But this whole hearted attention to the event cannot be sustained

forever to the same degree after the tragedy or it becomes a block to enjoying life with the good experiences it has to offer.

The lesson I took from the experience did not deny the horror or the evil done. I felt I was being given permission, if you like, to let go of the terrible thing that happened and was directed to rise above such evil to see the bigger picture, where both good and evil exist in our world alongside each other, instead of holding up this evil event as proof there was no good and no good God, as I had been doing.

Yours sincerely,

Tanya Garland

Post Script:

The experience of 'All knowing' is a fairly common element to or part of other experiences and there are many references to this in the Alister Hardy archives of spiritual and religious experience. I am aware that it can sound very arrogant or vain to include such a comment but of course the experience of 'all knowing' does not last and I was left as anyone else is afterwards, enquiring and seeking truth once again on my own.

To answer your question, '*does a revelation put an end to any doubt,*' I would say yes, to the area or subject revealed in the revelation and that 'faith' then is not a blind faith but founded on experiences. However, of course a revelation experience can open up many more questions not answered in the experience. For me the revelation was that there was a God of Love and I do not now doubt that and value doubt generally, as all important for re-examining one's faith in other areas and so I am constantly examining faith and belief. I think it is a life-long quest or journey as some call it which never ends.

There is always a big risk about telling people of spiritual experiences and it stops many from ever telling anyone what they have experienced. Even denying it to themselves. There is real danger in publishing too of course because one does not know one's reader. I was brought up atheist and told all such experiences were nonsense, so for me, the work of the Alister Hardy Trust, which values and opens up the subject, is of more value than avoiding misunderstandings or being thought arrogant.

You also ask about the relationship between revelation and faith and write, 'Is this knowledge only for the individual or is it meant for everyone?' There is a record reported by Saint Bonaventura I think it was, a fellow 'brother' to St. Francis who said that Francis tried to keep his stigmata secret from the 'brothers' for fear of appearing to be arrogant in sharing the pains of Christ, or trying to elevate himself to being like Jesus etc, but was told by Bonaventura that the experience was not only for him but was for all of them. I found this helpful and I believe it to be true. While these experiences are for general knowledge, it is also true that telling them can be costly to the individual, and they can be misunderstood, with others thinking that the motive for telling them stems from arrogance rather than humility and the desire for the spiritual side of life being taken seriously.



Remembering Friends



Professor Yen-zen Tsai

We have recently heard of the death of Professor Yen-zen Tsai, a distinguished Taiwanese scholar of religion who collaborated with RERC for several years. Most significantly, after the conclusion of our China project he secured major funding to carry out his own project on religious experience in Taiwan using the same questionnaire that we had used in mainland China. He also generously invited many of us from RERC to two international conferences in Taiwan to discuss what we had learnt from these comparative studies. These conferences led to major publications in which we have been delighted to participate.

Professor Paul Badham

Professor Yen-zen Tsai visited Lampeter in October 2010, and gave a talk in the Founders Library on Religious Experience in Taiwan in Global Perspective (Ed.)



Professors Yen-zen Tsai, Paul Badham, and Xinzhong Yao at the Taipei Conference in June 2010

Dr Pat Craig 1929 - 2019

My friend Pat Craig died on 5th August. She was 90 years old, and her birthday, in June, was celebrated this year in Keynsham with family and friends.

We were colleagues in the AHS: in 2002 Pat founded the West Wales group at Lampeter, and when I arrived there in 2004 as a (very) mature student on the MA religious experience pathway, I stepped in to help with what was by then an active and demanding programme. This included regular all day Saturday meetings in the Sheik Khalifa building which then housed the Alister Hardy Library and Archive. Our group also organised twice yearly public lectures at Lampeter, held in the Cliff Tucker conference hall (a dauntingly large space to fill) and the Old Hall where we were solemnly gazed upon by oil paintings of past Deans and Chancellors. After Pat retired as group organiser, I carried on with the lectures to keep a thread going until another convener could be found.*



Kevin, Pat, and Paddy having an uproarious time at Professor Paul Badham's retirement lunch in Oxford

I remember going to one meeting in spring with Pat and Kevin, Kevin driving and Pat and I singing a hymn to Mary, Queen of the May. Inspiration no doubt came from our shared Irish Catholic origins, but this hymn also satisfied my more recent pagan leanings. Kevin was a man of few words, (and I never heard him sing!) but he was at every meeting, by Pat's side. He died a few years before Pat, after having supported her with great love and little fuss during a long period of failing health.

Pat and Kevin were married at Ampleforth in 1960 where Pat's Uncle Jack was a local priest. Both the Craigs were first in their families to have the chance to go to Medical School; Kevin trained at Manchester, on a fast track at only seventeen as an RAF candidate. Pat was in the first batch of women students to enter St Mary's Paddington in the government quota for the newly appointed NHS teaching hospitals. Pat insisted she also only just got in because she was musically educated; it was said that the wife of the then head of school suggested places only be given to women who had accomplishments in music. Pat was a talented classical and opera singer, and both she and Kevin shared a lifelong love of opera, especially Wagner.

The Craigs traveled together extensively, mainly to attend and participate in the work of the Medical Campaign against Nuclear Weapons (MCANW) and International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW). They went to Japan in 1989 and visited Nagasaki. Pat went on her own to an IPPNW Congress in Mexico, where she was able to visit the home of her hero Frida Kahlo in Mexico City. They both also went to Cuba, and Cyprus where Kevin did an inventory of hospital provision after the annexation by Turkey of North Cyprus. On this occasion Pat planted a tree in the peace forest of Cyprus.

In the 1990's they spent a couple of months each winter in India, and stayed at the Bede Griffiths ashram near Shantivanam in South India. The place that Pat in particular loved more than anywhere was however Druidstone in Pembrokeshire, and their cottage there, Hope Cove. She had cultivated a large garden growing all the family's vegetables at their home in Corston, and there were even goats at Hope Cove, where Pat created from scratch a permaculture garden. At her last home in Keynsham in 2018 she was awarded a gold for her eco-friendly garden, also based on permaculture methods. She had real green fingers and was never without a small plastic bag to collect cuttings. True to form she brought a bag with her when the family came for lunch with my husband and myself. Already in poor health by this time, Pat consented to lie down briefly after lunch, but could not be deterred from then venturing forth with her bag as she had spotted some unfamiliar lichen.

My husband Louis and I had visited Pat and Kevin at Hope Cove before Kevin's death, and when the upkeep of the cottage became too onerous for them, we continued our visits at the spectacular Druidston Hotel perched on the cliffs overlooking St Bride's Bay. This is where we met Pat's daughters Jo and Emma, and Jo's husband Gary when the Craigs visited *en famille*. The girls and Gary continued the visits with Pat after Kevin's death, but we did not get the opportunity to meet their sons Tom and Gerry.



Pat and Paddy at Druidston

Lately, a throat condition had made it difficult for Pat to speak, which she found deeply frustrating, but she typically bypassed this obstacle and continued conversations by means of the written word. This photo, on one of the last occasions at Druidston, shows us conversing about bio-dynamic theories in biology as applied to gardening. There was to be another visit this Autumn, but instead the family will be scattering Pat's ashes at Druidston, and we will be there to say goodbye.

Patricia Murphy

**Eric Franklin and Marian Mac Polin both stepped in to run the West Wales group until dwindling numbers caused its natural demise.*

Revd. Prebendary John Geoffrey Rowland Osborn (1933 –2019)



We are sad to record the death of the Reverend John Osborn at the age of 86. John was one of the earliest members of the former Alister Hardy Society, joining in March 1989. Living in Abingdon, he became a member and supporter of the Society's Oxford Group for many years; and became Chair of the Society in 1997, serving as such until March 2002. He died on 15th July 2019 after suffering a stroke, passing away quietly and peacefully in the John Radcliffe hospital, Oxford in the company of his family. His funeral was held on 16th August at a packed All Saints Church at Sutton Courtenay, Oxfordshire, and was followed by a wake at the Abbey at Sutton Courtenay, with which John had strong connections. John is survived by his wife, Gilly, his children, Frances, Jessica and Thomas and grandchildren, Sam and Jo.

His period as Chair of the Society saw the final years of the Research Centre and Society at Westminster College, Oxford. His interest remained strong, and he received a bursary from the Alister Hardy Trust to enable him to undertake a Masters Degree in the Study of Religious Experience, which he completed, with Distinction, in 2011 at the age of 78.

John Osborn attended Jesus College Cambridge, gaining a degree in Maths. After a period working in aero-dynamics and teaching maths to schoolchildren in Trinidad, he trained for the ministry at Wells Theological College. Serving his Curacy in Easthampstead, Oxford, he then spent some time teaching in the Diocese of Blackburn, where he identified the mixed faith/interfaith issues which he found later to be of importance in the schools he came to look after in London. His time in Blackburn was followed by five years in Brunei, S.E. Asia, and on his return he became assistant director of religious education for the Blackburn diocese, then Director of Religious Education in the Diocese of Bath and Wells. In 1983 he became Director and Secretary of the London Diocesan Board for Schools, serving in the diocese of St. Pauls from then until his retirement in 1995. He was Prebendary of St. Pauls Cathedral from 1986.

Living in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, he was actively involved for more than twenty years with the Abbey, Sutton Courtenay near Abingdon – a small community which gives space for people of all faiths and none, to explore their spiritual journeys – providing here valuable spiritual direction for many years to those attending Rest and Renewal retreats.

Members of AHT, and others who knew John, will remember him as a kind, compassionate and courteous man: Marianne Rankin, who took over from him as Chair of the Society in 2002, records her personal gratitude for all the help he gave her at that time. The AHT was represented at the funeral by Rhonda Riachi, Chair of the Oxford Group. Our warmest thoughts go out to his family in their sad loss.

John Franklin



Wings

The graveyard is a silent place.
In melancholy thought
I am alone.

Suddenly I have company.
Raucous cries fill the sky
from flocks of seagulls
whirling through the air,
wide wing span spread
then narrowed,
diving down.

Now peace descends
in dusky light
and I can dimly see
each bird has found
its chosen night- time perch
– the same one every time?

Ranged up the hill
in serried ranks
the tombstones bear
not just inscriptions
to the sacred dead,
but living monuments
who fold their wings
like sleeping angels
made of stone.

Linda Lamont



BOOK REVIEWS

Steve Taylor, *Spiritual Science, why science needs spirituality to make sense of the world.*

London: Watkins, 2018. 264pp. ISBN 978-1-78678-158-1. £12.99.

Steve Taylor, *Waking from Sleep, why awakening experiences occur and how to make them permanent.*

London: Hay House, 2010. 271pp. ISBN 978-1-8450-179-9. £11.99.

At the beginning of *Spiritual Science: why science needs spirituality to make sense of the world*, Steve Taylor, a senior lecturer in psychology at Leeds Beckett University and a prolific author on psychology and spirituality, makes it clear that he is not taking issue with science itself, nor with individual scientists, but with scientism. By this he means the frequently unacknowledged belief system of materialism which underpins so much of today's scientific debate, scholarship and funding. Instead of subscribing to either a religious or a materialist interpretation of life, Taylor takes a post-materialist view, advocating panspiritism, an understanding of the essence of reality as spirit or consciousness. He writes, 'This quality is fundamental and universal; it is everywhere and in all things.'

According to Taylor, this spirit force is also found at the heart of all the major religious traditions, although variously conceived and named. It is no theoretical concept but is something which can be experienced, particularly in near-death experiences (NDEs) and out-of-body experiences (OBEs), psychic phenomena and spiritual experiences. Science supports this view, as quantum physics has effectively overturned an earlier, simpler view of reality and opened up a more complex understanding of reality as interconnected.

In the first chapter, Taylor sets out 'The Ten Tenets of Materialism' before exploring the theme in depth. These are balanced in the final chapter with the tenets of panspiritism and a plea for humanity to evolve spiritually.

Taylor discusses the relationship between mind and brain, how a lump of grey matter can produce the wonders of consciousness, which is known as the hard problem in neuroscience. Materialism is the assumption that the brain produces human consciousness, which ends with death. Yet scientists such as Francis Crick, who spent the last twenty years of his life trying to find consciousness in the brain, have had to admit defeat. That there is a link is undeniable, mind can be shown to affect brain structure and of course brain damage and drug use can cause mental aberrations. There are definitely correlations. Yet NDEs and OBEs, the placebo effect and other psychic phenomena cannot be explained in materialist terms and efforts to explain them away have failed. Scholars of NDEs such as Pim van Lommel and Penny Sartori have concluded that mind and brain can function separately, also that consciousness is primary. They envisage the brain more like a radio, transmitting non-local consciousness, which pervades all things.

Taylor discusses evolution, considering the process purposeful, moving towards an intensification of consciousness. The chapter on 'Quantum Questions: Mysteries of the Microcosm' explains how quantum physics counters the materialist view of the universe. For example, that time is not necessarily linear would allow for precognition, and quantum entanglement enables an understanding of telepathy. Might matter itself emerge from spirit-force or consciousness? Here Taylor offers a note of caution, explaining that in such an unpredictable universe nothing is certain, but he quotes quantum physicists James Jeans and Max Planck as supporting such a possibility.

The final chapter offers a clear summary of the argument against scientism, indicating how the limitations of materialism are becoming increasingly evident. He cites the move away from the assumption of mind and body as separate, which led to the treatment of mental illness merely with drugs. This is now being superseded by a more holistic approach as mind and body are being recognised as interdependent. He briefly mentions the deleterious effect of materialism on the environment, and how the view of an interconnected universe is needed to ensure that humans take more responsibility for the planet and its future.

Taylor asks the big questions and explores the issues raised, but is careful to acknowledge that there may always be limitations to our understanding.

While reading Steve Taylor's latest book, I thought I would draw AHT members' attention to an earlier work, more closely related to the focus of the AHT and the RERC Archive, *Waking from Sleep, why awakening experiences occur and how to make them permanent*. In this book, Taylor quotes from Hardy's work and from the Archive as well as citing accounts of induced and spontaneous spiritual experiences, which he himself collected.

As the title indicates, Taylor feels that we often sleep-walk through life, without being fully engaged. He considers that religious and spiritual experiences (RSEs) are actually awakening experiences, leading to a higher state of consciousness. These are seen as natural and normal, known throughout history, and he explores various ways to trigger them. He analyses the experiences into levels of intensity, from low to medium to the highest level of absolute wakefulness, that of mystical unity, found by David Hay and Gordon Heald in just 5% of experiencers.

Taylor asks why such experiences occur. He concludes that although they correlate with changes in the brain, they cannot be shown to be merely products of different brain states. Psychological explanations are also deemed inadequate. He probes the triggers, beginning with states of homeostasis disruption (HD) which means departing from the norms required for mental and physical stability. He explores techniques such as fasting, sleep deprivation, asceticism and even drug use. However, such HD experiences (drug-induced experiences in particular) although superficially similar to awakening experiences, neither result in inner transformation nor induce the sense of love and compassion found in true spiritual experiences.

If one is seeking to transcend ordinary consciousness, meditation is often regarded as the method of choice. Practised since ancient times and in almost every culture and religion, calming the chatter of the monkey mind, meditation has long been appreciated as leading to inner peace and opening to the transcendent. Taylor considers this a more long-term method of achieving awakening, a low-arousal experience achieved through an intensification and stilling of life-energy (ISLE). He explains that life-energy, also known as psychic energy, which fills us and pervades the universe can be harnessed for inner concentration through calming experiences such as meditation, mindfulness and walking in nature. This stillness opens us up to awakening.

Other triggers of awakening are described: music, sport, sex and love and NDEs, as well as the effects of meeting the awakened, giving as examples Richard M. Bucke's meeting with Walt Whitman and Paul Brunton's enlightenment experience with Ramana Maharshi. Taylor suggests that the ISLE state of mind can be made permanent through spiritual practice. The ultimate aim is a turn from ego

concerns to an understanding of our innate interconnectedness and a sense of peace and love, which is good for the individual and society. The terminology of HD and ISLE may be unfamiliar to AHT members, but not the subject matter.

In both books the material is logically set out and lucidly expressed. Taylor takes a non-religious but spiritual view, offers a wide perspective and includes many examples of the experiences to which he refers, including his own. This double review aims to introduce his work to members of the AHT, and we also welcome him as a new member.

Reviewed by Marianne Rankin

Steve Taylor's book Spiritual Science was also reviewed by David Greenwood in the Spring issue this year, page 74 (Ed.)

Julie J Morley, *Future Sacred: The Connected Creativity of Nature*

Rochester USA: Park Street Press, 2019. 256 pp. ISBN 978-1-62055-768-6 \$16.99

This is an ambitious book; Julia Morley combines cultural criticism, history, philosophy and complexity theory to describe a radical approach to rethinking our future.¹ The book is rooted in the natural systems thinking of holistic scientists such as Donella Meadows, and work such as that of eco-philosopher Joanna Macy; it is carried off with Californian intellectual aplomb. The following review describes author Julie J Morley's background, the contexts and mission of *Future Sacred*, and the book's main themes and structure. There is an appraisal of its strengths and weaknesses, and some observations are made on the intellectual and spiritual traditions in which Morley's writing resides.

About the author

According to her Sacred Futures website, Morley is 'an environmental educator, author and speaker on complexity, consciousness, ecology and interspecies creativity.' She has an academic background in the Classics, a Masters degree in transformative leadership, and is currently a doctoral student at the California Institute of Integral Studies where her research focus is 'interspecies intersubjectivity'.

Contexts and mission of book

Future Sacred addresses key cultural and philosophical challenges arising from the so-called Anthropocene age* including global problems such as human-induced climate change and mass extinction. Indeed, the book resonates with the current Extinction Rebellion movement (which includes former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams amongst its supporters). Confronted with increasingly dystopian visions of the future, Morley's calls for a re-sacralisation and radical re-enchantment of the contemporary worldview in favour of what she describes as a 'sacred futurism' that 'approaches world building through creative connectedness and synergy – the idea that our animate world is filled with sentient creativity at every scale.'¹

The author's mission is 'to build a future that supports the flourishing of all beings' and encourages readers to engage with 'diverse knowledge systems and embrace sacred principles of regeneration' in a spirit of 'Anthropocene interdisciplinarity'.¹ Infusing this mission are the concepts of panpsychism, 'the idea that all living beings are sentient or composed of sentient beings', and animism, 'the idea that soul animates all nature' (p.24). Also running through Morley's sacred worldview is what might

be described as a philosophy of positive Gaianism. She asks: 'Although we began as Pangaeans**, born of the stars and Earth, today we face our greatest challenge: *How do we evolve into Pan-Gaians* – united earthlings...?' (p.2). *Future Sacred* attempts to answer this very big question.

Structure and Main Themes

Glenn Aparicio Parry's extremely helpful Foreword locates the book within both scientific and religious paradigms, referencing the evolutionary biologist E O Wilson's concept of biophilia and Thich Nhat Hanh's engaged Buddhist notion of Interbeing (p.xi). He also highlights Morley's spiritual and intellectual grounding in the work of 'indigenous elders, Goethe, and modern interpreters of Goethe' as well as her writing's relevance to contemporary philosophers and scientists such as Joanna Macy and Lynn Margulis (p.xii).

The author's concise introduction provides an excellent summary of the book's structure and central ideas:

Part 1: Unity – Chapters 1 to 4 cover the themes of mind in nature (Cosmic Creativity), Entelechy (Intrinsically Marvellous), Metapatterns (Nature's Creative Archetypes), and Sentience (The Music of the Universe).

Part 2: Multiplicity in Unity – Chapters 5 to 7 discuss oppositional duality (The Madness of Mastery), Symbiosis (The Gift of Kinship), and Complexity Consciousness (Systemic Wisdom).

Part 3: Comm-unity – Chapters 8 and 9 advocate creative synergy (Connected Creativity) and Sacred Futurism (Radical Enchantment).

Strengths of Approach

Future Sacred presents a coherent overall argument that is likely to appeal strongly to those with an interest in ecology, spirituality and holistic science, and seekers after alternative worldviews in a time of unprecedented environmental crises. Morley's philosophical message of hope, as she elegantly navigates a complex subject in a straightforward and accessible way, should also appeal to a wide readership. For instance, her use of etymologies and what the cultural critic Raymond Williams described as 'keywords' reflect an approach to her subject which is both reader-friendly and incisive.² One such word is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's 'Noosphere' and what Morley describes as 'the ecosystem of consciousness' (p.23). She notes that as well as 'beautiful complexity and diversity', the Noosphere also has a 'shadow side' and both dimensions find powerful expression in the evolution of artificial intelligence and so-called human-enhanced technology. In this respect, *Future Sacred* might well be read alongside the Gaia Hypothesis creator James Lovelock's latest techno-optimist treatise on the Novacene.³

Weaknesses of Book

At the heart Morley's book is a challenge to the 'oppositional duality' of a post-medieval Western paradigm. For her this finds expression in the legacy of rational philosophy and mainstream science which, together with economic and technological progress, externalises many shortcomings, largely because of its own 'rigid, oppositional paradigm' (p.117). In rhetorical pursuit of this argument, the author makes some fairly sweeping generalisations on the history of Western culture which are, at times, un-nuanced and unduly oppositional themselves. For example, a shortcoming of some interpretations of eastern and indigenous worldviews, of the kind Morley seeks to promote, is their inability to accommodate opposing points of view, and tendency to sacrifice argument either in favour of enforced agreement or an uneasy New Age fusion of ideas. Aside from this problem, an editorial weakness of the book is the lack of a short glossary of Morley's keywords.

Some Concluding Thoughts

The inclination to goodness is imprinted deeply in the nature of man; insomuch, that if it issue not towards men, it will take unto other living creatures ... (Francis Bacon, Essays) ⁴

A particular target for Morley's criticism is the English polymath and renaissance man Francis Bacon. Readers of her book would therefore do well to consult Bacon's work first-hand. The above quotation is taken from 'Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature' (Essay XIII) and reflects Bacon's humanist outlook and deep interest in nature. Ironically, it could be argued that Morley writes within a Baconian tradition of politically engaged philosophical argument. However, *Future Sacred* resides most easily in the contemporary intellectual and spiritual milieu of writers and environmental activists typified by the Buddhist Joanna Macy.

'Active hope is waking up to the beauty of life on whose behalf we can act. We belong to this world' ⁵

Reviewed by Janet Mackinnon

References

¹ Morley, Julie J, Sacred Futures website: www.sacredfutures.com

² Williams, Raymond, 1976. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*

³ Lovelock, James, 2019. *Novacene – The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence*

⁴ Bacon, Francis, 1625. *Essays 1625*: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essays_\(Francis_Bacon\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essays_(Francis_Bacon))

⁵ Macy, Joanna website: <https://www.joannamacy.net>

* Human beings have existed for just 200,000 years, yet our impact on the planet is so great that scientists around the world are calling for our period in the Earth's history to be named the 'Anthropocene' – the age of humans. The changes we are now making have exacted a heavy toll on the natural world around us. www.populationmatters.org accessed 20/8/19

**Pangaea or Pangea was a supercontinent that existed during the late Paleozoic and early Mesozoic eras. It assembled from earlier continental units approximately 335 million years ago, and it began to break apart about 175 million years ago. (Wikipedia, accessed 20/8/19)

Vicki Mackenzie, *The Revolutionary Life of Freda Bedi: British feminist, Indian Nationalist, Buddhist Nun* Boulder (USA) Shambhala Publications, 2017. 186pp. ISBN 978 1611804256

The author is a journalist who has practised Buddhism since 1976 and previously written about other female Buddhist pioneers. The present book relates to the life story of Freda Bedi, an English woman born in Derbyshire, in the aptly named Monk Street, in 1911. There was little in her early life to indicate that she would go on to have such an influence on Indian politics or to be the first Western woman ordained as a Tibetan Buddhist nun; but her father's death in 1918 whilst fighting in the First World War had a profound effect on her. This and the death of her second child while still a baby gave her the firm determination to have a course of action in her life and to see it through.

The beginnings of her own journey took shape when she went to Oxford University in 1929, enrolling at St Hugh's, an all-female college at that time. It was here that she first engaged in politics, becoming aware of wider issues, and where she made two lifelong friends. The first of these was Barbara Betts (later to become Barbara Castle) who was also from the North of England and had much in common

with Freda. Her second friend was Olive Shapley who became a broadcaster and later a presenter of BBC 'Women's Hour'. Castle recalled hosting Bedi some forty years later in Westminster where her appearance in Buddhist robes and with a shaven head caused a stir. Whilst at Oxford she met and married a fellow student, 'BPL' Bedi, a Sikh from a well-known Indian family. After graduating the couple moved to Berlin where their first child was born and then moved to India. Bedi viewed her marriage as both an emotional and intellectual commitment to supporting the fight for Indian independence and from then onwards she only dressed in Indian clothes for the rest of her life. She was an early supporter of Gandhi, championing independence alongside her husband, and spending some time in prison for civil disobedience.

She first encountered Buddhism whilst working briefly for the UN in Burma. This had a profound effect on her and led to her eventual ordination in the Tibetan tradition as a full *bhiksuni*, the first Western woman to achieve that status of a fully ordained Tibetan Buddhist nun. Mackenzie details the many 'firsts' which Freda went on to achieve in a life lived to the full, made even more remarkable when you consider that her gender could have been a major stumbling block during those years when equal opportunities were seldom available to women. Amongst her achievements perhaps the most important was the setting up of a school for young Lamas fleeing Tibet after the Chinese invasion in 1959. Her own personal quest was to bring Buddhism to the West and in the final years of her life she undertook an exhaustive tour of Europe, often accompanying her guru, Karmapa Lama, lecturing about Buddhism in numerous cities, including a visit to Samye Ling Monastery in Scotland. Further visits took her to California and New York, where she was always warmly received and able to reconnect with other Buddhist leaders such as Trungpa Rinpoche, who was an old friend.

Given her busy life and commitment to Buddhism, the author questions if all this perhaps led to a neglect of her family, albeit unintentionally. Bedi had three children who survived to adulthood, all of whom went on to have successful lives. Perhaps most notable is her son Kabir who became an actor and Bollywood star, but is most widely known for his role in a James Bond film of 1983 in which he played a memorable villain to Roger Moore's Bond. He confirms that 'Mummy' was often absent and when she took up Buddhism it caused some anger amongst the family, who were left in difficulties through lack of financial support. However, the family are very proud of what their mother achieved whilst recognising that at times her life choices and absences made family life rather difficult for them.

The biography is well written and nuanced, capturing the complex and often contradictory life that she led. The author found herself on her own spiritual journey when, in 1976, she missed meeting Bedi by only a few weeks when she joined a meditation course in a monastery near Kathmandu. It was many years later that she was encouraged to write a biography after learning that – amongst others – the Dalai Lama had asked why no one had told Bedi's story.

I have two minor criticisms of the book, the first is the lack of index which can be frustrating in tracing links and identifying individuals, and the second is the spelling of certain words such as 'labor' (for the Labour Party) although this may be largely due to the American publisher of the book.

In summary, although she was known and respected in India it is remarkable that this female pioneer was little known outside of Buddhism. Mackenzie is to be congratulated for researching the life of Freda Bedi and bringing her story to a much wider audience. Barbara Castle, hearing the news of Bedi's engagement and commitment to a new life in India remarked 'thank goodness, now at least you won't become a suburban housewife'. It is entirely appropriate some ninety years to the month

after Bedi went up to Oxford that we are reminded of the actions of an early feminist, and a torch is finally shone on her remarkable life story.

Postscript: Whilst completing this review I became aware of the recent publication of a new book about Freda Bedi by Andrew Whitehead, a BBC news presenter and former India correspondent. His new biography is entitled *The Lives of Freda; The Political, Spiritual, and Personal Journeys of Freda Bedi* (Speaking Tiger Publishing, 2019)

I have not had the opportunity to read this new biography fully, but access to new family materials has enabled the author to add further details to her life story. Like Mackenzie, Whitehead also came across his subject by accident whilst researching Kashmiri nationalism and decided that her life and spiritual journey was worthy of exploration. It is encouraging to note the renewed interest in Bedi and to learn that her son Kabir is exploring the possibility of a film about his mother's life story.

Reviewed by Andy Burns

Dorothy P. Abram: *Seven Scents: Healing and the Aromatic Imagination*

London & Philadelphia: Singing Dragon/Jessica Kingsley, 2017. 159pp. ISBN 978-1 84819-349-9, £ 15.99

Dorothy Abram, professor of psychology and sociology at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, RI, USA, takes a fresh look at the ancient and contemporary practices of healing with aromatic plants as well as their use in religious rituals in Hindu and Judeo-Christian culture. She delves deeply into the role played by these plants, re-interpreting some well-known texts and rituals in the context of aromatic healing on a bodily and spiritual level. Abram thus elucidates how understanding the use of aromatic plants in their cultural, narrative and religious context may also enhance the work of today's aromatherapists.

In this book she reaches back to her early studies in art and archaeology, specifically those involving ancient Greek mystery cults and their use of psychoactive plants, and also her insights from a study of Integrative Aromatherapy (its use in a clinical context). This academic background, as well as direct experience of the practices of Nepalese and Bhutanese refugees, enables Abram to integrate a breadth of knowledge in her approach to the uses of aromatic and psychoactive plants in ancient and contemporary contexts.

The main introduction to the selection offers an overall background to Abram's approach and focus in the study of the various plants and their uses. Here Abram concisely presents recent insights into the history of the olfactory sense and scent. She shows how human evolution, beginning with the switch from a four-legged to an upright gait, has removed us more and more from this most primordial of our senses. What used to be a major sense connecting us directly to our environment has slowly been relegated to the back burner, especially in Western culture. Here scents have instead become a commodity, sanitised and transformed into a means for the wish-fulfilment central to a consumerist society, for example in terms of how a perfume might instantly translate your romantic dreams into reality.

A scent, from the essential oil of a plant, will when inhaled act directly on the limbic system which controls emotion and memory – this is why you will so suddenly remember long forgotten things

when you pick up a particular smell. As such the olfactory sense is still a major factor in the integration of our consciousness whether we realise it or not. Abram explains that this is why scented plants have been an integral element in rituals and healing traditions of almost every culture and religion throughout the world and time. They can help us to resolve the paradoxical experience of life and our consciousness. Aromatherapy has been re-discovering these powers for a long time, often referring back to ancient traditions. Science, while making use of the influence scent can have on us, for example in many products on the market, has only recently come to a fuller understanding of how much could be gained from a considered use of aromatic plants or their essential oils in the healing of mind and body.

Abram takes the reader on a journey through seven chapters with seven different plants and their usage in relation to specific personages and rituals in various religious traditions, from Hinduism to Christianity, and from sandalwood to spikenard. Each of the seven chapters can stand independently and has an internal structure of introduction, subtitled paragraphs and a conclusion, as well as its own footnotes and bibliography. The chapters can thus be read in any order or studied completely on their own. A small index at the end of the book helps in cross-referencing themes.

Abram's selection of seven plants and the role their scent, and other medicinal effects played in healing, offers an insight into the various culturally determined possibilities of their use. This applies especially to spiritual healing, the re-integration of paradoxical consciousness. As she says: 'Each story confronts its challenges differently, yet all were selected because of this common experience of the power of scent to create cognitive and spiritual unity.' (p.26). Accordingly she invites readers to expand their experience with a whiff of the actual scents they are reading about as they follow her explorations:

In Hindu worship sandalwood paste and leaves are used to anoint and decorate the statues of gods. Abram examines the very powerful effect to which the priestess/healer (*Bharavi*) used them in order to help Sri Ramakrishna – a Hindu mystic – to realise and integrate his inner divinity, thus overcoming sickness and madness.

The fragrant and psychoactive lotus plant mentioned in the Old Testament story of Job serves Abram to access a deeper level of the story. The lotus was known to be used in shamanic journeys, and Job's 'journey' can be interpreted in a similar way. Through suffering he comes to a higher spiritual understanding of the contradictory perceptions of the Divine, as unknowable yet perceptible through the senses.

The neem tree – a plant with such healing powers that it has been named 'wonder-tree' by the WHO – is sacred to the Hindu goddess Sitala Mala. Revered as the healer as well as the actual creator of small-pox, her worship is concerned with restoring the ambivalent experiences of life to balance and wholeness. Rituals involved with her as well as with the treatment of small-pox sufferers strongly promote the integration of natural ambiguities – as Abram suggests, a useful approach for contemporary aromatherapy.

The aromatic, consciousness enhancing terebinth tree plays an important role in the Old Testament story of Isaac and Abraham. Interpreting its mention as significant in a metaphorical sense, Abram suggests a different interpretation of the story: if this is seen as taking place in liminal space – entered through terebinth – Abraham's actions could be understood as testing the validity of his trust in his new god with the near-sacrifice of his son.

Tulsi/Indian basil is one of the most versatile healing herbs of India and known for its effects on cognitive functions and emotions. Used in a month-long ritual for Krishna/Vishnu its fragrance is a part of the immanent presence of the god and in culmination a transcendent experience – an integration of mind and emotion – is effected in the final ritual. Abram argues that this ritual has an important lesson for those of us in the west who constantly seek instant gratification.

The particular use of spikenard in St. John's gospel, in the story of Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus' feet, is shown by Abram to carry multi-layered meanings. While certainly the right aromatic oil to help relieve Jesus' tensions at just that time, its powerful sleep-inducing effect was well known. Abram points to the emphasis on Jesus' metaphor between sleep and death, and awakening and resurrection, which in her view mention of the oil in the narrative suggests.

Jasmine has long been used to prevent and deflect epileptic seizures, not only in Hindu India but also in contemporary Western therapies. Its direct influence on the GABA receptors of the brain can imitate anti-convulsive drugs. Abram examines the trances of the Hindu mystic Sri Ramakrishna (which are perceived as epileptic episodes by Western medicine) and his reported control over them in the context of his constant proximity to the jasmine garlands in the temples.

In common with her approach to some of the well-known religious texts and rituals Dr. Abram's book offers a multi-layered examination of the use of aromatic plants. Deeper meanings and variations in interpretation of texts, rituals and spiritual experience involving the effects of their scent, as well as cultural dimensions and possible applications in contemporary aromatherapy are carefully examined. While her writing can at times be technical and a little challenging, it is well worth working through this in order to experience the wider perspectives she offers.

Reviewed by Karen Assmus Wiggins

Charla Devereux, *Your Meditation Journey*

London: Eddison, 2019. 144pp. ISBN 978-1-85906-438-2 (pbk). £12.99.

There are so many books on meditation, do we need another? As soon as I saw the beautifully illustrated *Your Meditation Journey* by Charla Devereux, with its subtitle '*Over 30 exercises and visualizations to guide you on the path to inner peace and self-discovery*', I decided that the answer is yes. We need this one.

However, what makes this book special are the contents, which are comprehensive, clearly set out and combine scholarship with clarity. Practical exercises are set within the text, so the reader is involved in an exploratory journey. All the usual questions about meditation are answered. What is it for? Where did it originate? What are the scientifically proven benefits? Does it involve any beliefs or special preparation? How do you start?

Devereux begins by tracing the history of meditation in the major religious traditions, from Shamanism to Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. She explains how the practice is embedded within their mystical and contemplative practices. As the West adopted Eastern spirituality, the practice of meditation and mindfulness became more widespread and varied but also more secular.

The chapter on *Meditation, Medicine and Science* explores current scientific studies of the brain in meditation and the physiological and psychological benefits of regular practice. Clear explanations are given of how an electroencephalograph (EEG) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) work, and of the various brain rhythms, Beta, Alpha, Theta and Delta, Lambda, Gamma and Epsilon that can be measured. It seems that meditation may even slow ageing of the brain.

The fourth chapter offers practical guidance. Devereux begins by encouraging the reader to create a peaceful space, explains the use of incense and then how to sit and breathe. Taming the 'monkey mind' is often helped, particularly in the early stages, by the use of guided meditation and visualisation. Simple but effective exercises enable the reader to enjoy flight into the sky, the ascent of a mountain and floating along a river before increasing in complexity to explore the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. Single point meditation, although simpler, is more difficult as the initial external focus, for example a candle flame or bowl of water, is replaced by an inner eidetic image.

Mandalas are often used as aids to meditation, particularly in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The word means circle in Sanskrit and Devereux explains the construction and symbolism of a mandala, whether a painted image, laid out in beads or rice or sand and subsequently destroyed, or in the lasting form of a temple such as Borobudur in Indonesia.

To complete the journey, 'The Powers of Sound, Light and Nature' take meditation outside, listening and watching, at one with the natural world. Ultimately 'The Power of Silence' is experienced. Whether you meditate alone or in a group, regularly or just from time to time, whether you prefer guided or silent sessions, this book has something for you. It is beautifully presented, the title page of each chapter is exquisitely illustrated and each has a quotation from a poet or mystic encapsulating the contents. According to Sogyal Rinpoche, author of *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 'The gift of learning to meditate is the greatest gift you can give yourself in this life'. This volume is one to treasure and would also make a wonderful gift.

Reviewed by Marianne Rankin



Books Received for Review

Please see below the list of books we have received for review. If you would like to write a review of any of these, or of a book that is not on this list, please contact the out-going editor: theotokos66@gmail.com – who will arrange for a copy to be sent to you.

I suggest readers look at publishers' websites for more titles (see publishers below for suggested sites). They will have details of book contents, which we do not have room for here. I will be happy to send for any books requested that are within our remit.

Please send reviews to the new editor: denumine@gmail.com

Review copies which we supply will be yours on receipt of your review.

Alessandra Belloni	<i>Healing Journeys with the Black Madonna</i>	Bear & Company 2019
Selene Calloni Williams	<i>The Mother Mantra: The Ancient Shamanic Yoga of Non-Duality</i>	Inner Traditions 2019
Henry Corbin	<i>Jung, Buddhism, and the Incarnation of Sophia</i>	Inner Traditions 2019
Justine Afra Huxley	<i>Generation Y, Spirituality and Social Change: Young people are doing faith differently</i>	Jessica Kingsley 2019
Christopher Collingwood	<i>Zen Wisdom for Christians</i>	Jessica Kingsley 2019
Alan Rainer	<i>From Heaven to Heaven: Life's human story and pilgrimage from heaven to heaven</i>	GlintingBlue Press 2019
Ken R Vincent	<i>God is With Us: What Near-Death and Other Spiritually Transformative Experiences Teach us about God and Afterlife</i>	White Crow Books 2019
Marcus Braybrooke	<i>Faiths Together for the Future</i>	Braybrooke Press 2018
Ashley Cocksworth,	<i>Prayer: A Guide for the Perplexed</i>	Bloomsbury, 2018
Stephen Hance	<i>Forgiveness in Practice</i>	Jessica Kingsley 2018
Claude Lecouteux	<i>The Hidden History of Elves & Dwarves</i>	Inner Traditions 2018
Pia Matthews	<i>Ethical Questions in Healthcare Chaplaincy: Learning to Make Informed Decisions</i>	Jessica Kingsley, 2018
Elizabeth Mills	<i>In The Stillness: poems, prayers, reflections</i>	Inner Light 2018
Raimon Panikkar	<i>Cultures and Religions in Dialogue Part Two: Intercultural & Interreligious Dialogue (Opera Omnia volume 6 Part 2)</i>	Orbis 2018
Ben Ryan (ed)	<i>Fortress Britain?: Ethical Approaches to Immigration Policy for a Post-Brexit Britain</i>	Jessica Kingsley 2018
Lavanya Vemsani (ed)	<i>Modern Hinduism in Text and Context</i>	Bloomsbury 2018
James Walters	<i>Loving your neighbour in an age of religious conflict</i>	Jessica Kingsley 2018

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Dr Jack Hunter (page 4)

Jack Hunter is currently an Honorary Research Fellow at RERC, UWTSO, Lampeter. His article is based on the introduction to his forthcoming edited collection of essays on spirituality and ecology, *Greening the Paranormal: Exploring the Ecology of Extraordinary Experience* (August Night Books).

Revd Prebendary John Osborn (page 13)

John Osborn was one of the earliest members of the former Alister Hardy Society, joining in March 1989. He was a member and supporter of the Society's Oxford Group for many years; and held the post of Chair of the AHS from 1997 to 2002.

He served as Director of Religious Education in the Diocese of Bath and Wells and in 1983 became Director and Secretary of the London Diocesan Board for Schools, serving in the diocese of St. Pauls until 1995. He was Prebendary of St. Pauls Cathedral from 1986. He was awarded a Masters Degree with distinction in the study of Religious Experience; his treatise on NDEs can be read on pp.13-23. Also see remembering friends, p.61.

Dr Peter Hardwick (page 29)

Dr Hardwick, formerly Research Fellow at King's College, London writes:

In my working life I was an electrical power distribution engineer, but was interested in the mind from the age of sixteen, when a neighbour took myself and my mother to a Spiritualist Church and later went to King's College, London, taking my doctorate in Consciousness Studies, as this subject is now generally referred to. Due to my knowledge and background, my Supervisor was able, under the University Regulations, to appoint me as a Research Fellow without Stipend. My thesis was titled 'An Interdisciplinary Model for a Study of Consciousness'.

Since I began at King's College in 1985 the subject has gained increasing attention, but when I began it was still 'on the fringe', in fact when I first began my supervisor said if anyone asks what is your research subject tell them you are 'working on cognitive machines'!

Revd Professor June Boyce Tillman MBE (page 30)

June Boyce-Tillman is currently Professor of Applied Music at The University of Winchester and an Extraordinary Professor at North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa. She is the artistic convenor of the Centre for the Arts as Wellbeing at Winchester University and specialises in music, spirituality and theology. She composes and performs church music and promotes the role of women in church music. She was ordained as a deacon of the Church of England in 2006, as a priest in 2007 and is an honorary chaplain to Winchester Cathedral. In 2009 she received an MBE for her services to Music and Education.

She has been a popular speaker and presenter at AHT events and conferences and succeeded Professor Leslie Francis as chair of the RERC research committee in 2002.

Professor Boyce Tillman's publications:

Experiencing Music – Restoring the Spiritual: Music as Wellbeing
A River rather than a Road: The Community Choir as Spiritual experience
They Bear Acquaintance – African American Spirituals and the Camp Meetings
Spirituality and Music Education – Perspectives from Three Continents
Queering Freedom – Music, Identity and Spirituality: Four continent anthology
Freedom Song: Faith, Abuse, Music and Spirituality: A Lived Experience of Celebration
Rivers of Sacred Sound – Chant
Environment Matters Why Human Song Sounds: The Way It Does
Enlivening faith : Music, Sprituality and Christian Theology
The Spirituality of the Music of John Tavener
Music, Wellbeing and Spirituality

Dr David Greenwood (page 31)

David was Administrator for RERC and the AHS in Lampeter from 2004, and became Honorary Treasure of the AHT in 2013. His current research is in the field of art and spirituality. After a chequered professional and academic career he gained his Doctorate from Aberystwyth University in 2015. His book *Art and Spiritual Experience: Exploring the Romantic Period*, was published in 2018, is reviewed in *De Numine* issue 66, page 75.

David is a Reader in the Church of England.

Dr Penny Sartori (page 32)

Penny Sartori worked as an [intensive care nurse in Swansea](#), during which time she cared for many patients who were close to death. Her experiences with these patients led her to study for a PhD with Professor Paul Badham at Lampeter. Her dissertation was published as a monograph, which caught the public imagination, and her subsequent interviews with the press and other media helped to bring NDEs and spiritual experience generally into public awareness.

Dr Sartori's publications:

The Near-Death Experiences of Hospitalized Intensive Care Patients: A Five Year Clinical Study, Edwin Mellen Press, 2008.
Wisdom of Near Death Experiences: How Understanding NDEs Can Help Us Live More Fully, Watkins Publishing, 2014
What is A Near Death Experience?. Watkins Publishing, 2016

Anne Watkins (page 34)

As AH Librarian Anne Watkins worked closely with Peggy Morgan during the transfer from Oxford to Lampeter. She remained as AH librarian in Lampeter, and was keeper of the archive until Jean Matthews took up the post of archive supervisor. During her time as Librarian she was always on hand to assist with the West Wales and Lampeter local group meetings which took place in the Sheik Khalifa building where the AH was housed.

Jenny Jones/Dr Howard Jones (page 37)

Jenny Jones, who has lectured to the AHS on spiritual healing, writes about her husband's journey, from materialist scientist to eclectic cosmologist, through his encounters with her own path as a healer. See also remembering friends in issue 64, p.45, and his article on reincarnation in the same issue, p.4.

Howard Jones' publications:

Prescriptions for Health, William Collins Sons & Co Ltd., 1986
A Way of Health: Body, Mind and Spirit, Tynron Press, Scotland, 1990
The Thoughtful Guide to God, O Books, Winchester, 2006
The Tao of Holism: A blueprint for 21st century living, O Books, Winchester, 2008
The World As Spirit, Fairhill Publishing, Wales, 2011
Evolution of Consciousness: Progressing Towards Universal Holism. Fairhill Publishing, Wales, 2012

Tristram Jenkins (page 39)

Tristram Jenkin's earlier career was in education, serving at various levels in State Comprehensive Schools, then in mid-life he joined the Bishop of Hereford's staff as his Diocesan Director of Education.

For several years he was a member of the AHS Committee, and then Vice-Chairman, ably supporting Marianne Rankin who was appointed Chair in 2002.

Mark Seed (page 42)

Mark Seed is an international educator who has supported young people and families since 1988 in several different countries and is currently based in Cardiff. He is a life-long member of the Alister Hardy Trust and discovered the Religious Experience Research Centre back in 1993 while working for Kent Youth & Community Service. The Centre's research papers inspired him in his research degrees in community and youth work and subsequently in education, both of which focused on spiritual development. His current research interest is the spiritual health of young people.'

Andrew Burns (page 48)

Chair AHS 2012-15; Current AHT Honorary Secretary and MAG committee member

Andy Burns has been a frequent contributor of photographs for *De Numine* from AHT events and conferences. He writes:

I have a lifelong interest in photography having received my first camera when I was about 14. It was a hobby I picked up and put down depending on the demands of family life. However, I had the opportunity to train in forensic photography and this became a large part of my professional life and was very satisfying. Now in semi-retirement I continue to enjoy capturing images and also undertaking the occasional commission.

I first became interested in Buddhism many years ago whilst studying theology and later explored the RERC archives for Buddhist accounts of RE's and completed my MA dissertation on this subject.

Swan Song



We end this anniversary year with the text of Professor June Boyce-Tillman's presentation on Member's Day 2018. Writing in symphonic form, she traces her journey into research in Spiritual Experience. She follows this with some inspiring thoughts about cathedrals and music, both ancient and modern, from James Atwell, Dean Emeritus of Winchester Cathedral. As music convener for Winchester Cathedral herself, where she is honorary chaplain, cathedral music is very dear to her heart.

Thus, this Swan Song links music and words, music and sacred architecture, and through June's passion for music which she has shared with so many during her career, with our hearts and souls. At the very end there is June's original composition, a meditation on the Lord's Prayer, the words written as a tribute to Alister Hardy. (Ed.)

June Boyce-Tillman's Journey into Research in Spiritual Experience

Prelude: Spirituality and Academe

It has taken some time for academe to accept spirituality into its study areas and some are still suspicious of it and the methodologies used to study it.

Movement One: The visionary experience

I started my work in this area with the visionary experiences of the medieval mystic Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179):

And I see things by means of my soul ... for I do not hear with my outer ears, nor by the reasonings of my heart, nor do I perceive by any collation of my five senses, but directly into my soul, with my exterior eyes wide open. I never fall into weakness of ecstasy, but have visions while awake, both day and night.¹

In these experiences she saw images, heard speaking and singing voices:

And all these armies were singing with marvellous voices all kinds of music about the wonders that God works in blessed souls, and by this God is magnificently glorified.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying to me:

'God wonderfully formed and ordered His creation.'²



Hildegard was followed by:

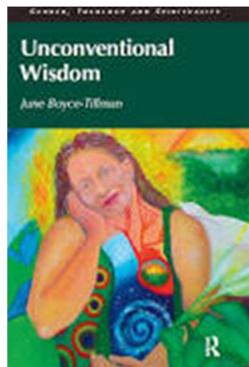
Mechthild of Magdeburg (c. 1207 – c. 1282/1294)

Julian of Norwich (c.1342 – c. 1416)

Margery Kempe (c. 1373 – after 1438)

I looked at William Blake (1757-1827) especially in relation to his illustrations to the Book of Job. He saw the triumph of reason over intuition and wrote often of the need to retain a spiritual view of the world:

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man [sic] as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.³



I have performed the stories of these mystics, so had to look in detail at their experiences. They lived in a period when the intuitive was accepted within the world and within the Church. I found these mystics encouraging because I had had experiences of angels since I was a young child. I had learned trance as part of my healing journey. In the healing of childhood abuse in my ministry I had anointed the abuser and I saw his soul depart from his body.⁴ However, through much of the 20th century it was assumed that perceptual spiritual experiences – visions – are pathological. They have been attributed to various psychoses, especially schizophrenia, and to epilepsy, migraine, and toxic states. An exception has been made for ‘non-Western cultures,’ based on the belief that these experiences are culturally constructed and could only be ‘normal’ in a culture that endorses and ‘teaches’ them.⁵

I encountered the story of Bernadette of Lourdes (1833-1879) as a Protestant and was fascinated by the strength of conviction in this young mystic. She lived on the edge of the pathologisation of the spiritual experience. However within the context of Roman Catholicism in the twentieth century we have a number of experiences of the Virgin Mary such as Our Lady of Fatima (1917 affirmed 1930). These were affirmed (not all of them) by the religious authorities.



June at the Tavener Centre

Movement Two: Post secularism – The uncoupling of religion and spirituality

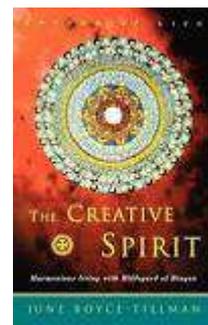
The process of secularisation in the 20th century marginalised the religious experience and it was into this context that Alister Hardy’s question appeared. Already Western culture, as Nietzsche predicted, was missing God and the rise of interest in spirituality may be regarded as a search for the lost Divine. Over the last 50 years the situation has changed. The experience of 9/11 changed this climate profoundly. It heralded the peaceful co-existence of sacred and secular world

views. The religious became more than a remnant of an older world order. Migratory communities with differing world views entered Western culture in larger quantities than before. There was a failure of the secularism that characterised modernity (Habermas 2008) and a growth of interest in spirituality in many areas, some of which I was involved in – work, education, the arts. There was a sense that the rationalism of modernity had caused a loss of the sense of mystery. The dualism of ‘either ... or’ thinking had produced a fragmented sense of reality that was destroying the wholeness and wonder of life. There was a need to move away from an ‘either ... or’ to a ‘both ... and’ attitude. We find these critiques in various commentaries such as this one from the composer, John Tavener:

An Ikon for instance, is not art – it is beyond art – because it is a real presence that we venerate, a still almost silent presence looking tenderly at us ... In a different way music should enable us (without imposing itself) to truly ‘lay aside all cares of this life’. Not to ignore this world ... Our contemporary world has accepted the all-embracing secularisation which attempts to steal the world away from God.⁶

Movement Three: Ways of Knowing – Experience and theory

As a practising musician I was interested in exploring the spiritual experience in music and followed the work of Isabel Clarke. Drawing on cognitive psychology⁷ she identifies a way of knowing that is different from everyday (propositional) knowing (Clarke 2005). It is a both/and logic, which may appear as a way of not knowing, as its central feature is paradox. It is to do with our 'porous' relation to other beings and the tolerating of paradox. It is in contrast to 'propositional knowing' which gives us the analytically sophisticated individual that 'our culture has perhaps mistaken for the whole.'⁸ We see this in accounts of the musical experience:



As I listened to a Bach fugue, I became aware of a hovering presence. I felt that I was in some kind of trance and my friend had to nudge me hard when the music stopped. At the same time, she said 'Why are you looking so yonderly?' I found it difficult to explain to her that I had been conscious of a presence greater than myself.⁹

I saw the experience in terms suggested by Victor Turner drawing on Van Gennep's work on pilgrimage:

A limen is, of course, literally a 'threshold.' A pilgrimage centre, from the standpoint of the believing actor, also represents a threshold, a place and moment 'in and out of time,' and such an actor – as the evidence of many pilgrims of many religions attests – hopes to have their direct experience of the sacred, invisible or supernatural order, either in the material aspect of miraculous healing or in the immaterial aspect of inward transformation of spirit or personality.¹⁰



Movement Four: The Spiritual Experience in Music

In these accounts it becomes clear that 'secular' music can act sacramentally in giving a sense of the divine.¹¹ We see a growth in an atheist spirituality which sees music as functioning as religion:

'The useful functions of religion were creating community and providing support in suffering.'¹²

There was a growth of people not needing religious or doctrinal beliefs and a re-appropriation for the secular realm of those 'consoling, subtle or just charming' religious rituals that inspire, such as gratitude, beautiful spaces, pilgrimages and singing:

We need to find a space where, if one believes, as I do, that music is liquid metaphysics, music must inhabit a sacred *temenos* for its performance. The opera house calls to mind powdered wigs; the modern concert hall is as clinical as a hospital. We need to recover the sense of sacred space.¹³

Movement Five: The Transformative Aspects of the Liminal Space

As convenor of the Centre in Winchester of The Arts as Wellbeing, I became interested in the place this experience can play in wellbeing. Tavener refers to this:

The original intention of music, according to the ancients – all of them, is that it gives heart's ease, and I think that is the one thing. If I'm able to give one inch of heart's ease, that would make my life – my work – worth doing and living.¹⁴

Rowan Williams in a lecture in July 2017 talked of the four habitats in which wellbeing takes place:¹⁵

- The body
- The environment
- The society
- The cosmos

The security of the space provided by the musical event enables normal boundaries to be porous. This opens up new possibilities of elaborate and innovative fusions between the alterities within the self and also with others who are different from us, and also with the wider environment and the cosmos. I examined the transformative effects of singing groups, such as the Threshold Choir:

When you came to our church and sang, I had more energy than I have had in many months. When you and the choir sang to my mom, I felt your singing was able to hold a space open that we all fear. That 'space' could be death or just the struggle of sickness, and when it's held open like that, we are less alone in it.¹⁶



The Winchester Centre for the Arts as Wellbeing evaluated the Elevate Arts programme in Salisbury Hospital¹⁷ outlining the therapeutic implications of the liminal space. We are undertaking a research project on the Cathedrals Group of Universities' Choirs festival. It will compare the place of sacred music within both liturgy and the concert tradition. It will use this analysis to define the place of sacred music in personal and cultural wellbeing. It is using on-line questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and brief statements from Vice-chancellors.

Postlude: The fourfold vision

I will end with Blake's vision of the world:

Now I a fourfold vision see
And a fourfold vision is given to me;
Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
And threefold in soft Beulahs night
And twofold Always. May God us keep
From Single vision and Newton's sleep!¹⁸



June writes: Recently I received this amazing statement from the Dean Emeritus of Winchester Cathedral, James Atwell:



We live in a world which is increasingly religiously fragmented or simply secular. There is a lot of fear abroad in the main-stream Churches relating to survival, as it is proving difficult to plant the Faith in the hearts of a new generation. One response to that has been to de-mystify worship, to simplify or even dispense with liturgy, to retreat from the formal or that which is not instantly accessible. Little acknowledgement is given to the ambiguity and complexity of the world or the

necessary space for doubt in any faith-journey. Porous borders which have been the strength of Anglicanism are less welcome. Seekers are quickly transferred to the hard centre and not given space to linger at the soft edges, perhaps even indefinitely.

Cathedrals have tried to offer an alternative approach. They make possible the crossing of a liminal threshold, one which seeks to enable the re-enchantment of the world. Cathedrals are about sacred space and glorious liturgy, soaring architecture and inspiring music. They unashamedly embrace the unfamiliar and the veiled in giving an inkling of eternity. They seek to offer an experience without requiring evidence of faith credentials or pressure to join the club. It is precisely that liminal threshold which Tavener exemplifies.

If you happen upon a Cathedral and stay for Evensong, the glory of Tavener's music can come as sheer grace. You are simply invited to let it anoint you with its costly perfume. It is a gift. No one is demanding anything first, checking your fitness or looking for the right answers. A door is opened in heaven. It is a moment of Christ-inspired generosity. The kingdom is offered without restriction or condition.¹⁹



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- ¹ Nolan (1994), *Cry out and write: a feminine poetics of revelation*, NY: Continuum p67
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- ³ Blake, William, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
- ⁴ Boyce-Tillman, June (2018), *Freedom Song: Faith, Abuse, Music and Spirituality: A Lived Experience of Celebration*, Oxford: Peter Lang.
- ⁵ Hufford and Bucklin (2006), 'The Spirit of Spiritual Healing in the United States', In Joan Koss-Chioino & Philip Hefner, Eds. *Spiritual Transformation and Healing: Anthropological, Theological, Neuroscientific & Clinical Perspectives*. NY: Altamira Press, pp25-42
- ⁶ Tavener, Sir John (2014), 'Composing Sacred Music', *Temenos Review*, pp200-5. This p201
- ⁷ Thalbourne, M.A., Bartemucci L, Delin P.S., Fox B. and Nofi O. (1997), 'Transliminality, Its nature and correlates', *The Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 91, pp. 305–31
- ⁸ Clarke, Isabel, (2005), 'There is a crack in everything – that's how the light gets in'. In Clarke, Chris ed. (2005), *Ways of Knowing: Science and Mysticism today*, Exeter: Imprint Academic pp90-102. This p93
- ⁹ RERC Archive 000410 60 yr old woman
- ¹⁰ <http://www.creativeresistance.ca/communitas/defining-liminality-and-communitas-with-excerpts-by-victor-turner.htm> Contacted June 25th 2004
- ¹¹ Brown, David and Loades, Ann (1995), *The Sense of the Sacramental: Movement and Measure in Art and Music, Place and Time*, London: SPCK. p. 11).
- ¹² De Botton, Alain (2012), *Religion for Atheists: A Non-believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion*, London and New York: Hamish Hamilton. pp5-6.
- ¹³ Tavener, John (with Brian Keeble), *The Music of Silence: A Composer's Testament*, Faber and Faber, 1999. Page not available
- ¹⁴ *The Mystery of Faith* – An interview with Sir John Tavener in the Theatre Royal, Winchester as part of The Art, Mind and Brain festival 2005, Friday 11th March.
- ¹⁵ Lecture given at Holy Rood House, Thirsk, Yorkshire, July 2017
- ¹⁶ <https://thresholdchoir.org/> Contacted July 2014
- ¹⁷ Preti, Costanza and Boyce-Tillman, June (2014), *Elevate, Using the Arts to uplift people in hospital*, Research Report, University of Winchester, UK. http://www.winchester.ac.uk/research/attheuniversity/Education_Health_Social%20Care/artsaswellbeing/projects-and-research/Pages/Projects-and-Research.aspx
- ¹⁸ Blake, William, *Letter to Thomas Butts*
- ¹⁹ Unpublished meditation.

Alister Lords Prayer

after Alister Hardy

June Boyce-Tillman

Meditatively *mf*

Dear Cre-a-tor God, to Whom we are de-vo-ted,

Meditatively *mp*

sempre legato

6

Help us to make the world a bet-ter place and show us how to

11

f

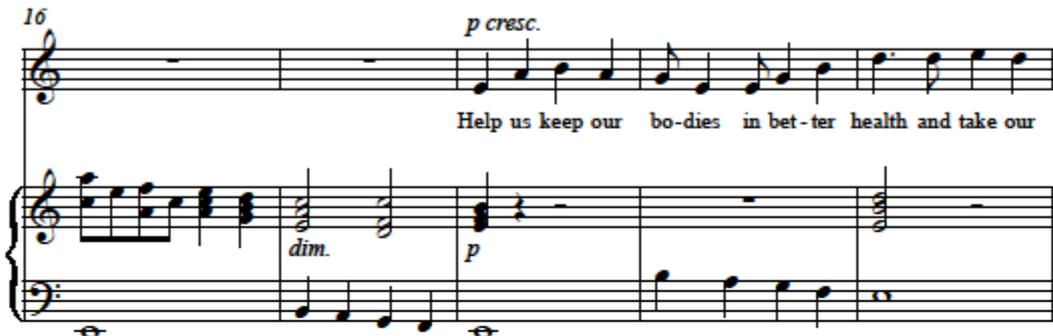
do it. So we may feel Your po-wer and Your glo-ry.

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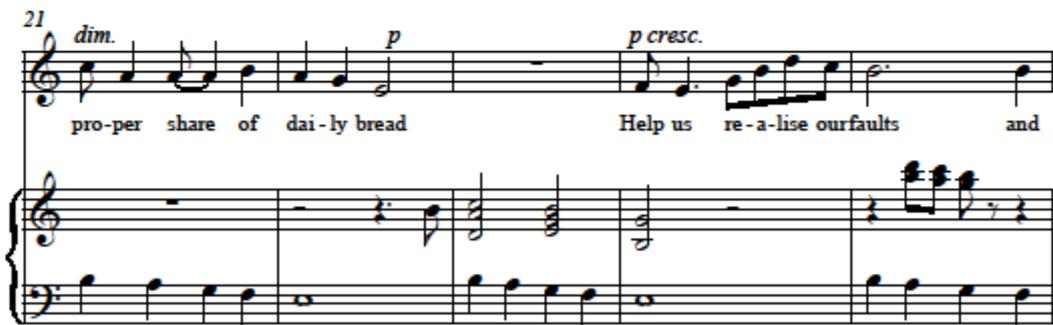
Copyright © June Boyce-Tillman

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16 *p cresc.*
Help us keep our bo-dies in bet-ter health and take our



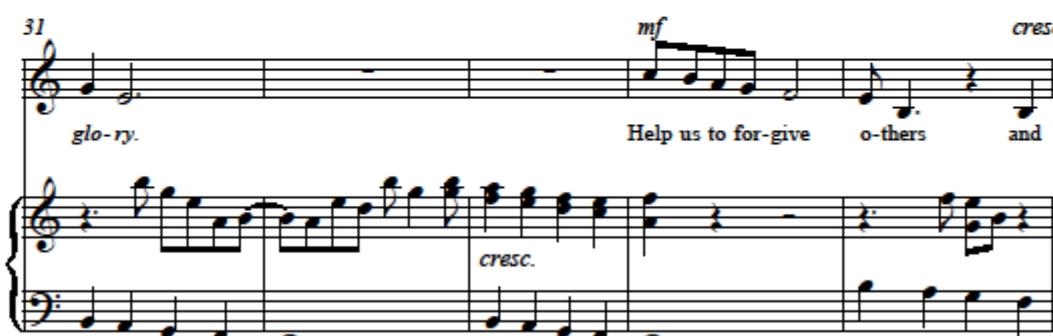
21 *dim.* *p* *p cresc.*
pro-per share of dai-ly bread Help us re-a-lise our faults and



26 *dim.* *p* *pp*
show us how to mend them So we may feel Your po- wer and Your



31 *mf* *cresc.*
glo-ry. Help us to for-give o-thers and



36 *mf cresc.* 8

show them our best ways Help us to re-cog-nise with our minds the real temp-ta-tions

41 *f*

that make our lives less wor-thy

44

So we may feel Your po - wer and Your glo - ry.

dim subito pp