

**TO: Brita Ostrom, Esalen Institute**  
**RE: Application for CEU's**  
**11 January 2001**

While our workshop, *Evolutionary Psychology and Spiritual Practice* (workshop code # 3203), is designed to produce a spiritual outcome (mainly, a renewed interest in, and real movement toward fulfillment of the mandate: "Know Thyself"), there is an essential and substantial body of concrete learning that supports it.

Modern science and ancient spiritual traditions seem to agree that critical self-knowledge (that is, the kind worth having) requires far more than free-ranging, free-spirited imagination and introspection. It minimally requires deeply *principled* imagination and *principled* introspection, along with a thirst for and an ability to *face facts*. Our workshop adheres to the "Gnostic View," broadly defined, that understanding fuels spiritual growth, and understanding that is earned in a lifelong process of making contact with the self and the world in a disciplined and principled manner. Our workshop tries to follow the related advice of G.I. Gurdjieff who said, "Take the knowledge of the west and the understanding of the east, and then seek."

So, the head plays a starring role in this workshop, *along with* the body and the emotions. The intellect receives principles and facts and begins the process of their digestion, hopefully offering the emotions and body this material in a form assimilable by them, and thus the whole person, so as to foster transformation of the whole person.

The "head action" inherent to our workshop should qualify anyone who takes it seriously to be awarded Continuing Education Units (CEU's).

*Lest you cancel our workshop, please know that presentation of all the intellectual material mentioned below is liberally interspersed with contemplative and introspective exercises and discussion, meant to facilitate assimilation and direct insight. Indeed, we believe that the ideas themselves would be of little value, spiritually, without many well-timed shifts into a less exclusively intellectual mode.*

Examples of CEU-worthy things that participants learn in our workshop include:

***Elucidation and Updates of Darwin's Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection.***

In the last forty years there has been some change and staggering elaboration and insight into the meaning of Darwin's original theories of natural selection and sexual selection. We comprehensively introduce workshop participants to the Darwin's own thinking processes, pointing out how his naturalistic observations and his reformulation of the conventional scientific wisdom of the 1850's led to the theory of evolution by natural selection. We discuss implications for the nature of mind of the idea that the mind was created by a historical process of natural selection.

We then cover the contributions of George C. Williams, whose writings in the early 1960's finally allowed naturalists to understand the broad implications of Darwin's ideas, and who demonstrated that group selection - the idea that organisms evolve to behave altruistically for the good of the species or group *per se*, instead of for their own individual good - was extremely unlikely to have evolved. Williams also elucidated an evolutionary theory of aging, which dramatically illustrates the central role that the reproductive interests of *genes* play in the evolution of life histories, a point further articulated by the prominent evolutionist Richard Dawkins.

We also cover in appropriate detail several momentous extensions of Darwin's theory (and the first to make real use of the knowledge of genes, which Darwin lacked) by perhaps the most important evolutionary theorist since Darwin, William D. Hamilton (with whom workshop leader PJW post-doc'ed at Oxford in 1989-1990). Hamilton proved that altruism can evolve when it is nepotistic in his theory of "kin selection" (i.e., on behalf of siblings, parents, nieces, or nephews). In doing so, he revolutionized the way that biologists calculate fitness. He also helped explain why sex evolved, and why organisms of most species, including humans, tend not to mate indiscriminately.

We go on to explain key ideas of one of Hamilton's most productive disciples, Robert Trivers, who developed the Darwinian underpinnings of parent-offspring conflict, the evolutionary theory of sex differences, how non-nepotistic reciprocal altruism might evolve as a major feature of animal and human sociality, and the evolutionary basis for mechanisms of self-deception in animals, especially social animals, and especially-especially (especially<sup>2</sup>, if you prefer) in humans.

Also covered are critical thoughts of key pioneers in human evolutionary psychology such as Richard Alexander, Nicholas Humphrey, Randy Thornhill, E.O. Wilson, and others. These individuals played pivotal roles helping us to understand the social and sexual selection pressures that fueled the evolution of the unusually big brain of humans and its awesome abstract cognitive capacities and complex emotionality. Thereby, they helped us to see more deeply into what the "Hallowed-Gray-Matter" is ultimately up to, from a biological viewpoint, at least when it is left to freely engage in *unprincipled* imagination and introspection for 75+ years. A spattering of ideas of Watson, Wymore, and others, on the evolutionary functions of everything from unipolar depression to the lusty rebelliousness of adolescents, the complementary roles of instinct and learning in human behavior, and the basic nature of attention and "intention," rounds out our students' exposure to modern evolutionary thinking as applied to humans.

***People learn more about what it means to have the Earth be your Mother.***

The workshop emphasizes the relevance and utility of cross-species comparison for the understanding of mind and nature. There is no (western scientific) evidence to suggest that humans have some new or different mysterious vital essence that other animals lack. Indeed, one of the big traps inherent to any spiritual quest is mistaking a basic biological impulse for the action of some uniquely human divine principle. (By the way, we'll explain biologically, to

anybody who listens, why this nasty mistake is a built in *design feature* of humans.)

This workshop uses the research of animal behaviorists, such as PJW himself, to demonstrate that human and non-human animals must solve many of the same problems, and that they use many of the same fundamental strategies in doing so. Problem-solving may or may not be done in awareness in humans and other largish-brained creatures, but the bulk of it almost certainly is not, and no problem solving task, indeed no movement of attention, probably ever occurs without heavy, albeit cryptic, unconscious influences at work. The workshop covers modern theory concerning the evolution of conscious awareness, and cutting edge ideas about the necessary co-evolution of awareness and mechanisms of self-deception.

***The workshop will help reveal the startling subtlety and complexity of animal behavior.***

An in-depth examination of one or more non-human species' mating behavior will be presented. Most people are floored by the realization of how complex and sophisticated the lives of "simple" organisms are. Human sexuality - all sorts of it - will not be neglected either! Many known and unknown (unconscious) behaviors and mechanisms of mate selection will be examined as evolutionary adaptations.

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

### ***CATEGORY ONE: THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE WEST***

**What Is Evolutionary Psychology : Explaining the New Science of the Mind (Darwinism Today)**, by Leda Cosmides, John Tooby, Helena Cronin (Editor), Oliver Curry (Editor); Yale University Press.

**The Moral Animal**, by Robert Wright; Random House..

**The Tangled Wing : Biological Constraints on the Human Spirit**, by Melvin J. Konner; Paperback Reissue Edition, Henry Holt; ISBN: 080501327X.

**Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge**, by E.O. Wilson; Random House.

**Social Evolution**, by Robert Trivers; Benjamin/Cummings.

**The Biology of Moral Systems**, Richard Alexander;

### ***CATEGORY TWO: THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE EAST***

**The Gospel of Thomas**, Marvin Meyer, Harper.

**In Search of the Miraculous**, P.D. Ouspensky; Harcourt Brace.

**Toward Awakening**, Jean Vaysse; Arkana (out of print; find used).

**The Myth of Freedom**, Chögyam Trungpa; Shambala

**Zen Mind Beginner's Mind**, Shunryu Suzuki; Weatherhill.

**Zen and the Psychology of Transformation**, Hubert Benoit; Inner Traditions International.

**In the Spirit of Happiness**, The Monks of New Skete; Little Brown & Co.

**Dr. Paul J. Watson**

**John D. Wymore, MA LPCC**