

# *The Philosophers' Yard*

## Newsletter

*Curiosity. Creativity. Community.*



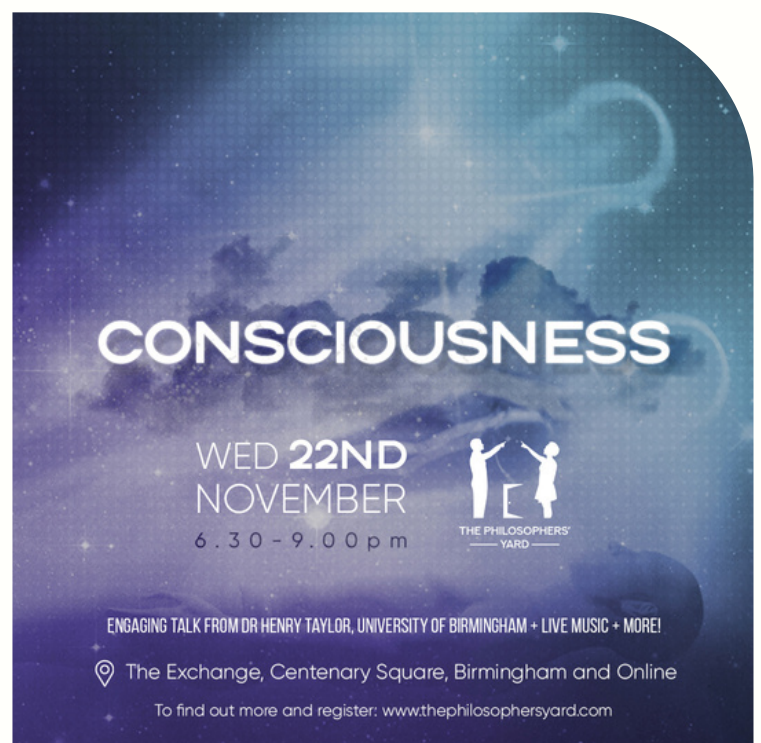
## *Exploring Life's Big Questions*

Welcome to The Philosophers' Yard Newsletter! We are very excited to announce the launch of our next event on Consciousness. Join us at 6:30-9:00pm at The Exchange, 3 Centenary Sq, Birmingham B1 2DR.

We'll be hearing from Associate Professor of Philosophy at University of Birmingham, Dr Henry Taylor, who will be introducing us to the fascinating topic of human consciousness. We will be treated to live music from the Birmingham-based band, LiveMusicEntertainment.

If you can't make it in person, don't worry, this event and all subsequent sessions, will also be hosted online via zoom.

To register for the event and book your tickets, visit us at [www.thephilosophersyard.com](http://www.thephilosophersyard.com).



# OUR SUMMER SERIES

Our inaugural series began on the 11 May 2023 to 22 June 2023. A collection of four sessions on the topic of Individualism Vs Collectivism. We were treated to a host of speakers, who shared their different perspectives on the topic and gave insight into their worldviews.

Our collection of special guests also included creatives, such as poets, meditation teachers and vocalists.

*“Reflecting on the different values and principles that I hold and how I’ve obtained them has been such a rewarding exercise and has helped me re-evaluate some things in my life.”*



*“I enjoy the way this is a space for open dialogue and deep thinking.”*

*“Learning about the ways individualism and collectivism can be realised in real life has been a fascinating journey.”*

*“The Philosophers’ Yard is a brilliant initiative to open a place for exploration and accessible philosophical ideas of living.”*

## Our speaker list:

### Session 1:

- Dr Herjeet Marway (Philosophy lecturer at University of Birmingham)
- Ana Franca-Ferreira (social researcher & community organiser)
- Becky Mitchell (Present Moment Meditations)

### Session 2:

- Baljit Singh (Basics of Sikhi)
- Zubeda Limbada (ConnectFutures)
- Malik Harrison (ConnectFutures)
- Aayushi (Folk singer-songwriter)

### Session 3:

- Mac Alonge (The Equal Group)
- Diary of a Poet (spoken word artist)

### Session 4:

- Sobia Iqbal (Pegasus Wellbeing)
- Zarah Alam (poet)



# Introducing Dr Henry Taylor



Where did you grow up and what first sparked your interest in philosophy?

I was born in Leeds, West Yorkshire and grew up mainly in in a tiny town called Pontefract and a tiny city called Wakefield. I first came across Philosophy through studying religious studies in school. What really sparked my interest initially was the ontological argument for the existence of God, which goes:

‘God is perfect by definition.

In order to be perfect you have to exist.

Therefore God exists.’

I remember thinking this is so bizarre and so utterly unlike anything I ever come across before. I was kind of torn between thinking it was genius and thinking it was ludicrous, so I decided I had to find out more about philosophy.

What attracted you to the field of consciousness?

I think as soon as I came across consciousness and the philosophical issues connected to it, I was really sure this is what I wanted to do. I’ve always been interested in science and everyone accepts that the brain is really complicated and the vast majority of people accept that consciousness is somehow closely linked to the brain. Yet it does seem very difficult to see how a machine like the brain could possibly give rise to consciousness. It just seems like a categorically different kind of phenomenon.

When you look out at nature, there doesn’t seem to be anything going on inside them but somewhere along the tree of life, what looks like a major categorical difference suddenly happens, where there looks like certain things are conscious and certain other things aren’t. I have no idea how a scientific theory would come to understand that.

One of the exciting things for me is with consciousness in science, there are vast number of different theories, there are whole debates about even the fundamentals of consciousness. So it’s always just exciting because it is such an unknown area.

### **Are you interested in the Artificial Intelligence side of consciousness?**

Artificial Intelligence could mean a lot, there's lots of different kinds of AI, what I am really interested in is robots. I'm working with a computer scientist from Birmingham called Masoumeh Mansouri, she's a roboticist and we're interested in culturally aware robotics. There's a big movement in robotics at the moment called HRI (Human- Robot Interaction).

What people have realised is that human beings won't really accept robots into their lives unless robots can behave in a culturally appropriate way. Making robots more culturally sensitive also means that robots will help humans more. But what's really interesting about that is that it generates tons of ethical and philosophical questions. So insofar as that counts as AI, yeah I'm really interested in AI but its mainly about robots for me!

### **Do you think there are things human beings can never know?**

I don't know. Haha. There's a long history of philosophers saying we'll never know 'x' in the fields of consciousness studies. I generally don't like that kind of thing. I don't think you can know that there exists something which human beings will never know. I think saying 'you will never work out this thing' is asking for trouble. You can't predict where science is going to go. You can't predict where philosophy is going to go. So I would certainly never say that we can never know.

### **What will you be talking about on 22nd November?**

One of the most exciting things that has happened in the last few decades for me is that philosophers have become interested in scientific theories of consciousness. There are tons and tons of different theories of consciousness in cognitive science, psychology and neuroscience. They're all really different to each other, which is really cool. But for quite a long while that cognitive science went on isolated from philosophy, but over the decades the two disciplines have come to work closely with each other.

What I will be talking about is two of the biggest theories of consciousness, one of which came from science and the other from philosophy. One of them is the 'Global Workspace Theory' and the other 'Higher Order Thought Theory'. I'm going to talk about what they try to say and what the problems and challenges are for them. I'm going to be discussing about stuff like 'which non-human animals are conscious and will we ever know' and things like that. Basically where are things now on the overlap between psychology and philosophy when it comes to consciousness.

### ***Something that resonates with us:***

*"If something burns your soul with purpose and desire, it's your duty to be reduced to ashes by it. Any other form of existence will be yet another dull book in the library of life."* - Charles Bukowski  
(German-American Poet & Writer)



***To Freedom, Benton Spruance, 1952, via Whitney Museum of American Art***