[EXCEPTIONAL HUMAN EXPERIENCE CLUSTER 21: SYNCHRONICITIES]

IF AND ONLY IF SNOW IS WHITE: EXPERIENCING SYNCHRONICITY

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PREFACE

I originally proposed writing about an uncanny series of synchronistic experiences of mine for *EHE* in my initial correspondence with Rhea A. White (March, 1994); and she encouraged me in this task. But despite my best intentions, I'd made no real progress on the piece until late August of 1994, when it occurred to me not only that this series was still in progress, but also that my acquaintance with Rhea may itself be an integral aspect of the meaning of these coincidences. When I realized this, I composed the following account over the course of two days.[1]

ACCOUNT

On Tuesday, February 2, 1994, I began my evening course on introduction to ethics by apologizing to the class for having missed several sessions due to the horribly relentless series of snowstorms that we in the East had been suffering through that winter. I was especially distressed about this because this hiatus had occurred at the very beginning of the semester, and so the natural flow of the course had been disturbed.

Subsequently, during the give and take of class discussion, a student raised a key question about the objectivity of values, namely: Do statements about good and evil say something about the real nature of the world, or do they merely express the attitudes, wishes, feelings, etc. of the person(s) making the statements? I hesitated in my response because this very important question would require a discussion of certain classical philosophical issues surrounding the definition of "meaning," and the notion of truth as a relationship of correspondence between language and the world. But I decided against pursuing matters in this way at that point, as it might have taken the class too far afield.

What had specifically come to mind as I momentarily pondered the problem was the so-called "semantic" theory of truth propounded by Alfred Tarski, the Polish-American mathematician and philosopher. Tarski's view was a variation on the correspondence theory; and although he only thought of himself as providing a view of truth applicable strictly to formal logical languages, other philosophers subsequently sought to apply his insights to natural languages like English and German; while still others saw his work as the foundation for a general theory of meaning.

The gist of Tarski's position (Hacking, 1975; Lacey, 1976; Prior, 1967), is that he sought to revive the medieval view that truth is an adjective which describes those sentences in which simple elements systematically combine to state what is the case in the world. It is not, as in some of the more modern versions of correspondence suggest, that every part of the statement names or pictures some part of reality. For then the problem arises as to how structural relations between linguistic entities like nouns and verbs are similar to, or mirror, the structures of non-linguistic entities in, or features of, the external world. Tarski's more "holistic" approach to the problem of correspondence is therefore supposed to enjoy certain advantages over its more analytically oriented rivals.

I have gone into some of the substance of Tarski's views for two reasons: Firstly, even though his focus is quite narrow and technical, it nonetheless touches upon some key traditional problems of philosophy concerning the relationship of mind to the world. This also happens to be the primary thrust of the principle of synchronicity as formulated by Carl Jung (1968):

> Synchronicity takes the coincidence of events in space and time as meaning something other than mere chance, namely, a peculiar interdependence of objective events among themselves as well as with the subjective (psychic) states of the observer or observers. (p. xxiv)

However, the second reason for providing the background on Tarski more directly concerns the experience of synchronicity rather than the theory that is to say, *my* experience of synchronicity. For the paradigmatic illustration of Tarski's theory which became famous (and ubiquitous in philosophy textbooks) runs thus: The English sentence "Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white. Or, as Hacking says, if we wish to construct a theory of truth along Tarskian lines for another language (e.g., German) but to state that theory in English, then we would have: The German sentence "Schnee ist weiss" is true if and only if snow is white (p. 132). I was mulling over these very illustrations when I decided against proceeding with the Tarski material in the class-

[1] I have revised the paper in the meantime, but apart from the lengthy postscript (see below), most of the changes have been made strictly for the sake of clarification and amplification. In this regard, I am indebted to the helpful suggestions of Rhea A. White, Steven M. Rosen, and Suzanne V. Brown.

room.

Of course it might be argued that I had thought of Tarski in particular only because my initial apology concerned my weather-related absences and made reference to snow (snowstorms). But this could hardly explain the following sequence.

During the class break, a student came over to apologize for her recent absences. It seems that she had fallen on a patch of ice and had broken her right arm, which was still in a cast. I did not yet know her name, not only because she had missed all our sessions, but also because I had not yet familiarized myself with the attendance list. Oddly enough, however, I could not locate a copy of the course syllabus when I searched my briefcase (I usually bring them with me for the first few weeks of classes), so I offered to leave a copy for her in the departmental office. When I asked her for her name, she replied, "Rhonda Schnee." Hearing this I felt something peculiar, or what I interpreted as a sense of the uncanny; but outwardly composed, and without missing a beat, I responded: "Oh, 'Schnee,' that's German for 'snow,' isn't it?" She replied in the affirmative, but seemed somewhat taken aback that I knew this. Perhaps she thought that I had studied German.

What she didn't know is that I do not speak or read German, and therefore would not have known that "*schnee*" means "snow"—except for Hacking's discussion of Tarski, which I had first read some fifteen years earlier. What also struck me was that I wouldn't have become aware of her name (and probably would have forgotten the entire incident had I discovered her name only subsequently) had I not—quite uncharacteristically—failed to bring extra copies of the course syllabus with me. But the coincidences didn't end there.

Prior to retiring that evening, I resumed reading Tam Mossman's (1993) *Answers From a Grander Self*, a book of channeled teachings by his "entity," James.[2] When I came across a reference (p. 213) to the late Helen Wambach and her work with hypnotic progression (guiding subjects to their ostensible future, as opposed to past, lives), something clicked. I immediately hopped out of bed and retrieved a particular cassette tape from my library—the same tape, in fact, that I'd been playing both on my way to class that evening, and on my way home. This was a *New Dimensions* interview by Michael Toms with the late Michael Talbot, whose books on science, mysticism, and the paranormal I greatly admire. I then recalled that Wambach's name had come up in *their* conversation, and that it was almost certainly on the trip home that I had heard this. I also recalled that there had been some discussion of Wambach's assistant—a fellow named Snow(!). So I listened to the portion of the tape where I thought this exchange took place and, sure enough, Toms mentions Wambach's work with life-progression, and then adds that Eric Snow carried on her work after her death. Talbot, however, agrees that while the fellow's last name was indeed Snow, "Eric" just doesn't sound right to him—though he is unable to recall the right name. And then they move on to some other topic. When I heard this again on the tape, I felt sure that I had seen this book somewhere. I began to search my bookshelves, where I found *Mass Dreams of the Future*, by Chet B. Snow, Ph.D., featuring future-life progressions by Helen Wambach, Ph.D. A book that I had not yet read, and had even forgotten that I'd owned.

At this point I experienced a resurgence of the sense of the uncanny, accompanied by a feeling of amusement. If nothing else, the universe had a sense of humor. But I also began to ask myself: Why snow? What meaning did this particular recurring reference hold for me? My childhood experiences of snow were, naturally enough, quite positive. I loved watching the snow fall, to feel it beneath my boots (that delicious crunch), and the clean blanket of it, before anyone had walked through it. More prosaically, a lot of snow meant a day off from school. And since school was largely boring and tiresome to me, I always welcomed time away from it. Then I could do what I really wanted to do, and not merely what I had to do. School felt flat and two-dimensional—a poor substitute indeed for my imagination and its flights, and a damper on my rather free-flowing form of study.

These reflections caused me to admit that I had been having similar feelings of late—but now as a teacher rather than a reluctant pupil. If the truth be told, I had not really been altogether disappointed over the class cancellations. In fact, I had used that time to my advantage by working on an article for publication—a paper I had enjoyed writing. Was I being reminded of something from my past that had also become true for me at that (present) moment? Did further associations with phrases such as "snowed under" or "snowbound" also not make emotional sense? Such questions led me to wonder whether this cluster of coincidences might not have even greater personal meaning. For this was not the first time that the image of snow had made an appearance in my recent life.

In February of 1993—almost exactly a year prior to this series of synchronicities—I had visited a channel named Sheila Reynolds, who has an office in Washington's Crossing, Pennsylvania. I had been feeling stuck in my academic career, unable to make progress, and at the same time wondering whether I really wanted to remain in academic philosophy in any case. My deepest interests were in subjects (such as synchronicity) which academic philosophers took up, by and large, only in order to debunk them. So I felt torn between two quite different paths. Sheila's reading contained a number of insights

[2]Mossman had been the late Jane Roberts' longtime editor at Prentice-Hall, and had himself developed channeling abilities back in the late 1970s.

that were right on target, not only in psychological terms, but also biographically. She correctly described certain childhood events about which she could have known nothing. I was not only highly impressed, but also extremely heartened. She encouraged me to follow my own deepest interests—even if this meant not comfortably belonging to any established group, organization, or community.

These insights were in part expressed as references to some of my ostensible past lives. I was told that in several of my previous incarnations, I lived in cold, northwest climates. In at least two of these lives (all of which involved harsh physical conditions), I wound up separated from my group—or from my parents—and got caught in snowstorms, resulting in my death. In one case, I had been frightened by the approach of some animals and ran off into a forest where I died. Although I had no conscious recollection of these events, they did make sense on a psychological level. The message was clear enough: Being independent had been dangerous. Hence I'm afraid of straying from the group and going off on my own—to the place where, as Joseph Campbell has observed (paraphrasing from *La Queste del Saint Graal*), the forest is darkest and there is no way or path (Campbell, 1976, p. 37).

Thus, "snow" in this sense could mean "death." Death, not only or even primarily in the literal sense of biological extinction, but rather, as a metaphor for the psychological crisis involved in going it alone. And so my image of snow was evidently bound up with fear and dread, as well as desire and joy. Consciously, of course, snow was suggestive of freedom (from the constraints of school, social duty). And that's life, not death. But what lay beneath the conscious level was evidently quite another matter. This ambiguity and ambivalence is deeply mysterious.

I then recalled another relevant incident. In April of 1993 (two months after my session with Sheila), my fiancée and I were browsing in a crafts shop in Maine when I came across a painting entitled *Wolf Guides in Storm*. The work depicts a Native American on horseback, with the rider's back is to the viewer, so you can't tell if it's a man or a woman. The Indian is apparently being guided through a blinding snowstorm by three white wolves. What I did not know at the time—but I subsequently learned from reading Hal Zina Bennett's (1993) book *Zuni Fetishes*—is that in Zuni iconography, the White Wolf is the Guardian of the East. The East, as the home of the Sun, represents solar consciousness: pure illumination. The Wolf is thus associated with the processes of renewal, creation, and intuitive insight. In any case, I was so taken by the painting that I didn't hesitate to pay what was (for me) a considerable sum for its purchase. And the artist just happened to be named—Evelyn Winter (!).

What the painting indicated to me was the possibility of finding a way out of my own predicament by aligning myself with my own deeper nature. The forest in the painting is equivalent to the forest of death where my frightened reincarnational predecessor had perished. In addition, it is the sacred forest of the adventure, the symbol of the spiritual quest of the individual for her or his own special relationship to the mysterious powers of the universe. White, as the symbol and facilitator of transcendence, is, metaphysically speaking, *both* the color of life *and* the color of death. (Thus, following Jewish tradition, my mother was buried in a simple white funeral shroud.) When I subsequently read Gary Zukav's (1989) *The Seat of the Soul*, I was reminded that the color white literally is "the integration of all the visible forms of radiance" (p. 68). I then understood my own experience of the ambiguity of snow as one aspect of the all-encompassing character of whiteness; for there is no life without death (and vice versa). Or, as it says in one of my favorite lines in the *I Ching*: "The earth in its devotion carries all things, good and evil, without exception."

This, however, was not to be the end of the matter. In the Summer of 1993, I finally resolved (in Joseph Campbell's words) to "follow my bliss" and put my energies into those things that really mattered to me. In July, 1993, I had no idea when, or if, anyone else would ever read it, but I wrote a lengthy essay on what I called "the new religious consciousness" and sent it out for review.[3] Some months later, in March, 1994, I came across Keith Harary's (1994) interview with Rhea in *Magical Blend*. I was immediately struck by her emphasis on the importance of the subject's continuing, open-ended quest for the meaning of her or his "exceptional experiences," for this sounded very much like one of the key themes of my own essay. So I sent her a copy of my paper along with a proposal to write an account of some of my own experiences of synchronicity, namely, the "snow-white" sequence as it had unfolded. Oddly enough, however, at the time I failed to notice the further coincidence involving Rhea's surname. And while it was not until late June (1994) that I received a response from her (she was extremely apologetic about the delay in her reply), I was tremendously excited by her papers and gratified by her enthusiastic reaction to my own essay. And, as I mentioned in my preface, she also encouraged me to write the piece on synchronicity for *EHE*. I went ahead and made a few notes, but that was pretty much as far as I got.

Just prior to receiving Rhea's response, however, yet another oddity occurred. My student, Ms. Schnee, was having difficulties with her writing and typing (due to her arm injury). So she didn't turn in her midterm paper until May 6, 1994. I had asked the students to relate

[3] It has since been published (see Felser, 1995).

some of the ethical concepts and theories we had been discussing in class with actual experiences in their own lives. This was not only a test for the validity of the philosophical ideas, but also a way of interpreting experiences which, in the past, may have proved difficult to understand or otherwise integrate into their lives. As I read through Ms. Schnee's paper, in which she discussed several points related to the topic of death, I was struck by the following passage, which contains a compelling report of an exceptional human experience:

> Now, to look at death from another point of view, the Judeo-Christian belief of heaven. I was never really sure whether I could believe in an afterlife or a heaven. It never seemed real enough to me. Therefore, it was no great comfort for me to think about death as a change from one place to another [as Socrates had also argued in Plato's *Apology*]. This was no comfort for me because I wasn't really sure whether I actually believed there was any truth behind this concept. Then, one day my feelings changed completely. A friend of mine showed me something called spirit writing. She contacted my grandfather, and got answers to questions that only he could have known. We did this a few times, contacting spirits that my friend couldn't possibly have known anything about. Each time we got correct answers to questions that only the deceased could have known the answers to. ... This is definitely something that sounds like a falsification; however if one were to see it done, he or she would definitely become a believer. For example, my friend's father laughed in our faces, and said we were making it up. Then he gave us a question to ask his mother, which was information that only he and his mother shared. Obviously, leaving my friend and I clueless as [to] what the answer was going to be. All I can say is that my friend's father was dumbfounded and speechless when he was given the correct answer from his mother.

Interestingly, I had never mentioned my interest in the paranormal in class. Moreover, in the six years I have been teaching, I cannot recall having received a paper from any student in which this type of experience was discussed. Of course, from the standpoint of formulating an explanatory hypothesis for the experience of Ms. Schnee's friend, it is impossible (as it is in many such cases) to rule out some sort of ESP, since the information in question was also in the possession of her friend's father.

But all of this hardly mattered to me, given the way Ms. Schnee had initially come to my attention, and given my own long-standing interest in what she called "spirit writing." For some of my earliest and most impressionable experiences of the paranormal involved working with a Ouija board as a young boy. My aunts Ruth and Anne had introduced me to this, as well as to the practice of table tipping. While nothing particularly dramatic occurred in these early experiences, there was *something* about those early episodes that had touched me deeply. (I was thus only half astonished when, several years ago, at a family gathering, a cousin I hadn't seen in perhaps fifteen years immediately exclaimed upon seeing me: "Do you remember working with the Ouija board?!" I hadn't recalled this episode until he mentioned it, but it had obviously been a significant experience for *him*.)

Once again, then, this strange series of coincidences related to "snow" had brought me face to face with some key aspects of my past, and specifically to significant childhood experiences of "the magical," "the paranormal," or the just plain spontaneous. Indeed, as I write this, I am reminded of Tolstoy's story *The Death of Ivan Ilich*. On his deathbed, Ivan Ilich agonized over the possibility that certain key childhood experiences and feelings might have been the only real, important, and valuable things of his life. Had everything else been nothing more than illusion, distraction, and waste? Was I now receiving the equivalent of a cosmic wake-up call?

I was intrigued enough to affirm my interest in the paranormal to Ms. Schnee; and I asked her if I could arrange for a session with her friend. As luck would have it, however, her friend had recently moved to Florida. But before I could even register my disappointment upon hearing this, Ms. Schnee informed me that she herself had tried "spirit writing" and had obtained equally striking results. The immediate problem, however, was her injured arm; according to her, illness or even fatigue rendered her unable to discern whether the entities she contacted were really whom they purported to be. Although Ms. Schnee thus agreed in principle to a session, we have yet to actually hold the session due to her problems and the summer schedule. I cannot, at this point, attest to her abilities firsthand. But I have no reason to doubt her claims. Furthermore, apart from any actual demonstration of her abilities, it is her report of her own exceptional experiences with her friend that has already figured into my own series of synchronistic episodes.

The epilogue to all this, or perhaps a better and more accurate term would be the most recent episode, occurred only in recent days. Upon returning from a brief vacation a week or so ago, I was greeted by a wealth of material courtesy of Rhea. Among the papers she sent me was an excerpt from a book entitled *The Feminine Face of God*, by Sherry Ruth Anderson and Patricia Hopkins. She thought I'd find this piece to be of interest because it contained a description of a "great dream" of Anderson's (who, like me, happens to be Jewish), which proved to be of especial importance in her spiritual development. I

did indeed appreciate the account. Yet, it was not until yesterday (8/19/94), when I remembered something I'd written in my response to Rhea, that I made a certain, very interesting connection.

As Anderson relates a key scene in her dream, she is led to a mysterious temple where she encounters several fierce threshold guardians. A struggle ensues, but she overcomes the guardians through sheer courage and determination—only to be greeted by a hierophant whose name is Melchizedek. Now in my letter to Rhea (8/19/94), I had mentioned the coincidence of my having come across the name Melchizedek (specifically, The Order of Melchizedek), both in Jacques Vallee's (1979) book on UFO cults, *Messengers of Deception*, as well as in Sidney Saylor Farr's (1993) biography of NDE subject Tom Sawyer, *What Tom Sawyer Learned from Dying*. But what I had forgotten (and recalled only on 8/19/94) was another incident recounted by Vallee concerning his investigation of this Melchizedek organization. This episode was also mentioned by Colin Wilson (1988) in a chapter of his *Encyclopedia of Unsolved Mysteries*, which is devoted to a discussion of—what else?—synchronicity.

The story is this: On February 21, 1976, during the course of his investigation of The Order of Melchizedek, Vallee was in a taxi when he happened to glance at the card which listed the name of his driver: M. Melchizedek. Struck by the oddity of this, Vallee asked the driver for a receipt so that he would have written evidence of his encounter. When he later had a chance to examine the Los Angeles telephone book, it turned out that the only Melchizedek listed was M. Melchizedek—evidently his taxi driver. To Vallee, this "suggested ... that the world might be organized more like a randomized data base than a sequential library" (p. 215). Wilson explains:

> Vallee points out that there are two ways in which a librarian can store information. One is to place it in alphabetical order on shelves. But computer scientists have discovered that there is a simpler and quicker method. They prefer to store information as it arrives—the equivalent of a librarian putting books on the shelves side by side as they come into the library—and having a keyword or algorithm that will retrieve it. (In a library, the equivalent might be as follows: as each new book comes into the library, some kind of 'beeping' mechanism is attached to its spine; each beeper is adjusted to respond to a certain number code, like a telephone. When the librarian requires a certain book, he dials the number on his pocket beeper, and then goes straight to the book that is beeping.
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> Vallee suggests that "the world might be organised more like a randomised data base than a sequential library." It was as if he had stuck on the universal notice-board a note saying; "Wanted, Melchizedeks," and some earnest librarian had said: "How about this one?" "No, that's no good—that's just a taxi driver. ..."
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> This picture, like Jung's, suggests that there is some mutual interaction between the mind and the universe, and that the key to "retrieving information" is to be in the right state of mind: a state of deep interest or excitement. (p. 261)

When I recalled *this* aspect of the "Melchizedek" connection, it was as if a light had been turned on, and for the first time the outline of the overall pattern of my "snow-white" experiences became clearly visible to me. And perhaps because my correspondence with Rhea, including her sending the excerpt from *The Feminine Face of God*, had become key to my re-cognition of this pattern. This was the same recognition that finally enabled me to sit down and compose the present account. I sensed that Rhea herself may indeed be one of the "whites" selected by Wilson's kindly, earnest universal librarian. For I now believe that it was my openness to the possibility of my own unfoldment, as signalled by my extremely positive and active response to the channelled material that I'd received back in February, 1993, which initially put me in the right frame of mind to encounter people, situations, and texts that might facilitate my progress. This was the equivalent of Wilson's "state of deep interest or excitement."

To say more at this point would require me to address, in a far more detailed and systematic fashion than I have done thus far, the *theory* of synchronicity. So far, I have been content to provide only an accurate historical and phenomenological account of my experiences, along with some provisional thoughts as to their meaning for me at this juncture-a snapshot, as it were, of my spiritual quest. Hence I have refrained even from proposing a provisional definition of synchronicity. This is not the place for definitions; for taking snapshots is one thing, and engaging in theoretical reflection is quite another.

Yet, on the other hand, I feel that my experiences as such are incomplete in the absence of a deeper, ongoing, and open-ended analysis of their meaning. Furthermore, if Wilson is right (and my own experience supports his position), this very intense focus of attention should serve to intensify the experiential end by precipitating further coincidences. All of which suggests that we cannot ultimately separate fact and interpretation, or experience and reflection: these are correlative aspects of a single process. The phenomenon of synchronicity serves as a reminder of this important truth.

August, 1994

POSTSCRIPT: JUNE, 1995

Due to the delay in publication, Rhea A. White invited me to update my original account. I am pleased to do so, and will confine my remarks to four general points:

1. In response to Rhea's specific inquiry: I did not ever get to "sit" with Ms. Schnee. When I last spoke with her, I indicated that I would leave it up to her to contact me; but she never did.

2. There were two related items that I had omitted from my original account. To be honest, I cannot now clearly recall whether this omission was completely inadvertent, or whether I had more or less consciously decided not to include these episodes. Perhaps I was afraid of presenting a report that was too baroque to follow. (I strongly suspect the latter to be the case.) In any event, both items are recorded in my journal entries.

(a) About ten days after receiving Ms. Schnee's term paper, I decided, as an experiment, to consult Ralph Blum's (1994) *Book of Runes* (this was 5/15/94), which I had only recently purchased. Now I am not very fond of divination systems. To me they all tend to feel unnatural and clumsy, and the process of familiarizing myself with a new vocabulary of images reminds me of the pain I experience when studying another language. Thus, for instance, I find both the Tarot and *I Ching* systems to be foreign and artificial. Furthermore, I have never been satisfied with my own understanding of the reasons why such systems are supposed to work. Yet, for some reason, I wanted to try the runes.

What I did was to draw a three-rune spread in which three runes are consecutively selected from the pouch and placed right to left (the order of reading). The first rune represents a general overview of the situation; the second indicates the key challenges to be met and overcome; and the third suggests a course of action to be taken. My first or situational rune turned out to be Isa, which is symbolized by a simple, vertical line (sans serif: |), and whose traditional meaning is ice or freezing. Blum calls this rune "Standstill." A few lines should be adequate to convey the sense of his interpretation of it:

> The winter of the spiritual life is upon you ... Be patient, for this is the period of gestation that precedes a rebirth. ... In your solitude, exercise caution and do not stubbornly persist in attempting to work your will. ... Trust your own process, and watch for signs of spring. (pp. 137-138)

Needless to say, drawing Isa underscored the persistence of my various "winter" leitmotifs. Also, Blum's interpretation coincided with my experience of the inherently paradoxical nature of the meaning of this motif, as it consistently referred to both death *and* life, hibernation *and* rebirth, stasis *and* creativity, and so forth. Trusting my own process (as trite as *that* may sound) was precisely the extremely difficult task at hand for me. And finally, drawing this rune reminded me of an unusual dream that I had had the previous spring. Which brings me to the second previously omitted episode:

(b) Almost exactly one year prior to drawing the rune of Isa, I had recorded in my journal a dream-fragment to which I gave the title "Walking on Ice" (5/7/93). My description (here edited only for clarity) ran as follows:

> I am walking along in a frozen landscape—heavy ice and snow everywhere, all around. I am trudging—walking slowly, cautiously, so that I don't fall or slip. Ahead of me are two older women [one of whom has a very dark complexion]. They [also] seem to be having a bit of trouble [walking] ... I go over to the "dark lady" in order to help her sit down. A car or truck is coming through ... [it is] as if she thought she had to move out of the way.

The caution advised by Blum's reading of Isa was what my "dream ego" appeared to be displaying in this episode. Perhaps the 'dark lady' represented some bit of unconscious wisdom, reinforcing the message of conscious waiting in order to avoid precipitous action or other dangers; or perhaps, as a shadow element, she further dramatized my own fears. But whatever the interpretation of its meaning, my experience of the frozen landscape was so vivid that I subsequently thought, upon awakening, that the dream might have progressed to a stage of full lucidity had it not terminated when it did.

3. Although I have not noticed any further winter/snow motifs in the intervening months (from late August, 1994 to the present time of June, 1995), I am nonetheless still in the process of unfolding the significance of some of the previously mentioned synchronistic connections. This, in turn, has led to further experiences of meaningful coincidence. Allow me to give one, very significant, example:

In further correspondence (8/94), Rhea inquired as to whether I was acquainted with one Dr. Steven M. Rosen, a fellow member of the college faculty where I teach, and someone whose interests (in parapsychology, the work of David Bohm, and other areas) happened to coincide with mine. Although I did not know him at the time, I did know of him. His name was familiar to me because several of my students had remarked upon the unusual similarity of my own interests and approaches to those of Rosen. So after sending him one of my papers, he called up and we scheduled a meeting.

At the conclusion of a most enjoyable and profitable dialogue (the first of many still ongoing encounters), Rosen supplied me with a copy of his novel *The Moebius Seed* (1984), which I began to read straight-away. In the

early part of the story, Phil, one of the main characters, is revisiting the Rockaway, New York beach where he spent many of his youthful summers. Part of the trauma of this re-visitation is that the "old Rockaway" no longer exists; virtually all of it has been torn down. And it is clear from the narrator's account of his memories-and of several key childhood scenes in particular-that this time and place had held a special significance for him. Indeed, the descriptive language of these paragraphs was so evocative that I was convinced that this had been a real experience of Rosen's and not a mere literary invention. Moreover, this account resonated with my own childhood experience. Like Phil, my parents and I had spent many summers at the seashore-only on the New Jersey shore as opposed to Long Island. But those summers continue to have a definite and important spiritual significance for me, in addition to their nostalgic or sentimental value. Like the snow, the sea has always felt familiar to me, like a dear, old friend-yet, unknown at the same time, and suggestive of even greater mysteries.

Thus, at our next meeting, I made a point of asking Rosen if he had indeed spent those summers at the seashore. Smiling and nodding in the affirmative, he added: "But actually, some of those descriptions"—namely, the ones that had moved me the most—"were not of Rockaway, where I spent my summers as a teenager, but of—I don't know if you've ever heard of it—a place called Bradley Beach on the [New] Jersey shore, where I spent my childhood summers; and those earlier times were really my more significant experiences of the shore." At this I began to laugh. "Heard of it? Why that's where my parents and I stayed!" (We reckoned that, due to the difference in our respective ages, we were not there at the same times.) And although Bradley Beach had not experienced anything like the degree of change absorbed by Phil's Rockaway, I had only recently been complaining of the fact that Bradley had replaced its storm-damaged boardwalk with a cement "promenade" which, however, did not smell, sound, look, or feel anything like the genuine (wooden) article. (As if Proust's madeleine could be exchanged for a twinkie without repercussion!). Similarly, Rosen's character Phil mused to himself: "What a curious feeling, this loss of continuity. A chunk of his past had been cut away and in more than a manner of speaking, it seemed" (Rosen, 1984, p. 42).

As if these coincidences weren't odd enough, I subsequently learned that Rosen had contributed a piece to *Exceptional Human Experience* in which he had described a hypnagogic vision of unusual power:

> At the time when I was still working on my doctorate in psychology, I was lying in bed one night, my wife reading beside me. I was half awake, half asleep, and went into a spontaneous reverie and saw myself moving along on a sled through the snow. I had the feeling that the snow was very soft, comforting, enveloping, and I was gliding very smoothly-no bumps-just the flow. There was something very serene about it.
>
> And then the sled began to rise into the air. It started to lift off, and as that happened, I felt a tremendous intensity building up within myself. It was directly correlated with the elevation of the sled. The intense feeling built up to the point where I sensed that every cell of my body was on the verge of exploding with ecstasy. It was a joyous and painful experience-painful in a joyous kind of way. The intensity of it became so excruciating that with an effort of will I had to shut it down. (Rosen, 1992, p. 190)

Only subsequently did Rosen read about kundalini and interpret this vision as an aborted kundalini awakening. Yet the experience did have important consequences for him in any case, as it led to a "life-changing" series of visionary insights which profoundly altered his basic sense of identity and reality. This, in turn, led to a major shift in career interests and his subsequent theoretical work in parapsychology, philosophy, and cosmology.

While it would be tedious and perhaps superfluous to exhaustively catalogue all of the connections between Rosen and myself here, I do want to note a few: (a) Rosen's experience of his visionary snowscape, like my encounters with the varieties of winter, encompasses the dual—or rather, the ineliminably paradoxical—nature of enlightenment (snow-white light?) that the shamans and mystics have always and everywhere recognized: ecstasy *and* pain, life *and* death, and so forth.

(b) Rosen's description of the hypnagogic snow scene ("soft, comforting, enveloping") makes use of attributes usually associated with the feminine—as is the kundalini serpent. Of course, nature and its energies (particularly the various states of water) are also typically associated, in many of the world's mythologies, with the female and the feminine. The "dark lady" of my snowscape dream recalls such figures as Kali, the Black Madonna, and so forth. Indeed, the very title of *The Feminine Face of God* (see my original text) neatly represents what I now take to be a key connecting thread of meaning in all of these experiences. In a recent essay, Meredith Sabini and Margaret Allen (1994) discuss Carl Jung's view of the possibility of a "new religion" (indeed, he regarded it as nothing less than an historical inevitability). The authors write:

> Much of Jung's work emphasized the importance of rediscovering the lumen naturae, the light of nature. This is how he saw the religious challenge facing us today: "If we can reconcile ourselves to the mysterious truth that the spirit is the life of the body seen from within [Jung writes in *Spiritual Problems of Modern*

> *Man*], and the body is the outward manifestation of the life of the spirit, then we can understand why the striving to transcend the present level of consciousness ... must give the body its due, and why recognition of the body cannot tolerate a philosophy that denies it in the name of spirit. These claims of the physical and psychic life, incomparably stronger than they were in the past, may seem a sign of decadence, but they may also signify a rejuvenation." (p. 32)

The mention of the feminine and its contemporary spiritual relevance obviously opens up a vast topic for conversation, which would have to include the Gaia hypothesis in science, the return of Goddess cults, the worldwide phenomenon of Marian visions, and a good deal more. My brief comments here may seem all too inconclusive and unsatisfying. However, when I came across the following passage in Michael Grosso's (1992) *Soulmaker*, I could affirm the truth of what he had written on the basis of my own experience:

> In my judgment, the modern soulmaker has a special affinity to the feminine. You may have noticed that many of the stories in this book had some tie-in with women. I used to dream of a mysterious woman who rescued me from hideous monsters. I grew up listening to psychic stories from my mother. ... What's the link between the psychic and the feminine? One link is pretty obvious. ... Women are more willing to admit they have psychic experiences and less afraid of them than men seem to be.
>
> But the link is deeper. The feminine, in a man, reflects his unconscious life-his anima or soul. Fear of the feminine is thus fear of the soul—of the "psychic." The soulmaker has to overcome this fear, which is a fear of surrender, a fear of losing control. (pp. 147-148)

Synchronistic events are experienced as delightfully or eerily spontaneous—as beyond our conscious control; and this may be either an exhilarating or a frightening experience, or both. What *is* nevertheless within our influence is our response to these events. But as Grosso's comments suggest, to respond creatively may require much work on the unconscious sources of fear. In any case, I would prefer to avoid using the term "surrender" to describe our proper relationship to these spontaneous phenomena. "Surrender" has too many militaristic connotations; it is part and parcel of that very same conceptual framework of domination and control which Grosso rightly views as an obstacle to the soul's evolution. Much of our traditional religious and philosophical language is infected with such metaphors of violence—and this is part of the problem.

If, from a purely descriptive standpoint, it *feels* as though one is giving over control of one's personal will to that of another, higher Person, or to the impersonal requirements of a Cosmic Law of cause and effect, then surely from the standpoint of reflection inhabited by the contemporary soulmaker, our inherited "common sense" ontology (whether in its Theistic or Newtonian version) of separately existing entities acting on each other by means of externally applied forces is precisely what these experiences put into question. The universe in which synchronicity is operative is characterized, not by the isolation of encapsulated, essentially unchanging, externally related entities, but by the intimate interconnectedness of mutually influential dynamic processes. Here the "inner self" (or selves) and the "outer world" (or worlds) are inextricably intertwined. This is why Jung found the vocabulary of the Taoist *I Ching* so eminently congenial to his purposes in explicating the meaning of his concept of synchronicity. In sum, we must be careful in our phenomenology, lest our conceptual prejudices deform the meaning of experiences whose values lies precisely in their ability to undermine those very preconceptions.

(c) Finally, and perhaps most significantly, both Rosen's visionary experiences and my own synchronicities proved to be openings which led to deep changes in our respective life-careers; changes which are but elements in still ongoing processes. In my own case, the decision to pursue my true interests in my own way has led to publication, offers of publication, and—most importantly—to a sense of accord with the deepest portions of my own identity and its mysterious promptings. Not surprisingly, this has led me to connect with like-minded others. So there is both an inward as well as an outward experience of harmony. Lest I give the wrong impression, however, let me hasten to add that following these promptings is not by any means a smooth ride, an easy task, or a comfortable posture. Then again, for me, now, the alternative has become unthinkable.

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COMMENTARY ON FELSER'S "IF AND ONLY IF SNOW IS WHITE"

Rhea A. White

I was powerfully affected by the image of the wood, where "the forest is darkest and there is no way or path," and the spiritual quest, probably because right now I'm "starved" for spiritual food for thought (and heart) because of the left-brained work involved in editing three publications simultaneously, all past due, and trying to get my things packed in order to move (fearing there will not be enough time).

I do feel overpoweringly this morning that we are all meant to start out on a "pathless path." We're clueless, and can only obey the inner urge, like lemmings or salmon—the mindless urge to move in a certain direction without knowing how or why but only that we must. "I can do no other." That experience is an EHE itself, and perhaps one of the most pure and powerful, because you *have* to be aware, at some level, of a reality richer and fuller and more personally and globally meaningful than your own present reality in order to let the latter go. Yet, you are not yet "in the know" concerning that which draws you out. So it is scary and seems dangerous. It makes your skin prickle. (Right now I'm rereading Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*—only T.S. Eliot moves me more. I'm right at the beginning, when Frodo is starting out, not knowing where he must go or how far or what, exactly, he must do, except for the certainty that he must go.) What else can we do in such circumstances, which are analogous to—if not the same as—the study of parapsychological and mystical phenomena, but follow the light and warmth of our beings, as rationality simply is incapable of serving us in this impasse, for we are not in possession of sufficient information for reason to work on. In fact, the urge is to move forward blindly in order to come to further light (consciousness), at which point rationality may well have a role to play.

I think at certain times in our lives we *have* to go forward where rationality absolutely fails us—so we must let go, surrender—to the unknown, in order to find our unique way, which our intuition, at least, whispers is *there,* ahead, waiting for us to take it up, or catch up to it. And as we find and travel our way, if we hold on to our bliss (in this case, that glimmer within that calls us forth into the dark without) a way will appear, glimpsed only sporadically at first, but eventually—maybe only after many years—it will become a constant path, a road. We are on *our* way, and we *know* it. And it turns out then—but only then—to be everyone's way, as well.

But if we start out seeking our way in the way of everyone (the ruling paradigm of our day, or the "behavior" expected of everyone) we will not find our way nor that of "everyone" either! So initially—and sometimes later, at new turns of the spiral, our only guide can be the irrational, the nonlinear, the act of immersing ourselves or throwing ourselves into the random database, as it were, from which everything comes. How can we pick and choose? You know that answer. By following that which brings warmth and light—what I call exceptional human experiences.

FELSER'S RESPONSE TO WHITE

I found Rhea's extended reaction to my original piece highly stimulating. I would like to comment on at least two specific points that she makes:

(a) On following the spiritual path, Rhea writes: "We're clueless, and can only obey the inner urge, like lemmings or salmon. ... [and] follow the light and warmth of our beings, since rationality simply is incapable of serving us in this area ... I think we have to go where ... rationality absolutely fails in order to find our unique way."

I have already confessed my own readiness to interpret my synchronistic experiences in terms of a demand to address and respond to nature. Thus, I'm entirely taken by her imagery and the references to following natural impulses or urges. But I wonder if it is rationality as such, or merely a certain impoverished conception of it, that fails us here. (Perhaps this also explains why I hesitate to regard these urges as altogether "blind.") For I am convinced that we must not allow the old dualisms—especially that of nature *versus* reason—to stand. They are the creatures of an impoverished and altogether too abstract conception of rationality that I wish to reject.

Now it seems to me that these synchronicities and other exceptional experiences function not simply as radical disrupters of a decadent (psychological, social) status quo, but also and at the same time as agents of the restoration or creation of deeper and more comprehensive forms of coherence and intelligibility. In being prompted to "follow my bliss" (to borrow Joseph Campbell's phrase), I was also making connections with important parts of myself that had been set aside, covered over, or otherwise marginalized, thereby allowing them to organically develop into maturity. Which is to say, I set myself the task of re-writing the story of my life-career by picking up certain narrative threads that had been prematurely cut off or undone. This task involves processes of reflection, judgment, and choice (among others), in addition to the (I should say very reasonable!) attitude of open receptivity to the flux of one's own experiences that Rhea and I clearly prize. It is by no means an original thesis of mine, but I would submit that the writing and living of such historical narratives embodies forms of rational understanding and inquiry that are even more fundamental than the experimental or quantitative/analytic forms of inquiry currently embodied in the natural sciences—at least as those sciences are currently understood in the prevailing scientistic paradigm. (By "scientism" I mean the unquestioning acceptance of a metaphysical doctrine of mechanistic materialism conjoined with an epistemology which holds that the methods of the natural sciences thus interpreted are the sole path to Truth.)

Thus, while I agree with Rhea's main point, I am more convinced than ever that we need to police our language in order to thoroughly purge it of those unfortunate, decomposing leftovers from the twin cultural corpses of scientism and religionism.

(b) Rhea writes: "And as we find and travel our way, if we hold to our bliss, a way will appear, glimpsed only sporadically at first, but eventually—maybe only after many years—it will be a constant. We are on *our* way and we *know it.* And it turns out then—but only then—to be everyone's way, as well. But if we start out seeking our way in the way of everyone (the ruling paradigm of our day), we will not find our way nor that of 'everyone.'"

This reminded me not only of Joseph Campbell, of course, but also of an important point made by Richard Moss (1986) in his book *The Black Butterfly*. In the course of his discussion of Norman Cousins' experience with self-healing, he argues that we must not make the mistake of turning one person's experience into a template for the rest of us. Moss (who is himself an experiencer of transcendent states, as well as the holder of an M.D. degree) believes that such generalizations express a misplaced confidence in the efficacy of spiritual "techniques" or methods:

> We must be willing to take the next step into life without knowing where it will lead.
>
> This is precisely what Norman Cousins did. In his book *Anatomy of an Illness* he reports healing himself of a serious illness by watching films that made him laugh. ... Mr. Cousins spontaneously and completely followed his intuition. Throughout that process, he acted without ever really knowing what he was doing, why he was doing it, or whether it would work. This is the essence of Creative Relationship. ... But now, as a result of his success, whole conferences have been organized recommending laughter as a healing technique. This I feel is a mistake. It would be wonderful if we could teach Mr. Cousins' admirable uniqueness, his ability to be himself and tap his deepest resources. But I don't believe this is something that can be taught. Rather, we can radiate and inspire this possibility if it is alive within us, but ultimately each person must find the equivalent in himself or herself. (p. 167)

This attachment to technique is present not only in science's need for repeatable results and theories which enable us to predict and control natural events, but also in the propensity of religions to require conformity to the orthodox ways of thinking about and relating to the Ultimate. Religions, too have their approved methods: Your guru will know which plane of consciousness you have achieved, and how far you still have to go in order to obtain full enlightenment. Or your priest will know

just what sacramental acts you need to perform in order to achieve salvation. But what if the traditional recipe, lovingly handed down from generation to generation, just doesn't work for *you*? What if it only leaves you hungry for some new and different, more nourishing, spiritual food?

I believe that, as Rhea suggests, "everyone's way" must be the way of each unique individual. We are not, however, in the ultimate sense, essentially separate, isolated entities. The process of living out of one's deepest resources will resonate with others and thereby serve as a catalyst for their own creative engagement with the universe. As Campbell said, the presence of even one person who is genuinely alive serves to enliven the entire world.

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WHITE'S RESPONSE TO FELSER

I almost always find myself in agreement with you, but there is one point you make with which I disagree, one place where you omitted an essential point in my argument in quoting me, and one place where you interpret my words in a way that does not go as far as I intended. I will discuss them in the order above.

In your Postscript, in the discussion of Grosso's *Soulmaker*, you take issue with his use of the word *surrender*. It is obvious, from your discussion of the term, that you only think of it in the military sense of being forced to give up one's arms and one's person. You see it as "part and parcel of ... the conceptual framework of domination and control" (p.). I don't. I see it as a spontaneous impulse that when yielded to is highly meaningful and, in fact, that can be an EHE in itself. I am reminded of T.S. Eliot's (1952, p. 136) insistence that to experience mystic union requires us to willingly let go:

> "But to approach the point of intersection of the timeless
> With time, is an occupation for the saint—
> No occupation either, but something given
> And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
> Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender." ("The Dry Salvages").

Here the small ego-self gives over its own private wishes to allegiance to the divine. It was when I surrendered to what I thought was death that I had the near-death experience, without which I would not have initiated this *Journal*. The surrender I refer to is not so much a matter of giving in to *loss* as giving over to *gain*. As Michael Murphy and I point out in *In the Zone* (Murphy & White, 1995), "the purpose of surrender, of letting go, in both religion and sport, is not to diminish one's self but to achieve a level of functioning otherwise impossible" (p. 27). You have to willingly surrender your self (i.e., what you were) in order to become the more that you are.

The place where I feel you omitted something pertinent to my argument is where you quote me about "being clueless." As I further elaborate, "I think at certain times in our lives we *have* to go forward where rationality absolutely fails us—so we must let go, surrender—to the unknown, in order to find our unique way, which our intuition at least whispers is there, ahead" (p.). I also write there are times when we *are* blind and are not *conscious* of sufficient data for rationality to have anything to reason about. Those are the times that call for surrender, when you've done all you consciously can, and you still come up way short.

The third point is your interpretation of what I mean that by following our unique path we find not only our way but that of everyone. You interpret it linearly, saying our way "will resonate with others and thereby serve as a catalyst or their own creative engagement with the universe" (p.). I don't disagree with this. You are right, as far as you go. But I intended to indicate something much stronger than simply resonating with and catalyzing others, which still implies some separation. I meant to convey that in finding our own way we find that we are one with others, and therefore they become me and I them. This goes back to my most important EHE, a mystical experience in which I became one with All. I was not only as much my "self" as I had ever been but was the *essence of uniqueness* at the same time that I was that which is everyone and everything. You could say my little stream finally tumbled into the sea that is all things. That certainly was a major aspect of the experience. But *at the same time*, my unique stream was more fully unique than it ever had been—it did not merge with the sea and become indistinguishable from it. So, in pursuing my way I came to the place in myself where everything is, and knew it was also me. Thus, I am unable to feel cut off from life or from others, not because we are physically near enough other so that we can resonate with and influence each other but because they are me and I them. There is no separation.

I had not expected this. I had not imagined it in my wildest dreams. But once experienced, it is impossible to go back to feeling oneself as separate. That's what I meant when I said one finds "everyone's way," and I feel it is the central insight toward which all EHEs are trying to take us.

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CODA

After finishing the above, it was after 11 p.m., and I was more tired than usual. I decided to treat myself by working on cataloging some documents—not work that "had" to be done but that I "wanted" to do. I promised myself that if I was still so tired after 10 minutes or so I would call a halt and go to bed.

I came to a document I had labeled "Surrender EHE case, pp. 1-7." I looked at it, and it illustrates all of the points I was trying to make above. What a beautiful synchronicity to happen in putting together an issue of *EHE* that has a lot about meaningful coincidences! I have not looked at this material since it was packed up prior to my move in June 1995. I have gone through several boxes and nothing was in any order. I had been finding quite a few sociology papers, so if I expected anything, it would have been sociology. I would have had a hard time finding this particular item if I tried. But I had forgotten I had it, even though it is a marvelous example of an EHE.

It is from a book by Rachel Breslow and is entitled *Who Said So?* (Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 1989). It is an autobiographical account of her discovery that she had multiple sclerosis and her long 12-year passage from despair back to health, and along the way, enlightenment. When MS was diagnosed, her whole world crashed down on her. The doctor told her it was incurable. She tried to be reasonable about what to do, "to make some sense" of it [i.e., use rationality] but her head was reeling and everything was a blur. [She was clueless. Not only the doctor but everything she had read said it was incurable..] In trying to realize the import of this for her very self, she writes: "I had to surrender completely, to relax my entire body. Finally, I just lay there, limp as a wet rag" (p. 5). There then followed an experience that she had told no one about because she was afraid no one would understand—she herself still does not understand it completely. "After awhile I felt lifted away. I felt extremely peaceful and knew that something deep and beyond my comprehension was happening. ...During a particular moment I felt as if my conscious mind separated from my body. I actually saw myself and my body at its very best, completely whole, perfectly formed, strong and healthy. It was the most comfortable, perfectly blissful feeling imaginable. ... I felt as if I were traveling through a very long tunnel. There was a glimmer of bright light far off in the distance. I wanted to keep going toward that radiant energy coming through the other end of the tunnel" (pp. 5-6). [She was unable to use reason, so she surrendered. She followed the glimmer.] She adds: "I know that something changed in me at that moment, that I would never be quite the same again. I felt a new sense of belonging, a kind of connectedness and oneness with the universe" (p. 6). It was this experience that enabled her to move forward, sometimes stumbling (literally as well as figuratively) until she regained her health many years later. [She would often remember that moment and recall her bliss, although she could never actually relive experience it again. But by means of that memory, she found her path. She found her way by using her intuition.] She observes that rationality is limited to facts whereas "intuition is a higher form of knowing" (p. 99). She says that intuition is our link to our inner selves and our higher consciousness, noting that the higher self has many names, among them, "true self, real self, God self. All are one and the same....This is the common meeting ground for me and the outside world" (p. 100). [Thus she was connected within to all things and found a sense of strength she knew she could turn to in every trying circumstance.] She adds that she shudders when she considers where she would be if she had simply listened to the reasoned words of her highly trained physician and ignored her intuitive, instinctual self. She concludes "Ultimate healing is your own enlightenment" (p. 113).

I can only repeat: There are times when we must be brave enough and wise enough (or pushed to the wall enough!) to put reason aside. Only an exceptional human experience can usher in the new, the saving grace. And *then* reason can go to work, which it does, most of the time, in all our lives. To grow and become more than we are, we need to use both, but seldom, if ever, at the same time.

FELSER'S SECOND RESPONSE TO WHITE

Joseph M. Felser

Thanks for the opportunity to respond to your response!

I think I finally see why we apparently disagree about "reason." I say "apparently" because it may only be a matter of using the same word but meaning quite different things.

In the coda to your response, you are discussing Rachel Breslow's EHE. You wrote: "She observes that

tionality is limited to fact, whereas 'intuition is a higher form of knowing" (p. 99). "Reason" in this sense seems to be little more than a center for processing data. This data may be received via the "outer senses" (i.e., our five physical senses), which acquaint us *with* the external, material world of our everyday experience. Or data may come via what might be called our "inner senses" (i.e., the forms of intuition, extrasensory perception, etc.), which acquaint us with an inner reality that we often meet up with in exceptional experiences. "Reason" in this sense might be contrasted with "intuition" (as in your example), "experience," or "imagination." Basically, then, "reason" means the processes of discursive thinking as governed by the rules or laws of logic, or what we ordinarily refer to as "intellect."'

This is a perfectly respectable (dare I say reasonable!) use of the term, and it has a lengthy historical pedigree. It is, in essence, the way that the term has been used by empiricist philosophers for hundreds of years. *Nihil est intellectu quod non prius frerit in serzsu:* "Nothing is in the intellect which was not first in sense." This is an empiricist axiom that has been subscribed to by seventeenth-century empiricists such as John Locke, as well as by contemporary positivists such as A.J. Ayer. Most empiricists—as I'm sure you are all too well aware from your background as a parapsychologist—do not believe in the existence of "inner senses" (or an inner reality, for that matter). But "reason" fulfills the same function in either case: It is a data-processing center, a second-order faculty limited in its scope of operations by the facts as introduced in first-order sense-experience.

There is, however, a Greek word, translated as "mind" or "reason," that has a much different pedigree: *nous*. This term goes back at least to Anaxagoras, the Pre-Socratic philosopher. For Plato, *nous* is the faculty that cognizes the Forms, the ultimate transcendent reality. The nature of this cognition is unique: *nous* describes a process of intellectual intuition or intelligible apprehension. (In Plato's dialogues, Socrates speaks of "seeing" the Forms.) On Plato's view, the soul inhabits the realm of the Forms prior to entering into association with a physical body. Thus, true knowledge is a form of remembering that is not at all dependent upon sense-experience. (Plato, of course, was not an empiricist but rather a rationalist in his epistemology.) The purpose of philosophical dialectic, then, is to stimulate, or rather reactivate, the noetic faculty—literally, to re-mind us of what we have forgotten. Note that "reason" in this (Platonic) use is not opposed to intuition; it is itself a type—indeed the highest type of intuition. Although intellectual, it is not reducible to discursive thinking or what we ordinarily think of as "mere intellect." It is "reason" in this sense that Joseph Campbell must have had in mind when he told Bill Moyers: "Reason has to do with finding the ground of being and the fundamental structuring order of the universe" (Campbell & Moyers, 1988, p. 29).

I do not know if there really is such a thing as a noetic faculty as such. I also disagree with Plato's view that true (metaphysical) knowing is merely remembering. For I believe that the infinite really is infinite. This means that novelty and surprise exist at every level of reality. Therefore, further inquiry is always necessary. I do not accept the postulate of an omniscient God. But I do feel that in my own life at least, I have always been guided by what I can only describe as a noetic drive: an overwhelming desire to know ultimate reality. I think that this preoccupation has been the core organizing principle of my entire life. All of my diverse activities and experiences somehow seem to revolve around, or refer back to it. I see it operating even in my earliest childhood years, in my mystical encounters with nature, and in my curiosity about my own dreams and paranormal phenomena such as ghosts and telepathy. I see it in my longtime fascination with religion. I see it as what secretly kept me going through much of my dry, tedious, academic training as a philosopher. It has been there all along. I prefer to think of it not as a faculty, enclosed in some watertight compartment, but as a form of suffusing, exuberant energy—intelligent energy—that powers my lifework.

If we are talking about reason in *this* (noetic) sense, then I do not see that reason is or need be set aside in order for exceptional experiences to emerge. Indeed, I would say that it is precisely the *nous*-energy that brings us to such experiences in the first place. Reason is not the Johnny-come-lately that empiricists suggest. Rather, it is there, all along, prior to all experience, informing and guiding us, whether we know it or not.

I would say that Breslow's experience (which obviously has many of the characteristics of a classic NDE) was the reply to questions that she couldn't then even formulate consciously, linguistically. But she was nonetheless engaged in an inquiry. This ever-flowing nous-energy is what gives this inquiry its impetus and shape. Reason is neither the slave of fact nor identical with mere dry-as-dust logic. It is, finally, what provides the search for facts and the use of logic their true point and purpose. EHEs may shatter our sense of identity, our previous beliefs about reality, our old paradigms, our logic, whatever. But this is just fine with *nous*.

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WHITE'S SECOND RESPONSE TO FELSER

I do wonder if it is wise to use a word in a manner that is not currently in vogue without pointing this out?

Most readers, reading what you say about "reason," will assume you mean what I assumed. I am glad you don't mean that, but it can be confusing.

Also, regarding Breslow, what you call "replying to questions that she couldn't even then formulate consciously linguistically, that's what I mean by surrendering to the unknown that confronts you. Maybe what that unknown really is is "questions one cannot yet formulate consciously linguistically," but it seems to be more accurate not to put thoughts into the unconscious but to own only what is in the conscious mind when we say "I think this" or "I do that," with the realization that yes, we are much more than we are conscious of (I should hope!) and it will be expressed, probably in an EHE of some sort, but we cannot call them from the "vasty deep," but can only be ready to receive them when they arrive. What is to be gained by saying a person is actually thinking a question they can't formulate when they think they have let go and are faced with nothingness? Actually, dynamically speaking, it could well be that one needs to let go, to face nothingness, in order to create a vacuum that may be required to usher in the response, or question, or EHE, or whatever the new thing is.

FELSER'S THIRD RESPONSE TO WHITE

Perhaps it would be a good idea to call attention to the *fact* that I am indeed using "reason" differently. This is, of course, quite deliberate on my part. I wish to call attention to the cosmic dimensions of inquiry. What I mean by this is that inquiry is not simply a human activity or project that is originally dependent upon our forms of language. The cosmos itself is in quest and is asking questions—about itself. There is a cosmic impulse to inquiry that finds expression in philosophy, science, and other forms of human investigations. Yet, inquiry is not limited to those activities; it transcends them.

This provides the context for my reply to your question, "What is to be gained by saying a person is actually thinking a question they can't formulate when they think they have to let go and are faced with nothingness?" Twentieth-century philosophy has been obsessed with the importance of language. The dominant view is that if something (such as subjective experience) cannot be put into linguistic form—if it cannot be conceptualized or described in some vocabulary or other—it isn't meaningful or real. If you can't say it, it simply doesn't exist. "'Thinking," then, is synonymous with using language—the philosophical counterpart to scientific "objectivism." (As B.F. Skinner derisively remarked, he never observed "consciousness" in the laboratory. Just lots of rats behaving in various ways.)

What I am trying to do, then, is first of all to call attention to the prelinguistic sources of questioning. Before a child can speak, she or he is curious and capable of wonder. These are expressions of a natural desire for understanding that is prior, both in time and in logic, to the development of the ability to formulate questions through language. Just as the brain is not the source of consciousness but only inflects it in certain ways, so culture does not create inquiry out of nothing hut only inflects it in certain ways. This is why I believe that inquiry continues even after the death of the body. Inquiry is not strictly a function of human ignorance or human problems. Rather, it is a primordial cosmic drive, an essential feature of cosmic intelligence (the *nous).* If the universe is truly an open process (as James, for example, thought), then there is no omniscience in the classical theistic sense. if you will, God is also asking questions. He does not have all the answers. By asking questions ourselves, we participate in—and perhaps even further—this process of divine inquiry.

Often, our capacities for curiosity and wonder are dampened rather than cultivated by our teachers and life-circumstances. We start taking things for granted. So it takes a crisis—a sense of incoherence or failure or some other shock—to reactivate the questioning faculty. Anyone faced with what Breslow was faced with wants—no, needs—to understand: Why me? Why this? Indeed, why suffering? What sort of place is this universe that we must endure such pain, loss, grief? What does it mean? Not everyone will articulate these questions consciously in just this way. But they are there, they are real, even if they have not been explicitly stated.

So I would say that when we let go to be face to face with nothingness, it is an intelligent letting go; it is not contextless or arbitrary. Such a letting go does embrace chaos and unpredictability, and its results may defy our ordinary logic. But the context is provided by our natural desire for understanding as it intersects with our particular life-circumstances. Language gives us useful, perhaps ultimately indispensable, tools for working with our questions. Nevertheless, the questions themselves are not mere linguistic inventions or creatures. Their roots are deep in the ground of our being, and their branches extend infinitely beyond what we can imagine being or even becoming.

SYNCHRONICITY, NONLOCALITY, AND EHES: AN EDITORIAL ESSAY

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