

THEOSOPHY- SCIENCE GROUP

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EDITORIAL NOTES

This Newsletter is prepared by the Theosophy-Science Group in Australia for interested members of the Theosophical Society in Australia. The email version is also made available on request to members of the Theosophical Society in New Zealand and USA by the respective National bodies. Members in USA should contact tsa@theosophical.org

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As editor of this Newsletter and Convener of the Australian Theosophy-Science Group I hope to continue providing readers with news of our activities, past and future, as well as articles of general scientific and theosophical interest. I would welcome contributions from our readers.

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SCIENCE and SPIRITUALITY



This seminar followed the 14th Triennial Conference of the Indo-Pacific Federation held in Auckland 14-19 October. It was organized by John Vorstermans, President, Indo-Pacific Federation, and was held from 6pm on 19 October and finished on 21 October at the Auckland Theosophical Centre, Epsom, Auckland. Details follow:

A seminar sponsored by the
NEW ZEALAND THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY
19-21 October 2016

PROGRAMME

Wednesday 19 October

3.00pm Registration

7.30pm Welcome and opening of Seminar

Opening Address by Assoc Prof. Victor Gostin, PhD (ANU)

The Reality of the Mental World: a modern take on the Noosphere.

Thursday 20 October

9.00am *A Quest for a Bridge* – Jacques Mahnich

11.00am *Has science Discovered the Etheric Body?* – Prof. Richard Silberstein, BSc Hons (Physics), PhD (Neurophysiology)

2.00pm *H.P. Blavatsky, Phenomena and Science* – Dr Brian Harding MA (Oxon), PhD (ANU), Grad Dip Rel Stud.

4.00pm *The Field* – Terry Murphy

7.30pm *When Heightened Tools of Consciousness are Turned Upon the Atom* – Murray Stentiford, MSc (Physics)

Friday 21 October

9.00am *Science Spirituality: Two Faces of One Life* – Mahendra P. Singhal

11.00am *Is humanity now the dominant force for change on our planet? And what should we do about this?* – Victor Gostin

2.00pm *The Aether Underpins Science and Spirituality* – Ray Tomes

4.00pm *Science of the Paranormal: an Overview* – Brian Harding

7.30pm *Theoscience.org; A Project* – Jacques Mahnich.

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Pavlov's plants: new study shows plants can learn from experience.

As reported by Prudence Gibson in *The Conversation*, Dec 7, 2016.

Australian evolutionary ecologist Monica Gagliano and her colleagues have just published a paper in *Nature Scientific Reports* that could rock our sense of human "self". The new paper explains her recent experiments where she sought to show plants can "learn" via classical conditioning, similar to the classic Pavlov's dogs experiment.

According to Gagliano: "*Plants may lack brains and neural tissues but they do possess a sophisticated calcium-based signaling network in their cells similar to animals' memory processes.*"

A forthcoming book titled *The Language of Plants* is edited by Gagliano and colleagues, and deals with this complex and provocative problem, following on from her book *The Green Thread*.

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THEOSOPHY AS SCIENCE

Unlocking the Corridors of Nature

Luke Michael Ironside
Nov 2016

In the first chapter of *The Ocean of Theosophy*, William Q. Judge, writes that "*Theosophy is a scientific religion and a religious science*"; and indeed, Theosophy and science can be seen to share a complex, yet complementary, relationship. Both are concerned with the discovery and nature of Truth, though each treads a separate path in the quest for the attainment of this common goal. In Theosophical and scientific investigation alike, Truth remains ever the pinnacle of enquiry; the final end to be sought. That which does not lead one closer to this objective must be discarded along the way, as may be seen in the countless obsolete theories of science, and which is expressed in the motto of the Theosophical Society, which asserts that "*There is no religion higher than Truth*". This is a sentiment which may be shared equally by the Theosophist and the scientist in their divergent methods of enquiry.

The scientist turns outward in his quest for Truth, seeking its discovery by the methods of objective scientific experimentation and by an exploration of the vast reaches of the Cosmos he inhabits. In his zeal to uncover the secrets of the Universe, he searches ever upward and beyond, his gaze fixed upon the hazy light of distant stars. He finds himself moved to a sense of wonder; an almost religious instinct which awakens in him an emotion of reverence and awe for the existence and beauty of the world in which he lives and has his being. He is, perhaps, incentivised to satisfy this urge to reverence by some involvement with religion or spirituality, but is so often discouraged by his peers in the scientific community, who steadfastly assert the incompatibility of the abstractions of religious thought with the well-established facts of scientific knowledge.

In seeking to understand the world, the scientist presents hypotheses, or logically suggested explanations for the causes of observable, yet currently unexplained, phenomena, which may in time develop into theories, depending upon the results of testing such hypotheses in an experimental setting. In order for a theory to replace a hypothesis, it must be sufficiently adequate to account for repeated observations in the experiments used to test it. A scientific theory is never proven; it is rather a working model based on significant evidence and as such serves as a well-substantiated, unifying explanation for a set of verified and accepted hypotheses. The lifespan of a theory is dependent upon the continuity of this confirming evidence. If new evidence comes to light which contradicts its assumptions, then the theory must be modified to accommodate it, or else be superseded by a new and better theory. In this respect, science is a tentative endeavour. Scientific knowledge is not absolutely certain and is forever susceptible to serious revision, as any glance at the history of knowledge will demonstrate.

Theosophy, on the other hand, is concerned with Truth at the level of inner discovery. The Theosophist's method is thus quite different from that of his scientific brethren, though some aspects are shared in common and may be recognised by both. In its essence, Theosophy seeks to unify and reconcile the divergent religious, scientific, and philosophical systems of the world and in so doing provide a scientific explanation for religious beliefs, as well as to rectify the problems of science with the

aid of esoteric principles and conceptions. This unified view of the Cosmos is indicated in the subtitle given by Blavatsky to *The Secret Doctrine*, which she designates *The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, thus emphasising the significance of all three systems of enquiry.

Theosophy steps boldly beyond the suppositions of scientific materialism, expanding its field of enquiry to embrace the furthest-reaching vistas of thought known to the mind of Man. It is for such a reason that Col. Olcott describes Theosophy as the "*science of sciences*". It does not shy away from the unresolved mysteries of Life – the riddles of creation voiced in the questions of the "Why and Wherefore" of our existence. Transcending the limitations of scientific thought, Theosophy has as one of its aims the investigation of the "*unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man*" hitherto unrecognised by modern science. It seeks those laws by which to explain the operation of the workings of the Universe and the principle of Unity inherent therein, without which the Cosmos could not exist. In line with this, Blavatsky presents three Fundamental Propositions in the opening section of *The Secret Doctrine*.

Firstly, Blavatsky posits "*The One Absolute Reality which antedates all manifested, conditioned being,*" which she says is: "*An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable PRINCIPLE on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception...*".

This Ultimate Principle, although transcending the Universe, is also immanent throughout it, being present under or over the Cosmic Activities and Laws. It is incapable of expression in words, as no finite quality or attribute can be applied to the Absolute to so describe it, nor can thought which is bound by the chains of Causation grasp that which is Causeless and Self-Existent. That such an Ultimate Principle exists, we can be certain; all else is merely speculation, as the Absolute in itself is Unknowable.

Though we cannot pry into the real nature of the Absolute, we may form certain conclusions by an observation and study of the Laws of the manifested Universe. A parallel may thus be drawn between the Theosophical and scientific methods of enquiry, by which we may draw our attention to the "how" phase of things and turn our investigation to the operation of the Cosmic Laws as expressed in the cyclic process of Involution and Evolution.

Regarding such, Blavatsky's Second Proposition asserts "*the absolute universality of that law of periodicity, of flux and reflux, ebb and flow, which physical science has observed and recorded in all departments of nature.*"

Here the Universe is considered as a "playground" of incessant and never-ceasing periodicity, by which all changes in the activities of the cosmic arena proceed forth in cyclic succession. All things rise and fall in accordance with this invariable Principle of Rhythm. In our world of constant conflict, the tides of war ebb and flow in a pendulum swing of triumph and defeat, as kings are made and unmade through a sempiternal cycle of emergence, progression, maturity, decadence, and death. On a cosmic scale worlds materialise, reach their heights of life and complexity, and are then destroyed. In like fashion suns arise, and upon the attainment of their acme of effulgence, the retrogressive retreat begins until, in the passing of countless aeons, the fading lights flicker out. And thus it is with all things – from the changing of the seasons to the rise and fall of nations. There is no cessation to this immutable sequence of events – like

the currents of the seas, it is ever in evidence.

Science likewise holds the orderliness of the Universe to be self-evident; it is fundamentally dependent on the rhythmic repetition of patterns in phenomena as without such its processes and methods would be rooted in a chaotic framework and would fail. All our conceptions of measurement, distance, time, and space are contingent on this, and may be understood only in the light of the Law of Periodicity and its concomitant Principle of Rhythm.

The Third Proposition involves the essential Oneness of existence, attesting to the "*fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul.*"

Here is postulated the essential interconnectedness and Unity of Life; that universal truth which has been experienced and expounded in the treatises and poetic musings of the mystics and philosophers of all ages of history, long anticipating the materialising thought of today. This basic teaching is now receiving confirmation in the light of modern science, which, whilst emphasising its rational and materialistic conception of the Universe, still finds itself compelled to the conclusion that: "*All is One, at the last.*" Science and religion, so long thought to be incorrigible foes, now seem to have found a common ground on which to stand, united in the quest for the discovery of Truth.

We are indeed on the verge of a grand synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy. Those aspects of each which can no longer withstand the changing face of progressivism will straggle and fall, and in so doing separate the wheat from the chaff. The materialising worldview of the modern era is a decidedly pragmatic one with an emphasis toward the acquisition of knowledge and the spirit of advancement. This is the great reconciliation; and the leading authorities of the myriad fields of human enquiry are beginning to comprehend the fact that they have been seeking the same thing all along. The realms of expertise over which they govern are but the superficially independent constituents of a larger and greater whole, which in Theosophy manifests as a practical system of enquiry into the Cosmos and man's role therein. Theosophy is thus an ever-expanding science, dynamic and alive, which continues to emphasise the necessity of ongoing research and investigation into the nature of our world.

Perhaps this common meeting ground of Theosophy and science could best be expressed in repeating the motto of the Theosophical Society, that "*There is no religion higher than Truth.*" In this, the Theosophist and scientist find themselves in absolute agreement. They walk hand in hand along the corridors of nature, united in purpose; together seeking to solve the Riddle of the Universe.

Introducing the author: Luke Michael Ironside is a writer and lecturer on subjects pertaining to Esoteric and Eastern Philosophy, Oriental Occultism, Comparative Religion, the Ageless Wisdom, and the history of the Theosophical Movement. Luke is a member of the Worthing Lodge of the Theosophical Society in England and has previously lectured at the Leeds Theosophical Society and at the School of the Wisdom in Adyar. He is currently studying Hindu Philosophy, History and Religion through the University of Oxford.

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Quote by John Glen, the first American to go into orbit, who passed away on Dec. 8, 2016, at the age of 95:

“To me, there is no greater calling, if I can inspire young people to dedicate themselves to the good of mankind, I’ve accomplished something.”

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Has Science Discovered the ‘etheric body’?

Richard Silberstein, talk to Science and Spirituality Seminar, Auckland, Oct. 2016

Theosophical literature posits the existence of a subtle yet physical ‘body’ termed the ‘etheric body’. A.E. Powell in his 1925 monograph, *The Etheric Double, The Health Aura of Man* describes the etheric body in the following terms:

“it acts as an intermediary or bridge between the dense physical body and the astral body, transmitting the consciousness of physical sense-contacts through the etheric brain to the astral body, and also transmitting consciousness from the astral and higher levels down into the physical brain and nervous system.”

And,

“that it plays an important part in determining the kind of physical vehicle which an incarnating ego will receive: that, like the physical body, it dies and decays in due course, releasing the “soul” for the next stage in its cyclic journey”

The ‘etheric body’ is thought not only to play a role in guiding the development and growth of the physical body but also in maintaining the health of the physical body.

In this talk, I review some recent research in the fields of developmental and regenerative biology to see if bioelectric fields could fulfill some of the functions attributed to the etheric body. In doing so, I will be drawing heavily on the exciting work of Professor Michael Levin of Tufts University

(<https://ase.tufts.edu/biology/faculty/levin/>).

We start with a brief outline of how cells create bioelectric fields across their cell membranes. This depends on different concentrations of sodium, potassium, chloride and other ions inside and outside the cells. These intracellular (inside the cell) and extracellular (outside the cell) ion concentration differences along with differences in the ease with which ions can pass through special pores or channels in the membrane gives rise to a voltage difference across the membrane also known as the ‘resting membrane potential’. The inside of the cell has a negative voltage with respect to the outside and this varies of minus 90 millivolts (mv) to minus 5 millivolts where 1 millivolt is a thousandth of a volt (and thus a resting membrane potential between -5mv to -90mv). The more negative the inside voltage is, the more ‘polarized’ the cell is said to be while a reduction of this internal negative voltage is termed ‘depolarization’.

Now while all cells have a negative resting membrane potential, some excitable cells such as nerve and muscle cells exhibit a rapid change in the voltage across the membrane and this is known as an ‘action potential’ and is sometimes described as a nerve of muscle ‘impulse’. However, most cells don’t experience action potentials

and biologists have tended to consider the constant voltage across cell membrane as an 'epiphenomenon' and not of any intrinsic biological significance.

An intimation that the resting membrane potential is more than an epiphenomenon comes from the observation that the ability of cells to subdivide and proliferate is tightly correlated with the resting membrane potential. Cells which normally do not divide in adulthood such as nerves and muscle have the most negative resting membrane potential (-90mv) while liver cells that can subdivide throughout life have a lower resting membrane potential (-35mv) while a fertilized egg cell has the lowest resting membrane potential (-5mv). Interestingly, when a normal cell becomes cancerous, its resting membrane potential drops.

Although correlation does not mean causation, Prof. Levin has published some fascinating work indicating that frog embryo cells that have been rendered cancerous by the introduction of a cancer promoting gene (oncogene) revert to normal non-cancerous behaviour when the transmembrane potential is normalized by drugs that act on the membrane channels. In other words, the transmembrane potential can override and control genetic expression. So perhaps correlation does mean causation here!

When cells having slight differences in transmembrane potential make contact through a specialized link known as a 'tight junction', this gives rise to electric fields that extends beyond the cells. Prof Levin and his group have shown that these bioelectric fields play a crucial role in guiding the development of an organism (insect, frog or human) from a fertilized egg through to maturity.

More importantly, Prof. Levin has argued that these bioelectric fields constitute a crucial 'top-down' mechanism controlling biological development that complements the better known 'bottom-up' genetic and epigenetic mechanisms. It is interesting to note that bioelectric fields may play some of the functions attributed to the 'etheric body'.

In considering the purported role of the etheric body in '*determining the kind of physical vehicle which an incarnating ego will receive*' I then went on to discuss the work of the late Prof Ian Stevenson. Prof Stevenson devoted many years to researching claims of past life memories (Stevenson, I. (1997). *Where reincarnation and biology intersect*. Greenwood Publishing Group). What I found especially interesting in Stevenson's work was the observation of birthmarks whose location appeared related to manner the person died in their previous claimed life. Most cases examined described dying young and violently in their preceding life. In all cases described, the identity of the previous incarnation was validated and in some cases, even medical post-mortem notes were available. These post-mortem notes appear to validate the link between the birthmark position and the position of the fatal past life injury.

If prof Steven's observations are valid and reincarnation is a reality, then the reincarnating entity must in some way be responsible for the development of the birthmarks. If this is the case, I suggested that this may have been achieved through some modification of the fetal and embryonic bioelectric fields by the incarnating

entity. This is also consistent with the suggested role of the etheric body, specifically “*determining the kind of physical vehicle which an incarnating ego will receive*”.

This opens another issue concerning claims of past life memories. Neuroscience research into long-term memory suggests that all memories that we can access are stored as neural synaptic networks located on the cortex and cerebellum. Thus, if past life memories can be accessed by the children, it means that they have in some way, been stored in the baby’s brain, either before or shortly after birth. This would involve the reincarnating entity influencing the synaptic connectivity of the baby’s brain. Once again, I would suggest that this may be mediated in some manner through bioelectric fields. After all, if the bioelectric fields can play a robust role in disturbing organ development to create birthmarks, why not a more subtle change in brain development to lay down past life memories?

Finally, I touched on Prof. Stevenson’s interesting observation that past life memories appear to fade after approximately 4 -5 years of age. This was the introduction to a brief discussion on the more general phenomenon of *infantile* or *neonatal amnesia*. Neonatal amnesia is a phenomenon where early childhood memories, say 2 ½ years of age can be recalled when the child is 3 ½ but they can no longer be recalled when the child is 4 ½ for example. Neonatal amnesia is not unique to humans and seems to occur in all mammals. It appears to be a consequence of rapid cell growth in the hippocampus, a region critical for memory and learning.

I ended the talk by going on to speculate that past life memories in very young children may be much more common than we think. Neonatal amnesia may thus play an important and beneficial role in limiting access to explicit past life memories so that ‘*we can properly engage in the challenges, lessons and opportunities this life has to offer?* ‘

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Margaret Cheney (2010) *Tesla – Man Out Of Time*

Touchstone / Simon & Schuster; Copyright 1981, revised 2010.

ISBN 978-0-7432-1536-7

Book review by Kevin Davey

Ask a group of people who invented radio and radio communication, they reply - if they can give an answer at all - that it was Marconi. In reality Guglielmo Marconi and his collaborators were better marketers and used patents already assigned to Nikola Tesla. Tesla had patents for radio transmission and reception granted in the 1890s after he had already demonstrated working radio controlled boats and submersibles. An ongoing patents battle was settled, in Tesla’s favour, in the 1950s.

The book *Tesla - Man Out Of Time*, written by Margaret Cheney, is a comprehensive review of Nikola Tesla, a remarkable man, electrical genius and prolific inventor. Among many other things Tesla invented and constructed working alternating current generators and motors, overturning the once dominant direct current industries. Tesla indeed changed the world.

Nikola Tesla was born in Croatia at midnight between July 9th and 10th 1856. At an early age he reported that his vision was peculiar. He said he saw electric discharges from his pet, even left in the cat's footprints in the snow. Young Tesla endured strong flashes of light in his eyes during moments of excitement. He also reported seeing specific objects and scenes, some of which he said he had "never imagined". Some extracts from the book make this more vivid

He described it years later as "a peculiar affliction due to the appearance of images, often accompanied by strong flashes of light, which marred the site of real objects and interfered with my thought and action. They were pictures of things and scenes which I had really seen, never of those I imagined. When a word was spoken to me the image the object it designated would present itself vividly to my vision and sometimes I was quite unable to distinguish whether what I saw was tangible or not." (p31).

They were not hallucinations. In the stillness of night, the vivid picture of a funeral he had seen or some other disturbing scene would thrust itself before his eyes, so that even if he jabbed his hand through it, it would remain fixed in space. (p31).

Tesla began to conjure up imaginary worlds. Every night he would start on make-believe journeys - see new places, cities, and countries, live there, meet people and make friends, and [he said] "however unbelievable, it is a fact that they were just as dear to me as those in actual life and not a bit less intense in their manifestations." Then, to his delight, he found that he could visualise with such facility that he needed no models, drawings, or experiments, but could picture them all as real in his mind.

He recommended this method is for more expeditious and efficient than a purely experimental. Anyone who carries out a construct, Tesla held, runs the risk of becoming bogged down in the details and defects of the apparatus, and, as the designer goes on improving, tends to lose sight of the underlying principle of the design.

*"My method is different," he wrote. "I do not rush into actual work. When I get an idea I start at once building it up in my imagination. I change the construction, make improvements and operate the device in my mind. It is absolutely immaterial to me whether I run my turbine in my thought or test it in my shop. **I even note if it is out of balance.**"*

Thus, he claimed he was able to perfect a conception without touching anything. Only when all the faults have been corrected in his brain did he put advice into concrete form."

"Invariably," he wrote, "my device works as I conceived that it should, and the experiments comes out exactly as planned it. In 20 years there has not been a single exception. Why should it be otherwise?" (p32).

Tesla had moved to New York in 1884, when 18. He worked for Edison for a time, but was really a lone operator. Tesla's work increased the wealth of others, such as George Westinghouse, while his own money was devoted to research, his inventions and in helping others in need.

As he grew older, Tesla elucidated other interesting ideas, some very relevant to Theosophists. Two examples follow.

He said that he had already conceived of the plan for transmitting energy in large amounts from one planet to another - absolutely regardless of distance. "I think that nothing can be more importance than interplanetary communication," he said. "It will certainly come some day with the certitude that there are other human beings in the universe, working, suffering, struggling, like ourselves, will produce a magic effect on mankind and will build the foundation of a universal brotherhood that will last as long as humanity itself." (p296).

Tesla said that he was deeply religious, although not in your orthodox meaning of the word, and gave himself "to the constant enjoyment of believing that the greatest mysteries of our being are still to be fathomed and that, all the evidence of the senses and teachings of exact and dry sciences to the contrary notwithstanding, death itself may not be the termination of the wonderful manifestations we witness." (p271).

Cheney's book, first published in 1981, is not well structured, but nonetheless is compelling. She describes Tesla intimately, from a child to a brilliant man driven to explore and develop electricity and electrical effects on a vast scale. Tesla dallied with weaponry as well as items beneficial to society and conjured up many dramatic effects that must have seemed stunningly magical at the time. He made a series of statements about discoveries he never followed through on. It is suggested by Cheney that some of Telsa's thoughts and undeveloped ideas may have been passed to Tito's Yugoslavia when the American government passed over Tesla's documents after Tesla's death – but perhaps not before the American secret services had looked through them. While Cheney was researching her book she was unable to visit Tesla's Yugoslav archives: the United State did not have good relations with Tito's Communist government at that time. Author Marc J. Siefer has reportedly had access to this material for newly released book, *Wizard: The Life and Times of Nikola Tesla: Biography of a Genius*. That should be an interesting read.

Nikola Tesla died virtually penniless in a New York hotel on 7th January 1943.
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Exciting new discovery of Ancient Australians

In a protected rock shelter high up in a gorge of the northern Flinders Ranges, a well-stratified accumulation of bones, emu shells, stone tools and fire hearths has now been publically revealed. The Warraty rock shelter reveals that Aboriginal Australians had settled the interior of the country around 49,000 years ago – some 10,000 years earlier than previously thought. Giles Hamm, an archaeologist and doctoral student at La Trobe University, found the site with local Adnyamathanha elder Clifford Coulthard while surveying gorges in the northern Flinders Ranges.

The Flinders Ranges are well known for their ancient rock engraving sites, and this shelter contains the first reliably dated evidence of human interaction with megafauna. The artefacts excavated at this site also push back the earliest-known dates on the development of key bone and stone axe technologies and the use of ochre in Australia. This news report in ABC Science was published by Dani Cooper, 3 Nov, 2016. Another short report can be seen in the Conversation 7 Nov, 2016.
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A theosophical approach to engage with Aboriginal Australians

Australia has always been seen by early Theosophical leaders as an important country in the development and future evolution of humans. With its lofty aims including "the universal brotherhood of humanity", it behoves members of the Theosophical Society to better understand and appreciate both the ancient origins and the ongoing relationships we have with Aboriginal Australians. Towards this aim, the following essay was volunteered by Olga Gostin.

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Commentary on Stan Grant: "The Australian Dream – Blood, History and Becoming" in *Quarterly Essay*, Issue 64, 2016 pp. 1-80. [Commentator's additions in quotations by Grant are in square brackets].

As the year draws to an end we are reminded of much unfinished business at the interface of White Australia with the First Australians. On TV we have recently joined Ray Martin and six celebrities as they traipsed through Indigenous communities and remote sites in various parts of Australia for 28 days. The group engaged with the First Australians on themes as contrasting as the pride and vibrancy of extant cultures and communities, and the challenges of chronic unemployment, abject poverty, domestic violence, substance abuse and the Stolen Generations (the forceful and duplicitous removal of children of mixed racial parentage to White-run institutions). Local Aborigines handled these topics with dogged dignity while the visitors engaged in their own internal journeys of discovery. SBS is to be congratulated for airing this sequel to an earlier series also entitled *First Contact* whose fascination in both instances lay as much in the unfolding awareness of the participants as the extraordinary tolerance and conciliation of the local interviewees who had to deal with the crass ignorance and sometime rudeness of some of the participants. Readers who may have missed this seminal series of three programs and the debates thereafter are urged to tune in to SBS 34 or NITV where an eye- and heart-opening engagement with Indigenous issues and creativity awaits them. Bear in mind that in common Indigenous parlance *country* denotes one's place of ancestral origin, imbued with many layers of meaning defined by kinship, The Dreaming and a multiplicity of non-material connections. It is to be distinguished from land, seen as real estate in the western sense.

Another Indigenous-related furor during the year related to the meaning and implementation of section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, introduced in 1995. Under this section it is unlawful to "offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate" anyone on the basis of their creed, colour, gender or racial origin. Readers may recall the three only cases to come to national attention in the past twenty years, out of thousands of complaints: journalist Andrew Bolt's challenge of the Aboriginality of a prominent academic on the grounds of her fair complexion (case lost by Bolt); the Queensland University of Technology recent incident where three White students challenged Indigenous-designated study rooms and computers on the grounds of discrimination (in which an Indigenous claimant asserted that she had suffered mental trauma as a

result of the challenge; case dismissed); the cartoon by Bill Leak in which he depicted an Aboriginal father as drunk and dysfunctional, not knowing his son's name (challenge withdrawn). All cases were investigated by the Australian Human Rights Commission and raised public debate as to whether the wording of 18C impeded freedom of expression (though section 18D details exemptions covering things said or done as part of art or "any other genuine purpose in the public interest"). As Katharine Gelber and Luke McNamara point out in *The Conversation* of November 15, 2016: "Removing the words ['insult' and 'offend'] would send a troubling symbolic message to the communities [women, Muslims, Aborigines, LGBTIQ and any other minority groups] that section 18C is supposed to protect: that the government feels they should bear the burden of more harm so that others can have free speech. Could there be a more wrong message to send at this time in our history?"

– Think about this, seriously.

Which reference to history brings me to the main topic of this commentary: Stan Grant's *The Australian Dream*. In this essay the high profile Indigenous journalist uses as his starting point a passionate speech he had given at the City Recital Hall in Sydney on 27 October 2015 when "Australia turned to face itself. It looked into its soul and it had to ask this question: who are we? What sort of country do we want to be?" (2016:1) This speech, lauded by some to be the Indigenous equivalent of Paul Keating's Redfern address in 1992, or Kevin Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008, was prompted by the systematic booing and baying that accompanied Indigenous player Adam Goodes' every appearance on the field following his impromptu warrior dance at an earlier AFL match. "Thousands of voices rose to hound an Indigenous man. A man who was told he wasn't Australian. A man who was told he wasn't Australian of the Year. And they hounded that man into submission. I can't speak for what lay in the hearts of the people who booed Adam Goodes. But I can tell you what we heard when we heard those boos. We heard a sound that was very familiar to us. We heard a howl. We heard a howl of humiliation that echoes across two centuries of dispossession, injustice, suffering and survival. We heard the howl of the Australian Dream, and it said to us again: you're not welcome..." (p.2).

What about the Dream? Grant lists the dirge of deplorable comparative statistics on Indigenous vs. non-Indigenous health, mortality, suicide rates, incarceration, employment, housing and education. We have heard them all before. It is an Indigenous nightmare, the substratum on which the overlying Australian Dream is founded – a dream "rooted in racism". Despite these historic obstacles, Grant celebrates Indigenous heroes like Albert Namatjira who "painted the soul of this nation", Vincent Lingiari who led the walk-off at Wave Hill Station and who was acknowledged by Gough Whitlam in the iconic pouring of soil into his hand as a sign of restored land ownership; of Cathy Freeman lighting the Olympic flame...

"But every time we are lured into the light, we are mugged by the darkness of this country's history" (p.5).

Even so, Grant acknowledges those who did support Adam Goodes, who marched across bridges for reconciliation, who resist injustice, who acknowledge Indigenous ways of seeing and being: "all these are better than that". And he concluded his address in the Sydney Recital Hall with the words: "And one day, I want to stand here and be able to say as proudly and sing as loudly as anyone else in this room,

'Australians all, let us rejoice' "(p.5). Not all Indigenous critics applauded Grant's stirring speech, some noting that mainstream White Australians listened to him enraptured precisely because he was "unthreatening and diplomatic" and did not unsettle the status quo (p.9).

The reception of the Sydney speech prompted Grant to engage in the lengthier exploration of the Australian Dream in the *Quarterly Essay*, to which I now turn. He begins by unravelling the role and importance of history as the background to contemporary life, stating that he did not need notes or to research his own history as it was seared in his mind by the stories of frontier conflict, survival and adaptation that formed the background canvas to his childhood. Interestingly, he quotes Vietnamese writer and academic Viet Thanh Nguyen who reflected on his own turbulent history as follows: "All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory" (p.7). Grant understands the knife-edge of engaging with a history as veiled and contested as Australia's. On one hand he asserts his belief that "it is possible to speak of a country's shame and still love that country" (p.9). On the other he acknowledges being confronted but liberated by fellow journalist David Rieff's book *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and its Ironies* in which the author reflects that "thinking about history is far more likely to paralyse than encourage and inspire" (p.12). For Rieff there is danger in making a fetish of the past and turning it into "a formula for unending grief and vendetta" (p.13). [Otherwise stated: John Howard's reference to the 'Black armband' view of history, to which Indigenous people have responded by coining the 'White blindfold' myopic view of European interface with the First Australians].

Grant admits to having been "drawn to remembrance of suffering and trauma that can sustain victimhood" (p.13). He expands: "It is a response to a country that has written Indigenous people out of history, preferring instead what the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner called the "Great Australian Silence". For many Indigenous people it is hard to move beyond grief when they are locked in a cycle of "sorry business"; a monotonous drumbeat of funeral marches. But remembrance doesn't necessarily stop the past repeating; sometimes it may even impede reconciliation and true justice. It is right to remember, but is it also right to forget?" (p.14)

Typical of his middle-of-the-road approach, Grant asserts that he has owned his past not to be silenced or held captive by it, but rather to be liberated from it. In much the same way, he claims, the Australian nation has sought to atone for its past history through "acts of reconciliation, national apology, recognition of rights to land and native title, a willingness to review history; through marriage and friendship; in our High Court, our parliaments and our personal lives - in all of this, we are forging a nation. It is a project without end, as all nations are (p.14).

Above all Grant seeks to dispel the prevalent negative stereotyping of Indigenous Australians where "we are bombarded with stories of dysfunction and disadvantage", whose "narrative is wedded to failure and deficit" (p.15). Exploring his own family's distant roots he describes how his paternal ancestors dealt with the vagaries of frontier history and the ensuing dislocations by adapting, hard work and a willingness to move beyond the confines of country while not refuting rights to it. He describes the process as a "typical economic migration story" (p.14). "Forced from their homes like refugees" Grant's forebears were "marooned by the tides of history" and sought a

new life on "farms, fishing boats, and cattle stations, in shearing sheds and sugar plantations"(p.14). This was a dynamic and mobile population that seized the day despite unequal pay, withheld wages and other exploitative practices. In fact he suggests that moving "from the fringes of the frontier" was a necessary condition of engaging with the emerging colonial economy. "The sacrifice and resilience of our forebears has created a burgeoning Indigenous middle class: confident, self-assured. They are redefining what it is to be Indigenous, and expanding the idea of what it is to be Australian in a multicultural country in a globalised world" (p.16). Reviewing his own stellar career, he describes how "becoming more engaged with mainstream Australia has made my life richer" (p.15).

I cannot but wince as I read Grant's eloquent references to the *fringe* and the *mainstream*. I am reminded of lecturing to my class of Indigenous students on the same theme some twenty years ago, in relation to the *outstation* movement of the 1970s – when Indigenous families forsook the so-called *mainstream* or *central* outback station to return to country – a reverse migration process, a return to roots. I recall the indignation and courteous correction of my students: who defines what is the mainstream, the fringe, the centre? Whose criteria apply? My students challenged the dominant discourse that presumed that say, Alice Springs or Anna Creek Station were/are the aspirational centre for Indigenous persons either in town or on the land in those geographic areas. For many Indigenous people it is *birthright country*, defined by kinship, Dreaming and ancestral connections that is the central focus of their being. The so-called 'mainstream centre' is nothing of the sort for those who have no roots there, who are there by default, whose identity is defined by ancestral connections to other places, and/or who remain in limbo for not knowing their roots in *country* where the real centre is, however marginal it might appear from a migrant, Whitefella point of view. It was an eye-opener for me, a watershed in my understanding of Indigenous definition of identity, and I am not sure that Stan Grant has understood the subtle but crucial nuances of terms like fringe, centre and mainstream that he uses much as any White Australian would.

Indeed, he confesses "to feeling uncomfortable with the migrant analogy...how can I be a migrant in my own country?" (p.24) Nevertheless he returns to this analogy again and again: "The hard fact of dispossession and the rapid growth of a world-leading economy, the imperative to prosper or perish, means that I am the product of a great intracontinental black migration" (p.24). He explores this phenomenon by tracing the migrant history of his predecessors, noting their resilience and accommodation to new situations and opportunities. Of course administrative authorities were also conducting what amounts to state-run "experiments in social engineering" as in the forceful removal of children of mixed descent and the policy of assimilation (p.35). Even in this much contested setting Grant remains unflinching in his view that "assimilation today is a dirty word and for good reason, but it opened a door [for Aborigines] to Australia, and unlocked opportunity and potential" (p.37). He refers to the pioneering political and social impact of leaders like William Cooper, Bill Ferguson and Doug Nicholls, as well as less prominent Indigenous persons, all of whom were the "powerful voices of the Aboriginal economic migration. They emerged from the missions, lives bound and controlled, to demand a seat at the table... They didn't appeal for equality; they assumed it" (pp.40/1).

The author consolidates his stand on the importance of deliberate migratory choices as a means of breaking out of poverty, by invoking the late academic Maria Lane. This Ngarrindjeri scholar distinguished between the emergence of a fledgling Indigenous 'Open Society' that is "opportunity- effort- and outcome-oriented" in contrast to 'Embedded Society' that is "risk-averse, welfare- and security- oriented," noting nevertheless that the two populations are "linked through kinship and continuing interaction" (p.41/2). This facile dichotomy begs the question: what is the measure of quality of life or happiness, and who can deny that being outcome-oriented may invite the ills of competition, lateral violence, tall-poppy syndrome and other negative aspects of the proverbial rat-race? True, Grant warns against falling into caricature and stereotyping, but affirms that Embedded Society has locked its adherents into a cycle of welfare dependency and social decay made easier by entrenched government handouts (p.43). I anticipate a roar of protest from many quarters at this deficit-based and negative representation of Indigenous communities grounded in their traditional country. The next edition of the *Quarterly Essay* should make interesting reading in its Correspondence/Feedback section.

Grant's analysis digs deeper when he raises the question of identity, or as he heads one of his chapters: The Identity Trap. Do his views betray his Aboriginality? Is he now White? Is he a coconut [Black on the outside, White on the inside]? Is identity best defined in Kafkaesque terms – as a cage in search of a bird? (p.44) He takes solace in Marcia Langton's caution against "a creeping sense of Indigenous exceptionalism – a belief in entitlement – tied to identity" that can deter Indigenous people from joining the mainstream of Australian life (p.46). There, that term again. I wonder how people of Lebanese, Italian, Syrian or Sudanese extraction define their relationship or identity in relation to the so-called mainstream – what mainstream, whose mainstream? Is there such a thing in Australia? What are our famous Howardian 'core values' and is that relevant enough to unseat the values of Embedded Society? – Think of it, seriously.

According to Grant, Aboriginal people are bound to a communal identity that binds them and that can "impose a rigid conformity, accompanied sometimes by an intimidating lateral violence"(p.46). The latter concept is perhaps not well known to the readers of *T-Science Newsletter*. It refers to Black on Black violence, more like the tall poppy syndrome, and is particularly prevalent among those who have 'made it' and whose success is resented or undermined by less successful Indigenous aspirants or jealous 'embedded' relatives. With a heavy heart I remember one of my very capable students who confided in a moment of despair: "I am too white for my relatives on country, and too black to be integrated in the wider Australian community". She committed suicide not long after this declaration of ambiguous and tormented identity. Grant elaborates: "Self-righteous Indigenous people take on the role of "identity police," deciding who is in or out. All the while, Aboriginal people face having to explain themselves to a wary, skeptical, ignorant – even hostile – Australian public" (p.46).

In a similar vein, Yin Paradies, an academic of Indigenous-Anglo/Asian heritage describes his 'prison-house of identity' and how "efforts to express a hybrid sense of himself lead to attacks on his authenticity"(p.47). Grant notes that another public servant, Kerryn Pholi, publicly renounced her Aboriginal identity, claiming that she had grown tired of being a 'professional Aborigine' in the 'Aboriginal industry' (p.47).

And I would suggest that some, at least, of the inordinate numbers of suicides of Indigenous people may well be the disarticulated cries of confused, misunderstood and/or rejected identities.

Very importantly, Grant reminds us that "identity is a two-way mirror – what we project and what others perceive" (p.50). What he doesn't articulate as clearly is that there may be a feedback loop between these two aspects. Thus the broader Australian community having constructed a [stereotypical] image of what an Aboriginal person is [that may or may not reflect reality] – some Aboriginal people might play up or conform to that image, thereby reinforcing it. Grant adds contentiously: "Precarious Aboriginal identity has been buttressed by a sense of pan-Aboriginal unity built around shared injustice, experience of contemporary racism, revival of "culture" (often reimagined), supposedly innate spirituality and, often, rejection of whiteness"(p.50). These are fighting words and I expect an avalanche of challenges to this definition of Aboriginal identity. What is less contentious is the implied role of history in forging Indigenous identity. Given the recentness of the White invasion of the continent, and the powerful role that memory and oral history play in Indigenous cultures, frontier history remains a recently lived history, or a history passed down in vividly remembered stories. However Grant puts a major caveat on the role of history in defining identity: "History is passed on as memory: selective and infused with imagination...history and memory can be potent weapons in constructing identity...[and] embolden a sense of victimhood, a superiority of suffering..." (p.51). Nor is this past over and done with. The legacy of dispossession at many levels – the illegitimacy of settlement; the ongoing structural inequalities that perpetuate poverty and associated ills; and the contested unresolved issue of Constitutional recognition and/or signing a Treaty – all of these amount to serious unfinished business between the First Australians and latter-day migrant populations.

Despite this bleak scenario Grant remains sanguine. "Identity can be a source of warmth and richness, and it can add to a tapestry of difference that we can all share, or it can incite hatred, violence and terror" (p.52). Whereas "fundamentalists everywhere feed on the politics of identity"(p.51), Grant urges *all* Australians to embrace the reality of their complex and sometime painful past: "Each land has its own story, each people is unique, but the sweep of history gathers us all" (p.54).

In his penultimate chapter titled *The Quiet Revolution*, Grant exposes "our inconvenient truths". On one hand "There is no single Aboriginal community. We are lacerated by class and gender and colour and geography" (p.68). On the other, statistical analysis reveals that 65% or 360 000 Indigenous Australians are employed and living lives that are materially and socio-economically no different from those of other Australians; 22% or 120 000 live in urban and regional areas but are welfare-dependent; another 70 000 or 13% are "languishing in remote areas, also locked in cycles of dependence and welfare far from regular education or employment opportunities" (p.68). This is the inconvenient truth, the story that remains largely untold. "It is a story of success and how it is spurned like an unwanted child." Whereas Indigenous lives have been framed by suffering – an undeniable reflection of historical fact – statistics show that the far greater majority are now part of the middle class. True, there remain gaps in health, wealth, longevity, education and professional development, but these are closing down fast (p.70).

For Grant, as for Larissa Behrendt (Harvard-educated Indigenous professor at the University of Technology, Sydney) the real issue for this unacknowledged middle class majority is how to redefine what it means to be Indigenous. "It is as much a rejection of black labels as it is of white stereotypes...How does a community that has partly been defined by its exclusion, disadvantage and poverty redefine itself? How does it increase its participation in the mainstream and not be assimilated?" (pp. 71&73). Noel Pearson and Marcia Langdon, both formidable Indigenous intellectuals, have also grappled with this problem and the manifest "gulf between the Indigenous middle class and the rest of the mob" (p.73). In her 2012 Boyer Lectures Langdon addressed the need to change the narrative "from the tired old story of the black victim/protester to a more informed account of Aboriginal engagement with modernity" (p.74). For Grant the new Black middle class is developing its own consciousness. "It is beyond trite to suggest that a university degree and a job means that someone is no longer – or less – Indigenous... Identity should not be means-tested... This Indigenous middle class is not new: Australia has just not noticed" (p.75).

And yet, and yet, I cannot but think of the disproportionately high rate of incarceration of urban Indigenous youth and the epidemic of Indigenous suicide, especially of men between 16-28 years. There is either something seriously amiss in the state of the emergent Indigenous middle class, or, more likely, in its interface with the wider society in which it is embedded. All is not as simple as the statistics would suggest. This brings me back to my starting point in this commentary: the *First Contact* program shown on SBS on three consecutive nights in late November/December 2016. In the light of this review of Stan Grant's essay *The Australian Dream*, I am struck by the fact that all venues accessed by the First Contact team were relatively isolated or remote Indigenous communities. This was emphasised by numerous lingering aerial shots of endless dirt roads in our famous Outback as the 4WD carried the participants to their next encounter with the First Australians. We did not venture into the urban setting that harbours the majority of the Indigenous middle class. Ironically, urban Australia was represented by the White participants of the program whose distinguishing feature was their abysmal ignorance of Australian history and their largely jaundiced and stereotypical preconceptions of Aboriginality. The important redeeming feature of the encounter (and literal first contact with Indigenous Australians for at least some of the team) was their willingness to listen, hear, absorb and learn – well, true for most members of the team. In this lies hope for the future of our collective move forward as a mature, integrated nation. In the end we have to move beyond difference or what divides us, and affirm the commonalities and richness that each of us brings to this wonderful, albeit flawed, country that we all call home.

Olga Gostin, December 2016.

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