

The Spong-Cupitt Debate (1)

by: Douglas Lockhart

... the way to what human beings have traditionally called God is not through some external projection of our needs, but through entering the depth dimension of the human experience. The divine we have always sought turns out to be a dimension of the human.

John Shelby Spong
Eternal Life: A New Vision

The Spong/Cupitt Debate

Many years ago, at the close of a Westar Institute conference in California,¹ I asked key-note speaker Bishop John Shelby Spong (retired) if his controversial approach to Christianity had a mystical base. We were at that moment about to vacate the Twelve Trees Hotel in Santa Rosa, a chance meeting in the foyer having granted me this unique opportunity. Glancing at me, he said without hesitation that he was not mystically inclined; he was a left-brained intellectual. And that, as they say, was that. Problem is, I didn't altogether believe him; his manner of addressing the conference had struck me as, well, oddly charismatic, but it was not the charisma one associates with evangelical preachers; it was the charisma of someone who has been touched by something a little more profound than a "belief" system. There was an energy in the man's phrasing of a sentence that held one's attention, an energy that attracted some and repelled others. And Spong's playful antagonist at that conference had been none other than Don Cupitt, retired Dean of Emanuel College, Cambridge, a powerful speaker in his own right, their left-brained contributions to do with Christianity's future having reflected the conference's own curiously schizoid nature. All was not quite as orderly as it appeared; there was an emotional, as well as an intellectual, tussle going on behind the scenes, and it was infused with an unspoken nostalgia for something Westar scholars had collectively pronounced untenable, namely, Christian confidence in the Jesus story as it had come down to us. On this score both Spong and Cupitt were in agreement; on how to handle what was left of Christianity as a religion they were however in opposite camps.

Bishop Spong's 2009 book *Eternal Life; A New Vision Beyond Religion, Beyond Theism, Beyond Heaven and Hell* suggests, as does the above quote from that book, that he has ditched old-fashioned Christianity and adopted much of Cupitt's humanistic vision. What else could it mean given that the divine is interpreted by Spong as a dimension of the human, a depth dimension of human experience that has to be plumbed. Being an intellectual for whom mysticism has no particular allure, and the history of Christian belief in dire need of renovation, the question of what actually separates Spong from Cupitt is for some a moot one.

So what of my suspicion that Spong was not altogether without a mystical element in his nature, that in spite of his many books dealing with the practicalities of a spiritual life minus Christianity's extravagant faith claims he was, in some difficult-to-define sense, mystically inclined? For what are we to make of his references to Christianity's supposed founder as his "Lord"? I say "supposed", because if Jesus of Nazareth was anything, he was not the founder of Christianity as we now know it, and it is in that historical fact that Spong seems to have found his curiously charismatic vision concerning what Christianity might one day be. He has, it seems, not only cottoned on to what drove the man Jesus to be the kind of man he was, he has also plumbed what that might mean in experiential terms. Left-brained indeed; but not lacking in evaluative feeling. And so he can write a claimed final book that purports to go beyond religion, theism, heaven and hell, a book whose subject matter is "so vast and my previous experience of it so slight, that it would take years to master the necessary material to dare write about it."² Intriguing. Particularly so when this previously ignored subject turns out to be "mysticism", those who have experienced its curious states of mind described as having threatened the Christian religion since its inception, and that it is through mysticism that "the essence of yesterday's religion can be transformed into tomorrow's spiritual understanding."³ But said with regret for having underestimated mysticism's vital role in religious matters, indeed, as that through which we might fathom the ancient route by which all limited religious ideas and values can be finally transcended. And not in the sense of a debunking that leaves one stranded in a glorious postmodern atheism; more in the sense of an expansion of conscious awareness that allows one to be encountered from within.

Mysticism and Science

I have arrowed in on Bishop Spong's mystical ruminations because they strike me as important when attempting to deal with Christianity's past and potential future. But there's a problem, for much that has been written in this area is bound up with the psychology of individuals influenced by a range of religious beliefs, and one has to be careful in how one deals with their sometimes deeply symbolic offerings, or, as is too often the case, their fanciful projections. But mysticism's importance is not in doubt; scholars from many religious traditions are now homing in on the vast literature that exists on this subject, and numerous secular scholars are also beginning to pay attention to this fecund field of human experience.

One such scholar is Harry Hunt, a professor of psychology who has written books and empirical studies on lucid dreaming, dream bizarreness, meditative states, creativity and metaphor, transpersonal experiences in childhood and theological papers on mystical experience based on a cognitive psychology of synaesthesia, and on the conceptual foundations of psychology. Quite an array of subjects, and augmented in his 2006 paper "The Truth Value of Mystical Experience"⁴ with an examination of the relation between classical mysticism and modern science. There is, Hunt argues, a correspondence between these distinct cognitive domains and cross cultural values in terms of spiritual or mystical experiences. In fact "the more abstract spiritual values of the major world mysticisms exemplify not only revelatory and pragmatic forms of truth, but are also broadly correspondent with both the principles of immediate concrete perception of modern physics."⁵ That is quite a statement; it both supports Carl Jung's contention that cross cultural correspondences are real, and flatly contradicts Don Cupitt's claim that cross cultural correspondences are imaginary. Cupitt's argument against such a possibility is based on Stephen Katz's 1978 assessment of mystical state as "everywhere couched in the locally available symbolic vocabulary", and that "Every religious experience is a datable human cultural expression."⁶ And Hunt is not alone in disagreeing with Cupitt and Katz;

the cognitive philosopher Bruce Mangan also takes issue with Katz's constructivist approach, describing it as "applying the most standard, narrow and lifeless forms of analytic/linguistic philosophy to mystic utterances."⁷

But Cupitt and Katz are not entirely wrong in their assessment; not all mystical experiences are in fact mystical - many are no more than projections resulting from religious expectation. If the meditator/contemplator is free from such impediments, however, then psyche may well produce symbolic alternatives shading all the way from images and sounds to that of abstract patterns. Metaphysics in the sense of perceptual "stuff" that gets in the way is still operative, but in the latter case it is less likely to impede deeper, and then deeper still, appreciations of reality that can be correlated across cultures. In the former case - the case of projection - the religious adventurer will probably end up strengthening his/her system of religious belief and forgo the possibility of symbolic alternatives. But this is not always the case. If persistent, some religious adventurers will find themselves progressively weaned away from their dependence on overt religious forms and challenged to rethink their religion's basic premise.

For me this raises the curly question of how psyche can cause symbolic forms alternative to religious offerings to arise within the conscious mind without the conscious mind having prior knowledge of them. How is that possible? Are these forms generated independent of consciousness by psyche, and if so, what does that tell us about psyche? By definition, beliefs of any sort belong to the conscious mind and are "propositional"; that is, they have to be measured for coherence within a linguistic frame of reference. In contrast to this, symbolic forms arising during mystical experience are not, in the first instance, propositional, therefore not generated by consciousness as it is presently understood. Visions and/or auditions of a recognisably religious nature are by the same token recognisable because they are propositional, and that tells us they have been generated by the conscious mind in relation to a belief system, not from some alternative source. As suggested above, however, this is not always the case; there are occasions when known religious configurations tease an individual to a deeper comprehension of reality. Religious language strains to transcend its limitations at every turn, of course, but in the case of Christianity that is often due

more to the machinations of a contortionist theology than to a transcendent core, although that too does exist. Behind this failure lies the Christian conception of God in relation to history, an interpretation of a supposed cosmic event that annuls its own premise. Christianity's central premise is that God, in some literalist fashion, entered history in the form of a Jewish Messiah figure, and that that act, consummated as it was by this man's crucifixion constitutes an act of salvation for the whole of humanity if humanity is willing to believe that that is the case. It is, in other words, a done deal from which no one can extricate themselves except by way of rejection, and as rejection signals rebellion against the will of God, the result can only be the opposite of salvation, namely, damnation for all eternity.

This differentiation of states cancels out as a "metaphysics of bondage" and a "metaphysics of freedom", the latter being a natural, as opposed to a supernatural, bridge between ordinary reality and a more extended reality. We are in receipt of an astonishing set of mental capacities with the power to penetrate not only physical matter as Harry Hunt suspects, but also religious forms if the process of inner attention is brought to an awareness/attention cutting edge. The matrix of self is psyche; the matrix of psyche is our all-encompassing but seldom actualised sense of being. In this sense psyche is both outside of time and ontological, that is, not individual in the sense that our egos are individualised. Our problem seems to be a schism between conscious and unconscious processes brought about by too great a dependence on artificially produced propositions. Intellectual propositions are themselves a form of metaphysics in that they often truncate rather than extend our appreciation of reality; and that even when the propositions are fundamentally correct: it is then a case of propositional distraction. When such propositions give way to artificiality through prejudice, or bias, however, they further dull our capacity for inner awareness and cause us to doubt, or ignore, our capacity for imagination and inspiration. In such moments the voice of the capitalised Self is all but silenced, but not completely, for if it were we would collapse in an untidy heap. But it is nevertheless a dangerous situation that arises; individuals cut off from their existential core tend to see most things in black and white terms, and that can lead to pronouncements where conceptual blindness governs outcomes.

Self as a Maximum Reference Point

In the final paragraphs of his paper, Harry Hunt guides us towards the recognition that “historical eras of secularization, as traced by sociologists such as Weber (1963) and Sorokin (1957), means that our hyper-differentiated consciousness ... lacks any sense of underlying support, overall purpose, and felt significance”,⁸ a state of affairs that leaves us in existential limbo as we go about the business of understanding self, other and world. Ignorance of psyche’s subtle urgings is therefore detrimental to society in relation to the self as maximum reference point, a state of mind and body progressively empowered as that self suffers further dislocation from psyche in relation to creative insight and inspirational support. The complex metaphors of physics and mystical experience may attest to a deep strata relationship between self and psyche, but if ignored by our major disciplines⁹ then without effect where needed most: in our multi-levelled collective appreciation of what it means to be a human being. And no more so than in our understanding of how “meaning” arises in the mind. Perceive this “arising” as due to language manipulation alone and the significance of mental events evaporates along with any meaningful sense of self as an attractor of meaning. The detection of meanings through language does not automatically signify that meanings are born only within the narrow confines of language’s differentiating rules. Language, as a process, does not miraculously conjure strings of related meaning out of itself in relation to itself as process; it is the place where meaning is “conceived” in terms of the relationship that exists between self and psyche as partners in the business of survival.

Harry Hunt speaks of a deep structure grammar of symbolic experience, and of a “higher cognition” in relation to mysticism and science; a form of inner attention and awareness that seems to penetrate other dimensions of knowing.¹⁰ There is, he contends, a direct patterning in mysticism that correlates with the inclusiveness found in mathematical physics, and that tells us that the “language” employed in both mediums is similar, if not identical, in some deep structural sense. And also “implicit within all perception and thought [albeit] deeply embedded within the structures of an adaptational symbolic intelligence

necessarily 'biased' towards its more concrete applications."¹¹ But not altogether cut off or dislocated from psyche's imaginal offerings, for we can in fact tap into this symbolic intelligence by a different route. This potential is however "pitted against the more specific practical focus of 'mind applied'",¹² and is forever losing sight of what is within the grasp of a more refined and immediate form of awareness. A moment by moment "unfoldment" of meaning is available to the developing ego as an "inner dialectic" linked to distinct stages of psychological growth and maturity. But as noted by Hunt, hyper-differentiated consciousness lacking "any sense of underlying support, overall purpose, and felt significance"¹³ is the tenor of society during eras of overt secularisation, and the effect of this is to interpret all such "unfoldments" as no more than processes processing.¹⁴

That we are in such a period of secularisation is obvious; the professional journals are laden with neuroscience's offerings. But not all neuroscientists are of the arch-psychologist Steven Pinker's unbounded confidence; one in particular is well aware of neuroscience's limitations, and with others in his field advanced a higher-dimensional geometry theory in 2012 to account for consciousness and "the remarkable phenomenology" in, of all things, Near Death Experience.¹⁵ The researcher in question is John Smythies, a neuropsychiatrist, neuroscientist and neurophilosopher who also happens to have been a member of the Society for Psychical Research for many years. Author of 260 scientific and philosophical papers and 16 books, Smythies is a formidable opponent for anyone advocating neuroscience's narrower, Pinkeresque vision, his paper "Consciousness and Higher Dimensional Space" covering the present status of the material dualist theory of brain-consciousness relations a must for anyone interested in this tricky area of investigation. Tackling the problem I have accused Steven Pinker of avoiding elsewhere, namely, what a "mental module" might be in itself, Smythies identifies "phenomenal space" as the root problem, and observes that phenomenal events in the mind would have to be coded in the brain for neuroscience's neuron-based theories of consciousness to work. This, he tells us, cannot be the case due to the problem of how "this code is decoded to yield the uncoded phenomenal visual field that we experience."¹⁶ And, he adds, "No

satisfactory answer to this question has been found." Claims to the contrary are therefore premature just as Edward Kelly suggests in *Irreducible Mind* (2007), the problem of how a neuronal substrate can produce a complex phenomenal systems of integrated thought and images a question yet to be answered.

The problem of "phenomenal extension" in relation to what mind is and how it functions in terms of the physical brain is tackled by Smythies by way of a new theory of consciousness in relation to a dimensional model set up in 1884 by the mathematician E. A. Abbott. As I was already familiar with Abbott's theory in relation to the writings of Ioan Couliano,¹⁷ and had detailed Abbot's fascinating multi-dimensional fable in an earlier work,¹⁸ it's use by Smythies to outline a new theory of consciousness "involving a paradigmic change in our concepts of space, time, consciousness, and the role of the brain"¹⁹ was something of a surprise. And no more so when Smythies' theory proved to be of such far-reaching consequences. Before attempting to deal with Smythies' approach to phenomenal consciousness, however, allow me to recap on Abbott's multi-dimensional theory, a theory Couliano linked to Einstein's Theory of Relativity in terms of how difficult it would be for the inhabitants of a two-dimensional world to detect the existence of a three-dimensional world.

Termining these two-dimensional beings Flatlanders, and Flatland to the surface of soup in a dish, Couliano described these intelligent Flatlanders as circles of oil on the soup's surface, and limited their movements to only two directions: left-right, or forward-backward, the direction of up-down being meaningless. Being so limited, Flatlanders would be at a distinct disadvantage in relation to three-dimensional beings, just as fourth-dimensional beings would have a distinct advantage relative to us. Couliano then speculated that if someone in our dimension started to eat the soup with a spoon, this act would be perceived in Flatland as a short line corresponding to the tip of the spoon appearing in Soupland, increasing in size, then decreasing in size followed by a portion of Soupland being absorbed into nowhere. As the spoon could only be experienced as a line and not as a vertical object, it would be perceived as a series of phenomena in time which even Souplanders of genius would find ultra difficult to interpret as contact with a superior dimension. Smythies' not dissimilar

description of Flatland contains an extension of this basic idea, however, and it is in this extension that the possibility of paradigmatic change lies. Smythies describes the situation thus:

It took the Flatlanders a long time to work out that Flatland was actually only a cross section of Cubeland that lay all around them in a direction they never knew existed. It took them even longer to discover that a part of a Flatlander's organism actually lies in Cubeland. A Flatlander actually exists as a 2D physical body, equipped with sensors located in Flatland (which is one 2D section of Cubeland) plus a 2D 'consciousness module' located in another parallel, or intersecting, 2D section of Cubeland.²⁰

Consciousness module? This is of course Pinker's "mental module" by another name, a phenomenal dimension located not in the physical brain, but in another parallel, or intersecting, section of three-dimensional reality. At least that's my interpretation of Smythies' reading of Abbott's fable, a fable that may be much more than a fable if Smythies, and others, are correct in their more advanced neuroscientific speculations. This of course suggests that the human organism consists of two parts located in different subsections of a higher-dimensional space, a space within which phenomenal consciousness exists separate from the physical brain, yet still operative even when that brain flatlines - if you'll excuse the pun. This is particularly evident in near-death experiences where phenomenal experience is known to continue, and in the nature of perception during NDE's where objects in a room can not only be seen clearly, but simultaneously from all directions.²¹ Some subjects report having seen the front, sides and back of individuals attending to them, their field of vision having expanded by 360 degrees.²² This expansion also extends to the time dimension, objects being seen as a four-dimensional object in space-time as described in the theory of special relativity,²³ and, oddly enough, in a vision reported by the prophet Ezekiel.²⁴ Which sounds not unlike my contention that language at depth (higher order language) no longer functions in the way surface, plateau language functions, but

in a more extended fashion where it ceases to be mind deliberating on "bits" and becomes, at its extreme pole, psyche embracing "wholes".

Smythies' next deliberation is even more startling, for in alignment with other researchers, he suggests such experiences could be due to the observing Self being located in another dimension of space "away from its normal site within the consciousness module",²⁵ an interpretation of NDE events that seems to confirm "Self" as an independent factor within the conscious matrix that can escape from the limitations of that matrix! Gone is the claim of Self being no more than a hoax perpetrated on the mind by the brain, an illusion created out of the integration of brain modules. In its place stands a theory of higher dimensional space in relation to visual perception during NDE's that allows for a "material and extended physical body and [a] material and extended consciousness module".²⁶ An extended consciousness module? I can get my head around that, but what might an extended physical body be? Is Smythies referring obliquely to what is commonly known in esoteric language as the "astral body", a non-physical duplicate of the material body sometimes experienced during episodes of astral projection? Or is he referring to something quite different? As he then goes on to give a highly technical explanation for all of this in relation to "trans-dimensional causal relations", we are obviously dealing with an explanation for ordinary, everyday consciousness, and for near-death (extended) consciousness, bearing serious paranormal implications.

What Smythies has done is offer a viable explanation for the phenomenon of "mind" and "self" that rescues both from: "It's just the brain stupid!" Neuropsychiatrist, neuroscientist and neurophilosopher he may be, but like Edward Kelly, and others, he has worked through the problem of there being a phenomenal dimension to awareness and avoided neuroscience's reductionist claims. We have, Smythies tells us, graduated from Cartesian dualism to monistic identity theory (IT), and from there to the new imagining techniques of neuroscience which, in relation to IT, is now viewed by many neuroscientists as undeniable as Darwin's theory of evolution.²⁷ Prematurely, alas, for it is now apparent "that there are difficulties with IT that have been skated over by its supporters."²⁸ There are in fact almost no common properties between what goes

on in the human brain and what goes on in the human mind, claims to the contrary being mistaken in relation to Leibniz's Law of the Identity of Indiscernibles.²⁹ Something a little more sophisticated is going on in relation to phenomenal awareness, and the dimensional model as proposed by Smythies, extravagant as it may sound, is in fact part of a growing suspicion among researchers that something of the kind is likely.³⁰ And as the same theory can also "account for the results of reliable research by parapsychologists", the proposed trans-dimensional causal process "has not only a normal focus on the brain but, in addition, a penumbra that allows information to be picked up from other minds (telepathy), other objects (clairvoyance), and future events (precognition). Likewise the ... causal process may have a penumbra that would allow for psychokinesis."³¹ We could well be living in more than one dimension of space-time without realising it, an existential fact intuited through a lowering of the ego's fiercely differentiated interactions with self, other and world as studies of intense creativity suggest. So also in meditative and contemplative experience, the multi-levelled, mystically-oriented cosmological experiences reported by some practitioners being indicative of their having traversed the space-time barrier between one dimension of reality and another. And that is exactly how this other reality is experienced; it is as if the traveller has entered another dimension of experience with its own laws and expectations, a world separated from this world by a system of fluctuating energies over which they never gain complete control.

The philosopher Jean Curthoys adds an extra dimension to this discussion in her book Victor Dudman's *Grammar and Semantics* (2012) where she tackles his Gottlob Frege-influenced belief "that the thoughts we express in language are both non-physical and independent of the human minds that grasp them" - a curious notion pointing to there being a dimension of comprehension unknown to the conscious mind. Language encodes thought via grammar as grammarians and linguistic philosophers believe, but as Curthoys is quick to point out, that fact in itself tells us that thoughts "are the kind of thing that can have their form imposed on them in that way",³² so making thought a non-sensible, pre-existing something corseted by grammar into meaningful shapes. Language is king, but only to the extent that it helps clothe immaterial thought in a garment of

meanings recognisable to the conscious mind,³³ not to the extent of it being the primary generator of thoughts as believed by Cupitt and Pinker. In Dudman's and in Frege's theoretical scheme, thoughts and ideas were not one and the same thing: ideas belonged to the conscious mind, thoughts to an ontological dimension of their own³⁴ I leave the reader to conclude what that might mean in relation to this chapter's fundamental argument.

Dismantling Theism's God

Harry Hunt's contention that there is a direct patterning in mystical apprehension that correlates with the inclusiveness found in mathematical physics works well when aligned with Smythies' dimensional model for phenomenal awareness. In terms of intense, focused inner attention, or awareness, mystical experience and the findings of theoretical physics seem to penetrate similar, if not identical, dimensions of knowing.³⁵ And that is how it should be if Smythies' challenging contentions truly reflect the nature of material reality and phenomenal consciousness. Problem is, those with prolonged, deep strata meditative or contemplative experience seem to be ahead of the pack in that they have been speaking for centuries of another dimension to ordinary everyday awareness that sounds remarkably like the trans-dimensional causal process advanced by Smythies, and so eloquently theorised by Hunt in his paper dealing with the truth value of mystical experience. Hunt sums up this intriguing situation thus:

Consciousness would be the most complex system we know, or potentially could even recognise. If so, in terms of the logic of systems organisation, consciousness - with mystical experience as its maximal intensification and specialised development - cannot be ultimately inconsistent with the system principles of the universe that generates it. If consciousness qua system was not broadly consistent with the universe as understood by physics, it would not be here.³⁶

Hunt's next theoretical step is however reminiscent of the French philosopher Henri Bergson at his provocative best, for he goes on to suggest that consciousness "must in some sense, and however distantly, already [have been] 'latent' and specifically potential within this universe."³⁷ Hans Jonas (an early student of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger) concurs, suggesting in 1996 that "[consciousness] cannot be entirely foreign to nature, which brought forth precisely this kind of being",³⁸ an evaluation of sentience to which Hunt adds "[with] very different implications than the older 'randomised' model, in which consciousness and life appear as an isolated fortuitous bubble within vast alien immensities."³⁹ And that is what we have to consider if we take the present trajectory of neuroscientific studies at face value, a trajectory that leaves us facing, well, no one in the mirror more substantial than our last observation of ourselves looking in the mirror! But it cuts both ways, for what does one do with a universe of crude planetary systems and galactic forces harbouring a capacity for sentient life at its evolutionary core? What are the 'implications' of there having been such a state of affairs since the Big Bang banged? Is it liberating to realise that consciousness may have a transdimensional profile with attendant cosmic responsibilities, or would it be better to remain isolated in three dimensions where self is an illusion and responsibility is no more than a social necessity? That is the kind of question that emerges from such speculation, and with a little thought many may end up accepting Steven Pinker's vision as the more attractive of the two - the illusion of being an illusion may be easier to live with. But what if Pinker's vision is not how things actually are? What if, as the physicists Menas Kafatos and Robert Nadeau suggest, in their study of modern physical theory,⁴⁰ the emerging epistemology in physics suggests quite the opposite. Two quotes from their quite riveting study should suffice:

Bohm comments that, "Consciousness is unfolding in each individual," and "meaning is the bridge between consciousness and matter ... meaning is being."

The new epistemology [in physics] ... should be welcomed not merely

because it seems to be required in order to maintain the consistency and integrity of a scientific world view. It provides, we believe, a new foundation upon which we can affirm our participation as conscious beings in a cosmos that no longer seems from the new perspective either "pointless" or "alien".

These statements clearly mitigate against the dilemma faced by many in relation to the above question having to rest on a barely conscious assumption born from centuries of Christian conditioning, namely, that if you postulate a universe in which, from the very beginning, consciousness was latent, then you inadvertently open the way for a reassessment of Christianity's faith claims. Why so? Because to do so is a recognition, however tenuous, of an intelligent principle at the heart of matter, and that principle, surely, has to be God - the Christian God as taught by the Church. What else could it be? And as the three great Abrahamic faiths all speak of a creator God, a God who called everything into existence so that we humans might have a life of meaning in relation to himself, then by the rules of logic alone we have no option but to acknowledge this fact and live in accordance with Jewish, Christian or Islamic values and beliefs. You simply can't have a universe that harbours consciousness *in potentia* and ignore the implications of that fact. Consciousness latent in physical matter is not exactly how these great faiths describe the process of creation, but given the inference that human intelligence and selfhood were also in the offing, then one has to assume an intelligent underpinning for the whole extraordinary affair. Consciousness could not have arisen without there having been a consciousness/intelligence/selfhood template in existence prior to the creation of the world for that world to carry such an extraordinary imprint. It is inconceivable that such an imprint or template could exist in matter by chance.

This raises a number of issues, each hinged on the problem of whether meaning is in itself meaningful. This may sound like a silly question, but it isn't. Meaning is ultimately meaningless if perceived as having no meaning other than the meaning it happens to carry. Meaning that is meaningful, on the other hand, is meaningful because conceived as grounded in meaning itself. And the same reasoning applies to the conscious "self", hence Steven Pinker's rejection of the

conscious self as an entity meaningful in its own right; once allow self to be meaningful in its own right and meaning, in relation to that self, is inadvertently elevated from a system of utilitarian reasoning to that of an ontological reality. As with Pinker, this is not a problem for dyed-in-the-wool atheists; they will view the latency problem as non-existent and sail on regardless. The situation is different for those to whom the latency problem has meaning; they may well tend towards theism and become (again?) embroiled in Christianity's more primitive offerings. When all is said and done, however, it is meaning, or lack of meaning in relation to the self that drives the argument, and that in turn raises the question of how we realise meaning within ourselves.

Meaning realised within the lowercase self by means of an external God who punishes unbelievers for all eternity is by nature utilitarian and dangerous; better to realise meaning by way of an intellectual openness to uncertainty and ambiguity, for that is about all we can make of meaning latently embedded in physical matter, or, in relation to psyche as a whole, as experiences that again link phenomenal consciousness to physical matter as physicists acknowledge. It's swings and roundabouts. It all depends on whether we've managed to deal with religious questions at some point in our life, or ignored them and hoped they would go away. Problem is, they do not go away; they are deeply rooted in psyche and have a habit of rearing into view when least expected. We are creatures capable of meaning because, I would contend, our realisations of self are embedded in meaning, a context of greater meaning that has changed the very nature of consciousness from being a latency in matter to that of a partner within which symbol and language have evolved, although seldom appreciated as co-authors of thought, particularly creative thought. It's all of a piece, really; it's just that we are in pieces and do not grasp the larger picture. In this regard Benny Shanon makes three pertinent observations in his 2008 paper "A Psychological Theory of Consciousness", each reflecting aspects of the meaning/greater meaning problem as already stated. In sequence, they are:

Just as matter cannot be instantiated but in space and time,
 experience cannot be instantiated without meaning and
 without there being something that is sensed or felt. Meaning

is not a quality that is added to cognitive structures and dynamics. Rather, it is the stuff that makes such structures and dynamics be in the first place. With this, the ground is established for semantic and actional operations ...

As I was going along, I progressively discovered how the pieces fit together into a picture exhibiting internal logic and aesthetics that I had not in mind beforehand. While I was the author of the ideas, in its own coherence the picture resonated to me as revealing a truth of its own. Indeed, as the picture broadened and evolved, its new facets furnished added corroboration of the basic foundations of the system and of its structure as a whole.⁴¹

These statements are fundamentally related in that they purvey a sense of meaning over and above that of the meanings we consciously create, and I find it interesting that it is trained thinkers like Hunt, Smythies and Shanon - not to mention Bishop Spong and Don Cupitt in their own specialised areas - who are breaking open the puzzle of creative inspiration in relation to psyche and world. Creativity, it seems, is about more than "making things up"; it is also about meaning intercepted by the self when functioning as maximal reference point.

References and Notes

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- 32) Curthoys, Jean, and Victor H. Dudman, *Victor Dudman's Grammar and Semantics*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. p. 55.
- 33) Ibid, pp. 55-56.
- 34) Ibid, p. 37. A further thought on this problem was offered by Jean Curthoys in an extension to her endorsement of *The Babylonian Lottery*: "Central to [Dudman's] heretical, out-of-left-field grammar is the claim that the English language treated time as form. It is heretical because mainstream philosophers and grammarians insist/assume that the form of language is that of their own formal logic - simply, the subject/predicate form of a basic clause which can be connected to other clauses by "and", "or" and "not" and "if then" (the logical connectives). Form is assumed to be timeless and time is treated as a domain of qualification or as a predicate - in plain speak as a thing or as a quality of a thing but in any case as content, not form. For [Dudman] the failure to recognise that time is the form of an English clause is the reason why the discipline of grammar has remained pre-scientific, giving us unwieldy, contradictory and merely classificatory systems. His time-as-form grammar, on the other hand, is neat, simple and astonishingly accurate (without exceptions).
- 35) Hunt, Harry, 'The Truth Value of Mystical Experience', (see above) p.37.
- 36) Ibid, pp. 9-10.
- 37) Ibid, p. 10.
- 38) Jonas, Hans, *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz*, Northwestern University Press, 1996. p. 10.
- 39) Hunt, Harry, 'The Truth Value of Mystical Experience', (see above) p. 37.
- 40) Shanon, Benny, 'A Psychological Theory of Consciousness', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 15. No. 5. 2008. pp. 37-38.
- 41) Isaiah 13: 3, 5, 9, 15-16.