book reviews

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science-philosophy of science

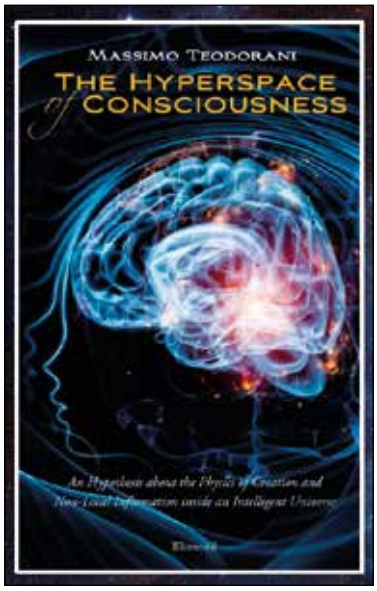
Quantum Selves?

Robert A Charman

THE HYPERSPACE OF CONSCIOUSNESS: AN HYPOTHESIS ABOUT THE PHYSICS OF CREATION AND NON-LOCAL INFORMATION INSIDE AN INTELLIGENT UNIVERSE

Massimo Teodorani

Elementà, 2015, 256 pp., £9, p/b - ISBN 978-91-7637-030-8



Dr Teodorani is an Italian astrophysicist, lecturer and science writer who obtained his PhD from the University of Bologna on the physics of binary stars. He is the author of 17 books (the previous two being *Intelligence Beyond Earth,* 2013, and *The Creative Mind,* 2009) and has published many articles on subjects across the science spectrum from quantum physics to bioastronomy, the search for extraterrestrial life within the ongoing SETI Project and the physics of strange atmospheric phenomena such as the Norwegian Hessdalen Lights. His inquiry as to the nature of the universe has led him to the hypothesis that matter and consciousness, which he often terms as 'spirit' are one at quantum level. In this speculative book he advances 'several rather courageous hypotheses' over 15 chapters into how quantum physics and related concepts can marry consciousness into the universe.

He proposes that we are quantum beings by nature (hence the 'hyperspace of consciousness' within quantum nonlocality) and in the first part of the book he presents some basic quantum physics which he interprets in terms of David Bohm's Wholeness and the Implicate Order theory of the universe. The world we see being the Explicate Order and the unseen world where matter, mind and consciousness are united in a 'quantum potential' or ***Q*** being the Implicate Order**.** According to Teodorani the Explicate Order is real in the sense of actual existence in space and time and the Implicate Order is one of virtual existence that, as he puts it, 'allows something to exist'. Consciousness is not some immaterial entity but a quantum entity and Teodorani interprets this as meaning that consciousness has the property of having a 'non-local radio' connectedness with the entire universe. As Teodorani sees it the purpose of the Universe as a whole is to exist in Explicate reality as otherwise it could not become aware of itself if it remained in a virtual Implicate. The quantum 'spirit' or consciousness is related to material reality through the DNA information that constructs the brain and its quantum capabilities. Teodorani suggests that 'spirit' is *'actually located inside the quantum "cloud of probability" that our instruments cannot see but the spirit can see what is happening while inside the probability cloud so doesn't need to collapse it'*. The spirit engages with matter in the form of the brain but *'being made of pixels of consciousness*' it is not governed by matter but by information so that matter obeys the spirit's orders and is bound to the pixels of consciousness '*whose main software is the Pauli Exclusion Principle'* (I got more than a bit lost here).

All this speculation is bound up with the late Karl Pribam's model of holonomic brain processing (developed in association with Bohm) in which the dynamic bioelectrical fields that surrounds the fine structure of dendritic 'trees' can influence other dendritic trees of nearby neurons which are in non-local contact to create a holographic consciousness in which the part contains the whole. Dennis Gabor, who invented the hologram described this information transfer in terms of 'holons' of information as in the quantum holography which is the basis of MRI, PET scans and other image processing. Central to Teodorani's speculations is the concept of the quantum brain/quantum mind as developed by Roger Penrose and Stuart Hameroff based upon the theory that the hollow microtubules that form the skeletal structure (cytoskeleton) of all cells including neurons possess the properties of collapsing the wave function into informational computation creating consciousness. This is known as 'Orchestrated Objective Reduction' (OrchOR).

Each collapse of the wave function by the microtubules generates moments of consciousness and the greater the concentration of microtubules the greater the level of consciousness. Teodorani estimates that as each moment of consciousness in humans lasts for one sixtieth of a second about one million moments of consciousness per day requires about one million microtubule quantum wave function collapses to be experienced as conscious continuity. Teodorani suggests that amoebas which have much fewer microtubules probably experience no more than a dozen moments of consciousness per day (hopefully, they fully treasure each one). According to Teodorani '*microtubules are real units with their own intelligence*' as demonstrated by the behaviour of single celled, ciliated, paramecium that can swim in any direction, learn, avoid predators and reproduce without the need of synapses and neuronal circuitry considered by mainstream neuroscience as essential for learned behaviour. This quantum brain-quantum conscious mind interpretation of microtubule function is rejected by mainstream physicists and neuroscientists although it does have some supporters.

In his opening chapter on 'Multidimensionality and Synchronicity' he says that *'the particles of consciousness constituting our spirit are all enclosed in a kind of cocoon. They stay there simply because the spirit is afraid to crumble and lose its identity and cleaves to the ego which is precisely its cocoon. But the ego is also spiritual blindness. When the spirit overcomes its fear it realises that it cannot crumble because the particles constituting it do not scatter but simply "turn on a switch" that potentially connects them non-locally to all the other particles in the universe. Once the fear is banished ecstacy follows and knowledge with it.*

All the foregoing, and much more, leads us to what, for Teodorani, is his central concept of 'The Big Library Hypothesis (BLH)' which, he says, is the Cosmic Library that exists everywhere throughout the universe including the

quantum vacuum together with all atoms and their subatomic units (Lazslo's Akashic Field theory is a close analogy). Where do we as individuals fit into the BLH? Teodorani's scenario is along the following lines; the essential 'spirit' of each of us exists in the form of a quantum field that can become manifest as consciousness in any body which has the property of quantum coherence such as the brain (mainstream physicists say that such neural quantum coherence is not possible as decoherence is almost instantaneous); it acts as the 'terminal' of a big 'supercomputer' to work as software controlling the hardware of the body to collect information about the physical world. This information is automatically and non-locally 'uploaded' on a 'hard disc' located in the quantum vacuum at the Planck scale of 10^{-34} cm. All thoughts and emotions are non-locally uploaded *'like an Internet website by every single spirit'*. This creates an ever expanding '*cosmic database'* that records all sentient life as long as this includes emotion as a strong factor. If there is no emotion associated with an event then that event is not recorded.

His hypothesis is that 'the void' contains, or is, the memory of everything thought and felt by everyone downloaded into the universal Big Library (BL) of pure information. Teodorani says that *'If information directing the orchestra doesn't exist the Universe would have no reason to exist as well*'. It is special access to the BL that animates great scientist, artists, writers, poets and mystics through their BL spiritual terminals. He takes the story of the Dogon people's apparent awareness that Sirius-A, the brightest star in the sky, had a tiny Sirius-B companion as a binary star system as an example of shamanic communication with the BL (Sirius-B was discovered in by telescope in1862). Others say that they were informed by post 1862 anthropologists. Teodorani proposes that the various manifestations of paranormality such as telepathy, clairvoyance and psychic healing involve accessing the BL. There is much more along a similar vein including discussion of tulpas as materialised thoughtforms and the suggestion that the Universe is, in effect, a Tulpa formed from the virtual particle inflation at the moment of the Big Bang.

We now turn to the 'Intelligent Plasma Hypothesis (IPH)'. Plasma gases are often seen in the atmosphere as luminous plasma streaks, balls or tubules, sometimes changing colour and pulsating. Plasma is the fourth and very different fundamental state of matter after solids, liquids and gases. Plasmas are formed from localised regions of freely moving positive and negative electric ions from electrons and protons to molecules in constant interaction emitting light and with temperatures that can reach several thousand degrees centigrade. Lightning, electric sparks, neon lights etc are typical examples. Teodorani has investigated the atmospheric plasma lights known as the Hessdalen Lights that frequently occur above the Hessdalen valley in Norway. Teodorani speculates that plasma lights may exhibit levels of intelligent behaviour, acting like a brain and may even be a form of Life. He suggests that at quantum level plasma balls may exhibit quantum coherence and even interact with the microtubules of nearby brains in resonant frequency of pulsation.

Teodorani quotes from an Internet source concerning a hilly location between southwest Missouri and northeast Oklahoma where atmospheric 'Joplin Spooklights' over a valley are often seen. A viewer trained in Remote Viewing claimed to be in telepathic communication with these lights saying that they are aware of their surroundings including humans. A more mundane explanation is that the atmosphere above the valley is in line with headlight beams from traffic on Route 66 near Interstate 44 as demonstrated when flicking headlights on and off resulted in Joplin Spooklight pulsation. He speculates that what he calls 'spirit' is an '*information package'* that survives bodily death. During life it is a '*quantum coherent electrodynamic field'* governing the electromagnetic biofield of the body in which biophotons generated by cells play an important role in cellular health.

After death spirit survives as '*a non-collapsed superposition of quantum states frozen inside the Planck field as an information databank.'* It can reconnect either with a quantum biophysical structure such as the human brain or, it seems, as plasma ball intelligence. Either way it would be in communication with the Big Library. I end this section of this review by quoting Teodorani's final paragraph '*The goal of the Cosmic Big Library – whose role is both communicating information non-locally and of creating new matter starting directly from the information stored in it – is to lead all sentient beings in the Universe towards an asymptotic limit approximating God. This is the only way God can take connivance of himself; from an orchestrated fire made of an infinite number of sparks wanting to revive him'*. I should add here that Teodorani does not mean God in any conventional religious sense but as universal quantum intelligence.

Although written for the general reader I feel that the validity of his interpretation of the quantum world as explored through his 'rather courageous hypotheses' concerning us as quantum selves within an intelligent Big Library Universe can only be assessed by those with an equivalent understanding of quantum theory. At most I could gain only a very limited understanding as many of his quantum based descriptions left me frustratingly baffled. The one point on which I am in complete agreement is that any attempt to explain the nature of the universe must include the nature of ourselves and, by inference, all life. In fairness to Dr Teodorani his Hypothesis about the Intelligent Universe as expressed in his subtitle and developed in this book may become common thinking in the future. Despite my lack of understanding I hope I have conveyed enough of his exposition through my selection of quotes for you to consider exploring his ideas for yourself.

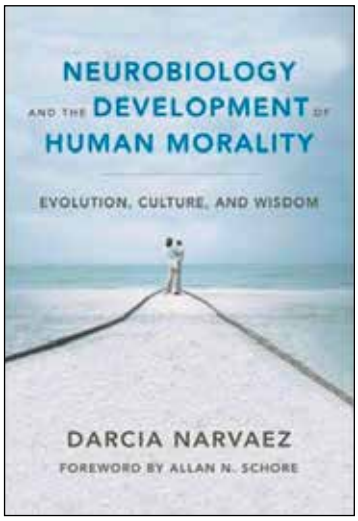
Time to Rethink Morality

Gunnel Minett

NEUROBIOLOGY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN MORALITY, EVOLUTION, CULTURE AND WISDOM

Darcia Narvaez with foreword by Allan N Schore

W.W. Norton, London, 2014, 422 pp., £23.74, h/b - ISBN 978-0-393-70655-0,



Throughout human history morality has been something that has had to be taught, ideally by people with knowledge or wisdom of what morality means, such as priests or elders in society. Morality comes out of rational thinking and knowledge of how to tell right from wrong. This thinking has been the backbone of most developed societies for centuries. In particular the view has been that children need to be taught morality or they will grow up to become immoral and cause problems for the rest of society. Religions such as Christianity have described this in terms of original sin; children are born with it and it needs to be remedied by baptism and bible studies. The church has played an essential role as the number one custodian of Morality.

For many, the view that morality needs to be taught is regularly confirmed in today's society. The perceived lack of moral values among the younger generation is blamed on lack of 'proper' education, in particular as regards the teaching of religious values in schools and society as a whole. It is because of the shrinking role of religion in our lives that crime and immorality has been spreading. This is a message put out by media on a daily basis.

This book challenges this conception and presents the argument that it is not the lack of religious or moral teaching that leads to a lack of morality but rather the way we treat our children in the beginning of their lives.

The author points to the importance of giving children a good start in life and refers to the latest discoveries in neurobiology and epigenetics to prove this point. A good start does not necessarily mean paying for the best schools but rather understanding a child's basic needs so as to develop a healthy mind and brain. To understand what this means we need to turn to the latest research in neurobiology and epigenetics.

Epigenetics is confirming the importance of the environment for a growing human being. In particular during the first years, a child needs to 'calibrate' and set levels for the genes to be able to express themselves correctly. Because each of us lives in symbiosis with our environment, the evolutionary process equips each new foetus with a set of 'assumptions' as to what life will be like. To reach the optimal 'settings' for the gene expression this process can only take place after birth. Unlike many other mammals, human beings are extremely versatile and have a brain that needs to be calibrated for a range of different situations.

One example of such a calibration is that a newborn child can't process normal food for the first six months and needs to rely on breastfeeding (or substitutes) given in a certain position in the carer's arms at a certain distance from the carer's head. This is the period of time that the eyes need to calibrate and coordinate eye movements to give us the varied vision we need later on in life. This is done by using the carer's face as a constant in the ideal learning situation, involving both security (in the carer's arms) and rewards (in the form of food).

The newborn child needs to be cared for in an intense way for several years before it can survive on its own. In order to achieve the necessary skills the child needs the external brainpower and examples that the carers can provide. Therefore it is vital for the newborn to feel noticed (in particular in a tactile way), in order to feel reassured it will be cared for and secure enough to develop properly. These are features that we have in common with other primates and are as old as the human race itself. Although in human beings they are more important than for animals with less versatile behaviour.

What epigenetics and neurobiology have revealed is that meeting these basic needs is extremely important for the child to develop properly. Not just physically but also to develop a healthy mind. And, as Narvaez argues, in order to provide the child with a healthy morality! To illustrate this bottom-up development she refers, among others, to Jaak Panksepp's theory of 'emotional systems', which he argues we have in common with other mammals. Panksepp has charted seven networks of emotion in the brain: SEEKING (interest in learning and progressing), RAGE, FEAR, LUST, CARE, PANIC/GRIEF, and PLAY. By giving the child the right support and opportunity to develop these systems, we allow them to be expressed in a way that will have a positive effect for the rest of the person's life.

Narvaez also identifies what she calls Primal Wisdom. This deals with issues that today we would refer to as morality. Primal Wisdom is as old as the human race itself and is built by multiple systems of biological and cultural influence from the ground up. Today it can be found in Small-Band-Hunter-Gatherer Societies. The morality displayed in these groups is much more like the altruism displayed among other social mammals. It involves being concerned about the wellbeing of the whole group rather than selfishness, a sense of collective responsibility for children, care for environment and a sense of being part of the environment, willingness to share and to focus on equality rather than hierarchy, etc.

Her conclusion is that with the right start in life, a child will develop a morality that 'goes all the way down' and is based on a neurobiological and emotional development in line with nature's 'intention' for the human race.

This will mean a holistic morality that takes care of environment and harmony with nature into the picture. Given that we can provide such a positive environment for a child to grow up in, the idea that morality has to be based on rational thinking, which has to be taught, will, at some point, fall apart. Instead we will develop a sense of morality based on a much more embracing and positive outlook on life.

There is no doubt that change is needed for humans to cope better with faster and faster changes and a constantly growing population on our shared planet. The question is just how we can bring about such a change. For many turning to religion seems to be the obvious choice. But as we can see in far too many instances, religion can be a disaster if it sets people up for an 'us and them' scenario. A return to more authoritarian upbringing for future generations is equally questionable. Neurobiology and neuropsychology can provide much better solutions!

Narvaez suggests building on data from clinical sciences and positive psychology to achieve a developmentally informed ecological and ethical sensibility. She suggests ways to self-author and revise how we think about parenting and sociality. She recommends techniques such as; joining like-minded groups, spending more time outdoors in positive environments and spreading an alternative vision of morality development and wellbeing.

For organisations such as the SMN her suggestions should be a signal to focus resources on becoming mentors for society. SMN displays enormous knowledge and insights into the benefits of a positive, environmentally friendly approach to life. As such, it could take on the role that elders had in tribal society. As an organisation SMN could also try to influence society as a whole to devote more resources to giving children a good start. The growing evidence that children with a positive start grow up healthier is not necessarily a demand for extra resources, but rather a redirection of resources. After all, prevention is better than cure! Helping children toward a happy life early on is a much better scenario than massive spending trying to solve problems later in life.

Gunnel Minett *is author of* ***Breath and Spirit.***

A Whole New World

Gunnel Minett

THE EPIGENETICS REVOLUTION: How Modern Biology is Rewriting Our Understanding of Genetics, Disease and Inheritance

Nessa Carey

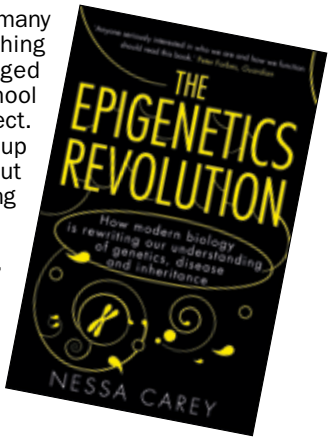
Iconbooks, 2011, 339 pp., illustrated, £9.99, p/b - ISBN 978-184831347-7,

JUNK DNA: A Journey Through the Dark Matter of the Genome

Nessa Carey

Iconbooks, 2015, 340 pp., illustrated, £12.91, p/b - ISBN 978-1-84831-826-7

When their children go to school, many parents discover that the teaching of certain subjects has changed dramatically since their own school days. Biology is just such a subject. The genome project has opened up whole new areas of research about what goes on in the cells of all living organisms.



It was in 2000, only 15 years ago, that the entire human genome was first sequenced. At the time, many believed that mapping the genome would enable us to understand the basics of how life evolved.

In addition, we would find cures for diseases, such as cancer, and that this would represent a complete turning point for medicine. No surprise then that the success of the genome project led to a frenzy in biological research.

Fairly quickly it became obvious that genes alone could not explain the unique characteristics of human individuals. We simply had too many in common with the most primitive of animals, and even plants, for them to be the final blueprint for human behaviour. The numbers did not add up either; there seemed to be too few human genes to account for our complexity. And genetic determinism failed to explain why or how identical twins could develop in different ways.

One result of this research was that genetics 'branched out' into epigenetics, the study of cellular and physiological trait variations that are not caused by changes in the DNA sequence. In other words, it is the study of the external or environmental factors that turn genes on or off, controlling where and when genes are expressed.

From assuming that identifying genes would be sufficient to understand how an organism functions, it has become clear that there were more factors involved. The genome constitutes more of a 'user manual' that allow an organism to respond to its environment than a rigid set of rules. Epigenetics studies the factors that interact with DNA, which can affect cell development. To start with, focus was on the DNA codes that produce proteins (genes), since proteins are the essential molecular building blocks that underlie all life. The rest was labelled 'junk DNA' since it initially did not seem to have a function.

Further studies, however, established that only 2% of the genome codes for proteins. The obvious question was why on earth 98% of our genome should be 'junk' with no real function. As Carey explains in her latest book, 'Junk DNA', a much more complex scenario is emerging. Although the picture is far from clear yet, it has become obvious that junk DNA is far from 'junk'. On the contrary, it contributes (in a different way from protein-coding genes) to the intricate system of finely tuned functions within the cell. Among the characteristics which may depend on 'junk DNA' are; our wellbeing, looks and our ability to lead a long and healthy life.

One of the interesting findings to emerge from the field of epigenetics is the hugely important influence of the environment has on gene expression. In the Epigenetics Revolution, Carey gives examples of how environmental factors affected victims of the Dutch famine during WW2. Thanks to good record keeping in the Netherlands, research has shown how this extreme external factor had a huge effect on gene expression pattern of the affect individuals. The period of starvation affected not just on the generation immediately exposed, but also their children and grandchildren. It also showed that it was not a simple lack of food that had an impact on pregnant women, but also the particular period of their pregnancy at which this occurred. The effects on the victim's children include a life-long propensity to be underweight (as in the case of the film star Audrey Hepburn).

Stress comes in many forms though, and it is becoming more evident that it is not just the physical environment that can affect gene expression. Psychological stress can also have an effect on cellular activities, highlighted by an exciting new area of psychology that looks at the connection between body and psyche, and the role of emotions in this interaction. Jaak Panksepp's animal research is a good example of this.*

Although we know from many sources already that our environment is important for our wellbeing, epigenetics offers a biological mechanism to help explain how this occurs. For a layperson interested in expanding their knowledge in this growing and fascinating area of research, Nessa Carey's books offer a very good introduction. The language is accessible and written by someone with in-depth knowledge of this field.

Understanding the basic building blocks of all life also offers food for thought in a number of other areas, from nutrition to psychology through to consciousness studies. Above all it helps us see that we are part of a larger creation of all life on the planet where everything seems to be based on interaction and co-existence. In a wider perspective it could even be said that this adds a spiritual aspect to epigenetics.

*see Jaak Panksepp, ***The Archaeology of Mind*** (2012) reviewed in the Network Review, summer 2013

medicine-health

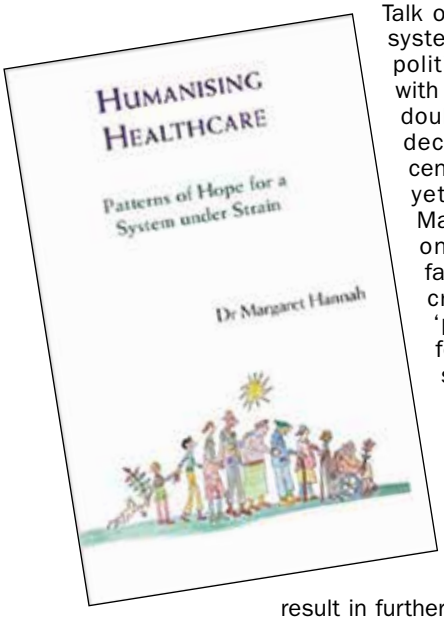
Cultural Transformation

David Lorimer

HUMANISING HEALTHCARE

Margaret Hannah

Triarchy Press 2015, 144 pp., £12, p/b – ISBN 978-1-909470-44-6



Talk of crisis in our health systems has become a political commonplace, with expenditures nearly doubling in the first decade of the 21st century. In this simple yet seminal book, Margaret Hannah not only analyses the factors underlying this crisis but presents 'patterns of hope for a system under strain' that should be required reading throughout the system as present attempts to contain spiralling costs are clearly inadequate and may indeed paradoxically result in further complications and a compromised quality of service. She quotes Aldous Huxley as saying that 'medical science has made such tremendous progress that there is hardly a healthy human left.' His adopted country of the US illustrates his maxim although the food industry must shoulder part of the responsibility.

The three parts of the book discuss the contemporary challenge, current responses and a third way. Margaret highlights some crucial issues in the first part, some arising from our history like the emphasis on machine and military metaphors, on objectivity and the clinical gaze, all of which tends to dehumanise the relationship between carers and patients. Medicine is implicitly being asked to address existential issues with technical equipment. The epidemiological transition from infectious to chronic conditions requires a systemic understanding grounded in culture and the realities of inequality, social dislocation and loss of meaning, sedentary lifestyles and an ageing population.

One illustration in the chapter on escalating costs comes from Scotland where, between 2001 and 2010, new cases of heart disease fell by 28% and deaths by 40% while in the same period the number of people living with heart disease rose by 70% from 500,000 to 850,000. The main cost factors are the inexorable rise in demand, medical technology, increased prescription of drugs, overdiagnosis and escalating staffing. Prescriptions in England rose from 374 million in 2001 to a staggering 961 million in 2011 with the average number of items prescribed per person going up from 12 to 18 – this seems to be going down the American road.

All this means that the brakes are failing. Responses in terms of increasing efficiency and productivity, cost savings, innovation and reorganisation are attempted by every government, yet they put huge strain on the carers and may lead to deteriorating standards of care and unfortunate oversights and accidents. Regulation and inspection are rife, intensifying pressure on staff, undermining morale and creating institutionalised anxiety. A critical chapter on randomised clinical trials exposes the limitations of a quantitative approach based on the biomechanical model that fails to recognise the complexity of life.

However, Margaret shows that another way is possible by telling the story of the South Central Foundation in Alaska, which takes a radical new approach of 'intentional design' to healthcare. They began with a two-year listening process encouraging participation and ownership and evolving a system consonant with local values. The results speak for themselves: between 1997 and 2007 there was a 40% drop in A & E usage, a 50% drop in specialist referrals and a 20% drop in primary care visits. The architecture is friendly and people are encouraged to chat in the front entrance; in other words they are creating a really human context. The UK Peckham Experiment before the Second World War took this kind of integrated family approach building up trust and stressing salutogenesis rather than disease management. Overall there is a shift of control towards patients, who are encouraged to take responsibility for their choices.

The current system – as do all systems – shapes behaviour in particular ways and we cannot expect a wholesale transformation. However, small-scale projects can be undertaken within existing structures, and Margaret provides some examples from her own experience – forms of transformational innovation that can be pioneered very inexpensively with a supportive policy framework. We can foster a human system of relationships based as much on being as on doing. She introduces a very useful framework used within the International Futures Forum (in which I am also involved) of the Three Horizons. H1 is the dominant system in the present trying to maintain itself; H3 is a place of aspiration, a patterning of hope; between lies H2, a place of opportunity and innovation but less radical and visionary than H3. This framework can provide a space for deepening non-confrontational conversations as a step towards genuine transformation. She recommends configuring round commitment rather than targets, growing the new in the presence of the old – real humanism in action.

Although I recommended this book at the beginning to health professionals it can and should be read by anyone wishing to understand the deeper dimensions of health within our current cultural context – and do take a copy in for your local GP!

'The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.'

Gandhi

Learning by Returning to our Roots

Gunnel Minett

ANCESTRAL LANDSCAPES IN HUMAN EVOLUTION - Culture, Childrearing and Social Wellbeing

edited by Darcia Narvaes, Kristin Valentino, Agustin Fuentes, James J. McKenna and Peter Gray

Oxford University Press, 2014, 364 pp., £45.99, h/b - ISBN 978-0-19-996425-3,

In most parts of the world the social structure has come along way from that of our earliest hunter-gatherer ancestors. From living in small groups of up to 150 people many now live in larger groups, from villages up to mega cities with over 10 million people. Undoubtedly this development has meant, materialistically at least, a more comfortable life for most people, in particular as regards nutrition and health issues. The life span of hunter-gatherers was a lot shorter and infant mortality a lot worse. But according to the authors of this book, the hunter-gathering life also had advantages, in particular for children. Advantages that we now seem to have lost.

The main advantage of Stone Age life, it could be argued, is living in small tribal groups: human beings have spent far longer, historically, living in this way than any modern form of living. From an evolutionary point this means that human beings have had more time to adjust to tribal life than to the social changes that created modern society.

This applies in particular to childrearing. As most of us probably would agree modern life is not very child-friendly. Even for parents totally dedicated to giving their children the best possible start in life, this is not always easily done. Children need safe environments, a group of people they can learn to trust and relate to, fair chances to play by themselves in groups where they can learn from other children as well as adults. All of this is necessary for their socialisation process and their social wellbeing as adults.

Although things are changing in many countries, child-care is still not a top priority. Instead of listening to a growing number of experts who point to the fact that giving children a good start in life is a very good investment, childrearing is often left to 'make-do' solutions and a real struggle for parents to cope with. Regardless of wealth in the country, it is obvious that many countries are not allocating sufficient funds to provide a good environment for families with young children.

This is why studies of Stone Age life can play a role. That way we can go back to our roots and see which important factors we have lost on our way to a modern society. In a collection of essays, by a number of experts in this field, this book presents the findings of such studies. A number of hunter-gatherer societies around the world have been studied from a range of different approaches with the common goal to identify the optimal environment for mammalian development. They range from observations of living conditions; how children never sleep alone, are breastfed for several years, allowed to play and learn from each other in egalitarian groups to observations of the situation for modern children.

Some important conclusions are that play is essential both to develop creativity and self-confidence. The fact that many hunter-gatherer groups have a much more collective approach to childrearing also has a positive effect. It is an old view that it takes a village to bring up a child. This notion is often ignored in today's childrearing. Adults who are not directly related or paid to look after a particular child will be reprimanded or worse if they try to participate in the child's upbringing.

The book also challenges reports, often paid for by companies who produce breast milk formulas, that mothers should stop breastfeeding after a few months. Instead the book reports positively on a lifestyle where young children are breastfed for several years, not just by their mother but sometimes even by other mothers. In comparison, in countries such as

USA breastfeeding is not an easy job for working mothers. Maternity leave is often only a couple of weeks (whereas in many European countries it can be up to a couple of years paid leave). There's also constant advertising advising mothers to switch to formulas that have more 'controlled' nutritional values. Interestingly, other research by American scientists also point to links between lack of breastfeeding and an obsession with the female breast in adult life. This applies both to men who tend to prefer women with large breasts and to women who are prepared to spend a lot of money on breast enlargement.

There's also a revealing chapter on the consequences of too much TV and Internet for children. TV and internet adverts, aimed directly at children, may be seen by the child as a version of a 'bad mother': they generate the same message as a bad parent making demands on the child, sometimes in ways that the child does not know how to meet. This can trigger a stress reaction in the child. Also, if the child spends too much time watching TV it may not develop a proper experience of two-way communication. This is something that can have a negative effect in the school environment and other situations later in life, according to other reports. For example, some British children starting school need to be taught to speak. Too much TV may also lead to the child bonding with the TV rather than their family. Many children show real withdrawal symptoms if their TV is removed.

Modern adult vanity can also have a negative effect on child development. Botox injections block movement of the facial muscles; a growing child needs to learn communication from observing the facials expressions of people around them. Having a mother with a semi-paralyzed face, may be a problem and a source of confusion for the child.

Obviously the book does not argue in favour of a return to Stone Age life. The disadvantages are far too many. Besides, the planet's current population is far too large to sustain a Stone Age life-style for everyone. But by returning to our roots to see what we have lost and where we may have gone wrong, may help us to detect good ways forward and to understand which changes need to be made.

Childbirth and the Future

David Lorimer

CHILDBIRTH AND THE EVOLUTION OF HOMO SAPIENS

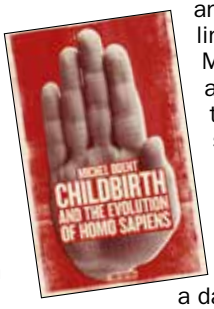
Michel Odent (SMN)

Pinter and Martin, 2014, 160 pp., £11.99, p/b – ISBN 978-1-78066-210-7

DO WE NEED MIDWIVES?

Michel Odent (SMN)

Pinter and Martin, 2015, 144 pp., £11.99, p/b – ISBN 978-1-78066-220-6



Michel Odent is one of the world's foremost obstetricians who is also the founder of the Primal Health Research Centre (www.primalhealthresearch.com and www.wombecology.com). His work has been pioneering in many respects, and in these two books he reviews developments in childbirth practices and their implications for our collective future. It is easy to forget the revolution that has taken place during my lifetime, especially with respect to Caesareans.

They used to constitute only 2% of births, but the latest figures in the US are up to 33% and rising. The procedure used to take an hour and required two units of blood, while it now takes 20 minutes with minimal blood loss. This means that in advanced countries it is likely that the Caesarean will become the predominant mode of delivery in the foreseeable future. In addition, there is research to suggest that labour is becoming more difficult.

Few general readers would stop to consider the implications of this trend in modes of childbirth.

Foremost among the consequences is an interruption of the natural occurrence of oxytocin during a normal vaginal birth. It is an example of a physiological function that has suddenly become underused and is important in bonding between mother and baby. Michel explains that adrenaline and oxytocin are natural antagonists, and that it is important for the mother to be in a state of neocortical inhibition while she gives birth. This has the incidental advantage of reducing pain. It follows that too much hands-on interference in the birth process is likely to activate the mother's neocortex and favour adrenaline over oxytocin – as do bright lights. The ideal midwife is one who sits knitting in the corner in a supportive role.

Most societies in history have interfered with the birth process, and there has been a strong cultural conditioning to regard the microbe in terms of disease rather than supporting the development of the baby's immune system. In the 1970s, ecologists like Tinbergen and Lorenz developed the notion of a critical period surrounding birth when the infant should be in direct contact with the mother. An additional taboo was the danger of the colostrum, so that medical systems of care tended to isolate the baby from the mother in order to protect it from potential infection. We now know that it is crucial for the mother to be able to pass on her microbiome to the baby, and that breastfeeding is much easier if the baby has immediate bodily contact. As indicated above, the baby needs the mother in a specific psychological and physiological state. An amusing example of this was the woman who gave birth very easily after having a glass of champagne offered by her roommate who had given birth the day before. This had the ideal of inhibitory effect on the mother's neocortex.

Michel relates the cultural interference with the birth process to the rise of the human domination of Nature during the evolutionary process. It is arguable that this dominator mode has had historical advantages, but it is now becoming clear that this approach is unsustainable if we are to continue to live on a habitable planet and that the partnership mode suggested by Riane Eisler is now an evolutionary imperative. The emergence of such terms as symbiosis and Gaia theory is symptomatic of a change in direction. However, there is a further evolutionary consideration to take into account, namely that modern medicine is neutralising natural selection and potentially making us even more dependent on it.

Michel discusses research on patterns of immune response and disease relating to modes of childbirth. I already mentioned an interruption of the oxytocin process above, which means that the immune response of Caesarean babies is less robust than those born through the vaginal route. Another modern discovery is that the human gut is an ecosystem and that gut flora are responsible for about 80% of our immune system. There also appears to be a link between oxytocin dysregulation and depression. In addition, it is possible that this is also linked with rise of autism and the decline of empathy. Michel points out that there is a correlation between autism and Asperger's syndrome with mathematical talent; one study showed that the autistic group had significantly lower blood oxytocin levels than the normal group. It is these people who are more likely to become scientists with IQ predominating over EQ, left hemisphere thinking over right hemisphere thinking, head over heart. This can even translate into visions of the future where we become progressively cleverer but less empathetic - a dangerous prospect.

Michel concludes that we need a better understanding of the needs of the labouring mother and new born child and that contemporary scientific discoveries should overturn centuries of cultural conditioning so that we can create the ideal conditions for childbirth. These informative and research-based essays can help general readers get to grips with these critical issues and apply them to their own circumstances.

philosophy-spirituality

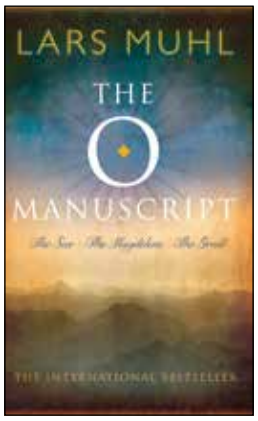
Paths of Initiation

David Lorimer

THE O MANUSCRIPT

Lars Muhl

Watkins Publishing, 2013, 536 pp., $29.95, h/b – ISBN 978-1-78028-562-7



While describing various paths of initiation, this extraordinary book is an initiation in itself as it plumbs the depths of the essential spiritual agenda of our time. Lars Muhl is a former musician and also a scholar in Aramaic with a particular historical interest in Mary Magdalene, who forms a central theme in his journey. We are living at a time when inner work is critical if we are to achieve a real shift of consciousness, transforming darkness into light, matter into spirit, power into service and fear into love. These dramas are going on at some level within each of us.

Struck down with a debilitating illness, Lars is put in touch with the 'Seer', who gives him an appointment in Montsegur - a long way from his native Denmark. He arrives in Foix very early in the morning and mysteriously gets a lift to his destination where he meets the Seer and begins his initiation. He discovers that he has much to let go of, symbolised by rocks that the Seer puts into his rucksack and casts off the mountain as they are making their steep ascent. We do not discover the exact identity of the Seer, but it is very clear that he is an advanced initiate able to travel and work freely in various dimensions. He works with clients remotely and on one occasion explains how he has to 'reset' the organs of a man in order to get them functioning properly again. A widow also asks him to accompany her husband on his journey beyond death, which he describes partly through the fascinating concept of the Shaft of the Soul, representing the tunnel in the near death experience. The task is to acknowledge each experience and let it go, otherwise the pattern will be reconfigured into another life. The Seer is apparently able to help in this process.

He speaks at length about dissolving the old patterns and thought forms in order to allow the new to flow through so that we can express a more embracing consciousness. This involves facing ourselves and questioning our motives, releasing the need to control while opening ourselves up to the universal and making ourselves available for service. In this way 'man is a transformer, a channel for the universal, where the energies are transformed.' Lars undergoes many adventures with the Seer, including a fascinating journey in Toledo, which had been a centre of mediaeval Kabbalism and where he finds a coin bearing the image of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, with whom the Seer has an inner connection. Book 2 continues the story while introducing the feminine archetype represented by Mary Magdalene.

Lars reconstructs her life and the powerful initiatory processes that she might have experienced at the time, culminating in her meeting with Jesus when they become lovers and she initiates him into the mysteries, including that of sacred sexuality where the holy of holies represents the man entering the woman and achieving mystical as well as physical union. This new understanding of her status is a major and controversial theological theme that sets a new agenda of the unification of masculine and feminine principles. This is beautifully written and expressed, and the dramatic narrative begins to alternate between different scenes and time periods. Another important figure is a woman called Sylvia, who herself had undergone a dissolution of the ego and an initiation some 50 years ago. The feminine archetype is also represented by Shekinah, who is all-embracing, containing and reconciling the opposites. Later in the book, Lars describes the spiritual journey of a woman he calls Ishatar from prostitute to initiate and the transformation she brings about in a lecherous merchant on her quest to meet Mary Magdalene. And Lars himself has a mysterious encounter with a woman towards the end of the book, who finishes up by vanishing as suddenly as she had appeared.

A further theme is that of the Grail, also associated with Montsegur (I now live only half an hour away). Symbolically, the Grail represents a higher state of consciousness as well as the eternal spiritual quest and the heart, whose content is love. Lars sees this new energy as inclusive, healing and altruistic – the carrier of both the cosmic fire and the living water as symbols of spiritual renewal. This is what we each need to embody within ourselves, recognising the image of God in everyone. Sylvia reminds Lars of the importance of Sophia or intuitive wisdom, and assures him that she will remain in touch telepathically during his subsequent adventures that take him back to Montsegur, this time actually inside the mountain by a very difficult route. Throughout the book, his outer journeys are mirrored by inner ones that are just as significant, for example in the Bethlehem Cave near Tarascon, where we attended a winter solstice celebration last year. He finds that, like all of us, he may not always get what he wants, but rather what he needs.

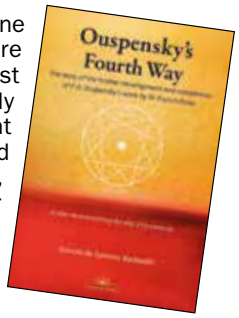
If our current world is the outcome of a thought process, then a new world can only be created in the same fashion, from the inside out by people who are prepared to take the responsibility for helping dissolve the old and co-create the new. An essential component of this process is forgiveness and giving up personal judgement as another form of limitation. By integrating the vertical dimension we can bring heaven and earth, matter and spirit together in our own being - Lars describes a parallel process within an ancient context, but the work is the same. At the end of the book the reader is invited to step into an enlightened consciousness that is the NOW of all eternity, realising that 'deep in your being you are already the eternal, unchangeable joy that you seek outside of yourself.' The Divine dwells in stillness within. He adds Sylvia's message: 'Remember, the door is on the inside. Remember that the key is on the inside. As of today there is no intermediate stage between man and God.' This powerful and transformative book invites readers to deepen their own inner journeys and participate in the alchemical process of our time.

Setting the Record Straight

Chris Allen

OUSPENSKY'S FOURTH WAY

Gerald de Symons Beckwith Starnine Media & Publishing Ltd, 2015, 388pp., £19.90, p/b - ISBN 978-0-9931776-0-6



No man is without fault but, that said, anyone who has studied the canon of literature concerning the lives of two of the greatest truth seekers of the 20th century—namely G. I. Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky—might be forgiven for thinking that the latter had more than his fair share. Over the years, this Russian writer, philosopher and teacher has been accused of just about everything from being an ineffectual dreamer and a weakling, an overly intellectual upstart who lived off the crumbs of his mentor's table, having deserted him for no good reason, to ending up as a sad old drunk who lost his way spiritually … Dubious credentials indeed! Even the celebrated writer: Colin Wilson, whilst conceding that Ouspensky was a genius, berates the man's shortcomings, oddly by drawing on the Russian's semi-autobiographical first novel by way of justification. Consult Refs [1] and [3] for further details.

Anyway, what are we to make of all this? Well, an interesting new book—as may be gleaned from its title—attempts to set the record straight. Skilfully written by Gerald de Symons Beckwith, beautifully illustrated and supported with useful colour photographs, it is the extraordinary story of the further development and completion of P. D. Ouspensky's work by Dr Francis Roles of the Study Society in London, providing compelling evidence for a re-appraisal.

The author's impressive background puts him in perhaps a unique position to throw new light on both the Fourth Way and the iconic Enneagram by drawing on previously unpublished work. As he explains in the Foreword to his book, in his early twenties, Gerald Beckwith joined Dr Francis Roles' School, re-organised after the death of Ouspensky in 1947, and studied for some 35 years under the tutelage of several of the Russian's most devoted followers. The author was entrusted to ensure that the essentials of their completion of Ouspensky's work—for which the foundation was laid during the last years of his life—should be preserved for future generations. And, as becomes evident from its content, Mr Beckwith has succeeded in demonstrating a complete reconstruction of a living system of knowledge tailored to the needs of the Western World in the 20th and 21st centuries—truly a timely new psychology for man's possible evolution.

Following the Foreword, Ouspensky's Fourth Way is divided into two main sections, each of nine chapters:
Part 1 – The Making of a School
Part 2 – The Synthesis of a Teaching

In Part 1, the author opens the batting by explaining that the Fourth Way is an ancient Non –dual philosophical teaching—similar to Advaita Vedanta and Eastern in origin—that was NOT invented by George Gurdjieff as is generally supposed and how it was introduced to the West by the latter's foremost student PD Ouspensky.

The author proceeds to describe in detail what constitutes a School of the Fourth Way and recounts how Ouspensky set up his in the UK in the early 1930s using properties such as Colet House in London and Lyne Place in Surrey, having broken with Gurdjieff in 1924. Ouspensky attracted an inner circle of devoted followers, most notably Dr Roles.

The story gathers in pace as the author details how Ouspensky overcame great personal difficulties to succeed in his lifelong spiritual quest in dramatic fashion shortly before his death at Lyne Place in 1947. In this connection, there is fascinating material on Time and Recurrence—Ouspensky's obsessional interests since childhood.

In addition to the importance of re-connecting with the source of the teaching, Ouspensky was aware that something—a simple and natural process—was missing from the Fourth Way, points he stressed to his inner circle and that Dr Roles never forgot.

In 1951, by registering the Study Society, Dr Roles set up his own School of the Fourth Way to continue the work. His organisation expanded over the next ten years and he became involved with such formidable characters as Leon MacLaren and the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi whose mantra based form of meditation, Roles identified as the missing ingredient. According to Gerald Beckwith, relationships between these highly influential figures were far less cordial than is generally supposed. Some readers may be offended by some of the shocking revelations. Nevertheless, the author appears to be even handed in his judgment and truthful throughout his narrative.

Part 1 concludes by relating how—through the Maharishi—Dr Roles succeeded in finding the source of the Fourth Way by meeting Shankaracharya Shantananda Saraswati in India with whom he formed a twenty year relationship. The author also stresses the importance of meditation and explains the approach in detail.

Part 2 consists of a detailed exposition of Ouspensky's re-constructed and completed work. It is necessarily more technical than Part 1 but is nonetheless equally as interesting and in Chapter 9–Towards an Enneagram Psychology—contains material that this reviewer has never previously encountered.

The controversy surrounding the conflict between Gurdjieff and his foremost student will, no doubt, continue unabated as is well illustrated in Ref [2]. Nevertheless, this book has some nuggets which offer interesting new perspectives on Ouspensky's true character and the nature of his work.

When asked by Dr Roles whether a detailed exposition of Ouspensky's Fourth Way was identical to Advaita Vedanta, the then Shankaracharya of Northern India replied: "Yes, there couldn't possibly be any difference."

The doorman of the New York restaurant who commented: "I can't understand his books but Mister Ouspensky is the only really kind man I ever met."

The fact that, following their breakup, Ouspensky was never heard to make disparaging remarks about his mentor whilst Gurdjieff did not reciprocate in kind … very far from it.

The fact that Gurdjieff shamelessly plagiarised ideas from Ouspensky's early work, embodied them into his version of the Fourth Way and claimed them as his own … some crumbs … some table … providing evidence that Gurdjieff, for all his of charisma, had lost his way by 1924 and, more importantly, contact with the source of the esoteric teaching.

And finally, according to eye witness testimony, Ouspensky attained full realisation of the Self at Lyne Place shortly before his death. In plain English, in spite of immense difficulties, he got the job done. Can the same be said of Gurdjieff?

Potentially a game changer in the genre, this fascinating book is not cheap and requires concentration but it is worth both the effort and the cost. It is bound to upset some people, yet it provides tantalising clues towards the solution of long standing puzzles. I strongly recommend that it is read with an open mind and the fullness of attention … twice.

References:

1. Colin Wilson: The Strange Life of P.D. Ouspensky originally published in 1993
2. William Patrick Patterson: Struggle of the Magicians first printed in 1998 Published by Arete Communications Fairfax California
3. P. D Ouspensky: *Strange Life of Ivan Osokin*. London: Faber & Faber, 1948 - available from Amazon.

Chris Allen *is a professional Hypnotherapist and also a crime writer who specialises in novels with strong and factually accurate philosophical as well as hypnotic themes, based on over 30 years experience as a student of Advaita Vedanta and the Fourth Way with the School of Economic Science in London. web site: www.cach.co.uk*

"Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated."

Confucius

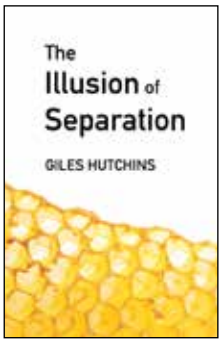
The Reality of Interdependence

David Lorimer

THE ILLUSION OF SEPARATION

Giles Hutchins

Floris Books 2015, 199 pp., £16.99, p/b – ISBN 978-1-178250-127-5



Gregory Bateson was famous for his remark 'Only Connect', representing his holistic approach to life. He is quoted here as saying that our civilisation has entered an evolutionary cul-de-sac with its emphasis on short-term advantage: like EF Schumacher he takes the view that 'the creature that wins against its environment destroys itself.' The history of 20th century thinking in physics, biology, ecology and consciousness studies has highlighted the reality of interconnectedness, and by implication the illusion or limitation of the idea of atomistic separation and detachment built into the Cartesian worldview. In this wide-ranging book, Giles Hutchins examines the history of this sense of separation and provides constructive means of overcoming what he regards as a systemically anti-life attitude.

The first part explores how the Western mind adopted a predominantly materialistic outlook with a science and technology of control and an economics of manipulation. With his background in business, the author begins with a short history of consumerism in the 20th century with increasing manipulation of opinions and desires underpinned by a competitive individualism appealing to greed. Darwinism has been used to justify a dog-eat-dog world of competition separating humans from nature and the organism from its environment. Along with this goes a mentality of conformity and homogenisation inimical to the natural diversity of life. As already mentioned, Descartes played a key role in the history of our culture at a time when our view of Nature became desacralised with the rise of a soulless mechanistic worldview (here the work of Iain McGilchrist on hemispheric thinking is brought in).

Going further back, the next two chapters examine the formation of Western philosophy in ancient Greek culture with an emphasis on concepts of participation and the immanence of spirit within the world. There was a gradual loss of immanence as God came to be seen as more transcendent and indeed outside the universe. Going still further back, Giles reminds us of the principles of shamanism and the ubiquity of animism before the advent of patriarchy. This philosophy has its correspondence in epistemology always of attending. Here the author draws on the work of Owen Barfield, Iain McGilchrist and Steve Taylor on the evolution of culture away from what Barfield called original participation to the modern alienated outlook where separation is associated with competitiveness and consumerism.

In the second part, Giles reminds us that Nature's own ways of relating are co-creative, fluid and connective, sometimes using nonlocal sensing. Quantum theory also gives us a picture of interconnectedness, and in this connection Giles also refers to the less well-established Variable Speed of Light and Black Hole Principle theories and the importance of spiral patterns. A participatory and panentheistic approach re-emerges beyond dualism in the writings of Bergson and Whitehead, while phenomenology has provided a more intuitive way of perceiving and relating, enabling us to become more fully present. At an individual level, this implies the awakening of the Self as envisaged by mystics like Corbin and psychologists like Jung. The heart understands interconnectedness more deeply and attunes more finely to the rhythms of Nature as in indigenous communities, where the self is embedded within a larger whole and has a strong sense of kinship. Giles joins the call for transformational change in terms of being, doing and becoming and presents a model of co-creative and courage-based leading that he contrasts with fear-based leadership.

In the third part, Giles begins with the harmony of opposites and the essential expansion of our awareness involving the reconciliation of the sacred masculine with the sacred feminine. He suggests that the metamorphosis is not one where the ego dissolves but rather embodies the divine presence of Nature. He then has a chapter about the work of Alan Rayner on natural inclusion, which is an excellent explanation of this approach and its value. It encourages us to restructure our perception away from cutting things up towards an understanding of relationships as interdependent flow forms. We can come to realise that we have imposed conceptual discontinuity on natural continuity and flow. The book makes it very clear how we have to go beyond the logic of control-based thinking and co-innovate our culture on a new basis of love-infused wisdom involving a different kind of attention. The emerging dialogue makes room for diversity of opinion and real exchange. He concludes that Nature's wisdom is a far cry from our current mind-set and that we can correspond closely with this operating system through a participatory approach involving redesign, re-establishing our attunement with Nature and rekindling indigenous wisdom.

Ultimately, this well researched and timely book joins the call for a transformation of Western culture that is gradually gaining ground, as the reference base of this study demonstrates. It is a call for a different way of being, knowing perceiving and relating that corresponds to new scientific and philosophical developments. We ourselves have a role to play in this process by the way we lead our lives and relate to others as an expression and embodiment of Nature - this book provides some sensitive guidance about how best to do this while overcoming our historical conditioning.

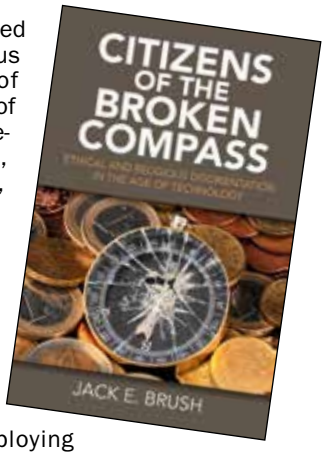
Shifting Identities

David Lorimer

CITIZENS OF THE BROKEN COMPASS

Jack E. Brush

IFF Books (John Hunt), 124 pp., £9.99, p/b – ISBN 978-1-78279-954-2



These stimulating and well-informed essays discuss ethical and religious disorientation in the age of technology, covering a wide range of topics such as consumerism, same-sex marriage, the just war, Darwin, linguistic events, human rights, individual interests and the common good, and forms of atheism. The title suggests that we do not receive any reliable orientation in matters of great importance. The author uses as guidelines the ideas that there are no absolutes, that solutions are contextual, and that the resolution of complex issues requires dialogue employing complementary concepts. He suggests that we experience a disrupted relationship between time and eternity when in fact they belong together.

Brush begins by discussing consumerism and the problem of self-identity within the larger context of the 'economisation' of society. This has its roots in the 18th century but now plays a central role in establishing personal identity in terms of status symbols. As such, it is a superficial solution to the problem of identity. His discussion on same-sex marriages illuminates the radically different moral visions of the debate in the US - biblical conservativism and Enlightenment rationality. I found his essay on Darwin one of the most interesting in his description of his background, especially in relation to Paley's argument for design - it is easy to forget that Darwin studied theology at Cambridge.

The influence of his grandfather Josiah Wedgwood was fundamental in shaping his understanding of competition and free markets, but he also played a role in convincing his father to allow him to embark on the Beagle.

An important theme running through three of the essays is the notion of the common good. In one context, Brush draws a parallel between the non-separability of quantum events and the holistic view of reality, remarking that 'they have their counterparts in the moral complicity of the individual and in the responsibility of all citizens for the common good.' He criticises human rights as atomistic and individualistic, noting that the Stoic idea of natural rights was cosmic rather than individual. Hobbes made an important contribution by basing his right of nature as a claim rather than a duty, corresponding to atomism. In contrast, 'there is a connectivity of the universe that mandates a return to a more holistic view of society, specifically to the notion of common good.' In the US, the supreme individual interest is thought to be freedom, while the defining common good is security. By contrast, Brush supports Plato's view that individual interests do not provide a viable basis for society since they tend to separate citizens.

The two essays on atheism are also very helpful in formulating important distinctions, for instance between theoretical, practical and religious atheism. He maintains that 'theoretical atheism denies the ultimate; practical atheism ignores the ultimate; religious atheism trivialises the ultimate.' Atheism is always contextual, related to an individual's particular understanding of the world. Brush makes the case along with Tillich that critics of religion should attack the most advanced rather than obsolete forms for theology set up as straw men. Interestingly, drawing on Hannah Arendt's distinction between entertainment and culture, he links practical atheism with the consumption of entertainment on flat screens as a distraction. He also refers to Tillich's concept of ultimate concern, commenting that we tend to treat everything as relative – distraction lends itself to ignoring or trivialise the ultimate.

Ethically, individualism also raises the question of the limits of our moral obligation - who counts as our neighbour? At the end, Brush returns to the topic of the relationship between time and eternity, defining eternity as the experience of the fullness of time where past and future coalesce in the present. He suggests that we need a new way of experiencing relationships and a new way of experiencing the movement of time, leading to an understanding of religion as existential rather than theoretical, enriching our condition and opening up access to the divine presence. This is surely a more constructive way of moving beyond atheism, although atheists might well accept this argument while maintaining their position. The book not only provides some interesting historical background to the issues considered, but also personal reflections that we can incorporate into our own thinking and lives.

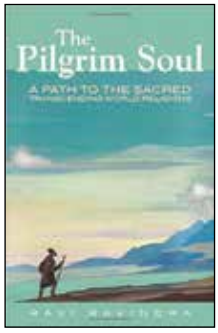
A Higher Calling

David Lorimer

THE PILGRIM SOUL

Ravi Ravindra (SMN)

Quest Books 2014, 140 pp., $15.95, p/b – ISBN 978-0-8356-0929-6



Some years ago I first heard Ravi use the phrase 'inter-pilgrim dialogue' when talking about interfaith matters. The phrase and his explanation of it struck me at the time. It characterises people as seekers and questioners rather than already knowing the answer so that one has a fixed position from which to relate to others. In the course of this brilliant and visionary book, Ravi argues that this exclusivism has its roots in monotheism, and has been imported into modern science. His path to the sacred is one that transcends particular religious expressions and is based on experience and practice. As pilgrims, we are all on a path or journey.

Our starting point is the culturally conditioned ego and the tension between matter and spirit, where we are and where we would like to be. The great traditions all insist that humans need to wake up and transform themselves from within. Nor is this a one-off process, but rather a continuing and ever renewed striving and letting go. We are called to penetrate into finer and more subtle levels of consciousness and reality with our full being - this requires a discipline of mind, heart and body to move beyond the personal to a more universal perspective and understanding: dying to the smaller self and awakening to the Self within and gradually unfolding a deeper level of insight, freedom, love and compassion.

The present is where time and eternity intersect and where we can also engage deeply with the world, literally being in time and living as consciously as we can. It is in daily life that this practice occurs involving 'attention, quiet mindfulness and constant vigilance.' Throughout the book, Ravi quotes apposite sayings from many traditions that he himself has internalised, moving effortlessly from 1 Corinthians to the Bhagavad-Gita. The spiritual quest is one of asking who I am, not at the level of the ego, but rather in truth and spirit. We all recognise the narrowness of our self-will and self-interest, and the great sages surrender to the bidding of a higher will: 'not I, but Christ in me', not fear and separation, but love and union, seeing and hearing more deeply, in short, *metanoia,* being transformed and reborn.

There is a very good chapter on the divergence of religions, beginning with the key patterns in the Indian tradition. The fundamental question is 'who am I?', which draws the pilgrim inwards to meditation and contemplation, to the knowledge of Atman and its oneness with Brahman. In his discussion of Buddhism, Ravi quotes TRV Murti as saying that Buddhism is Hinduism for export - and indeed it has enormously popular over the last generation. I liked his translation of *sunyata* as luminosity. The Judaeo-Christian tradition begins from God rather than the individual, with an emphasis on His transcendence and the need for faith. Only a few mystics have spoken about union with God, while the mainstream is more concerned with the hope for salvation through grace. As Ravi puts it, 'God is the active agent, who calls human beings to respond to the challenge of his revelation', become aware of our sinful nature and surrender ourselves to his will and grace. The contrast is nicely encapsulated in the differences between the Indian sage and the biblical prophet. While the language of Christianity uses words such as sin, faith, prayer, revelation, grace and salvation, Indians are more at home with the awakening from ignorance and illusion towards knowledge and liberation. This corresponds more closely with the Neoplatonic tradition where the fall is not due to disobedience, but rather to ignorance.

Pilgrims on the path are seeking human-to-human dialogue rather than an exchange of interfaith views. Sometimes, as in the case of Bede Griffiths, the dialogue can even take place within one person. We still have a long way to go to overcome intolerance and fanaticism based on the certainty that I am right and you are wrong - as Montaigne observed even in the 16th century, it is putting a very high value on your opinions to roast people on account of them - we need greater humility and openness. Sages simultaneously experience 'the oneness of all and the uniqueness of each creature.' Beyond form is vibration and we can attune to more subtle and sacred levels of reality through silence and contemplation, allowing our sense of self to expand as we gradually grow in love and wisdom. Ravi quotes a nice equation from Gandhi that God = Truth = Love. In this understanding love is required to know truth and knowledge of truth is expressed in love. This is a wise book of living wisdom, the fruit of many years of reading and spiritual practice, which will speak to the condition of the pilgrim reader.

The Way of Feeling

David Lorimer

NOT I, NOT OTHER THAN I – the Life and Teachings of Russel Williams

Steve Taylor (SMN, Ed)

O Books 2015, 160 pp., £9.99, p/b – ISBN 978-1-78279-729-6

Readers may like to refer to Steve Taylor's article above before reading my review of this remarkable record and compilation from a little-known spiritual teacher now in his 90s. Steve has rendered a valuable service to spiritual seekers in making this wisdom more widely available. The book neatly alternates a chronological account of Russel's life with his spiritual teachings transcribed from his talks at the Buddhist Society in Manchester. Russel's life is both ordinary and extraordinary, ordinary in some of the jobs that he has done, but extraordinary in terms of his experience, development and insight.

Even as a child, he came close to death by drowning on a number of occasions. The narrative describes a number of accidents that would probably have killed a normal person, including being struck by lightning and electrocuted. He lived through the Blitz and took part in the evacuation of Dunkirk, seeing some terrible scenes in the process. He shows no fear, recalling an incident as a child when he pummelled the legs of an elephant for throwing his dog into the air. After the war, he got a job looking after horses, which proved a turning point in his life. He became so concentrated on the horses that his mind went quiet and he was not thinking any more; effectively he was absorbed in mindfulness meditation. As described in Steve's article, he suddenly becomes one with the horse from the inside, realising that there is one consciousness linking us all together – he then felt a sense of oneness towards everything.

He became involved in circuses and tells the story of when he was trapped inside a lion's cage with the lion walking towards him, then the next thing he knew he was standing 10 feet outside the cage watching the lion bringing his other legs in. Not only was the door closed, but it was also padlocked. His relationship with horses is based on complete trust and is quite remarkable. One horse had mauled four people, and Russel manages to calm him down within half an hour. On another occasion, he had to deal with 27 wild horses, so he sat down completely calm with a bucket of water, waiting as each horse came up to drink and sniff him. He did a similar process with another 150 wild horses. He was also able to calm a horse that had impaled itself on a fence and required a painful and protracted set of stitches. The vet had never seen anything like it.

Through an interesting coincidence of circumstances, Russel finally meets John Garrie, one of the founders of the Buddhist Society, who is absolutely able to understand what he has been through and his spiritual philosophy. He then gets involved with the Buddhist Society and has been teaching there ever since. He seems to have a special relationship with Ramana Maharshi and it is clear that his wisdom is channelled from another level and not derived from any reading. For him, the only reality is consciousness itself, with no separation. He sees the future involving a shift in the human psyche where people will more readily perceive their spiritual nature. As for him, he has memories of being a spiritual teacher in previous lives, but does not feel that he will be born again - his influence will remain as a wider consciousness: 'I won't be coming back, but I'll still be here.'

Russel's teaching is one of feeling and being. For him, feeling unites and thinking separates, to feel is to experience through mindful attention to the present. This involves giving full attention not only to people, but also to trivial household tasks. God is the universal unmanifest consciousness that manifests through each of us. Metta or loving-kindness is equally important and can be felt as a sense of unity and expansion in his meetings, creating a rapport between those present. He encourages shorter rather than longer periods of meditation in order to gain a greater sense of continuity.

He reminds us that it doesn't take any effort to be content, we just need to let go and be in the present. This also enables us to nurture, to give out - and in moving beyond duality we move beyond thought into stillness and peace. Russel urges us to slow down and be gentle, reminding us that our qualities and perceptions are reflected back to us by life.

Spiritual development enables transparency to emerge and to reach a place beyond words: 'living in the moment, there is now a clarity - in the seeing is the knowing, in the experiencing is the knowing…..we see clearly, with no judgement whatsoever. There is nothing to judge by, because judgement lies in a conceptual field. And if that field is clear and empty, then no judgement can take place.' As he humorously summarises, 'when you see things clearly for what they are, understanding isn't necessary.' There is nothing missing in our lives if we look into wholeness rather than duality. He also comments that our problems cannot be stronger than ourselves 'because you are the one who created them in the first place.' Similarly, 'someone might feel there is something missing, but as a person they are the bit that is missing from the whole.'

Readers can perhaps appreciate that there is great simplicity, clarity and wisdom in these insights into the nature of consciousness and the self. The mind likes to complicate things and we can end up chasing our tails instead of experiencing life as it is. There is a way of striving and a way of letting go. If the approach of Barbara De Angelis is fundamentally one of striving, then Russel's is equally a simple way of being that focuses on experiencing life beyond duality and feeling its wholeness.

psychology-consciousness studies

In or Out?

Robert A Charman

DEMYSTIFYING THE OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE

Luis Minero

Llewellyn Publishing, 2014, 370 pp. £48 h/b - ISBN 978-0-7387-3079-0

The sensation of being outside of your body is a genuine experience. The question is whether you, as a separate self, have actually separated from your brain in the sense that what you are now experiencing is not being registered by your brain or whether it is ***as if*** you were separated in the sense of being a very convincing hallucinatory type experience. This book, based upon an absolute belief that the conscious self does separate from the physical brain during an OB experience, is subtitled as *A Practical Manual for Exploration and Personal Evolution*

Louis Minero, a former chemistry honours graduate, is now the Education Director of the International Academy of Consciousness (IAC), founded in 2000 by Dr Waldo Vieira (b.1932), a Brazilian medical doctor and dentist who has written voluminously on the subject. The IAC now has a worldwide network of teaching centres including one in London directed by Sandie Gustus who was one of the lecturers at the *Body and Beyond 3: Scientific and Spiritual Perspectives* conference (2012) and is the author of *Less Incomplete: A Guide to Experiencing the Human Condition beyond the Physical Body* (2011). Minero teaches the skill of voluntarily entering the OB state of mind to IAC students and lectures widely on the subject. His aim, which he carries out in a calm and reasoned way, is to present the case for the actuality of separation of self from body during the OB experience by describing the whole process from separation to return together with instructional guidelines. To follow his train of thought we need to understand some basic IAC terminology. Dr Vieira, who has had OB experiences since childhood, coined the term *Conscientiology* in 1994 as the study of

consciousness as a self existing entity and *Projectiology* as the study of the OB experience in his two huge volumes *700 Conscientiology Experiments* (1994), and *Projectiology: A Panorama of Experiences of the Consciousness Outside the Human Body* (2002) reissued as *Projections of the Consciousness: A Diary of Out-of-Body Experiences* (2007, 3rd ed).

In his opening chapter on fundamental concepts Minero says that for science to study matter and energy as if they are the only realities is a conceptual error as it ignores the third reality which is consciousness. The Consciential paradigm includes the primal reality of consciousness as the intelligent principle underlying the universe. It is consciousness that animates and controls the body during life and it is the consciousness of self as an independent entity that continues after bodily death.

In IAC terminology the *Holosoma* (*Holos* meaning whole or complete and *soma* meaning body) refers to the set of four bodies that comprise each person's consciousness the study of which is called *Holosomatics.* These four bodies consist of the *Soma,* the biological body that interacts with physical reality; the *Energosoma* (the energetic body often defined in terms of chakras) that vitalises the biological body and acts as the continuing link between soma and consciousness during an OBE; the *Psychosoma,* often referred to by others as the astral body, that provides the psychic vehicle for the conscious self during an OBE by which we can communicate with other people's psychosoma during their OBE, and the *Mentalsoma* (intellectual body) the most sophisticated and complex body of the consciousness through which we can attain the ultimate level of lucid awareness of being 'at one with the universe'. According to Conscientiology the fact that we can have OB experiences demonstrates that we do not live in a one-dimensional-one-life-only-universe but in a multidimensional, multiexperiential, many-life-return universe which we can explore in depth during an OBE. I must mention one more central concept which is the *Thosene.* 'Tho' is derived from *Tho*ughts, *'s'* from *s*entiments or emotions and '*ene*' from *ene*rgy. Consciential energies (CEs) are manifested in the thoughts-emotions-energy synergies of thosenes which form the units of conscious informational energy. Strongly emotional thosenes can, for example, imprint objects, buildings and rooms as when it is said that people can enter a room after it has been vacated in anger and sense the anger still present.

From this introduction onwards Minero explores the whole subject in depth with many more technical IAC definitions. Ch 2 on *Bioenergy* divides this energy into two forms; one is the Immanent Energy (IE) inherent in nature and the other is Consciential Energy (CE) expressed in the interaction of the Energosoma with the physical body; Ch 3 on *Out and About* discusses the characteristics of nonphysical consciousness, different forms of OB projections and different levels of extra-physical lucidity; Ch 4 on *How To* describes a range of suggested techniques through which one can develop the ability to induce an OBE and learn strategies for effective post OBE recall; Ch 5 on *Extraphysical Consciousnesses* describes how you can interact with other OB selves including those who are 'deceased' and awaiting their return; Ch 6 on *Consciential Maturity* explores how to use the OB experience to evolve in wisdom as a spiritual being including acting as mental helpers to others and Ch 7 on *Planning a Life* uses the OBE perspective to explore the re-incarnatory life-death-rebirth cycle of each consciousness including where we go after we physically die, what we do, the implications of karma, and how we prepare for the next life. Each chapter is illustrated with personal accounts including many of Minero's own experiences, icons defining terms, line drawn figures, a key point summary and chapter referencing. There is an extensive bibliography, a glossary of terms and an index.

This book is very well written without making any dogmatic assertions. Minero's credo is that you must test what he is saying by reflecting upon your own OB experiences. The IAC has obviously collated a huge descriptive database of OB experiences and Minero presents an important percentage summary of their findings concerning thirty-seven reported sensations during an OBE including falling, floating, spinning and hyperacuity which should prove invaluable to other investigators (Figure 3.1 Typical OBE Sensations, p. 92).

What is one to make of this interpretation of the OB experience as a genuine separation from the brain and body? Conscientiology with Projectiology is Vitalism writ large and as far as the IAC is concerning an OBE is exactly what it says it is – a genuine out-of-body experience during which the physical body and brain remain in one location while the self-aware-self separates from them with the freedom to visit different geographical locations in the reality of this world as well as nonphysical realities. During an OBE you can interact with other OB selves and download the whole experience into the brain on your return for later referral. There are, of course, many religious and esoteric belief systems going back to prehistory that share a common belief in body/mind separation during out-of-body experiencing.

The question is whether this very sincerely held belief is correct. If it is, then during the OBE the brain will continue to quietly monitor bodily functions as if in non-dreaming sleep and there will be a period of intense activity when the self returns and downloads that experience into memory for later reference. With so many people now practised in inducing an OBE and with so much current neuroscience research into correlations of brain activity with altered states of consciousness one would have expected that brain imaging would have demonstrated such a temporary separation and return beyond all reasonable doubt. Unfortunately this is not what brain imaging has found. During what neuroscience terms as 'extra corporeal experiencing' (ECE), to disentangle this experience from popular OBE connotations, the brain is highly active throughout the OBE in all those areas known to relate to body imagery in imaginary context. No matter how spiritual the experience, no matter how in tune with the universe and no matter how apart from your body you may feel there is no escape from the brain. It seems that the correlation of brain activity with mind activity cannot be separated and then reunited.

There are, of course, many anecdotal accounts (much challenged) of what are termed 'veridical OBEs' with some, like Maria's shoe on the hospital window ledge and Pam Reynolds perching on the neurosurgeon's shoulder attaining almost mythic status. Such veridical observations should be easy to demonstrate in controlled, replicable circumstances with simple instructions such as 'Go into the lab room and describe (or remember) what you can see on the lab table' (where, say, a large, black vase with a rose in it standing in the middle), or remember the number you saw projected onto a blank laboratory wall, or identifying a person at the site. So far no one has been able to demonstrate such an ability beyond reasonable doubt during an OB experience.

Until there is replicable evidence of neural silence during the OB experience and a flurry of neural activity on return the explanation advanced by the neurosciences and cognitive psychology that an OB experience is a dissociative experience still seems to be the most likely explanation. The OB experiencer learns the skill of creating a personally convincing hallucinatory type experience of being elsewhere in which unfettered imagination can roam at will. Whether future research findings will challenge this interpretation remains to be seen

Regardless of whether an OBE is a factual separation or a brain based dissociative experience Luis Minero does succeed in his aim of demystifying the OB experience by clearly describing the whole process as it may be experienced and in that sense his account provides much valuable information. With a Foreword by Wagner Alegretti, President of the IAC and author of *Retrocognitions: An Investigation into Memories of Past Lives and the Period between Lives* (2004) this detailed and well written book is an important addition to the OBE literature whatever your belief as to true separation or dissociate imagining.

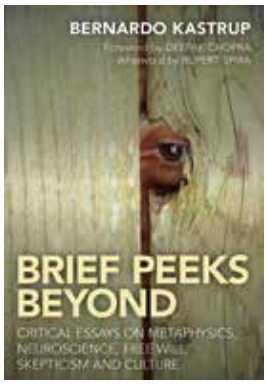
Idealism Revived

David Lorimer

BRIEF PEEKS BEYOND

Bernardo Kastrup

Iff Books (John Hunt), 236 pp., £12.99, p/b – ISBN 978-1-78535-018-4



In this brilliant and combative book subtitled 'critical essays on metaphysics, neuroscience, free will, skepticism and culture', Bernardo Kastrup attacks the assumption and presumption of materialism in science and society, proposing instead an understanding of the world based on the primacy of consciousness and a philosophy of monistic idealism. This involves challenging both the ontology and epistemology of modern science while pointing out that scientific materialism is of course a philosophy or ideology rather than science per se. He builds on his earlier book *Materialism is Baloney* and pulls no punches in putting forward his arguments and criticisms. The various essays are divided into self-contained sections that contribute to the overall argument.

His basic proposition is that there is no reality outside consciousness and that we are all manifestations of one Mind at Large (Aldous Huxley's phrase) linking us together. Materialism states that the world is fundamentally outside consciousness, and yet consciousness is required for any awareness of the world and 'is the only carrier of reality anyone can ever know for sure.' He uses the analogy of a whirlpool, arguing that in the same way that the whirlpool doesn't generate water, the body-brain system doesn't generate consciousness. The brain is what consciousness looks like from the outside when observed by another person (he calls this a second-person perspective while most writers refer to this as third-person). Put more succinctly, 'it is the body-brain system that is in consciousness, not consciousness in the body-brain system.'

Moreover, the fact that our bodies are separate does not mean that our psyches are fundamentally separate, and there is a good deal of evidence to suggest this very connection. He sees individual human beings as localisations within a broader, transpersonal stream of experiences, similar to the view in physics that matter is a condensation of the field. Bernardo then lists some common materialistic criticisms and gives his own rebuttals, showing how in many instances the reasoning of materialism is circular by assuming what it sets out to prove. He gives an interesting example of this in a debate between Sam Harris and Eben Alexander about the status of the latter's near death experience: 'the very fact that Alexander remembers his NDE suggests that the cortical and sub-cortical structures necessary for memory formation were active at the time.'

There is a fascinating section on psychedelics and the mind-body problem where a 2012 study found only reductions in brain activity while subjects were having vivid psychedelic experiences. This was not just a question of inhibitory processes, since the researchers observed no activation anywhere in the brain. Hence 'the more the drug deactivated the brain, the more intense were the subjective experiences reported by the subjects.' This recalls Huxley's 'reducing valve' metaphor and parallel work by Henri Bergson and others. The researchers themselves had trouble understanding their data, putting forward a disinhibition hypothesis prompting an email exchange and clarifying the result that more consciousness was indeed accompanied by less brain activity, indicating that the brain is a localisation of consciousness rather than its producer.

The next section takes an ironic look at intellectual fundamentalism, defining it as a condition of undue emphasis on the rational intellect. Bernardo lists signs and symptoms, including a tendency to interpret everything literally, putting forward potential causes and risk factors that include a high academic education in science or engineering, working in academic environments and being a publicly recognised expert with, however, a lack of appreciation for the humanities and intuitive ways of knowing. In this respect, he could have mentioned the work of Iain McGilchrist, since his characterisation is broadly in line with exclusively left hemisphere functioning. There is also a tendency to extrapolate beyond the validity of current models. A case in point was the BBC documentary about the work in Princeton of Robert Jahn where Nobel laureate Philip Anderson dismissed Jahn's experimental results on the basis that they could not be right if they did not fit our current expectations. Contrary to his view, these results do not invalidate the current scientific paradigm, but only call on us to revise scientific prejudices about the primacy of matter and the epiphenomenal nature of consciousness. As readers are already aware, something is defined as anomalous only in terms of theoretical expectations, which may be incomplete.

Bernardo comments that academic philosophy seems to have lost its relevance as a means of exploring the meaning of life, while many leading scientists also contend that life is meaningless. He makes the interesting cultural observation that the materialist paradigm is tightly aligned with our similarly materialistic economic system, so we are dominated by materialism and its power structures in two different senses. This arguably encourages us to seek meaning through consumerism but leaves us with a vacuum of meaning, which we cannot survive - witness the growing proportion of mental health challenges in industrialised societies. His own contention is that 'only the internal reality of consciousness can confer any meaning to human life.' Towards the end, his idealistic perspective gives him an interesting take on free will and self-identity where he suggests that my choice is only free if it is determined solely by what I perceive as me.

Bernardo finishes with some practical implications and applications of his outlook, which involve a turning inwards rather than a reliance on outer things. He is surely correct in arguing that life is a journey in consciousness and nowhere else and that meaning 'resides in the emotions and insights unfolding within.' This view implies that death will be a change of consciousness and that the oneness of consciousness validates the possibility of psi phenomena. This is a new as well as an ancient basis for a philosophy of life and living, turning us more towards being than doing and having - the very message of the near death experience as well. Whether they fully agree with Bernardo's arguments or not, readers will find themselves challenged to reassess their philosophy and understanding of the nature of consciousness.

> *"Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must first be overcome."*

Samuel Johnson - 1709-1784, Poet, Essayist, and Editor

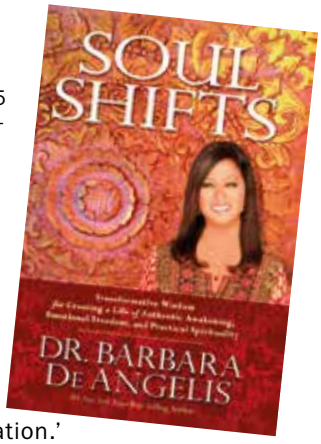
Vibrational Awakening

David Lorimer

SOUL SHIFTS

Barbara De Angelis PhD

Hay House 2015, 315 pp., £12.99, p/b – ISBN 978-1-78120-248-9



Barbara de Angelis has been devoted to the spiritual path since she was a teenager and in this inspiring book she distils the wisdom of a lifetime of practice in a clear and highly readable fashion. She quotes Tesla as saying: 'if you want to find the secrets of the universe, think in terms of energy, frequency and vibration.' Vibration is a fundamental theme of the book and represents the being element in our lives. Indeed, the author states that the book is not only information, but also a transmission, a vibrational bridge or gateway that we can pass over or through. The soul shifts in the title work from the inside out and help transform the way we relate to ourselves, to others and to the world.

The book is in four parts: gateways to authentic awakening, the technology of transformation, soul shifts for practical spirituality, and living your soul shifts. Throughout the book, Barbara illustrates her points with pertinent stories. For instance, she visited a European monastery, and when talking with a friend found out that she had missed a candlelit room with a huge statue of the Blessed Virgin. It turned out that it was right at the bottom of a dark stairway that she had not seen. Her friend remarked: "I guess you just didn't go deep enough" - a parable for life and the spiritual path. In order to embark consciously on the spiritual journey, we need an awakening or remembering of our deeper identity. Sometimes life provides a cosmic alarm clock when we experience a sense of divine discomfort and are ready to open up and let go of our limitations. Barbara is always pushing at the boundaries, encouraging readers not simply to seek, but also to see. One of the key soul shifts is the following: 'Today I'm going to see what there is to see, to feel what there is to feel, and to know what there is to know.' This is a commitment to live and experience life to the full; it is more a matter of being than of doing or practice, although our actions are infused with our being.

This is where vibration comes in, since we are all by definition vibrational beings emanating certain energies. I remember meeting Brother Boris in Sofia over 20 years ago. At the time, he was over 90 and I experienced a palpable feeling of love emanating from him. This was the fruit of intense spiritual work over a long period. In this connection, Barbara quotes the Maharishi as saying that when the fruit comes on the branch, the tree bows. Real transformation is a transformation of our consciousness and being that then informs the quality of all our thoughts and feelings. We are each a broadcasting station with certain dominant frequencies that put us in resonance with some people and not others. Our very being affects everything and everyone around us. Past events are also vibrational in terms of our experience of them in the present. And our relationships are also primarily vibrational - we can inherit some patterns from our parents.

If we are truly committed, we realise that everything counts in life and the way in which we spend our (life) time. This implies being as conscious as possible all the time, even in the smallest actions: today and every day counts, every choice matters since it is through these choices that we build ourselves. Barbara suggests that taking a stand for awakening involves choosing expansion over contraction, but then the rhythm of life involves both: the sap goes up through the tree in the spring and descends back into the roots in the autumn. At one level she is right encouraging readers to choose love over fear, openness over shutting ourselves off, although there is a time for retreat and a time to go out. Again, we can assess people and situations in terms of their vibrational impact. Another important theme is the spiritual practice of choice, through which we continually define and redefine ourselves. It is the natural corollary of awareness and we can always ask ourselves in any given situation if there is a more enlightened choice that we might make. As Antonio Machado remarks, 'There is no path. Paths are made by walking.'

Throughout the book, readers are encouraged to reach for their highest potential, vibration and expression. In this sense our soul accomplishments are more significant than material ones. Barbara relates the time around the passing of her mother and the soul accomplishments of her mother's life in terms of the living example of love that she represented. Life is both about giving and receiving, so we need to practise grace and gratitude in both directions: it is an art to be a receiver as well as a good giver. Barbara reminds us that we can also be grateful for things that are absent and that the ultimate gratitude is beyond conditions. Her conclusion is that we are here to make a vibrational difference through our presence and by being a blessing rather than a burden, lifting people up rather than weighing them down. She offers a prayer in this respect and reminds us that our ultimate legacy is one of love and light, a legacy that we need not wait to give, but can give every day. She has given us a profound guide for transformative wisdom that highlights the essentials and gives readers ample guidance in applying their personal soul shifts.

ecology-futures studies

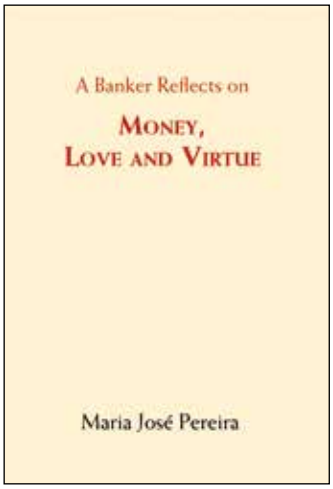
Towards a New Humanism

David Lorimer

A BANKER REFLECTS ON MONEY, LOVE AND VIRTUE

Maria Jose Pereira

Triarchy Press 2015, 215 pp., £12.50, p/b – ISBN 978-1-909470-60-6.



The title of this remarkable book is designed to be arresting. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis there has been a great deal of analysis, but, as far as I know, no reflection of this depth, especially by a banker familiar with the economic system and the underlying reasons for the crisis. We need to do more than understand the evolution of financial systems - we also need to look inside ourselves and at the culture we have created by our understanding of what it is to be a human being. The three parts look at the material in terms of money and finance, the person in terms of love and virtue, and the integration of money, love and virtue in a new humanism. Like the book reviewed above by Margaret Hannah, this is also partly the fruit of the International Futures Forum. The book is very clearly set out, with summaries at the beginning of each chapter and a clear route map of what is to come. Incidentally, reflection is equated with the Latin *intellectus,* rather than analytical reason as *ratio.*

Maria explains the Aristotelian understanding of virtue in her introduction as corresponding to proportionality and justice, harmony and reciprocity, with a view to the common good. Some readers will know that there has also been a return to these Aristotelian concepts with the establishment of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues in Birmingham University. Maria has a good grasp of the meaning and history of economics, pointing out that the word credit is related to *credo* and hence trust and credibility, which is exactly what has been lost with the deregulation and financialisation of the economy. She discusses the contributions of Locke, Hobbes and Adam Smith, higlighting in the last case that his economics took place within a moral framework, and that self-interest was balanced by self-command. Our current focus is on consumption and financial trading rather than real investment in the future.

She moves on to constructive and destructive finance, painting a detailed picture of developments over the last 25 years - I myself was in the City 40 years ago where we were told to embody the maxim 'my word is my bond.' Technology has enabled the development of more complex financial products and has accelerated the speed of trading. Many leading banks have been fined for fraud, but managers responsible for criminal practices such as selling toxic assets to clients and betting against these very assets have not been put behind bars. Readers will learn about credit default swaps, leveraged buyouts and huge mergers and acquisitions. Finance has become self-serving rather than serving the common good. As regulations have become more complex, some banks now have whole departments dealing with compliance (including ways of getting round the new regulations) when what is really required is a new level of responsibility. This brings one back to the human aspect in a dehumanised system.

If economics is the business of best managing our material needs, it has gradually become divorced from its original purpose of serving the human being, with its emphasis on abstraction, mathematics and modelling. This includes *homo economicus* as a rational maximiser of wealth and his own self-interest. Maria feels that 'abstraction in economics, the commercialisation of life, the destruction of nature and nefarious elements in the world of finance have all contributed to a society that is dehumanised. Technology threatens to bring this further down that path to a point where the situation is irremediable.' (p. 81) As many people are increasingly realising, happiness is more than measurement, and we need to recover an understanding of the common good.

This brings us to the next chapter, which raises the critical question of our fundamental view of human nature. The assumptions about the nature of human beings inevitably influence the way we organise ourselves. Are we simply self-interested individuals seeking power and status in a competitive struggle? Maria reviews Machiavelli, Hobbes and Mandeville, all of whom have an overall negative view of human nature that needs to be restrained by a social contract. A more optimistic view is advanced by Maritain, which lays the ground for her call for the recovery of virtue, reminding us that economics used to be called a moral science. The Dalai Lama insists that the source of our problems lies at the level of the individual, with people giving priority to material values. By contrast, he advocates a vision of shared humanity and interdependence. The restoration of justice in an Aristotelian sense would promote mutual benefit and reciprocity for the common good. Instead, we have a view where money represents reality and morality is an ideal, so we expect reality in the form of money to take precedence over the ideal. This is exactly what needs reversing.

Maria presents compassion and collaboration as an understanding of true self-interest, which corresponds to a neglected aspect of Darwin's work on cooperation, symbiosis, empathy and reciprocity. This leads on to a chapter on love as the infinite resource, drawing on CS Lewis, Luc Ferry and especially Pitirim Sorokin, the first professor of sociology at Harvard who made an extensive study of the nature of love. Unless we think deeply about this, we are inclined to underestimate the power of love as a fundamental motivation that can be the basis of a new humanism. The role of love has recently been highlighted by Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation and with reference to the Earth in his encyclical *Laudato Si.* Interestingly, John Stuart Mill wrote about this in his later work and Martin Luther King advocated the marriage of love and power to enable justice. Tillich went even further by placing these concepts within an ontological framework, so the ultimate power becomes love in action. She also adds beauty, quoting the Greek word *kalosagathos* representing the ideal human conduct of harmony and containing the words beauty and virtue. A network of love is also a network of trust - we have to believe in this possibility before we can create it, while also recognising the many challenges of doing so.

The strength and timeliness of this book is that it invites readers to reflect not only on our systems, but also on the quality of the human beings lying behind them and inviting a new view of human possibilities. Maria suggests that inner motivation stems from compassion or love, that a flourishing life will permit a humanistic society and that the organising principles of such a society are 'friendship or reciprocity, consideration and collaboration, with the human being at the centre' in terms of real liberty. Science shows us to be part of an interconnected world, which should encourage us to develop corresponding social systems - education in this direction will need to become part of standard university courses. In my own case, I remember a philosophy course at St Andrews on seven theories of human nature, which did encourage us to consider alternative views. These will need to be articulated so as to become part of our common language and discourse - this book is an excellent starting point for such human and social renewal.

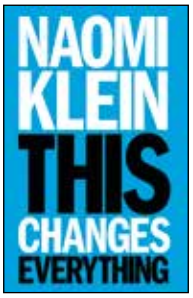
Does this Change Everything?

Chris Thomson

THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING

Naomi Klein

Simon and Schuster, 2014, 576 pp., $16.99, p/b - ISBN 978-1-4516-97391



In 2006 Al Gore presented us with an "inconvenient truth", about climate change. But it was not so inconvenient that we felt compelled to radically change our lifestyles. Perhaps we made a few tweaks, such as getting a more economical car or buying some locally produced food or doing more recycling, but most of us, including those of us who think we take climate change seriously, carried on more or less as before. Not surprisingly, climate change just got worse. So, when I first saw the title of this book, I had my doubts. After all, I had been waiting years for some kind of wake-up call that really would change everything, and force governments, businesses and society to take climate change as seriously as it needs to be taken. I wondered how loud the wake-up calls have to get before we stop what we are doing and start to live very differently.

It is not as if there is a shortage of wake-up calls. These days, they come almost every day. The polar ice-caps are melting. The rainforest is disappearing. The seas are warming, and acidifying. On many days in many cities it is impossible to step outdoors because the air is so toxic. Human population growth is out of control, putting even more pressure on the biosphere. Extreme weather (storms, drought, floods, and very high temperatures) is becoming the norm, rather than the exception. Important species (such as bees and plankton) are under threat, and some others (e.g. tigers, polar bears) are very likely to become extinct. As if this were not enough, all our life-support systems - i.e. clean air, clean water, forests, topsoil, aquifers, fisheries, wetlands, biodiversity – are in serious decline. And yet nearly all of us carry on almost exactly as before. We continue to fly, drive, overconsume energy, and buy food and other things produced far from our homes.

The book begins by reminding us what we should all know, if we have been paying attention. The climate has already changed, and there is nothing we can do about this. We are going to have to learn to live with the consequences. That said, we can do a lot to prevent the situation getting even worse. In essence, this means that we stop taking carbon out of the ground and pumping it into the atmosphere. And we have to stop right now. Setting targets for the future will no longer work. It might have worked twenty three years ago, at the Rio Earth Summit, but we have reached the point where drastic action is needed, not targets and promises. Given our addiction to fossil fuels and perpetual economic growth, and given the disproportionate influence of business and money on governments and the media, things look bleak indeed. Yet, as this book keeps revealing, there are many chinks of light, and these keep increasing in number and size. Arguably, the most important of these take the form of campaigns by indigenous peoples, in North America and elsewhere.

Naomi Klein has a collective name for these campaigns – Blockadia – because they aim to block further extraction of fossil fuels. To do this, they are using the law. Specifically, they are using treaties, often made a long time ago, to enforce their rights to clean water, clean air, and clean land. These were provisions insisted on by wise elders when they were bargaining with the US and Canadian governments, sometimes more than 150 years ago. To everyone's surprise, the courts are upholding these rights in case after case, and these judgements sometimes bring the fossil fuel juggernaut to a complete halt. Equally interesting are the unlikely new alliances being formed, such as those between tribes and ranchers in Montana, as people realise that they have a common interest in blocking the Keystone pipeline. Of course, these are relatively early days, and we have yet to see how the higher courts and national legislatures will respond. That said, it is already clear that something big is changing, as more and more people realise that they are fighting for their very survival. I think that it is this realisation that Naomi is referring to in her title, because it is a realisation that, as it spreads rapidly, could change everything.

Speaking personally, this book has come in the nick of time for me. I was beginning to wonder whether anything would ever shock me again. Like the frog that does not notice that it is being boiled very slowly, I had begun to feel that I was becoming immune to the succession of spectacular announcements that, if I had heard them in the Seventies or Eighties, would have shocked me to the core. I suspect that many of us feel this way. Yes, this book has shocked me, but in the best sense. It has restored my belief that, although we cannot reverse climate change, at least not in the near future, we can stop it from getting worse. Interesting, is it not, that the very people so damaged by the invasion of modernity may be the ones who eventually bring the world back to sanity.

Chris Thomson *is author of* ***Full Spectrum Intelligence***

> *We are always complaining that our days are few, and acting as though there would be no end to them.*

Seneca

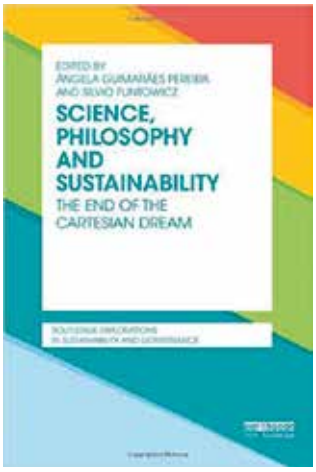
The End of the Cartesian Dream?

David Lorimer

SCIENCE, PHILOSOPHY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Angela Guimaraes Pereira and Silvio Funtowicz

Earthscan 2015, 169 pp., $145, h/b.



I feel I must begin with a comment on the Taylor and Francis/Earthscan pricing policy, which you can see above. Here is a book that would appeal to the sophisticated general reader, but it is priced for libraries only. This also applies to other Taylor and Francis books in the Books in Brief section - the book on character education is $165 and the handbook on sustainability is $240. This policy does not reflect that of other university presses, where this kind of book would be put within the range of the general reader. Even their paperbacks are overpriced. Having said all this, I would encourage you to request the book from your local library since it discusses a critical issue affecting much of our policy discourse: namely, the Cartesian dream of total prediction and control based on a mechanistic understanding of life and the planet and the omnicompetence of science and technology in relation to progress.

The idea of being 'masters and possessors of Nature' is usually traced back to Francis Bacon, but the authors show that it was indeed a based on the precision of mathematics allied to the understanding of bodies and the world through a mechanistic metaphor as found in Descartes. We are brought up to believe that all problems have solutions and that human ingenuity and effective institutions 'will sooner or later fix everything.' We can now clearly see that this is not true, especially since we have many of our historic unresolved problems like war, hunger and inequity, added to which are more modern challenges of environmental damage, terrorism, migration and progressive ageing. Hence we arguably have a situation where 'the rate at which some solutions are found cannot match the rate at which new problems emerge or old problems exacerbate.' In non-systems language, this is partly due to unforeseen side-effects and a lack of understanding that many problems are in fact non-linear and 'wicked.' Nevertheless, we continue to believe as a society that we can innovate our way out of crises and continue to have confidence in the problem-solving power of science. This volume argues that the belief in predictions and innovations has no rational basis, but is rather a dream about power and control in the face of uncertainty. Jerry Ravetz even suggests that far from being masters and possessors of nature, we should see ourselves as disruptors of natural systems.

The nine contributions to this volume begin by explaining the Cartesian dream and look at its fallout in a number of different areas including the Challenger disaster, epidemics, techno-sciences, the Internet of things, genetic digital networks, geo-engineering, imaginative numbers and the limitations of mathematical modelling - always in a context of uncertainty that is acknowledged at an intellectual level but not fully understood in terms of its implications.

Here the authors scrutinise the narratives by which we live, including those of growth, evidence-based everything, innovation everything, and responsible research. In analysing the Challenger disaster, it is not sufficient to isolate the technical aspects, since the context is lack of communication in NASA as a whole - and more generally between the humanities and sciences. There is an interesting chapter on biomedicine as a Cartesian project that has assumed the status of an ideology 'discrediting and excluding all other paradigms of understanding health' and creating structures of orthodoxy, intolerance and dominance. Readers will be familiar with this in various different fields. It also impacts our understanding of causality with the complementary perspectives of holism and reductionism.

Applied to the techno-sciences, the vocabulary is one of building blocks and information codes whereby we are capable of engineering anything (note the metaphor). Fern Wickson suggests that we should favour a relational ontology consistent with an ethic of care, as in deep ecology, with an emphasis on flourishing in the Aristotelian sense. The essay on the Internet of things asks how smart we really want and need to be. Again we are treated as complex machines that need optimising in order to achieve the most efficient functioning, and we are implicitly encouraged to hand over our agency and control of our lives to machines. Technically minded people sometimes feel that this kind of progress is as desirable as it is inevitable, but it has to be measured against maintaining a humanistic outlook. These developments are also driven by economic developments and shareholder value.

Geo-engineering incorporates the same underlying assumptions of our capacity to predict and control. I had not realised that there was an IPCC expert meeting on this topic in June 2011. Paula Carvelo picks through the vocabulary and its assumptions, including the remark that there could be substantive unintended effects across national boundaries. Attentive readers will recall that I reviewed a documentary on this topic – Look Up - in the December issue. The main two forms are carbon dioxide removal (CDR) and solar radiation management (SRM). Although governments deny it, there is ample evidence that SRM is already occurring, creating artificial cloud cover and, more seriously, acid rain. The IPCC report remarks that there could be a substantial offset of global temperature rise using this technique, but were it to be terminated, there would be a resulting rapid increase in surface temperatures. In other words, once this process has been initiated, it would/will be hard to stop - and it is almost certainly a contributor to global dimming. Although the language used is objective, there are very considerable uncertainties both in terms of systems and the limitations of existing knowledge.

The last two chapters analyse imaginative numbers by showing how numbers regarded as authoritative at the time have been proved completely wrong by subsequent events. So the question arises: what did the original number actually mean? Often, it is used as a justification for policy decisions - so 'the numbers are important not because they are true, but because we believe them.' Another example is the re-evaluation of oil reserves during the 1980s, which had no firm evidential basis. Culturally, this raises the question of what Alvin Weinberg calls 'trans-science' to describe questions that can be asked of science and yet which cannot be answered by science. So far as mathematical modelling is concerned, we need to check the model against the assumptions on which it is based, and the authors provide a suitable checklist including questions of uncertainty, sensitivity analysis and asking if the model actually addresses the right question. Overall, this is an excellent study that should be required reading for think tanks and policymakers. I will end with an amusing anecdote quoted near the beginning of the book where a weather officer in the US Army Air Corps established statistically that his month-ahead weather forecasts were no more reliable than a roll of the dice. After he had informed his superiors of this fact, the commanding general said that he was well aware that the forecasts were no good, but 'needed them for planning purposes.' Need one say more?

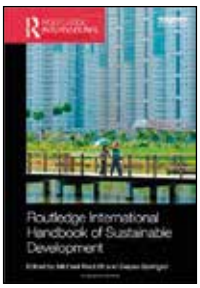
A Route Map for the Future

David Lorimer

ROUTLEDGE INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Michael Redclift and Delyse Springett (eds)

Earthscan 2015, 447 pp., $240, h/b – ISBN 978-0-4158384-29



This magisterial and comprehensive volume is indispensable reading for anyone wishing seriously to come to grips with the nature and scope of sustainable development. It covers the full range of issues one could immediately think of and many more besides. These six parts address the history and evolution of the concept of sustainable development, institutional dimensional sustainable development, environmental dimensions, social dimensions, economic dimensions and future challenges. There are 28 chapters in all. The first gives a fascinating historical overview of concept first widely used in a 1987 report, but defined in many ways and from many angles since that time. There are indeed many competing discourses and interests, which is well illustrated in a discussion of the situation in China. Among the institutional dimensions are the role of illegality, islands as analogues of larger issues in sustainable development, the process of writing IPCC reports, population health and ecological overshoot, and education for sustainable development, which has yet to be incorporated in the mainstream but which is vital for the future (p. 115). Young people need to be informed so as to question prevailing economic assumptions and the system that would like to incorporate them.

Environmental dimensions include biodiversity, water, architecture and design, the management of ecosystem services and the tension between conservation and economic growth. Buildings are associated with 50% of carbon emissions, and Keith Bothwell outlines the principles of sustainable design while at the same time commenting on the huge expense of retrofitting existing buildings without some form of government subsidies. He sets considerable store by traditional building designs for particular habitats. The chapter on ecosystem services has interesting discussion ecologically dependent functions, goods and services of rivers. Two of the essays under and social dimensions on indigenous perspectives and the relationship between food and sustainable development are quite brilliant. The first sensitises the reader to the human rights and ecological violations imposed by Europeans through colonialism and imperialism on indigenous peoples, who have a much wider view of the interests of all living beings. Food and environment are of course tightly coupled and our current systems are based on the power and interests of large corporations. In this section there are also essays on the politics of sustainable consumption, environmental justice and sustainable tourism development - the number of tourists has increased by 50% is the year 2000, with the latest 2013 figure at 1,087 billion. This may seem a lot, but the vast majority of humans on the planet have never been in an aeroplane.

Moving on to economic dimensions, we have a magisterial essay on ecological economics, which is clearly demarcated in its priorities from the green economy. I regard the adoption of a new measure beyond GDP as urgent, and the authors discuss the index of sustainable economic welfare (ISEW) and the genuine progress indicator (GPI). There is also a further essay on indicators for sustainable development and a critique of corporate social responsibility along with a piece on urban transport and China's transition to sensibility. Among future challenges are what the authors call the creeping incubation of disaster, women's rights to sustainable development, governance issues and agro-ecology as a comprehensive approach that goes beyond variations on neo-liberalism.

According to Graham Woodgate, we need to recognise the unsustainability of transforming fossil fuels into food and 'establish an enduring basis for the ongoing co-evolution of society and nature.' (p. 376) our current system is based on subsidies from the geological past and loans from the ecological future. I think he is right that this 'huge burden of ecological debt will eventually bankrupt industrial capitalism and demand new, post-liberal politics and economics.'

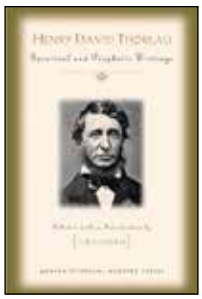
Simply Present

David Lorimer

HENRY DAVID THOREAU – Spiritual and Prophetic Writings

Tim Flinders (ed)

Orbis 2015, 197 pp., $22, p/b – ISBN 978-1-62698-110-2



Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was, as Jon Sweeney rightly puts it, 'an American prophet of deliberate simplicity, nonviolence, civil disobedience and care for the planet' – all themes of a modern ecological approach, way before their time. Tim Flinders also edited the equally good book in the series on John Muir, who was born some twenty years later. A biographical introduction is followed by a series of extracts under various headings on his life, essentials, the spiritual life, sacred Nature and God, religion and time. The essay on civil disobedience is reprinted in full along with fairly extensive extracts from his best-known book *Walden.* There is some repetition between the chapters, but many selections can be re-read with pleasure.

A surveyor by profession, Thoreau did just enough work to keep body and soul together, preferring to spend long and solitary periods in Nature, as he did with his experiment of living simply at Walden Pond. One of his self-professed strengths is 'to want but little' instead of multiplying his desires like modern consumers, and his real wealth lay in the quality of his experiences, often ecstatic, in Nature ('I was all alive, and inhabited my body with inexpressible satisfaction'). He could spend a whole morning contemplating in front of his cabin and regarded a walk (or saunter) of anything less than four hours a day as a deprivation. He responded to a higher dictate, seeking to discern spiritual laws beyond the physical. He placed a great deal of emphasis on fully living life in the present.

Thoreau was in many ways a monk as well as a mystic. Although he took no vows, he lived according to poverty, simplicity and obedience to his conscience – which on a famous occasion led him to withhold a tax and spend a night in prison. He treasured solitude and silence, remarking that much social intercourse is debilitating to the spirit: 'I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone.' In the woods he aimed 'to front only the essential facts of life' and to see things as they are: 'the question is not what you look at, but how you see.' Solitude also enabled him to attune to his inner voice. He adds that he wanted to learn what life had to teach, 'and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived….I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.' (Elsewhere he writes of extracting honey from the flower of the world).

Thoreau lived close to and was influenced by Emerson. He was devastated by the death of Emerson's son Walden, and all the more so by that of his brother John in January 1842. He reflects on death and rebirth in Nature: 'soon the ice will melt, and the blackbirds sing along the river which he frequented, as pleasantly as ever.' He reflects that Nature does not recognise death, finding new forms without loss: 'every blade in the field, every leaf in the forest, lays down its life in its season as beautifully as it was taken up…dead trees – sere leaves – dried grass and herbs – are not these a good part of our life? The law of their death is the law of new life.' This thought further encourages him to 'dive into some deep stream of thoughtful and devoted life, 'to lurk in crystalline thought like the trout under verdurous banks, where stray mankind should only see my bubble come to the surface… I wished for leisure and quiet to let my life flow in its proper channels, with its proper currents.' For us, this also entails striking a balance between earning a living and life.

Living in rural France as I now do, I appreciate more intensely the wealth contained in everyday simplicity – the wind in the trees, morning birdsong in the woods and the texture of water while swimming in the nearby lake. One morning we unexpectedly came across a water tortoise on the path – the dog was not at all sure what to make of it, barking uncertainly. Then I read about Thoreau finding a baby tortoise coming out of the earth and the way he is affected by the thought that the earth (and the sand for turtles) nurses these eggs. This suggests to him a certain vitality and intelligence in the earth: 'their mother is not merely inanimate and inorganic.' Reading Thoreau is refreshment for the spirit and a timely reminder of life's essential qualities and simplicity.

general

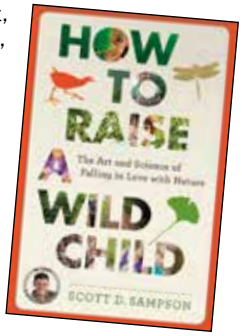
A Walk on the Wild Side

Martin Lockley

HOW TO RAISE A WILD CHILD

Scott D. Sampson

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015,h/b, $25.00, 327p., ISBN 978-0-544-27932-2.



On reading Scott Sampson's excellent exposition, I realised I had, like some others of my generation, been fortunate to have been raised as a *Wild Child*, walking back alone from primary school via the woods, fields, lakes and farmyards of rural Wales. My father, who had had a similar rural upbringing, lived a dozen years on a storm-lashed Welsh island, was perhaps even more of a wild child, and like many of his generation had a keen eye for nature. Unlike far too many of today's children he was a "countryman" and knew most of his native plants, birds and animals. He often wrote for the magazine *The Countryman*, which found a wide audience among nature lovers.

Today the general populace, especially in America, is, and alas this applies to a huge percentage of children, more in love with "screens" than nature. The statistics are rather horrifying. The average American child spends "four to seven minutes a day outdoors." They are essentially under "house arrest" and their health suffers from lack of "unstructured play" time. Such circumstances have generated what Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods* has called *nature-deficit disorder*. The good news is we have begun to address this deficit with a number of back-to-nature initiatives for children and adults. The Japanese, for example, have a tradition called Shinrin-yoku, or forest bathing, and studies have shown that surgery patients recover better when they have recovery rooms with views of natural settings. Some Doctors now recommend horticultural and pet therapy and some even write "park prescriptions" for nature-deprived children, needing a dose of vitamin N (nature).

Things were much different a century ago: almost everyone from Victorian times onwards (at least until WWII and the advent of TV) spent hours out of doors, and natural history was immensely popular. Now we have to re-educate kids to appreciate nature using books like this one to prescribe the three pronged approach a new breed of teachers are finding effective: experience, mentoring and understanding (EMU).

This means engaging the heart more than the mind and showing kids that the outdoor world matters. Kids learn by example and have to see an adult's passion for nature.

Doc. Sampson, a paleontologist, and Denver-based colleague, has an admirable holistic approach to science, pointing out that it is "destructive" to think of ourselves as machines, separate from organic nature. Such a rigid worldview can be attributed, in part, especially in America, to puritan, Calvinist influences on an educational system, which taught that we were separate from beastly nature, and could not trust it not to overwhelm our passions and instincts. So the mechanical round of rote testing and achievement developed as an intellectual passion-controlling approach. Even today "teachers are trapped in the current system every bit as much as the students" because these rote test-based approaches remain the norm.

Sampson acknowledges that only a few school systems, e.g., Waldorf and Montessori, promote holistic, experiential, developmentally-coherent education, recognising that we are organic beings, part of a superorganism network "*connected* to nature through the web of life." Failure to understand this holistic interconnectivity has made it unnecessarily difficult to build well-rounded character in our youth, and has left American schools ranking about twentieth in the world, in contrast to "high-ranking Finland…opting for shorter school hours and more playtime." As wise educators have said: "all education is environmental education… by what is included or excluded, students are taught that they are a part of, or apart from, the natural world." So it is school gardens, natural settings and the like that foster the relationship between children and the natural world, in which they must be healthily embedded. This is a true sea change in educational philosophy because subjective experience of nature becomes more important than abstract and objective observation of from afar, or through screens. As Thomas Berry has said we must transform the world from a "collection of objects" to a "communion of subjects."

Sampson quotes both classic and novel sources. Einstein reminded us that it is "a kind of optical delusion of consciousness" to regard ourselves as separate from all that is. Thus, according to theologian John Haught, we live in a sacred and "resoundingly meaningful universe" which should "inform the arc of our lives." In language reminiscent of Alan Watts, poet Muriel Rukeyser tells us, non-reductively, that "the universe is made of stories, not of atoms." Cosmologist Brian Swimme says " you take hydrogen gas,…leave it alone, and it turns into bushes, giraffes and humans." Einstein also said if you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales, and if you want them to be more intelligent read them more fairy tales.

All this points to the need for teachers and scientists to be playful, to construct meaning actively, and to provide experience rather than treat students as "information receptacles." Youngsters should experience and cherish "ecstatic moments." I found it refreshing that Sampson feels liberated enough to write in this vein, bucking the trend of much conventional mainstream science. His vision of a world in which nature-deprived youngsters reintegrate with natural settings is compelling for many reasons. First, it is relatively easy to accomplish with outdoor excursions, playgrounds, lessons and activities. More importantly it leads to healthy self-confidence, well-being and a mature appreciation of our embeddedness in the natural world, and our dependence on a sustainable environment. Sampson waxes lyrical and even Steiner-esque: "if beauty is symbolised by the heart, and truth by the brain, goodness might be considered the domain of the gut - a moral compass guiding our decision making."

Our recent love affairs with technology have placed obstacles, mostly electronic screens, in the way of the soothing balm of nature. But, knowing the drawbacks of being slaves to such screens simply highlights the need for alternatives: i.e., restricting screen time and increasing outdoor experience. As befits his position as vice president of research and collections and chief curator at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science Sampson is prescriptive in providing many examples of programmes that redirect children and their adult mentors along natural organic pathways. His matter-of-fact ability to integrate prescription with his aforementioned poetic, ecstatic and fairy tale sentiments is impressive. I particularly like the notion that we can reverse unsustainable activity, not merely to be "sustainable" (not lose ground) but to flourish and attain "thrivability"- what a great word! As Sampson so aptly says: "there's something worth fighting for." In short "one of the greatest gifts we can give our children is an optimistic outlook on the future." [I note here that this optimism is to some degree built into the psyche of the prophets of the baby boomers, as suggested in the generations book *The Fourth Turning,* and Sampson like many of his generation received such "gifts" in fair measure]. But yes! One must agree that it is good to pass on such gifts to all generations. Sampson sees thrivability as having this positive optimistic and ultimately moral dimension. Such vision translated into community action and gentle mentoring will help children again "fall in love with nature" as they naturally will given half a chance. We adults will benefit equally and see our youth grow into well-balanced human beings rounded and grounded in the natural world.

I happened to read *A Memoir of Thomas Bewick*, the famous engraver, at the same time as Sampson's fine book. Bewick, a very talented artist, writing of his youth in the late 18th century, recounts walking hundreds of miles around the north of England and Scotland. He drew all his bird and animals sketches from life if the species was available, and lamented if it was not. He expressed strong opinions about the damage cause to youth and adults, alike, if indulged and nature-deprived by artificial or city life. His constitutional fortitude was impressive. Through "many years of uninterrupted health and buoyant spirits. I had begun…to habituate myself to temperance and exercise, which hardened the constitution to such a pitch that neither wet nor cold had any bad effect… on …my weekly pedestrian 'flight' up the Tyne, I never looked to see whether it was a good day or a bad one; the worst that ever fell from the skies never deterred me. I …had sometimes the river to wade at the far end. I never changed my clothes, however they might be soaked with wet, or stiffened with frost…till I went to bed…with my windows open, by which a thorough air, as well as the snow blew through… I lay stripped into 'bare buff' except being rolled in a blanket, upon a mattress as hard as I could make it… Notwithstanding this mode of treatment of myself, I never had an ailment, even in the shape of a cold, while I continued…in this way; nor did I experience any difference until, when married, I was obliged to… live and behave like other folks." Now that was a wild child!

> *"Extend to each person, no matter how trivial the contact, all the care and kindness and understanding and love that you can muster, and do it with no thought of any reward. Your life will never be the same again."*
>
> Og Mandino
> 1923-1996, Author

The Force of Love

David Lorimer

GANDHI AND APPLIED SPIRITUALITY

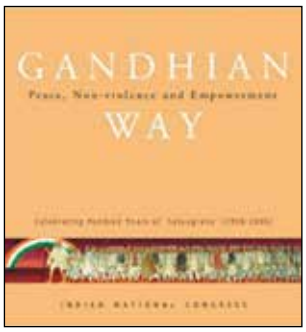
K Ramakrishna Rao

Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 2011, 377 pp., Rs 895, h/b – ISBN 93-81320-00-4

THE GANDHIAN WAY

Indian National Congress

Academic Foundation, 2007, 320 pp., Rs 3,000, h/b – ISBN 978-81-7188-648-7



One of the founders of the Network, George Blaker, knew Gandhi when he was working as a civil servant in India. He told me the story that he once went for a walk outside the place he was staying and down the hill. At a certain point, a car stopped and the driver enquired if he would like a lift back up. George felt it polite to accept, and on climbing into the back seat, found himself sitting next to Gandhi. He tried to engage him in conversation, but without success. It turned out that this was Gandhi's day of silence, so he would not speak to anyone. There is spiritual power in silence, as Gandhi himself remarked: 'a man of few words will rarely be thoughtless in his speech, he will measure every word.'

These two books on Gandhi complement each other. The first, by a distinguished philosopher, places Gandhi not only within his Indian cultural context, but also relates his work to applied spirituality more broadly. The second is an international conference bringing together India and South Africa and speakers from around the world to commemorate the centenary of Satyagraha dating from 1906. It is richly illustrated with black and white photos of and quotations from Gandhi, who himself stated that his life was his message and that he was constantly undertaking experiments in truth. He never regarded himself as perfect, but he was always striving towards perfection. One story relates a mother coming to him to ask if he could persuade her son to give up sugar. Gandhi asked her to come back in a fortnight. It turned out that he felt that he himself had to give up sugar before he could advise anyone else to do so. Equally, it is hard to live up to Gandhi's ideals. In the foreword to Rao's book, the Dalai Lama draws inspiration from the simplicity and discipline of his way of life, which he himself emulates; also the fact that personal liberation is integral to the successful achievement of national liberation - he sees nonviolence as an expression of compassion. By the same token, Barack Obama is inspired by Gandhi but he leads a country whose policies are the antithesis of Gandhi's approach.

Rao explores Gandhian thought within the current context of terror and identity violence, framing it as a form of pragmatic spirituality; rather than the politicisation of spirituality, he sees it as the spiritualisation of politics where it becomes a branch of ethics and not the other way round. This raises the important question, mentioned by Desmond Tutu in the second book, that we live in a moral universe where there is 'no way that injustice, oppression and evil can ever have the last word.' He relates his own experience of using forgiveness, negotiation and compromise with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, epitomised by himself and Nelson Mandela, who also spoke at the conference. According to Mandela, Gandhi was right in believing in the efficacy of pitching soul force against brute force. Returning to Rao's analysis, he sees Gandhi as bridging the gap between the secular and sacred, science and spirituality, the mundane and the moral, ideals and action.

A central concept in both books is *satyagraha*, explained by Gandhi himself: 'Truth (*Satya*) implies love, and firmness (*agraha*) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force…the force which is born of truth and love or nonviolence. Rao provides a more extensive philosophical analysis where it is understood as an active mobilisation of a force 'generated by rigorous practice of love, compassion and altruism and unwavering commitment to truth.' It is more than abstention from violence or passive resistance and civil disobedience - it is an intensely active state, as Gandhi himself insisted. He went as far as saying that it is the moral equivalent of war, a phrase used by William James in a very different sense in an essay dating from a similar period. As we know from Gandhi's life, the practice of *satyagraha* demanded enormous self-sacrifice in the generation of this spiritual force.

Rao provides a rigorous analysis of key concepts relevant to Gandhi's philosophy. He discusses identity, conflict and violence with a special emphasis on identity violence and structural violence. He asks how relevant Gandhi's practice of nonviolence is to current predicaments - it always constitutes a risk to the practitioner. There are also essays on Indian identity and national integration, the relevance of Buddhist social philosophy, and Nehru and Gandhi and legacy. The second half of the book addresses the much wider context of the relationship between science and spirituality and the relevance of yoga psychology as a framework for understanding western parapsychology (these topics are treated at far greater length in Rao's book *Cognitive Anomalies, Consciousness and Yoga,* which I reviewed in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* last December).

The later chapters discuss the common ground between science and spirituality, highlighting the limitations of the current practice of science and psychology, and arguing for parapsychology to be taken seriously. Classical Indian philosophy also has valuable insights to offer to modern cognitive science, as does Buddhist psychology. There is a further chapter on hypnosis, yoga and psychic phenomena and on parapsychology and yoga psychology. The final chapter presents the author's Trident BMC model of the person based on yoga psychology. Consciousness is defined in the widest sense and differentiated from mind as the active instrument of thought, feeling and action. It represents the witness or observer. Importantly, the final goal of Indian philosophy is not refined analysis but rather liberation so that the Self can shine through the self, implying a journey towards and expression of higher levels of being. He relates this to Gandhi's life as a spiritual flowering of consciousness in the person leading to a more inclusive and altruistic outlook characterised by vast and compassion. He concludes that Gandhian philosophy does indeed have a scientific basis for human application, which Rao demonstrates with enormous erudition and sophistication.

Returning now to the conference book, this is divided into five sections with many distinguished contributors: Gandhian Philosophy in the 21st Century, a Nonviolent Approach to Conflict Resolution and Peace Building, Gandhian Philosophy for Poverty Eradication, Education and People's Empowerment, Dialogue among Peoples and Cultures, and finally Towards a Nuclear Weapons-Free and Nonviolent World Order. This all adds up to 45 sections with many inspiring contributions, of which I can only highlight a few.

Kenneth Kaunda characterises Gandhi as a 'legend of extraordinary quality, endowed with a depth of vision, humility and wisdom without parallel, with exemplary passion for justice, and indefatigable fighting spirit for what was right, courage to face any risk and readiness to make the supreme sacrifice in the service of mankind. Nothing that touched humanity was foreign to him.' In his view, the relaunch of the *Satyagraha* movement can provide a new impetus for serious consideration of the implications of Gandhi's approach. Pragmatists will say that violence and war will always be unavoidable, but this in turn rests on an assumption about human nature questioned by Maria Pereira in her article and book in this issue. Gandhi realised, partly inspired by

the Sermon on the Mount and the philosophy of Tolstoy, that violence is ultimately self-defeating and is only a short-term solution to our challenges. The contribution by Lech Walesa provides another inspiring example of its application.

Janez Drnovsek calls for individuals and institutions to move beyond a culture of selfishness and self-interest that destroys the Earth and our climate for profits. Violence, he argues, cannot achieve any sustainable change and without a higher more inclusive consciousness the world will collapse. If we realise and become conscious of this fact, then perhaps we can act and make the impossible possible. A quote from Nehru emphasises the importance of Gandhi's fearless attitude when the pervasive atmosphere in India was one of fear on all fronts. Gandhi's approach to dialogue was uncompromising in standing against the oppression and injustice. His own dialogue operated at political, cultural and spiritual levels involving the quest for freedom, love and justice, as explained in a brilliant essay by Rajiv Vora. At the end of this book comes the conference declaration, a truly inspiring document. However, along with many other such documents like the Earth Charter, it gathers dust while the world continues much as before. We have sufficient declarations of intent about all the challenges we face, but we lack the political will and sense of urgency to put these into practice.

Gandhi's life and indomitable spirit as represented in these two books asks each individual a series of questions: are we really being the change that we seek to bring about? Are we doing all we can? What more could we do if we truly put Gandhi's inspiration into practice? Lives like Gandhi's are reminders of our extraordinary potential, which few of us fully realise. However, inspiration is essential, and from my own work with schools - including some in India - I know that Gandhi will continue to provide inspiration to future generations.

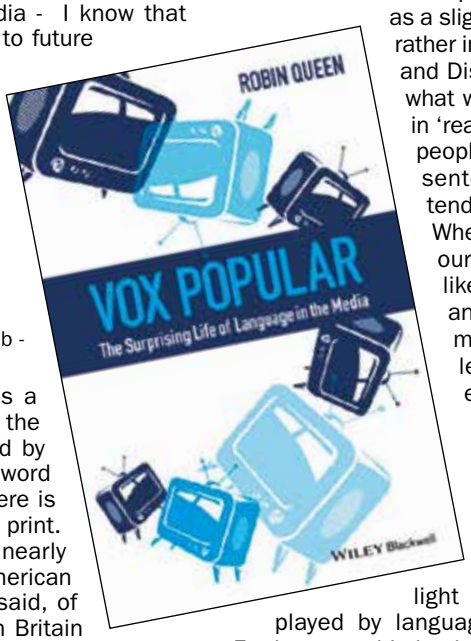
Linguistic Variations

Lance Butler

VOX POPULAR: The Surprising Life of Language in the Media

Robin Queen

Wiley Blackwell, 2015, 266 pp., £23.50, p/b - ISBN 978-0-470-65992-2



This study of language-use is welcome as a contribution to our understanding of how the registers and dialects of English are used by writers of film and television scripts. The word 'media' in the subtitle is misleading as there is no consideration of radio, social media or print. The other limitation of the book is that nearly all the examples given are taken from American television series and films. It has to be said, of course, that we do watch a lot of those in Britain and, indeed, around the world.

In a sense these restrictions may not be as bad as they sound. Robin Queen's limitations at least enable the book to maintain a sharp focus. You want to know how to analyse the script of *Mad Men*, *Modern Family* or *The Sopranos* ? To see what is happening in the language of those highly verbal structures? Here's your chance. And if it seems unlikely that you would give such matters high priority you have to recall the modern consensus that language is what we are made of and that mere dictionary definitions are only the beginning of understanding it. Registers, dialects, tones, echoes, contrasts and other elements of language *variation* indicate or even dictate what we mean just as much as the simple propositional content of our talk and writing. To take one of Queen's favourite examples, we learn at least as much from the fact that a character says 'bein" and 'lovin" (rather than 'being' and 'loving)' as we do from the semantic 'content' of those words.

This is a text-book. Clearly aimed at students of Film and Media and of what is known as Communications, *Vox Popular* fulfils a pedagogic function. The book isn't the result of, nor even a contribution to, academic research or the forwarding of the boundaries of these disciplines. Instead it lets us have a mild and refreshingly uncontentious overview of the sorts of things that students of the media can, perhaps should, now say about their subject.

Thus we learn some things we already knew pretty well: 'language is the mechanism by which you gain access to my thoughts and by which I make my thought… available to you' for instance, a definition included presumably on the grounds that the student body is innocent of these insights. But we also see at work an interesting analysis of some ordinary pieces of discourse (very ordinary, some of it, including excerpts from *Friends* for Heaven's sake) which shows how the effects of such scripted language work. And then we have it explained to us, and this is indeed sometimes as 'Surprising' as the subtitle of the book claims, how such effects have their origins and explanations in the technology of the modern media as well as in the sociology of the society that consumes them.

Though not an undergraduate I think I learned something from Robin Queen. If you need to understand how films and television series are written and how they convey their meanings she will tell you how. ('*She*?' A surprise there? Yes, 'Robin' is a woman. The 'ungrammatical' use of a male first name is to be seen in the context of the Feminism that has been present in Western culture since about 1970. Just the sort of point Queen makes here.) And it comes as a slight shock to realise that we had all been rather innocent before Conversational Analysis and Discourse Analysis showed us what was what when we communicate with each other in 'real life'. Did you notice that in older films people tend to speak in proper grammatical sentences? Or that all the characters tended to speak the same kind of English? Whereas now, since the 'linguistic turn' in our reading of the world, they are more likely to speak very differently from one another and, of course, to speak much more realistically? There are broader lessons to learn here alongside the exegesis of register in *Sherlock*.

So this is an informative study and it sheds light on what we do with language variation and what it does to us. I would hope, though, that any reader would go on from these pleasant analyses of light entertainment to consider the part played by language variation in all our interactions. Furthermore this book leaves me crying out for some deeper attention to be paid to the strong linguistic theories that have come into the field over the last century. Queen, with her American bias, has very little to say about the master of language variation, the great Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) who invented modern discourse analysis, nor much about the founder of Structural Linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, who lies behind so much of the linguistic turn. She also ignores Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and the others who, among other credentials, were great philosophers of language. Without them Queen and her discipline would hardly exist.

Still, it is useful and instructive to see a language analyst at work and I will watch the next episode of *The Sopranos* with my ears more sharply tuned.

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