

# REALISTIC LIVING

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Editing: Alan Richard

The theology course just mentioned is entitled **Christians, Who Are We?** And the following three essays are included in that course:



## You? Are? Accepted?

a deeper look into ourselves  
by Gene Marshall

Paul Tillich boils down the Christian Gospel (Good News) to three words "you are accepted." The shadow side of this condensation is that we Western-enculturated humans are prone to take these three words as a rational statement about which arguments can be made pro and con. But merely believing these three words rationally is not a healing message at all. To be a healing message these three words have to be grounded in our transrational existence. We have to ask ourselves what we mean existentially by all three words. What do we mean by "you"? What do we mean by "are"? What do we mean by "accepted"?

And there is another key issue: *Who* is saying these three words to us? It is not our mother. It is not our spouse. It is not our friends. It is not our mentor. Who or what is communicating this message to us? Here is Tillich's text on that:

Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks through our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: "you are accepted." *You are accepted* by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know.<sup>1</sup>

Let us notice that Tillich is saying that these three words are said to us by a Transrational Reality. And what does transrational mean? That is a great question only if we are asking for something more than a rational definition of "transrational." It is a great question if we are asking to see with our own consciousness the transrational REALITY that this rational word "transrational" is pointing to in our existence.

## We Still Need to Study Theology

The ongoing activity of Christian theologizing is part of Christian practice. We never get through with theologizing. There is no finally settled "theology." None of us need to have settled on our own "theology." As practitioners of the Christian religion, we get to keep on keeping on with our theologizing for as long as we live.

Here are, however, a couple of useful rules: (1) Be relevant to our own experience within our own time and place in human history. (2) Be true to the revelatory event that goes by the name "Jesus Christ." Herein is something about Christian theologizing that people often overlook: the Jesus Christ event reveals something about Reality as a Whole, something that is happening in every event of our lives and in every event in the lives of our species throughout its entire history.

In order to grasp how that claim can even make sense, we need to study some good theology, not in order to settle everything in our own Christian theologizing, but simply to get going with an intellectually honest form of Christian reflection.

I have created a course that includes such theology and that is easy to teach. It has 10 accessible essays, and each essay comes with a one-page lesson plan for teaching that essay. Here is the URL for downloading that 10-session course:

<http://www.realisticliving.org/UR1/0ChristiansWhoAreWe.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> Tillich, Paul; *Shaking the Foundations* (Charles Scribner's Sons: 1948) page 162

### Are?

Existence? What do we mean by “existence”? We westernized-philosophical “geniuses” can keep this rational game going forever and thereby never understand what Tillich was attempting to say to us. Existence is simply the *are* pointed to by the word “are” when applied to a human being.

### You?

Let us examine “existentially” the word “you.” Let us imagine for a moment that “you” does not point to your ego or your personality, or to your cultural conditioning, but to a transrational “you” who is in bodily alliance with an ego, a personality, and a cultural conditioning, none of which are “you” in the full sense of “you.” You have an ego, but that ego is not you. You have a personality, but that personality is not you. You have a cultural conditioning, but that cultural conditioning is not you. And here is the most difficult realization for many of us: you have a mind, but your mind is not you. The mind is just a tool of your biology that the transrational you uses for thinking about your world and about your own transrational being or “self” if we wish to stretch that word “self” beyond all that we commonly mean by “self.” Contrary to much western thought, there is no such reality as “the rational self.” “The rational self” is an idea in the mind that has no correspondence in Reality. The self that you are or I am is not rational. The true self is that enigmatic or transrational consciousness that watches your mind work and at times uses your mind constructively to do something that your transrational self arbitrarily elects to do.

### Accepted?

That to which the word “accepted” points is as deep and difficult to talk about as the verity of the true self. It happens that Christians who are reading Non-Christian writers sometimes get more clear about what our Christian words mean. This quote from Scott Kiloby illustrates what I mean:

Sit still for a moment and notice the timeless, empty, spacious, quiet presence that is here in the room. Even if there is noise in the room, notice that this quietness is surrounding and permeating that noise. Notice that presence within and without the body and mind.

Say the word “acceptance” out loud. Notice that the sound of the word “acceptance” arises and falls back into the

quiet presence that you are. The word is virtually useless when you realize that presence itself is acceptance. The presence that is simply here is already fully accepting of what presently is. It does not have to do anything to come to acceptance, including utter a word

Thought does not accept. It measures, judges, blames, complains, analyzes, categorizes, labels, and thinks about life. It is not in the business of acceptance. It is in the business of thinking and talking about acceptance. That is not acceptance. That is thinking and talking. This is not a prescription to not think or not talk. This is an invitation to notice what is totally untouched by thought. All thoughts about acceptance merely arise and fall within this presence. True acceptance is this presence that is always and already naturally and effortlessly accepting of what is, including accepting of thoughts about presence.<sup>2</sup>

In this passage, Kiloby reveals to us the source of our acceptance. Not ourselves! Not other human beings. *The Presence within which we live and die is the Accepting Reality.*

More needs to be clarified about the self that is accepted. It is the self that is existing in the present Accepting Presence. This existing self has a current image of itself, but that image is an image, not the self itself. My self image or ego is a fabrication of “me” that I have created. The self that is accepted is the self with the fabricated image of itself, not the fabricated image, for the fabricated image is just an image, not a self. But the fabricated image is something: it is a fabricated image. And as a fabricated image, it is also accepted. We have no need to fabricate a better image of ourselves. We don’t have to get rid of our current self-image. We only need to see that our self-image is just an image. The “you” that is accepted is the you with its currently self-fabricated self image.

Also accepted is the personality of habits, practices, skills, and so on that you or I have built up over the years. Again, this personality is not “me;” it is aspect of my uniqueness like my finger nails and my liver. As such my personality is accepted. I don’t need another personality in order to be accepted. Whatever is real about me, including my personality, is accepted. My health or lack of health, my brilliance or lack of brilliance, my neurosis or lack of neurosis are all accepted. Also, my culture and my cultural conditioning are

<sup>2</sup> Kiloby, Scott; *Reflections on the One Life: Daily Pointers to Enlightenment* (www.booksurge.com: 2000) page 237



accepted. It is not me, it is just my cultural conditioning, but I, the self with that cultural conditioning, am accepted, however lousy or great that conditioning may be. Also, the standards that I use to judge lousy and great are also accepted, even though those standards are not perfect, but simply my currently chosen standards that I can change, that I may evaluate as realistic or crazy. It is I, the real I, even a despairing I, that is accepted.

So again, what is this "I"? It is that enigmatic awareness that no science, and no religion can contain in mere words. It is consciousness being conscious of being conscious. And what is consciousness? A complete enigma! A total mystery! We can try to describe it. For example, it seems to me that consciousness has these three basic aspects: attentionality, presence, and intentionality. Consciousness takes in reality (knowing). Consciousness is an inescapable presence (being). And consciousness puts forth in the real world (doing). Consciousness is knowing-being-doing—three inescapable dynamics of this one *whatever* that consciousness is. Despite our ability to use our minds to describe our experience of consciousness, consciousness remains a mystery as enigmatic as life itself, as gravity, as the cosmos, as what was before that enigmatic Big Bang that "banged" before anything like noise had come to be.

It is this I of consciousness that is accepted. The accepted "I" that is the "I" of consciousness embedded in my body, my mind, my ego, my personality, my culture, my social humanity, my planet, my cosmos. All of this embeddedness is accepted. All of my confusions about my embeddedness are accepted. All of my fight and flight from my embeddedness is accepted. All of my transrational quality is accepted. All of my false viewing of my self is accepted. How do I know this? Look and see. Everything that is real is accepted by Reality. Even my rebellion from Reality, which is in this moment a real unreality, is accepted. All my despair over my unrealities not being real is accepted. Whatever my state of realism, flight from realism, or fight with realism, I am accepted. I can only begin my return to realistic living exactly where I am at this moment. And I am accepted to do so.



## The Grace Happening

At what sort of moment are we in a position to hear Transrational Reality say to our transrational consciousness, "you are accepted"? Here is the moment, according to Tillich, in that same paragraph when he says we can hear "you are accepted."

Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual, because we have violated another life, a life which we loved, or from which we were estranged. It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us. It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage.<sup>3</sup>

It is at this moment, moments such as these, that we can hear: "you are accepted." We can hear Reality because these are Reality-experiencing moments—moments when our estrangement from Reality is becoming conscious to us—when our falseness is being caught-up-with by the TRUE—when escape into illusory comforts have been undermined—when the worst about our unrealism appears to haunt us. At such moments Reality speaks to us, "you are accepted." And by "you" is meant the "you" that has been awakened to your estrangement from Reality. There is no other you than the estranged you who in this moment is facing up to estrangement. So what do we do now? Tillich gives us this answer:

Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. *Simply accept the fact that you are accepted.* ( page 162)

Let us notice that this letting be who we are is a huge doing on our part. It is the biggest doing that a human being can do. It is the opposite of the doings that have been done most of the time by most of humanity since the very first day we became human. Instead of creating a reality that we like better than Reality, we let be what IS. And to

<sup>3</sup> Tillich, Paul; *Shaking the Foundations* (Charles Scribner's Sons: 1948) pages 161-162

start with “what IS” is our facing up to our estrangement from Reality and thereby being close to home, close to our true self. One simple deed remains, “*accept the fact that you are accepted.*” Reality holds no grudges against your years of fighting Reality. In facing Reality you are facing an always-loving “parent” who has run down the road to meet you coming home to Reality. You are welcome. You are accepted. A feast is being prepared for you.

Tillich calls this entire happening an illumination of the Christian word “grace.” This happening is the healing that the Jesus Christ revelatory event means to the human species. This healing does not happen only to practitioners of a Christian religion. It has nothing whatsoever to do with screwing up our minds to believe unbelievable Christian doctrines. Grace is simply a deeply human event applicable to all humans in all cultures, times, and places. Christian doctrines, God talk, sermons, theologies, etc. came into being to share with one another (and with whoever else was ready to listen) how it is that the human is healed from the most important disease that ails us—estrangement from Reality.

Tillich is clear that life after grace is an ongoing surrender to God’s forgiveness or acceptance. Clearly, the life after grace is not a life of imposing our ideals upon the real situations we face. Here are two more Tillich paragraphs that provide the flavor of this:

In the light of this grace we perceive the power of grace in our relation to others and to ourselves. We experience the grace of being able to look frankly into the eyes of another, the miraculous grace of reunion of life with life. We experience the grace of understanding each other’s words. We understand not merely the literal meaning of the words, but also that which lies behind them, even when they are harsh or angry. For even then there is a longing to break through the walls of separation. We experience the grace of being able to accept the life of another, even if it be hostile and harmful to us, for, through grace, we know that it belongs to the same Ground to which we belong, and by which we have been accepted. We experience the grace which is able to overcome the tragic separation of the sexes, of the generations, of the nations, of the races, and even the utter strangeness between man and nature. Sometimes grace appears in all these

separations to reunite us with those to whom we belong. For life belongs to life.

And in the light of this grace we perceive the power of grace in our reunion to ourselves. We experience moments in which we accept ourselves, because we feel that we have been accepted by that which is greater than we. If only more such moments were given to us! For it is such moments that make us love our life, that make us accept ourselves, not in our goodness and self complacency, but in our certainty of the eternal meaning of our life. We cannot force ourselves to accept ourselves. We cannot compel anyone to accept himself. But sometimes it happens that we receive the power to say “Yes” to ourselves, that peace enters into us and makes us whole, that self-hate and self-contempt disappear, and that our self is reunited with itself. Then we can say that grace has come upon us. (pages 162 & 163)

Such forgiving grace is Final Reality’s action for everyone all the time. Here is a most important implication of “God’s” universal forgiveness: if we accept our forgiveness, we accept it for the whole of humankind. To accept forgiveness for ourselves means accepting forgiveness for our worst enemies, our unfaithful friends, and our stupid advisors, everyone. And forgiveness means a fresh start. Everyone on Earth faces this possibility of fresh start. Reality accepts us for a fresh start in realism.

In reading these words, we must not assume that Tillich is minimizing the importance of our decision to surrender to God’s forgiveness and make a fresh start based on that commitment. The decision to accept our acceptance is not a minor part of the grace happening. Without our choice to accept forgiveness, grace has not happened.

Our whole nation faces a thoroughgoing fresh start. A fresh start is already here for the taking. For the taking, we could have a whole new energy system. People cry and moan that such a transition is too huge to be possible. *But with Reality all things are possible!* Also beckoning to this nation is a fresh start in the full expression of democracy. Our whole crummy half-baked democracy is forgiven. Fresh start is a fact of life. Fresh start is a fact of life built into the cosmos. *You Are Forgiven.* We are forgiven. Welcome home to Reality—to the real fresh starts that confront us.



## Julian's Delight

don't despair over  
your despair

by Gene Marshall



*Heaven (authenticity) is not a solemn affair, but a party, full of gladness and glory, and even now we can begin to enter into its happiness.<sup>4</sup>*

The above quotation (not including my metaphorical translation of the word “heaven”) is the concluding sentence of Grace Jantzen’s book on *Julian of Norwich*. Julian of Norwich was a 14th century English anchorite who achieved in her solitary cell a lucidity about life and about the Christian heritage that remains a source of clarity for all time. Jantzen, who died in 2005, was one of the most interesting and important Christian theologians of this century. The combination of the spirit of these two women in this remarkable book offered me one of the most encouraging and life-changing study experiences in recent years.

Both Julian and Jantzen are clear about the depth of human estrangement, yet they both emphasize our essential goodness and the good news of our forgiveness and healing—that is, our restoration to our authenticity, a state which they view as a “party, full of gladness and glory,” a happiness that can begin now.

Both are also clear that the Final Reality, referred to with the word “God,” is a disturbingly mysterious and overwhelming power that is, nevertheless, nothing other than love for us. They see that a commitment to such complete realism is the key to our happiness, however puzzling, frightening, or challenging such a journey can be. Julian initiated this core phrasing of the Christian faith: “God (Final Reality) does all things well.” God has done all things well, is doing all things well, and will do all things well.

Julian is clear that this Final Reality is both *far* and *near*. Final Reality (“God,” if Final Reality is indeed your core devotion) is *far* in the sense that Final Reality is a Mystery that never goes away, however much we learn about it. The future is always a surprise. The past is always unfathomable. The current moment is always a fullness beyond the mind’s comprehension.

Yet, this Mysterious Otherness also confronts us in a daily and personal way. God is *near*, never absent in each event of our lives. That God is *far* beyond our comprehension does not mean God

(Reality) is “far” in the sense of being only an ancient Maker of the machinery of the cosmos, who has now retired, handing the cosmos over to its laws. Rather, every event that happens to us contains the presence of this Final Reality. No small or large thing comes to pass in our lives that is not Final Reality doing all things well. Julian and Jantzen probe the stories of Jesus as revelations of the heart of God. What such revelation shows us is this: Love is present in all the other showings that have been shown, are being shown, or will ever be shown to us in the events of our real lives.

Though much has been shown, Julian was also clear that the Final Otherness is not showing us everything. Since Final Reality is doing all things well, we trust that it is good for us that we have not been shown everything. What we have been shown is enough for us at this moment in our journey. Not knowing everything is a positive gift, for we do not yet need to know it. Our not-knowing is just as much “God doing all things well” as when more wisdom is being given. Indeed, we can take delight now in what we know and in what we don’t know. Wisdom is good. Curiosity is good. Not understanding fully is also good. Striving to know more fully is good as well. Julian’s life and writings provide us with an example of what it looks like to do ongoing theologizing, a thinking that makes ever more clear each piece of Christian heritage, each event of our lives, and each opportunity to hold further clarification within our God-given, but limited minds.

We can notice that each of us is a profound enigma—a dynamic that is as mysterious as the Final Mysterious Otherness as a whole. In our experience of the mysteriousness of our own selves, we are experiencing a closeness with that Final Mysteriousness with which we are inescapably related. Indeed, that very relatedness can be said to be our true self.

So while that Final Mysteriousness remains far away and absolutely Other than our Earthly space/time talking, walking, thinking, choosing being. Yet all of this talking is a talk with God. All of this walking is a walk with God. All of this thinking is seeking the thoughts of God. All of this choosing is choosing a life with God, or not. This is the ultimate choice, to trust or not trust Final Reality. It is this trust that gives Final Reality the name “God.” This trust became activated in Jesus, and it can be so activated within us through our “following” of Jesus.

Though this positive vision captured Julian’s first attention, she was not naive about the tragedy of human life—that we are all sick from our persistent distancing of ourselves from Reality and

<sup>4</sup> Jantzen, Grace; *Julian of Norwich* (Paulist Press; New York: 1987) page 218

from the realistic living of our lives. Through our own doing we are living astray in unrealistic behaviors—despairing and trapped in horrifically inappropriate doings we might like to take back, but can't.

The further we journey into the nearness of God and God's healing attention to our estranged lives, the more our sickness of delusory behaviors floods our awareness. Indeed, we can be sure that "sin" (in its many strange and subtle forms) will continue to appear. It is at this point that Julian reaches her core helpfulness as an advisor to each of us with regard to our spirit journey.

### Four Practical Lessons

Following are four practical lessons summarized for us by Jantzen in the last chapter of her book on *Julian of Norwich*:

#### 1. Rather than despairing over your despair, focus on your healing.

It does no good to be morose over your failures to live your authentic life. When you discover yourself, once again, behaving badly and sinking into despair, do not despair over your despair. This is a bottomless pit. Be contrite, yes, contrition with regard to your sin is the right step, but contrition is not a morose descent into your filth, but a joyous opportunity to move beyond despair. To despair over finding yourself in despair is digging a deeper hole into an already unendurable life. When awakening to our sin and its despair-laden consequences, Julian counsels us to view this as a happy event, an opportunity for the contrition journey to begin, or to begin again. Focus on the process of healing, not on the grimness of the disease of despair.

A quote from Julian: *"And so all shame will be turned into honour and joy. For our courteous Lord does not want his servants to despair because they fall often and grievously; for our falling does not hinder him in loving us."* page 205

#### 2. Don't project upon God your feelings of self loathing.

The wrath you feel toward your sin is real enough, but such disgust and anger over yourself is something you are doing to yourself; it is your life agonizing over itself. This self-loathing is not the doing of God. God is doing nothing but Love for you. God is doing all things well. God is operating to heal you, not condemn you. This counsel is not to be understood as sentimentality. Of course it is true that when we flee Reality, Reality comes after us and chases us down. And

being caught up with by Reality may feel like hell. But this so-called "wrath of God" is a consequence of our flight from Reality. Reality is simply active in restoring us to Reality. We can understand such "being caught" moments as the love of Reality for us. When we surrender to Reality (and to Reality's doings) and thus begin walking in a realistic direction, Reality welcomes us home with open arms and prepares for us a feast in the joys of realism. We are accepted in spite of our unacceptability. We are sinners who are, nevertheless, welcomed home.

A quote from Julian: *"God is closer to us than our own soul, for he is the foundation on which our soul stands . . . For our soul sits in God in true rest, and our soul stands in God in sure strength, and our soul is naturally rooted in God in endless love. And therefore if we want to have knowledge of our soul, and communion and discourse with it, we must seek in our Lord God in whom it is enclosed."* page 209

#### 3. Focus on God (Reality as healer) not on our feelings of misery.

Sometimes it seems as if life is all darkness with no light at the end of the tunnel. It can seem that misery extends forever into a hopeless future. Julian's counsel is simple: don't focus on the misery, but on God (Reality, the trustworthy healer). Trust is always the right response.

A quote from Jantzen: *"This has nothing to do with repression. It is rather fixing our minds and training our emotions to focus on what is true and real, namely the love of God and our own worth in God's sight, rather than hold to fixed ideas or false notions of God's wrath and our worthlessness."* page 215

#### 4. Keep in mind that authentic life is not a somber affair, but a party.

We all have suffering of a physical and psychological sort. On average, real life is about half rest and pleasure, with the other half stress or pain. But we add more pain with our foolish attempts to render life something that it is not. When we live the vision that Final Reality is doing all things well, when we surrender to the life we actually have with all its limitations and possibilities, life is a party. That is, life can be a strange joy in both its ups and downs. This party may happen on the occasion of a birth or a death—on a surprisingly rewarding day or on a surprisingly grim day. But in the deep place where despair and trust struggle with each other, life is a party. And this party never ends; it just has variety.

A quote from Jantzen: *"For all of Julian's realism about human sin and suffering, she lends no support at*



*all to the idea that it is somehow more spiritual to be in pain and distress, physical or mental, than to live in joy and enthusiasm. Of course, it is better to own up to inner pain than to pretend it is not there and live in a superficial or dishonest cheerfulness, but as the wounds are opened to the healing of God, we are gradually enabled to let go of the pain and depression which they caused, and enter into a life of gladness and delight . . .* page 216

Julian and Jantzen encourage us to trust that realistic living, in spite of all its ups and downs, is the best case scenario for our lives. The restoration to realism is indeed very good news, a rescue from despair over the ups and downs of life. No matter how we are tempted by the misery of some of our downs, the healing of our despair is the real issue. This is the party that can take place at any moment of living. This is the tranquility that can exist among the huge waves we encounter on the realistic sea of living. *We can join the party.*

### Human Nature and the Cry for Justice

personal roots for social ethics  
by Gene Marshall



Those who say that human nature is primarily characterized by greed and competition are mistaken. Among mammalian species humans are among the most empathetic and cooperative. Bears are among the most solitary and competitive of mammals. They hunt alone. Adult male bears are viciously competitive for mating rights. Among bears we see intense cooperativeness only among the solitary female bear and her cubs. In contrast to bears, wolves use cooperativeness to become successful hunters. Like wolves, the hunter-gatherer tribes of pre-civilization humans won their food through cooperation. It is because of their intense human cooperativeness that the prey of humans included adult elephants and rhinos. These huge, tough, adult animals have no other predator.

Humans are cooperative not only to gain their biological basics, but also in their extreme empathy for one another, as well as their empathy for many other species. Even the prey of most hunter-gather societies were empathetically studied, ritualized as relatives, and respected as companions in the grand overview of life. Our profound consciousness of consciousness came into being within already empathetic, cooperative human societies. Human babies raised by wolves or some

other species, who are then returned to human society, have an enormous amount of catching up to do.

Biological life as a whole is cooperative. The vast drama of evolution does include competition as a factor of its dynamism; nevertheless, the drama of evolution is also cooperative. The cells of our bodies are marvelous examples of cooperation. Further, each of our cells is itself a "metropolis" of cooperating simpler cells of life. Every well-established ecosystem is a manifestation of cooperation as well as competition. We vastly oversimplify when we view biology and human history through a narrow vision that over-emphasizes the aspect of competitive struggle.

### The Deadly Sin of Greed

Greed has been well discussed by humans as a perversion of our nature, as part of a tragic *fall* from our profound human essence. The metaphor of a "greed gene" is profoundly misleading: our nature is not greed. As a form of estrangement from our true nature, "greed" means the quest for more and more and still more that we erroneously hope will alleviate the pain of finitude with a state of complete security, privilege, and abundance. So defined, "greed" is clearly an illusory quest. The pursuit of happiness is a deeper matter than simply having more wealth.

It may be true that a cold and starving human can increase his or her happiness with a simple meal and a warm fire. But a billionaire does not increase his or her happiness with a second billion. The quest for extensive comparative status and power was scorned in a typical hunter-gatherer society. Only within the mode of social organization called "civilization" did gross indulgence in greed become allowable and quite commonly encouraged.

As an organizing principle the invention of hierarchy was a technology that made large-social organizations viable. A hierarchy of classes was the social innovation that enabled the ever-larger structures of civilization. These larger structures enabled the monumental achievements and deepening consciousness that has characterized the civilizational era. At the same time, the construction of economic classes fostered a *fall* into a depth of greed that remains to this day a form of horrific estrangement from our primal human empathy and cooperativeness. When we who live in so-called "democratic civilizations" allow a huge share of our social wealth to be held by a very small portion of our population, we are not living in accord with our nature. Furthermore, we are undermining our best vision of democracy. Our

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social organizations are simply failing when we allow or force a large portion of our population to be without certainty of their next meal, a warm place to sleep, security, healthcare, a chance for remunerative work, an education, or any other of the basic social participations in human cooperativeness. Indeed, the very existence of poverty is a sign of the obsolescence of civilization as a humane mode of social organization. Being comfortable with or unconscious of the flaws of our civilized mode of social arrangement is a manifestation of our estrangement from others, from our own best selves, from the evolution of our species, and from the Power that posits us in being.

### **The Cry to End Poverty**

Within the United States, poverty could be eliminated by employing Martin Luther King Junior's proposal of a universal stipend distributed through the income tax system. Here is King's proposal in brief outline: Put everyone on an assured minimum income using the already well-organized income tax system. Allocate a minimum income return check to every person whether they earned income or not. This would result in saving lots of money, King argued. It would make customers out of wards of the state, upon whom the state now spends much more money on relief programs, public housing, and prisons. This would end poverty in the United States with one congressional law and its presidential signature.

This proposal is passionately opposed by those who hold the view that economic life should be a competitive monopoly game with a few big winners and with many losers who are blamed for their lazy play. Apparently, the U.S. citizenry, cannot yet tolerate giving up our competitive-monopoly-game life story. "We all have to earn our way," so we say. We also assume, "We all have to do something in addition to being born to be worthy of minimum care." Very few of us think that way within our own families. But we have been brainwashed to think that way within the broad social economy. We need King's new mind on this topic. King received stronger rejection for challenging our mindset on poverty than he did for challenging our racism.

Human social life is much more complicated than our blaming-the-poor-and-idolizing-the-rich type of social thinking. Though the dynamic of competition is real and unavoidable, human social life is far more than a competitive game. Society essentially is, and could manifestly be, a cooperative and empathetic construction in which everyone is valued no matter how minor their social contribution. Getting born can be viewed as

contribution enough to deserve a basic level of support and affirmation.

Absolute economic equality is not viable or needed. Additional monetary power, as well as added responsibility, can be awarded to those making the larger and most needed social contributions. Such a reasonable pattern can exist alongside a full elimination of poverty (as well as any need for a billionaire status). It is typical for a loving family to follow the ethical principle of care by the relatively wealthy for the almost impoverished. Those who ideologically resist applying such sensibilities to society as a whole are guilty of an intense form of greed—a greed that is rationalized by phony excuse-making on the part of the rich, and too often believed by the poor as well.

The speculative means of making money from money itself could be severely limited by tax policies and basic structures. Huge banking establishments that make their profits with risky bets, and then ask government tax payers to stand good for their losses, could be broken up into organizations that serve the population rather than rob it. Even without further exploring the details of a poverty-free society, we can opt for its possibility; we can begin our repentance for the greed that is permitted by and embedded within the vast inequity that we so unconsciously tolerate and call "free-enterprise democracy." Let us begin our repentance by just calling it "greed."

Let us hear within ourselves the cry for justice—the cry to fight against the estrangement of greed within our species and within ourselves. Let us notice that this cry is not a cry of weakness. It is a strong cry, a type of scream in the belly. Even though creating justice is also a calm, careful, thoughtful work, the motive power for justice is a loud protest originating in the core of our being.

### **The Cry to End Hierarchical Order**

We can probe even deeper into the horrific estrangement allowed and even fostered by the civilization-mode of social organization. Our being also calls for ongoing repentance from our craze for hierarchical status—our stinking thinking that classist patterns are natural to the human species. Topdown modes of social ordering and decision making can be replaced by grassroots-out consensus building that makes everyone a participant in choosing what is right and wrong, what is just and unjust, what is ecologically advantageous and what is not. With proper arrangements we can structure planet-wide consensus building that includes all eight billion people. This arrangement would include the basic question of whether there should be fewer of us.

Let us notice that hierarchical rule is enhanced by unrestricted population growth—more people means cheaper labor, more pawns to do the jobs no aristocrat would stoop to do, more desperate citizens volunteering to fight wars to preserve the power and status of the wealthy.

We could begin now educating the billions to be informed, compassionate, effective, global citizens of the various neighborhoods, regions, and continents of this one planetary matrix of human presence. Such a direction can be taken in spite of the fact that this emerging vision of social justice will be violently opposed by those who are comfortable and defensive with regard to retaining their greedy estrangement from profound humanness. This tragic state of rich and poor alike is allowed and fostered by the civilization mode of social organization.

### The Cry for Just Power

In order to overcome 6000 years of aristocratic momentum, we will find it necessary to establish and respect effective, democratic governing *power*. Such power is absolutely necessary to restrain the greed and power-lust to which humans are currently habituated. Such effective governing power will also be needed to support a viable order of justice. The current foolishness of libertarian politicians and laissez-faire economists needs to be ridiculed, and ultimately eliminated from intelligent social discussion. These hypocrites cast disdain upon government, yet spend many millions of dollars to own the government and use it for purposes of independent greed.

The increasingly widespread disrespect or outright hatred of governing power must be replaced by a mode of governing that is joyous—joyous because it is genuinely government of, by, and for the people. Yes, let us take joy in defeating those who lust for governing power in order to do away with responsible governing power. These ideological screwballs are actually puppets supporting the dictatorial power of existing wealth. Current U.S. libertarians are, willingly or not, doing the bidding of the most greedy elements of our society—those who strive to reduce governing power over their greed.

It is a still further depravity to add to the misguided fight against governing power the overreach of governing power into the bedrooms and doctors' offices of the citizenry. We now have office holders (erroneously called "conservatives") who would be more appropriately called "sociopaths." Such degenerate qualities lodged in existing governments deserve our grim disgust, but we must not hate governing power itself. Our

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challenge is not to do away with government, but to make governing better in a thoroughgoing manner. Social power itself, when constructed by the consent of the governed, is a necessary "good" for bringing about any viable, sustainable, post-poverty, post-hierarchical social system of justice. It is not the restraining power of government that we should fear: it is allowing such power to be owned and controlled by the greedy few, the rampantly bigoted, or the sociologically deluded.



### Love, Power, and Justice

Love, power, and justice are companion factors in a viable Christian ethics. We must understand that in spite of our estrangement from our true, profound essence, we are compassionate beings, a compassion that can be accessed historically. In spite of our malice, malice is not who we essentially are. In spite of our greed, greed is not who we essentially are. In spite of our lazy indulgence in obsolete social patterns, lazy indulgence is not who we essentially are. We are essentially a cry for *social justice* among humans. This cry for justice also plays out between humans and our one, available, inhabitable planet for which humans are now substantially responsible. Yet we escape-minded humans are willing to spend billions of dollars getting a few humans off the planet on a trip to Mars, while being unwilling to spend sufficient billions in down-to-Earth programs of justice for all humans and for the Earth itself.

A true cry for justice is something more than an idolization of a humanly invented set of principles; it is a life passion within our own deep human essence to create a workable form of living within the existing environment—a life in tune with our inheritance from the past and our possibilities for the future. No construction of justice is absolutely correct for our time, and our temporal solutions will be even less applicable to future times. Justice is an ongoing construction of viable social ordering, sourced from our compassionate, empathetic, and cooperative essential humanity.

Obedying this cry for justice is essential for any viable humane presence on this planet. And responsible *social power* is an equally crucial factor of a complete Christian social ethics. Any relevant temporal vision of *justice* cries out to be empowered governmentally. We are social beings, communal creatures as well as differentiated individuals. We put in place the *social power* that governs

us—restrains our worst features and offers opportunities for our best inclinations. Without *social power*, there is no *justice*. Without *justice*, *social power* is tyrannical. Without *love*, there is no creation of *justice*. Without the creation of *justice* and its governmental empowerment, *love* is perverted into an aloof sentimentality.

The sort of *love* that goes with the honoring of *social power* and the creation of *social justice* was exemplified in the life and teachings of Jesus. Jesus was a social revolutionary of a deeply spiritual sort. In the tradition according to Luke, Jesus began his public life in this way:

When he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to do the reading and was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The spirit (*breath, wind*) of the Lord (*Final Reality*) is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor,  
He has sent me to announce pardon to the  
prisoners, and recover sight to the blind,  
to set free the oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's amnesty.  
(to announce the new era of *Final Reality's*  
action)"

After rolling up the scroll, he gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the attention of everyone in the synagogue was riveted on him. He began by saying to them, "*today this scripture has come true as you listened.*"<sup>5</sup>

This is certainly one of the passages that portrays Jesus as a social revolutionary. Let us note, however, that his good news to the poor was not that poverty was going to be done away with in their lifetimes. While he challenged everyone to relieve the needs of the poor, his message to the poor was deeper than a politician's promise that better days were on the way. To the poor his good news was that they were not riffraff who deserved the existing despised status that the rich and powerful claimed they deserved. Rather, Jesus was revealing this to the poor, "You are prisoners of a perverse social system and you need to be pardoned and set loose. Both you and your prison guards are blind humans who need to wake up. You are being needlessly oppressed. You can be set free right now. Release is happening to you right now as you listen to these words being

<sup>5</sup> Luke 4:16-21 (the Jesus Seminar translation in *The Five Gospels* plus my parenthetical additions)

spoken to you in the breath of Final Reality by one who is anointed by that essential Spirit wind."

\* \* \* \* \*

So let us experience, feel, and brood upon our own deep cry for justice. Let this cry from our own deep nature fertilize our solitary practice, our communal rituals, our daily schedules, our vocational aspirations, our interpersonal relations, our whole Earth affections, and everything else that fills our days, our dreams, and hopefully our memories as well.

## ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall

### FICTION

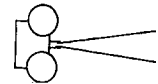


*Where We Are Now*

short stories by Carolyn Osborn

Each story in this collection can stand alone, yet read in succession they make a novel that is hard to put down. Each gives a different fragment of the history of a Tennessee family, skipping from one family member to another, from one time period to another in no particular order and the sequence seems right somehow. Osborn seems to be drawing from her own clan for these stories, or at least from people she knows well. They are down home, gritty, unsentimental and bring to awareness things we know about our lives as families, but don't always know that we know.

### MOVIES



**The Theory of Everything.** This is my pick of best picture of the year. Focusing on the the personal life of renowned British physicist and cosmologist Stephen Hawking and his wife, Jane, the film explores the difficulties and ambiguities of intimate relationships. A perfunctory internet search indicates that the film did not fully deal with, but gave strong hints of some of the more distressful aspects of this love relationship between a brilliant, extremely physically debilitated, and famous man and his able-bodied and also brilliant wife. Eddie Redmayne justifiably won an Academy Award for his depiction of Hawking's suffering. The great gift of the film is that it gives equal attention to the life of Jane (kudos to actress Felicity Jones) who genuinely loves Hawking, but when she courageously agrees to be his wife and caregiver they have no idea that he will live for decades. The film gives comforting insight that there are many ways to make a relationship work.



**Into the Woods.** I found this adaptation of the Stephen Sondheim musical to be an absolute delight. Weaving together several Grimm fairy tales with modern psychological twists, the film tricks you (well, it did me) into discovering ways you still hold to happy endings rather than more realistic possibilities. The acting/singing (it is mostly sung) is superb. It is funny and inspiring.

**Wild** also takes us into the woods, literally, with author Cheryl Strayed's story of hiking 1100 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail. I reviewed Strayed's excellent memoir of this title several issues ago. The film does it justice. Her mother's death threw Strayed into a tailspin involving heroin addiction and meaningless sex. With no serious hiking experience, she made a somewhat desperate decision to hike the trail and her stubborn determination kept her going in spite of a naive lack of appropriate preparation. This is one of the more profound and life-affirming films this year. My personal advice is to skip **Birdman**, **Foxcatcher**, and **Whiplash** and see **Wild** instead.

**Still Alice.** Julianne Moore plays a linguistics professor who encounters early-onset Alzheimer's with remarkable subtlety and no sentimentality. Yet this direct approach to Alice's story is totally heartbreaking. I felt the shock and humility of losing one's cognitive facilities, as well as the struggle of her husband and three offspring in adjusting to what comes as an unbelievable happening to their brilliant wife and mother. Most touching is the sequence when Alice, now almost infantilised, comes upon a video message she made to herself while in the early stages of Alzheimer's. A thoughtful and sobering film.

**Cake.** Jennifer Anniston plays a Los Angeles attorney angry from the chronic pain that has her still on leave from her job more than a year after a disabling car crash and uses her comic chops to sarcastically cut down everyone in sight. Kicked out of group therapy and addicted to pain-killing drugs, the only person who tolerates her is her Hispanic housekeeper. I was touched by her struggle to decide whether to take her own life and loved her unapologetic disgust with anything smelling like sentimentality.

**The Imitation Game.** Benedict Cumberbatch knocks it out of the park again in his portrayal of tragic hero Alan Turing, British codebreaking (and possibly Aspergers) genius now credited with shortening World War II by years who was afterwards arrested for "gross indecency" (code for being gay) and given the choice of prison or chemical castration. Kiera Knightly is also

unusually good as the only woman on the team of brilliant nerds on this top secret project. The film moves between three time periods. First, the war years when Turing struggles to convince his team of the validity of his "machine" (a precursor of the modern computer) and then struggles with his team to protect their work from higher ups impatient for results. Then there are flashbacks to his youth at private school where he did not fit in and was tormented, but did have one important relationship. And finally, the flashforwards to the police investigation after the war when his code work was still held secret. The film is totally engrossing.

**St Vincent.** I may just be a sucker for Bill Murray but I really fell for this movie. Jaeden Liberther was perfect as his 12-year-old sidekick, Melissa McCarthy showed her chops in a straight role as the mother of the boy, and Naomi Watts stretched herself to play a visibly pregnant Russian pole-dancer. The movie worked hard not to sentimentalize the sainthood of a totally messed-up guy who was simply himself. It sure brought tears to my eyes.

**Selma.** The best of the recent films on the African-American story focuses on the voting rights act and what it took to bring it about. It gives fair attention to other players in that drama, as well as Martin Luther King, Jr. Directed by an African-American woman, Ava Duvernay, the film is moving and also timely, what with Republicans trying to undo the voting rights brought about by the 1965 act.

**Caesar Must Die.** This 2012 documentary was made in the high security Rebibbia Prison in Italy. Its inmate theater program does a production of William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. The film intersperses scenes from the auditions and rehearsals (in black and white) with those of the production (in color) before a delighted audience. Many of the prisoner-actors are long termers or lifers for serious crimes. They relate intensely to the violence and conspiracy of the drama and their "acting" carries a powerful sense of reality. I haven't seen professionals do better with Shakespeare.

**Big Eyes** tells the story of Margaret Keane, the artist of the paintings of children with large eyes. I have never been a fan of her paintings, but her story is a cautionary tale for women. I didn't realize until seeing the film that her husband (not even a painter of any kind) took credit for her work (with her permission) for ten years. Her story is that of every woman to some degree, I suspect, certainly for

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those of us who were spawned prior to the 60s.

**In the Land of Blood and Honey.** Angelina Jolie's directorial/screenwriter debut shows her to be quite capable in both roles. This portrayal of the Bosnian conflict of the 1990s through the relationship of a Muslim woman and a Serbian officer gives a tough-minded balanced look at the tragedy. I found this movie to be superior to her second film, **Unbroken**, which also addresses the atrocities of war, specifically in a Japanese prison.

**Rosewater**, the directorial debut of Jon Stewart, is a surprisingly fine film. This fictional movie tells the story of the real Maziar Bahari, an Iranian-born journalist living in London who was arrested in Iran while covering the 2009 elections for Newsweek.

Part of the reason he was imprisoned was for appearing on Stewart's Daily Show in a comic piece about terrorism, so Stewart apparently felt some responsibility to tell his story. Fortunately, a huge international outcry helped secure his release after 118 days. But he had no idea that he was not totally forgotten and his interrogator/torturer (whom the blindfolded Bahari recognized by his smell of rosewater) worked to convince him of that fact. He noted that his mental soundtracks of Leonard Cohen's music helped him to survive. He arrived home in time for the birth of his first child.

**Boyhood.** This unusual film was made over the course of twelve years with the same actors playing a Texas family going through divorce and growing up and growing older. It features the boy who begins as a first-grader and is off to college at the end. The various struggles of his older sister, his separated parents, and a couple of stepfathers are also depicted.

**Boy.** This 2010 New Zealand film is one of the best of the "coming of age" genre. It badly needs subtitles, but the story comes across anyway. Boy, about ten, narrates the story as he goes to school and manages the care of his younger brother, Rocky, and his cousins while their grannie is away for a funeral. He and Rocky's mother died giving birth to Rocky. Boy has conflictual interactions with another boy over Boy's father, whom Boy depicts as a war hero and a reincarnation of Michael Jackson (Boy's idol). His father is actually in jail for robbery. The father shows up with a couple of cohorts and Boy's naive adoration gradually begins to cave as the charming, talented, but utterly self-serving man reveals himself. Boy's process of becoming his own person is beautifully enacted, with both humor and drama. And don't miss the Maori dance with elements of Michael

Jackson during the closing credits - a delight.

**Speaking in Strings.** This film introduced me to Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, a controversial and apparently troubled artist. I found her not only fascinating, but admirable, not only because of her unbelievable talent as a violinist, but for her determination to play with her own openly emotional and vigorous style which often conflicted with other's belief in traditional interpretations of various composers.

**They Came to Play.** This film chronicles the Fifth International Piano Competition for Outstanding Amateurs which is hosted by The Van Cliburn Foundation. Players from all over the world, ranging from self-taught to classically-trained, aged thirty-five to almost eighty, convened in Fort Worth, Texas in 2007 for a week of intense competition, music and camaraderie. The film follows the contestants as they prepare for and go through the competition. They include doctors, a dental assistant, a jeweler, a tennis coach, a physicist, all balancing their work and family with their love of music. It is difficult to believe that these folks are amateur musicians. I was stunned at the quality of their performances. A fine documentary.

**HMS: Pinafore.** This Opera Australia filmed performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's satirical operetta is simply phenomenal. I have not seen a better performance of anything. The singing is fantastic, both soloist and ensemble, the humor delightful, the staging inventive. It is presented with a short companion piece, a modernized "Trial by Jury" which is played like an encore. Be sure to get the Opera Australia version.



## RECOMMENDED READING

reviews by Joyce Marshall

### HEALTH

*Being Mortal*  
*Medicine and What Matters in the End*  
by Atul Gawande  
Metropolitan Books, 2014

Indian American Gawande, a practicing surgeon, doesn't see our society replacing the veneration of elders with the veneration of youth. He thinks what we now venerate is independence, which becomes more unrealistic as we age. He details how the body deteriorates with age, quoting Philip Roth: "Old age is not a battle. Old age is a massacre." He notes the issues that need to be addressed with many good suggestions.

Unfortunately, he notes that the field of geriatrics, which could contribute substantially to an aging population, has not been supported financially in the U.S.

With a history of nursing homes and of experiments with creative alternatives, Gawande puts our situation in context and helps us to make the decisions we must make when we, or those close to us, are near dying. Also helpful are his detailed stories of his own patients and family members, making clear the possibilities we may face and giving information that we will need. It is surprising to realize that as recently as 1945, most deaths occurred in the home. By the 80s only 17 percent of deaths were in the home, even though most of us would prefer it.

Gawande is a strong voice from the medical establishment supporting our freedom to be the authors of our lives. He says, "Sickness and old age make the struggle hard enough. The professionals and institutions we turn to should not make it worse." Using his own experience as a doctor and as son to his dying father (by the way, both of his parents were medical doctors), Gawande shows the importance of having honest conversations within the family and with the doctors in making the end of life decisions.

This is both an important book and a very readable book for everyone. We all have family members dying, and we all are dying, sooner or later.

## CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Early feminist, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, said that "the moral degradation of woman is due more to theological superstitions than to all other influences together." Heather Walton, University of Glasgow theologian, says that theology "faces a crisis generated by its deep antipathy to the ambiguous, emotive, embodied and aesthetic aspects of existence." She goes on to quote English philosopher, Don Cupitt, saying that "if we are to survive at all, human beings must embrace a feminisation of knowledge."<sup>6</sup>

I have been sorting out for myself recently just what it means to embrace "a feminisation of knowledge" as well as "the ambiguous, emotive, embodied and aesthetic aspects of existence." As a step in that direction, I begin below with a summary of a book by philosopher and theologian, Grace Jantzen.

*Foundations of Violence*  
by Grace M. Jantzen  
Routledge, 2004

Jantzen sees her task as an intellectual to offer an analysis of how thought patterns of the West have shaped and mis-shaped the world and how they might be changed to enable human flourishing.

Beginning with Homer and moving through centuries of Christianity, she describes the pursuit of death and the love of death (necrophilia) as characteristic of Western culture. The focus on other worlds and the degradation of this one has taken particular violent destructive shape in Western postmodernity. Our language betrays our deathly preoccupations. Words such as battle, weapons, arsenal, fight are used routinely as if the world is filled with enemies whom we seek to exterminate. Homer glorified death on the battlefield as beautiful. Jantzen shows how this theme has been carried on in literature and politics to the present day.

The adversarial approach developed by Parmenides is still taken for granted as the method of philosophical thinking in which positions and their opposites are taken; there is the assumption that no advances are made without conflict; positions are advanced, attacked, defended, and shot down. This approach reinforces entrenched patterns of thought.

Jantzen follows the masculine style through history. In summary: Socrates calls himself a midwife to the souls of men, superior to women and actual birth. Aristotle sees reason as ideal, masculine, godlike and the mind as immortal. The Roman Empire was based on the army, the willingness of ordinary men to kill and die; and Rome has formed the identity of Western culture. Cicero made it clear that military, masculine, and morality are one, and the opposite of manly is effeminacy, whereas the ideal woman is true to her husband and kills herself after being raped.

Jantzen sees the gladiatorial spectacles as crucial for understanding Roman ideology and its investment in death and violence. They were a staple of Rome's entertainment industry, involving mass butchery, lasting sometimes 100 days with 320,000 spectators, 9000 animals and 10,000 gladiators. They featured the major themes of the Roman power structure: social stratification, political theater, crime and punishment, repression of women, exaltation of bellicose masculinity, and a preoccupation with violence. She notes that eroticized violent and necrophilic values were encoded in subsequent Western culture, not least in our "entertainment."

She goes on to describe how Christian martyrs

<sup>6</sup> *Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Pamela Sue Anderson and Beverley Clack, (Routledge, 2004) page 123

had an enormous impact on Rome by undermining the whole structure of power and transforming the meaning of death for Western culture. They did not fear death and welcomed the opportunity to witness with their deaths. By despising power they rendered it powerless. Jantzen says the metaphors of seed and resurrection arise out of the martyr literature and subvert the imperial ideology of death.

Instead of this ideology of death and destruction, her alternative is natality and the flourishing of life. She would replace a desire to control and exertion of mastery with these features of natality:

1. embodiment in this body and welfare here on this earth (not salvation in another world or in the mind)
2. gendered existence
3. can't be born alone but in a web of relationships
4. hope for a fresh start, free creativity
5. beauty is central and linked to feminine
6. attention to beauty opens the way to redeem the present

## SPIRIT



*I Am That I Am*

by Francis Bennett

Non-Duality Press, 2013

Bennett followed in the footsteps of Thomas Merton by joining the Trappists and living at the Abbey of Gethsemani where Merton had earlier lived. He also explored Merton's long-standing interest in the Eastern spiritual traditions. Bennett, in this book, begins with his story and his own experience of awakening. He goes on to connect that experience with his understanding of Christianity, Buddhism, Advaita Vedanta and non-duality. He includes some practices, at the core of which is: don't fight with reality (God). Learn to trust the unfolding of life as it happens and let go of all inner resistance to *what is* in this moment.

*Beyond Mindfulness*

*The Direct Approach to Lasting Peace, Happiness, and Love*

by Stephan Bodian

Waterfront Digital Books, 2014

Bodian abandoned grad school to spend 12 years as a Buddhist monk practicing mindfulness meditation. He then disrobed to study Western psychology and then became a student of a non-dualist teacher. Though this book gives credit to mindfulness practice, it reflects his journey beyond mindfulness in that you are already awareness and

it is simply a matter of homecoming, or maybe just looking in another direction. In Bodian's words, "When you recognize and abide in awakened awareness, you see everything and everyone with fresh and open eyes and, as God did in Genesis, find it good, and complete, and inherently lovable." In response to our tendency in the West to be a hero, overcoming all obstacles and winning the prize, Bodian says, "The more open you are to listening to what life has to offer, rather than to your ideas about how things should be, the more meaningful life becomes, and the better able you are to respond appropriately to the moment and to be of genuine benefit. Resting in awakened awareness involves an intimate, global listening to the whole situation just as it is, then allowing your purpose to arise spontaneously in alignment with the situation at hand." I find his book to be both practical and inspiring.

*Eternity Now*

by Francis Lucille

Non-Duality Press, 2009

Frenchman Lucille renounced a career as a scientist designing and developing weapons for the French military after becoming interested in Advaita Vedanta and Zen Buddhism. He admits to suspiciousness of any "non-logically or non-scientifically validated hypothesis," but an experience of the "death" of his old sense of himself led to his becoming a teacher. He now lives in California and leads retreats in the U.S. and Europe. Lucille notes the difference in common intelligence and what he terms higher intelligence. By common intelligence, he means the cerebral ability to obtain a postgraduate degree, to deal logically with complex and abstract questions that involve a large amount of data. It is a deductive process in time. He describes higher intelligence as our true nature, enabling us to understand simplicity, unity. It is an instantaneous intuition that is timeless. He says, "A very simple being can know the truth, whereas a highly educated one can fail to know it." The book is written in question and answer form, evidently recorded from his retreats or group meetings.

*Presence. Vol. I*

*The Art of Peace and Happiness*

by Rupert Spira

Non-Duality Press, 2011

Britisher Spira calls Francis Lucille (see review above) his teacher. I assume he is referring to Lucille when he says in this book, "The first words I ever heard my teacher say were, 'Meditation is a universal Yes to everything.' Everything that came after that was simply a commentary on these



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words." In this book, Spira addresses the human search for happiness. He notes that we seek happiness in things, activities, relationships, or in states of mind. But his book is about the turn around of the prodigal son, to investigate who it is that is searching.

In addition to being a teacher, Spira is a ceramic artist, and I find his comments on art and beauty quite illuminating. Here are a couple of quotes: "Beauty tends to be the word that is used when perception is relieved of superimposed beliefs and love tends to be the word that is used when feelings are relieved of superimposed beliefs. Likewise, understanding is the word that is used when thinking is relieved of superimposed beliefs or doubts." "The purpose of art is to restore in an experiential way our original and natural condition in which we know and feel ourselves to be intimately one with all things."

I find Spira's YouTube talks and meditations to be grounding, inspiring, and helpful.

*I Am That*

*Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*

Acorn Press, 1973

Many well-known teachers today consider Nisargadatta (1897-1981) to be at least one of their teachers, and this book is considered to be a spiritual classic. It is a recording of 101 interactions that took place between him and those who came to his humble abode in Bombay (now Mumbai). Everyone was welcomed. I find myself amazed at his patience in dealing with the often-verbose and argumentative people who came to him. I certainly was not as patient in reading their remarks, but the book is worth it for the nuggets that are hidden within. An uneducated man, he seems to intuitively come up with whatever the particular person he is addressing needs at that moment. Here are some examples:

"Once you know with absolute certainty that nothing can trouble you but your own imagination, you come to disregard your desires and fears, concepts and ideas, and live by truth alone."

"From moment to moment, the little I need to know to live my life I somehow happen to know."

"Pain is physical; suffering is mental. . . Pain is essential for the survival of the body, but suffering is due entirely to clinging or resisting; it is the sign of our unwillingness to move on, to flow with life."

To the question: Without desire and fear, what motive is there for action?, Nisargadatta answers, "None, unless you consider love of life, of righteousness, of beauty, motive enough."

*The Ease of Being*

The Acorn Press, 1984

*I Am*

Non-Duality Press, 1989

both by Jean Klein

In the Non-Dual lineage (though there isn't a formal one, so far as I know) Klein was the teacher of Francis Lucille, reviewed above. A musicologist and doctor, Klein was born in Berlin. In his early twenties he was a part of the French Resistance in World War II. After the war, he studied in India for three years, then returned to the West to become a spiritual teacher himself. He died in 1998 in Santa Barbara, CA. One of Klein's major points is the importance of listening. Not ordinary listening. One of Klein's comments in *I Am* is that real listening "reveals itself when the mind is struck by wonder." In *The Ease of Being*, he says, "When you listen without evaluating or concluding, you can't memorize it. It comes back to you, but not through the ordinary process of memory. If you try to retain it, what are you keeping? Only the words, the formulation, and then you listen through a veil of the already known, through comparison with the past. You must become innocent in your listening." He also says, "When you listen without being aggressive or resisting, our whole body becomes this listening, it is not confined to the ears." This discrimination between conceptual memory (localized in the brain) and organic memory (maintained in the cells of the body) sees real understanding as that in which the body participates. Which brings me to the next two books.

*Reclaiming Vitality and Presence*

*Sensory Awareness As A Practice For Life*

*The Teachings of Charlotte Selver and Charles V.W. Brooks*

Edited by Richard Lowe & Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt

North Atlantic Books, 2007

and

*Waking Up*

*The Work of Charlotte Selver*

*Talks, Reports, Experiments & Exchanges with Her Students*

Collected and Edited by William C. Littlewood with Mary Alice Roche

AuthorHouse, 2004

Meeting Charlotte Selver through these books has been a major happening for me this past six months. Just reading *Reclaiming Vitality*, even without doing any of the suggested experiments, was life-changing. Like Klein, Selver was also born in Germany where she was fortunate to study with Elsa Gindler before fleeing Hitler for the U.S. in 1938. When Selver went on to teach, she named her work, "Sensory Awareness." She was a teacher to

## RECOMMENDED READING

many who later became luminaries: Erich Fromm, Fritz Perls, and Alan Watts, for examples. She died in 2003 at 102 and was still traveling the world leading workshops through her hundredth year. Selver emphasized learning from inside, distinguishing our actual experience from our thoughts and fantasies, and becoming your own authority.

*Waking Up* includes transcripts of Selver's directions for experiments so you can try them out yourself, although she notes that it isn't methods or techniques she teaches. In fact, she always creates spontaneously, responding to the moment and to the people she is working with. She notes that doing the work of Sensory Awareness "makes you so aware of the superficiality of your usual contact that you cannot stand it any more, and your inner demands a different quality of contact. It makes you hungry for real contact."



*Dancing in the Dharma*  
*The Life and Teachings*  
*of Ruth Denison*  
by Sandy Boucher  
Beacon Press, 2005

As I read this biography of Ruth Denison, who died just this past February at age 91, I am amazed at how many gifts we have received from those Germans who lived through the Nazi regime. Ruth Denison is yet another and by a different journey she met Charlotte Selver. Boucher tells not only Denison's story but that of Germany from the time of her birth in 1922. She was an "ordinary German" raised with Nazi propaganda against the Jews. Her story is one of becoming gradually aware of the truth of its atrocities and as the war ended, she was one of many refugees in the chaotic aftermath, wandering for a year and a half from disaster to disaster, frequently raped (by Russian soldiers) and imprisoned for a time in a Russian labor camp. She did not relate to what happened to her as unjust. She saw herself as part of the wrong the German nation had done, and even though the Russians didn't do much better, she considered their behavior not her concern. Her story reveals another side of the bigger story. In fact, two million German women were raped, most by the Red Army soldiers. Eventually she made her way to the U.S. where she married a wealthy man in Los Angeles who had been a monk and they became part of the counterculture movement. Charlotte Selver was her first teacher. In fact, for many years Selver led an annual workshop in Ruth & Henry Denison's living room. Eventually, Ruth

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took Charlotte's sensory awareness exercises further, into Buddhist spirituality.

In the early sixties, Ruth and Henry traveled to Japan and Burma, studying with meditation masters where Ruth discovered she was already well-prepared by Charlotte Selver. Her principal teacher was Burmese U Ba Khin, the teacher of S.N. Goenka, who later was one of the first teachers of many of those who brought Buddhism to the U.S. Ruth had to deal with her husband's resistance to her leadership as U Ba Khin passed his teaching mantle on to her. She helped set up the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, (one of the first meditation centers in the U.S.) adding movement and dance to the schedule. This brought on controversy, as U Ba Khin's other student, Goenka, didn't even include walking meditation in his continuation of Khin's 10-day format. Eventually, she set up her own retreat center in the Mojave Desert in California. Her legacy has brought the feminine touch to Buddhist practice. This is a fascinating biography. Well worth reading.

*Listening to the Heart*  
*A Contemplative Journey to Engaged Buddhism*  
by Kittisaro and Thanissara  
North Atlantic Books, 2014

Our weekly circle just completed a quarter studying this book. It inspired much personal sharing, as Kittisaro and Thanissara share their own personal story and struggles as they impart the wisdom they learned from their experience as monks with Ajahn Chah in Thailand before moving on to married life and working with AIDS programs in South Africa. An American who studied in Oxford, Kittisaro struggled, among other things, with his propensity to achieve and be the best. Thanissara, a working class Britisher, struggled, among other things, with the patriarchal nature of the Buddhist traditions.

In the preface, they summarize a clear understanding of the non-dualist perspective. Here is my shortened version: We are awakening into an awareness that knows no ultimate separations. Consciousness, when it is aware of its own nature, knows itself as everything. Yet we all experience a separate sense of self. The journey of the personal self is one of great struggle. At first, contemplative practice highlights the sense of self caught in its own fears, projections, and desires. We encounter wounds that need to be healed. Finally we see our true nature as both empty and yet interconnected with everything else; but we cannot rush to this insight and prematurely bypass our personal difficulties and negative emotions. The Dharma guides us through these territories. Aligned with the Dharma, we listen. (Here they include a long

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list of listenings.) And hearing it all, we thereby find our way home.

I also appreciate how this couple clarifies over and again the important Second Noble Truth of the Buddha - that pain is a given in life, but suffering is generated from the mind's inability to accept reality. As they say, "To feel pain is one thing. To suffer needlessly in reaction to the reality of that pain is quite another. . . . Suffering is a choice we make."

## SOCIAL ISSUES

### review by Jeanette Stanfield

*The Comeback*

*How Aboriginals Are Reclaiming Power And Influence*

by John Ralston Saul

Viking, 2014

The Comeback refers to the journey of the Aboriginal people in Canada over the last 100 years seen particularly from this moment of Idle No More protest movement and the issue of treaty rights. Saul makes several strong statements relative to the relationship of non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people in Canada.

First: Aboriginal people do not need or want sympathy or even emotional guilt or empathy. They want their Rights of treaty, culture, language and respect.

Second: Canada has a great gift of being a multicultural country. This gift has been created on the foundations of Aboriginal values in dialogue with French and British. Aboriginal complex ideas of belonging and identity allow for the diversity of understandings living here today. They work because they are not based on population, financial numbers, race or power.

Third: There is a misunderstanding around authority and power. The Supreme Court is ruling for Aboriginal land claim and treaty rights. The government is appealing. Canadian taxpayers are paying for our government to fight against these rights in court.

Saul shares the ways the Aboriginal peoples across Canada are coming back to a position of power, influence and civilizational creativity. Non-Aboriginal people are asked to respect and support this "Comeback" and to encourage shifts needed in our institutions where structures and values are hindering it. He sees this issue is the pivotal one for Canada, saying that our choices about the Comeback will strongly define the nature of Canada for the future.

This book helped me to clarify the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. I am in wonder about the constant message Aboriginal leaders

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have sent to non-aboriginal peoples over the last 300 years about their treaties and rights. I am in deep pain over the consistent manipulative responses we and our governments have given to these messages. I am glad that young people are daring to confront this situation in thoughtful ways through the Idle No More movement.

I am grateful for the role Aboriginal values have played in forging a multicultural society in Canada. I am aware that Aboriginal people have more legal rights over care of land, water, animals and plants than the rest of us do and much more wisdom about sustainable care of the earth. Their wisdom and the wisdom of Aboriginal peoples around the world are vital for the creating of sustainable societies into the future. This wisdom is nestled in Aboriginal languages and cultures. Respect and encouragement of Aboriginal people to speak their own languages and rediscover their own cultures is a crucial aspect of their own healing and the healing of our planet. I sense that this book is a classic for Canada at this time and needs to be read by every Canadian.

### review by Gene Marshall

*This Changes Everything*

*Capitalism vs. The Climate*

by Naomi Klein

Simon and Schuster: 2014



Klein has written the classic book on this topic. She makes clear to us how the truth of global warming is even more "inconvenient" than we have learned from Al Gore. Senator Inhofe of Oklahoma will cling to his climate-crisis denial even if his own house is blown away by the increased frequency and violence of the winds in tornado ally. And the Koch brothers will continue building business plans for oil expansion into the 22nd century even though ending the burning of fossil fuels by the end of this century is now becoming an international goal.

Klein's book is far more than another wake up call to the grim details and crushing demands surrounding this issue; her book is an optimistic overview of what we can do. She tells us why climate crisis is the top item in the progressive agenda, why it pulls with it every other progressive issue, why moderate action is inadequate, and why the reactionary ideologues are right to deny the very existence of a human-originated climate crisis, *for this changes everything*.

Klein shows us that climate change is not something alongside the the key issues such as correcting the big-money rule of our democracies or creating an economy that works for everyone. Such issues form one tapastry of absolutely necessary

change. There is no conflict between them. Indeed, what it takes to moderate climate catastrophe shows us what it also takes to accomplish any of these other big challenges.

And the seemingly impossible is already beginning to be done in many surprising places which Klien describes with keen and moving detail.

The core of Klien's address to our lives takes place on the moral level. The following quotation says what I mean:

"Similarly, there are plenty of solid economic arguments for moving beyond fossil fuels. . . . But we will not win the battle for a stable climate by trying to beat the bean counters at their own game—arguing, for instance, that it is more cost-effective to invest in emission reduction now than disaster response later. We will win by asserting that such calculations are morally monstrous, since they imply that there is an acceptable price for allowing entire countries to disappear, for leaving untold millions to die on parched land, for depriving today's children of the right to live in a world teeming with the wonders and beauties of creation." (page 464)

Klien makes it clear that the opposition and minimization of the need for fossil-fuel ending are "alongside history's most damned crimes." Human beings have gathered the moral energy to end the deeply established institution of slavery and continue cleaning up its hangovers. Humans have also ended the scourge of fascism, and other historic crimes. Some changes, like the rescue of women from second-class status, are being done without warfare. The end of fossil fuels can, likewise, be done; and it can only be done as our moral outrage is fully engaged in actions like disinvestment in the violators, blocking extreme extractionism, and voting locally and nationally against everything from pollution of our own places to bad global trade deals that affect everyone. This moral cause will take a bit more time, but the victory has already begun.

### **The Enigma of Consciousness**

*A Philosophy of Profound Humanness and Religion*

by Gene W. Marshall

iUniverse 2015

This is an author's review of his own book soon available from Amazon.com, and now available from iUniverse in both hard copy and e-book. This is my eighth book-length project, and the most innovative of the eight. It is not about Christian theology directly or any one religion; it is an inquiry into the foundations of consciousness with special attention to wonder or awe and how to

understand and share wonder experiences. It also provides a redefinition of religion and why religion is a necessary social process in every society.

The nature of good religion is indicated by this story of a student who asked his meditation teacher if meditation causes enlightenment. "No," said the teacher, "enlightenment is an accident, but meditation makes one more accident prone." If "religion" is defined as any practice that opens us to the enlightenment of wonder, then good religion is any practice that makes us more accident prone to the gift of wonder-filled living. Because wonder is foundational in human existence, every long-standing human society has come up with some form of wonder-filled religion. This also explains why religion appears as one of the down-to-Earth social processes in human society along with education, economic systems, and sewage disposal.

This 276-page book spells out these important perspectives with full illustrations and careful definitions of the human approaches to truth, consciousness, wonder, and religion. If you want to probe to the heart of these topics, you will find this book helpful. Send a \$25 check to: Gene Marshall; 3578 N. State Highway 78; Bonham, Texas 75418 for a postage-free copy.

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With clarity and abundant insights, Gene Marshall proposes ways by which we can move beyond old forms to those that would enable us to manifest qualities of "profound humanness." He has given us a roadmap constructed of vital possibilities, which are urgently needed in this time of multiple crises when the status quo simply will not do.

—Charlene Spretnak: author of *Relational Reality, The Resurgence of the Real, and States of Grace*; Ojai, CA

The truth of reality is a mystery—in Gene Marshall's language, "an almighty unknown"—but reality is ever-present to our consciousness. To know what is known, or to make reality real, these are the profundities that Marshall systematically and thoughtfully probes in an analysis that rings as earnest and true as the author who penned it.

—Dr. Jeffrey W. Robbins: Professor and Chair of Religion and Philosophy; Lebanon Valley College; Annville, PA

Gene Marshall coaxes the reader beyond the limiting enclosure of the personality-centered self and ego mind and into the realm of authentic personal interior experience. The author lifts the fog created by the pesky self-serving human mind regarding the interior life, and provides a path of clarity into depth states of being.

—Michael D. May: Teacher, Group Discussion Leader, Curriculum Editor for *Interior Mythos Journeys*; Bloomington, IN



# Realistic Living is a Way of Life

The organization, Realistic Living, fosters a movement in:  
Christian resurgence, religious rediscovery, & planetary well-being.

Dear Friends of Realistic Living,

We have made significant progress this past year in rethinking the role of this organization for its fourth decade of service. We see that the primary need is leadership training and providing that leadership with easy-to-use materials for fostering a fresh and vital Christian presence in local places across the continent. We see this Christian presence participating in an interreligious dialogue that leads to a common social awakening of our profound humanness and to an appropriate transformation of the social life of our intensely troubled planet.

Some of the numerous pieces of this vast purpose are pointed to in the essays and reviews that fill this journal. Extensive *reading* in these veins is a large part of the need that so many of us feel. Yet *action* is also part of the calling of this movement. We envision an active partnership among awakening Christians, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and other communities of religious practice. Each of these rich religious heritages and the cultural geographies from which they have emerged bring unique contributions to a viable humanity for planet Earth.

It may seem that this purpose is too big for a small organization hidden away in the outskirts of a small town in rural Texas. And this is true; nevertheless, we do promote this large purpose for every small place on the planet. In the religious aspect of social transformation, small places are where everything begins. One, two, five, twelve living persons flow together into ever-larger rivers of change.

In order to continue this work, we need your financial support. And we want to expand our constituency of persons who will join this work—not only financially, but with time and energy as well. You can begin by simply sending us names and addresses of people who will read this journal. We also seek those who will teach courses, organize groups, as well as attend nurture events and planning meetings. We desire a grassroots, democratic style of camaraderie. We promote a creativity that includes respect for the last 200 years of radical Christian renewal. If there is to be a legacy for Realistic Living, it will be a movement of people who are prepared and willing to carry on the ever-evolving form of this calling.

Sincerely,

Gene, Joyce, and Alan,  
Faculty of Realistic Living



# Realistic Living

*is contemporary language for "Holy Spirit."*

Check out our newly revised web site: [RealisticLiving.org](http://RealisticLiving.org).

Also, check out our  
Facebook page:



[facebook.com/realisticliving](https://facebook.com/realisticliving).

To continue on this mailing list, we request a yearly contribution of \$20 or more (a tax-deductible donation within the United States).

OR

Make an arrangement with your bank to become a **Supporting Member** with \$10 or more per month. More than ever Realistic Living needs a steady income to expand our work, our faculty, and continue long-term.

The *Utne Reader* outlined these **principles for the art of philanthropy**:

- Support really good people who have a total commitment to doing good in the world and who are willing to put their asses on the line to do it.
- Seek out originality and imagination.
- Support unpopular truths.
- Fund players with a long view.
- Support people no one else is supporting.
- Support people whose work is their passion in life, not a day job.
- Fund those attacking root causes and trying to change the system.
- Trust what inspires you.

In terms of such principles, we are willing for you to evaluate our work for its appropriate place in your benevolent budget.

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## Realistic Living

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