



## books in brief

David Lorimer

Note: many of these books are now available in downloadable electronic form

### SCIENCE/PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

#### **A New History of Life**

**Peter Ward and Joe Kirschvink**

*Bloomsbury 2015, 301 pp., £20, h.b.*

It is striking how many new discoveries have been made about the history of life in the last 25 years, partly associated with new disciplines such as astrobiology and geo-biology. Peter Ward is a palaeobiologist while Joe Kirschvink is a geophysical biologist. In this well written and accessible book, they use three main themes: that the history of life has been more affected by catastrophe than the sum of all other forces, thus challenging the principle of uniformitarianism; that three molecules - oxygen, carbon dioxide and hydrogen sulphide - have had the greatest influence on the history of life; and that the evolution of ecosystems is central. This includes the key importance of the carbon cycle in regulating atmospheric temperature and the conditions for life - counteracted by the weathering process. They speculate that life might have originated from Mars and explain the history of multiple ice ages (Snowball Earth) in our evolution. The narrative makes it clear that greenhouse events have been responsible for many previous extinctions, and that we should pay close attention to this lesson from history given our current situation. The authors explain how conditions for life will eventually become impossible on Planet Earth but we ourselves could hasten our own demise if we do not get our carbon emissions under control – a very engaging read.

#### **Beasts**

**Jeffrey Masson**

*Bloomsbury 2015, 213 pp., \$16, p/b.*

Subtitled 'what animals can teach us about the origins of good and evil' and building on his previous books about emotions in animals, this trenchant book puts the case that animal aggression 'is not even remotely equivalent to the violence of mankind.' Partly for reasons already identified by Konrad Lorenz in the 1960s, we do not as a species have the necessary checks on aggression and indeed project our own aggression onto animal behaviour. Another key factor is the dehumanisation of the other based on conformity and the need to belong, so that the perceived threat of the other justifies our cruelty, hatred, exploitation, indifference, killing and war. We are in fact socialised into racism and false views. Even the orca or killer whale has nothing on humans: 'when it comes to complex, deep, almost unimaginable violence, our species is beyond compare.' This is a sobering conclusion from the chapter on kindness, but it does not mean that we are all alike - although under pressure we too can become inhuman.

The great evolutionary biologist JBS Haldane remarked that kindness to human beings and animals usually go together although he also argued that violence is part of human nature. Masson's conclusion is nevertheless optimistic if we can acknowledge the existence of the dark side of human nature and abolish the ugly aspects of the us/them distinction, the results of which are only too apparent in the current international scene; we can also do more to cultivate compassion. Incidentally, the appendices contain fascinating lists on traits unique to humans and those we share with

animals, human universals, and, more soberly, what humans do to other animals – 60 billion are killed for food, over 50 million used in animal experiments, 5 million in zoos and 100 million a year killed by hunting in the US alone.

#### **Testosterone**

**Joe Herbert**

*Oxford 2015, 217 pp., £16.99, h/b.*

This is a highly readable history of a crucial hormone that still has a powerful effect in our time. Subtitled 'sex, power and the will to win', the book is a wide-ranging study by a Cambridge neuroscientist. It becomes clear that testosterone is not only important for sexual selection and survival, but also has important social implications and is indeed constrained by many social norms. It causes men not only to grow features enhancing their sexual attractiveness, but also hones their competitive and risk-taking skills. Reading the book makes one more self-aware of its impact. On the wider front, testosterone is related to aggression and war, including rape, especially in war. This represents a breakdown in social norms, which one also sees in gangs. Naturally, young men feel its effects more strongly, especially when combined with the kind of peer pressure that also establishes identity.

Herbert discusses the rather different manifestation of testosterone in financial traders, remarking that unbridled behaviour of any sort is incompatible with a stable and functional society. In young men, the impact of testosterone also seems to be associated with the development of fanaticism. Similarly to the implications of Paul Mclean's triune brain, it is useful to realise that 'humans bring with them ancestral baggage in the form of basic brain mechanisms for sex, aggression, and other behaviours that represent their evolutionary history and have been essential for the success, but are now modulated by more recently developed parts of the brain and the demands of a very different social and physical environment.' We certainly need the drive and energy associated with testosterone, but equally we need to remain alert to the most appropriate types of its social management.

#### **The Deeper Genome**

**John Parrington**

*Oxford 2015, 246 pp., £18.99, h/b.*

The early 2000s saw the completion of the sequencing of the human genome, announced with great hype partly on the basis that it would enable extraordinary medical advances. In the event, single gene conditions are comparatively rare, and a much more complex picture has emerged, represented by the publication of the results of the ENCODE study in 2012. It had been thought that up to 98% of DNA was junk, but it now turns out that at least 80% has a regulatory function. For me, the crucial shift in thinking has been from a linear atomism typified by reductionist microbiology to a more systemic field understanding of the genome as a whole in epigenetics. Just as the original evolutionary thinking spoke only of the adaptation of the organism to the environment rather than the interaction between the two in Gaia theory, so the central dogma of Weismann and later Crick has proved a limited way of thinking: the genome has turned out to be much more dynamic and interactive, with many genes responsible for regulatory mechanisms within the environment. So the picture is one of complexity rather than simplicity.

I found it fascinating that over 4 million 'switches' are scattered around the genome devoted to 'controlling' (this is also a metaphor) the activity of 22,000 genes. This means that the similarities between humans and other mammals are far less than supposed by genetic make up alone. The book takes the reader through the development of this thinking from Darwin onwards so that one can appreciate how modern theories have been formulated. He discusses the work of Jacques Monod, Barbara McClintock and Conrad Waddington, among others, and explains the vitriolic reaction to the ENCODE findings not only in scientific terms, but also for the potential support they might be seen to give to the intelligent design position. In his conclusion entitled 'the case the complexity', the author goes back to the Romantic movement of the early 19th century, including the work of Goethe, about whom he might have written more (it was not clear that he was familiar with modern developments of Goethean science). He remarks that 'the methods available to study the complexity that they recognised in nature were far too simple to do justice to it', a contention that he also applies to a purely reductionist approach in trying to simplify a complex process. It is encouraging to read that this approach might have reached its limit and needs to be incorporated in a more holistic understanding as in genome-wide association studies. This is more consistent with similar pictures emerging in quantum physics and ecology - representing a complex web of interactions.

### **Genes and the Bioimaginary**

**Deborah Lynn Steinberg**

*Ashgate 2015, 191 pp., £35, h/b.*

There is no doubt that the author of this penetrating book is correct that the gene 'has now powerfully and pervasively infiltrated the full fabric of contemporary life' in both a scientific and cultural sense. In this case, as in many others, science and culture are in fact inseparable and mutually influencing. Sometimes, as this book and its studies demonstrate, the influence is hidden in assumptions and even social structures, for instance the nature of the Reith Lectures and the cultivation of specialist expertise. This involves the generation and validation of knowledge as well as its communication within an implied power structure; also the promises of transformation as justification for continuing levels of research funding (she illustrates this with a begging letter on breast cancer BRCA research). The metaphor of the body as machine is never far away, as also evidenced by the use of such terms as programme and engineering going back to the 17th-century scientific revolution. The rhetoric can also be redemptive and correspondingly seductive.

One of the strengths of this study is the different methodologies applied to the various case studies including gay genes, genes and crime and the search for a Jewish gene. One point of departure was the Reith Lectures given by Steve Jones in 1991, which was an important milestone in the popularisation of genetic discourse, indeed referring to genes as a language and set of instructions. These are illustrated with cartoon versions that reveal a great deal about underlying cultural assumptions. Genes can become a putative locus of responsibility both in terms of disease and crime, although the causal reality is much more complex and multifactorial. There is nevertheless a temptation to argue in narrow linear terms. In her concluding chapter, the author shows how genes are real at a number of levels, including what she calls the bioimaginary where their power lies within the human imagination. This is a thoughtful interdisciplinary study that raises important issues about genes and culture.

### **The Sceptical Optimist**

**Nicholas Agar**

*Oxford 2015, 206 pp., £18.99, h/b.*

Subtitled 'why technology isn't the answer to everything', this eloquent and well-informed book enables readers to get to grips with the relationship between technological progress and enhanced wellbeing. Agar also provides a range of explanatory terms that inform the debate, such as the central concept of radical optimism arguing that accelerating technical progress will soon end poverty, disease and ignorance as well as improving our happiness and wellbeing. It is just this view that he convincingly challenges to create a more realistic model of the impact of technology. Radical optimists take progress in IT as the standard when it clearly cannot be applied across the board. Indeed, wellbeing can be undermined by 'status anxiety' generated through social networks, and we should not forget record levels of mental health disturbances in advanced societies.

Agar brings psychological findings to bear on his argument such as hedonic adaptation in relation to set points (we gradually revert to our hedonic set point) and hedonic normalisation as society as a whole becomes accustomed to new forms of technical advance. The new paradox of progress is that improvements of individual wellbeing resulting from technological progress have failed to translate into equivalent improvements for society as a whole. The author highlights a key difference between technological progress and progress in, say, cancer research or even the design of muskets. The former incorporates a reflexive dimension whereby technological advances enable further advances. He also proposes technological progress experiments, arguing that technological progress will not in itself and poverty and advocating the choice of an appropriate tempo of technological progress in view of his contention that it makes marginal diminishing contributions to wellbeing. The book is a refreshing corrective to the excesses of technological optimism.

### **Quirks of the Quantum Mind**

**Robert Jahn and Brenda Dunne**

*ICRL 2012, 256 pp., \$17.95, p/b.*

Robert Jahn and Brenda Dunne are well known for their collaboration at the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research Laboratory on their work on the mind-machine interface and remote perception. In this radical book they propose that quantum mechanics, 'like any other model of human representation, is both a reflection and a product of the mind that seeks to comprehend and explain its observations and experiences.' In this they are backed up by the patriarchs of modern physics – there is a fascinating 80-page series of extracts that alone would make the book worth purchasing. They are only too aware of the intellectual resistance to accepting paranormal phenomena in terms of replication and explanatory models and they investigate the potential of quantum theory to provide some degree of theoretical underpinning.

To this end they define their terms very carefully before giving a relatively technical overview of quantum theory. They then explore analogies and metaphors in the field, including waves, atoms, covalence and the metaphorical principles of indistinguishability, exclusion, correspondence, uncertainty and complementarity. They apply these to their data on human-machine anomalies and precognitive remote perception with some very interesting implications. Specifically, successful subjects seem to achieve a balance between observation and participation, analysis and synthesis, doing and being. Trying too hard does not guarantee optimum results. Although we normally separate our thinking processes from our observations, the authors remind us that Einstein said that it was the theory that decides what we can observe.

They also quote William James to the effect that the intellectual life of man insists in substituting our conceptual order for the

perceptual order from which our experience originally derives. This is one of the main points reinforced by the quotations from distinguished (in some ways neo-Kantian) 20th-century physicists - here are three for illustrative purposes: 'all ideas of the form of the outer world are ultimately only reflections of our own perceptions' (Max Planck); 'all new experience makes its appearance within the frame of our customary points of view and forms of perception' (Niels Bohr); 'the same organising forces that have shaped nature in all her forms are also responsible for the structure of our minds.' (Heisenberg). The book breaks new ground with the boldness, rigour and coherence of thinking.

### **Are Dolphins Really Smart?**

**Justin Gregg**

*Oxford 2015, 301 pp., £9.99, p/b.*

Five years ago, I reviewed a book that argued that dolphins qualified as persons and should therefore be protected as such under international law. The case seemed convincing enough, but this book provides an update as well as a history of dolphin research, running to over 60 pages of notes and references. It aims to provide a balanced view of the evidence while at the same time critically examining competing claims based on empirical research. It turns out that the popular understanding of dolphin intelligence derives almost completely from the work of John Lilly in the 1950s. The author examines in detail five main ideas: that the dolphin brain is unusually large and sophisticated, that the dolphin mind is unusually complex in terms of self-awareness, consciousness and emotions, that they display sophisticated behaviour in the wild and in experimental situations, that they speak their own language, and that they lead complex social lives living in harmony with each other and their environment. These themes provide the main chapter headings and the picture emerging is much more complex and nuanced, as one would expect from careful scientific research. There are also issues with terminology such as intelligence - scientists prefer to use the more neutral term of animal cognition.

One example concerns the nature of dolphin language. Gregg provides a set of ten criteria as markers, where human beings will score 5 out of 5. It turns out that dolphins score 20/50, the same as chimpanzees and four more than bees. The idea that they are always gentle is also shown to be false, although they also display remarkable capacities for cooperation and altruism. The author relates his own experience of swimming near an aggressive male where he was astonished that one of his fellows interpreted this behaviour as friendly and playful, in accordance with his own preconceptions. The last chapter sums up his findings, which I found very fair in view of the evidence cited. He makes a more general point that we need to consider dolphins in relation to other intelligent species and that we may be left with as many questions as answers. He takes the view that it is not necessary to accord a special status to dolphins to argue for their protection, which can equally be supported on the grounds of minimising suffering. In the end, this is a philosophical and ethical rather than a purely scientific issue.

## **MEDICINE-HEALTH**

### **Effortless Healing**

**Dr Joseph Mercola**

*Hay House 2015, 323 pp., £12.99, p/b.*

If you only buy one book on healthy living this year, this should be it. Dr Joseph Mercola created Mercola.com in 1997, and it is one of the leading sites on the natural medicine. Here he synthesises some of the key points to the found on his website in a highly readable and referenced form. He himself undertook the journey he describes, and was not always a healthy eater. At one point he was even a paid speaker for pharmaceutical companies. Over the last three decades, he

has treated over 25,000 people using naturopathic principles. At first, he lost many of his patients as they were unwilling to embark on a challenging journey to address the fundamental causes of their illness. He gives some staggering figures about estate of American health. Nearly 70% are taking at least one prescription drug; the average 18-65 year old fills a dozen prescriptions a year, but the figure for over 65s is 30 and 25% of this age group takes 10 to 19 pills a day.

It is worth remembering the dictum of Hippocrates that food should be your medicine and medicine your food. The title comes from the self-healing capacity of the body if given half a chance and not assaulted with processed foods and fizzy drinks. Mercola sets out nine simple ways to help the body heal itself involving drinking pure water, juicing and fermenting vegetables, high-intensity exercise, exposure to the sun for vitamin D, looking after your gut bacteria, sleeping properly and barefoot exercise - then a warning to avoid certain popular health foods such as whole grains (gluten can be a real problem), natural sweeteners, unfermented soy, vegetable oil, farmed fish and conventional yoghurt (some of this is also advocated in the paleo approach). Readers will find themselves challenged as Mercola presents the latest research and debunks a number of popular notions on the way. However, the advice is well worth taking and is based on solid evidence. I myself will be making a number of modifications to my lifestyle as a result, and will be signing up for his newsletter. [www.mercola.com](http://www.mercola.com)

## **PHILOSOPHY-RELIGION**

### **Emil Brunner – A Reappraisal**

**Alister E. McGrath**

*Wiley Blackwell 2015, 246 pp., £65, h/b.*

My friend Norman Cockburn gave me a couple of books by the Protestant theologian Emil Brunner from his extensive library the 1970s. He also offered me the complete works of Brunner's better-known contemporary Karl Barth, which I declined on the grounds that I did not find his outlook congenial. This new and authoritative study brings Brunner back from comparative obscurity after his death nearly 50 years ago. The book is both thematic and chronological, dealing with his life as well as themes such as a theology of crisis, dialectical theology and natural theology. It also comments on his role as a preacher and public intellectual and gives an assessment of his legacy. Brunner explores the limits of reason, affirming its critical role while denying its foundational role in relation to revelation. There is considerable interesting discussion of the personal and theological relationship between Brunner and Barth, especially their different understandings of natural theology and the communication of insights to ordinary people. For Brunner natural theology can only exist within the standpoint of faith. In a discussion of objectivity and subjectivity in truth as encounter, McGrath brings in angles from Kierkegaard and Buber. The book is aimed at the scholarly community and succeeds admirably in its aim of recovering Brunner's significance and a major theologian.

### **The Best Things in Life**

**Thomas Hurka**

*Oxford 2015, 200 pp., \$14.95, p/b.*

Subtitled 'a guide to what really matters', this highly readable philosophical book takes the reader on an intellectual journey to explore various forms of the good life and what they mean; this varies according to our temperament and inclinations, but the author provides us with the means of critically evaluating our own approach. He begins by discussing pleasure and feeling good, exploring ethical and psychological hedonism in different guises. Feeling good does not come automatically and is more difficult for some people than others. We feel it in the flow of absorbing activity although there is always the paradox that the pursuit of pleasure may not be achieved

directly; moreover, mindless pleasures may be self-limiting. The author moves on to other forms of intrinsic good in terms of the varieties of virtue (being good), knowledge and achievement and their possible combination in a rounded life, with helpful analyses in the respective chapters. There is a very good chapter on variations and developments in love and friendship and a final one bringing together different qualities and trajectories of life. All of this is bounded by death, which nevertheless does not negate the enjoyment of life's goods: 'it will always be true, into eternity, that you understood those truths, accomplished those goals, and cared for those people' - even if our life could have been better and we could have lived longer. This well-written book helps us reflect on the choices we are making and their implications for a good life.

### **The Wisdom of the Liminal**

**Celia Deane-Drummond**

*Wm Eerdmans 2015, 358 pp., £23.99, p/b.*

This book has emerged from the author's twin interests in Christology and theological anthropology, discussing the relationship between humans and other animals. At one end of the continuum, as she sees it, is animal evolution and at the other is the human being fully developed in the image of God, with a long journey in between. This means covering a great deal of ground in the light of new evolutionary research and different epistemological and theological starting points. Her main argument is that the difference between humans and other animals is one of degree, and she covers the key areas of human reason and animal cognition, human freedom and animal agency, human morality and animal virtue, human language and animal communication, evolving social worlds, and human justice and animal fairness leading to a common ground of kinship. She engages not only with evolutionary biology and animal behaviour, but also ethology and cognitive psychology. Interestingly, she draws a great deal on the work of Thomas Aquinas, who set some of the theological boundaries of her discussion. It is a detailed and impressive treatment informed by the latest scholarship in these various fields, which makes it a book of more interest to professionals than the general reader.

### **Dialogues with the Stars**

**Henryk Skolimowski (SMN)**

*Creative Fire Press 2015, 79 pp., no price given.*

With each passing decade, Henryk extends his vision and that of human potential to match our stellar origins with a corresponding philosophy of light. He explains that his two favourite places for contemplating the stars are in the Himalayas and near his house on a Greek island. There are ten short dialogues with a star he names Annabel - cosmic conversations on essential matters. One simple and profound message is to BE - we spend a great deal of time doing from our own little perspective. Light transcends religion and its history and yet it is of the essence. Henryk sees our own and cosmic intelligence in a process of evolution towards a wiser culture with a much deeper and more universal understanding involving a process of endless transcendence. Henryk himself experiences a huge sense of space, breadth and depth as well as peace, beauty and radiance. This gives us a real sense of proportion. He concludes that 'we must be truly open to the magic of the cosmos, and of the stars, to be able to truly appreciate who we are and what it is all about.' His Hymn to Light at the end is infused with a spirit of wonder that reminded me of Francis of Assisi. This inspiring book is food for the soul and joy for the spirit.

### **St Francis of Assisi**

**G.K. Chesterton**

*Hendrickson 2008, 129 pp., £12.99, h/b.*

G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) was a popular Christian writer with a prodigious output, including this well-written study and reflection on the life of St Francis. He begins by sketching out possible vantage points from which to view his life without the interfering prejudice of scepticism that denies miracles *a priori* and cannot understand the nature of sanctity. He explains the broader background of his time and the evolution of Catholic Christianity as a response to paganism. One of his most interesting observations is Francis's self-characterisation as a troubadour, a lover of God, Christ, men and Lady Poverty: what he calls Le Jongleur (jester) de Dieu (think of his *Cantic to the Sun*). He began as a fighter, son of a cloth merchant whom he famously repudiated along with his earlier life. The various chapters describe him as a fighter, builder, little poor man and mirror of Christ who began a truly mendicant order initially without any economic security whatsoever. Chesterton explains how Francis saw things dramatically, for instance on his pilgrimage to Rome to seek out Pope Innocent III, who only took him seriously after a dream. His life was certainly an imitation of Christ, culminating in the stigmata shortly before his death. Importantly, he also instigated the idea of a Third Order enabling men and women to be part of his movement without abandoning their homes. There is no doubt about his inner power and supernatural capacity, for instance in terms of healing. The power of his testament can also be seen in the life of the present Pope and his recent encyclical on the environment. Although written more than 80 years ago, this book can still inform our understanding of this great life.

### **Morning Homilies**

**Pope Francis**

*Orbis Books 2015, 205 pp., \$18, p/b.*

Every morning Pope Francis says Mass for fellow residents and guests in the chapel of St Martha's, the modest guesthouse where he lives. This book of homilies - reflections on scriptural passages - is edited from the first five months of his papacy and gives a clear indication of his priorities in terms of humility, gentleness and love. The Church, he claims, is not an organisation but rather a love story, speaking to the heart rather than the head, which is inclined to formulate divisive ideologies. He goes as far as characterising the church as a mother and definitely not an NGO, although his recent environmental encyclical has appealed to NGOs in this field. Humility runs through many of his reflections, starting from the Incarnation and person of Christ himself. For the Pope, an aspect of humility is not to think that one can make one's own way and find one's own door - for him, the only door is Jesus. The book is best read in small sections as the homilies were delivered. Readers are warned against hypocrisy, idolatry, slander, grumbling and gossip, while recognising the unavoidable frailties of human nature. The format is one of reports with direct quotations, rather than a verbatim account of the homilies themselves. This certainly clarifies the message, and many homilies are full of down-to-earth practical advice.

### **Sun of God**

**Gregory Sams**

*Weiser 2009, 232 pp., \$17.95, p/b.*

Just in case you wondered, the spelling of gOd is not a typo but stands rather for the nameless ultimate principle, the visible counterpart of which Sams equates with the sun. The first religions were all animistic, spirit was everywhere, while we now live in a scientific world that denies the reality of spirit, but mainly on a philosophical rather than strictly scientific basis. Sams puts forward a view whereby the boundaries of consciousness are extended beyond human beings. It reminds me of an excellent conference and 15 years ago arranged by Rupert Sheldrake on The Conscious Sun.

What if, we wondered, the sun was a conscious being far beyond our own comprehension? This also happens to be the view taken by the Bulgarian sage Beinsa Douno. This engaging and well-written book takes the reader through the history of religion and the human distortions that they have implied. He also considers origins, but all in the light of a conscious and self-organising universe. It adds up to a powerful argument that is a plausible alternative to the way we currently understand life and one in which we have more than an accidental role. The book also features many stimulating and sometimes amusing quotations – Gallagher is quoted as saying ‘don't you wish there were a knob on the TV to turn up the intelligence? There is one marked “Brightness,” but it doesn't work.’

### ***A Star in the East – the Rise of Christianity in China***

**Rodney Stark and Xiuhua Wang**

*Templeton Press 2015, 148 pp., \$24.95, h/b.*

This new study is based on two major surveys, one with Chinese villagers, as well as the history of missionary activity in China and its repression by the Communist regime. The first famous missionary, the Jesuit Matteo Ricci, arrived in 1582, and part of the book describes Christian missions to China, particularly in the period 1860 to 1950. The best estimate of the current number of Christians in China as of 2007 is about 60 million, and the authors project a growth rate of 7% through to 2030, giving a staggering increase to some 295 million, which would make China largest Christian country in the world (this may or may not occur). The fact that 40 new churches a week are emerging is indicative. Another interesting implication is the large number of Christians within the Communist hierarchy, which might lead one to suppose that they would encourage free markets and democracy. The book presents a network or social ties theory of conversion whereby family and neighbours is far more critical than preaching or reading the Bible – this applies especially in rural areas. They show generally that educated people are more likely to become Christians and move away from Buddhism, although the numbers are far larger - nearer 20% than 5%. In addition, many Chinese venerate the graves of their ancestors, which the Chinese themselves would not regard as religious, although sociologists of religion would disagree. A more general consideration is that the rise of religion in China is due to a spiritual deprivation represented by the meaninglessness inherent in materialism. Overall, the book documents a fascinating trend.

### ***Christianity and Reincarnation***

**Rudolf Frieling**

*Floris Books 2015 (1977), 117 pp., £14.95, p/b.*

As many readers may be aware, Rudolf Steiner wrote extensively on reincarnation with a more Western view. The author was one of the founders of The Christian Community and in this book provides a scholarly account of Western thinking around this question with a deep knowledge of biblical sources. He has an interesting quote from Schelling, where he says that Christ is not the teacher or inaugurator of Christianity, but rather its content - this provides an important point of departure for Frieling's analysis, especially of Christ becoming man and what it really means for man to become a Christian in terms of growth and development. He fully integrates reincarnation into Christian doctrine with a number of interesting examples taken from the Bible itself and a particularly interesting chapter on human evolution in the Apocalypse of John. It is an encouraging and hopeful vision.

### ***I Know how to Live, I Know how to Die – the Teachings of Dadi Janki***

**Neville Hodgkinson (SMN)**

*Mantra Books (John Hunt) 2015, 131 pp., £9.99, p/b.*

One of my enduring memories of Dadi Janki was an occasion at a conference in Uxmal, Mexico in 1994 when the subject was science and silence – we sat with Dadi Janki in meditation, bathing in the atmosphere of peace and love that she exuded. She is now 99 and was one of the original founders of the Brahma Kumaris movement in the mid 1930s. Although led by a former jeweller Dada Lekhraj (also known as Brahma Baba), the senior leaders were and are women. I met the author at their headquarters at Mt Abu in India in 1987. This accessible book is both an account of Dadi Janki's life and teaching as well as giving some history of the movement, which will be well known to most readers. The BKs have a distinctive teaching about the soul and its relation to God, with an emphasis on purity and detachment from identification with the body. They believe that we are at the end of a cycle when God will intervene to renew the planet and we will attain a more spiritualised form of existence and understanding. Neville writes not only about the importance of purity, but also of truth, positivity, honesty, respect and silence. Throughout, he quotes the wise words of Dadi Janki based on 80 years of spiritual practice. The last section is on death, which also means dying to our old nature and the old world as well as leaving the body. The main thing throughout is to maintain a close connection with the Supreme Being in both life and death.

### ***Voices of the Sacred Feminine***

**Rev Dr Karen Tate (ed)**

*Changemaker Books 2014, 408 pp., £13.99, p/b.*

This wide-ranging book derives its 40 chapters mainly from a radio series of the same name with four main parts addressing deity, archetype and ideal, ritual and healing, alternatives to patriarchy, and sacred activism. Some contributors are well known, and others less so, but the content forms a powerful message amounting to a new cultural agenda of rebalancing masculine and feminine and demanding a radical reshaping of education and culturally embedded roles. The editor argues that patriarchy is based on racism, sexism, environmental and cultural exploitation resulting in inequality, abuse and injustice. The necessary new education is unlikely to come from the system itself, but must draw on many of the insights and experiences contained in these inspiring interviews and articles. A number of mythological figures make an appearance, including the Egyptian Sekhmet, and there is a thoughtful reflection on the role and significance of Mary Magdalene. Ava explains the importance of the Queen archetype along with the maiden, mother and crone as an embodiment of empowerment as an architect of life. Among the more unusual but persuasive contributions is David Hillman on pubescent goddesses and sexual rituals. The last part on activism includes contributions from Charles Eisenstein and Matthew Fox where one can discern real change afoot, albeit initially at our cultural margins. The hope of the volume as a whole is to contribute towards the emergence of a new normal and every reader is sure to find elements that they can incorporate into their own lives.

## PSYCHOLOGY-CONSCIOUSNESS STUDIES

### *Completing Piaget's Project*

Edward J. Dale

Paragon House 2015, 379 pp., \$24.95, p/b.

Subtitled 'Transpersonal Philosophy and the Future of Psychology', this is a dense, demanding and rewarding read, reframing as it does the seminal work of Jean Piaget beyond its generally perceived atheism. Piaget's early genius is evidenced by the fact that he had published over 30 academic papers by the age of 18 and while still at school was offered the post of director of the prestigious Geneva Museum of Natural History. It was around that time that he encountered the work of Bergson, which was profoundly influential, especially on his early novel *La Recherche*, containing the seeds of his important concepts of immanence and equilibrium or 'structure-of-the-whole' involving the transcendence of ego and the unifying action of love. This is the Piaget unknown to psychology who was also making important contributions to biology, many of which have since been validated by more recent systemic models. The author reviews a number of relevant sciences and the importance of nonlinearity in his thought. Progress in both science and religion can lead to convergence not only in these fields separately, but also between them.

This makes Piaget a pioneer of a sophisticated post-modern scientific understanding and he describes the interesting process of transpersonal heterochrony - the variable emergence point of transpersonal experience in the life cycle. One interesting theme is that we may be in danger of losing this capacity if we immerse ourselves too deeply in a materialistic understanding of life that denies the spirit. The author argues that systems theory reintroduces a direction to evolution in terms of self-organisation and 'emergent teleonomy' towards a more spiritualised society. We already have within us spiritual 'chreods' awaiting activation and drawing on collective human experience. We can each contribute to maintaining the openness of these channels. Science, philosophy, psychology and religion are all bound together in human experience and our quest for a deeper understanding of reality and demanding post-formal thinking. In the final analysis, the spiritual must incorporate the findings of modernity, which the author find plausible largely because of adaptive complex systems theory restoring a sense of directionality to our view of life.

### *Microgenetic Theory and Process Thought*

Jason Brown

Imprint Academic 2015, 212 pp., £19.95, p/b.

The aim of this volume is to establish some foundational psychological principles of the philosophy of mind grounded in process (what the author calls microgenetic) theory and evolutionary development. In this view, outcomes incorporate earlier segments in the series including values, meaning and beliefs - formative phases. The writing is technical but clear and the contents cover the mind/brain state, experience, consciousness, feeling, thinking, novelty and causation, certainty and conviction, and the psychology of free will - in other words, a survey of fundamental topics. Readers will find a fresh perspective on all these themes from a panpsychic or dual aspect viewpoint whereby the psyche is the experiencing brain.

The essential ingredients of consciousness are argued to be a 'self, world and an intermediate phase of introspection or imagination embedded in the self-world relation' of immediate experience including both feeling and thinking, introspection and sense perception. This also involves a thorough discussion of the relationship between choice, decision and action and a subtle treatment of the topic of free will.

Brown points out that the terms of reference of the discussion are critical as is the nature of freedom in free will. On the one hand, 'the brain as a part of the natural world is a physical entity presumed to obey causal laws' while on the mental side, free choice is problematic if it is supposed to be the impact of an immaterial self. Causal determinism, though, assumes that choice and action correspond to brain process while the process is in fact one of transformation or actualisation entailing creativity, as explained by Whitehead. Readers engaged in these philosophical and psychological debates will find much food for thought in this volume.

### *First Steps to Seeing*

Emma Kidd

Floris Books 2015, 190 pp., £16.99, p/b.

Emma Kidd studied the MSc in Holistic Science at Schumacher College, studying under Brian Goodwin and especially Henri Bortoft, whose books will already be known to many readers. Here she builds on their work and that of Goethe to offer a practical means of seeing more dynamically and living life more attentively beyond the abstract concepts that help shape our representation of the world - as also explained in the work of Iain McGilchrist. The way we see influences what we see and we often neglect the immediacy of our senses as our minds are elsewhere. The author provides a series of practical exercises and reflections to enable the reader to attend differently - a new form of mindfulness. The second part of the book provides a fresh approach to life and I was struck by some remarks by Arthur Zajonc that learning to love is also the task of learning to know in its fullest sense, relating cognition with affection. As we experience life more immediately in the now, we also tend to become more grateful and make the most of our experience and relationships. Here, a helpful concept was the 'And Stance' in which we can hold contradictory opposites in mind simultaneously without reducing the complexity of our feelings. We may have to let go of what we think we know if we are to open fully to life - thriving is not merely surviving.

### *Integration*

Ann Betz and Karen Kimsey-House

Changemaker Books (John Hunt) 2015, 171 pp., £12.99, p/b.

We are all shaped by the expectations of our families and the society in which we grow up; also by the experience of separation from a sense of belonging that is our evolutionary heritage. This book considers the sense of separation in the light of our evolutionary development, focusing on the imbalance between left and right hemisphere thinking identified by Iain McGilchrist and giving rise to the idea of being co-active as an integration of right and left hemispheres. Indeed, integration is the central theme of the book, as the title suggests. This has the four dimensions of self, others, the world and God. The second part of the book is devoted to the practicalities of being co-active and achieving an appropriate balance between the Default Mode Network and the Task Positive Network in the brain. Various stories illustrate imbalances in one direction or the other, but it is always important to harmonise these capacities both in life and at work. The authors describe the four cornerstones of the philosophy with practical tips for their implementation. We need to treat people as creative, resourceful and whole, dance in the moment, focus on the whole person and evoke transformation. It is also important to forge consciously designed alliances in order to enhance the cornerstones. They also suggest five keys to integration: listening, intuition, curiosity, deepening the learning and self-management. This practical approach informed by neuroscience can help readers refine their approach whatever their situation. There are some interesting quotations in the book, but I was surprised to see a quotation from the Gospel of Thomas attributed to Daniel Pinchbeck. (p. 36)

## Happiness is a State of Mind

HH the Gyalwang Drukpa

Yellow Kite Books 2015, 253 pp., £14.99, p/b.

The title states the thesis of this excellent book written by an acclaimed spiritual teacher who is involved in environmental protection, education, medical services, relief aid and heritage preservation - [www.drukpa.org](http://www.drukpa.org). The depth of his understanding is apparent on every page as he discusses the nature of happiness, how to cultivate a happy state of mind and putting happiness into action. He sees happiness as our intrinsic nature, so it is a question of removing obstacles and engaging in practices such as meditation and mindfulness. We can in fact choose happiness and cultivate it through gratitude as well as changing mental habits, embracing our fears and being friendly with our whole range of emotions. There are reminders at the end of each chapter and a suggestion for a random act of happiness. The book is enhanced by the reflections of followers who have attended his retreats and experienced various forms of transformation. We can each play a role in making the world a happier place and follow his advice to 'live with all your heart and be a warrior of joy and happiness.'

## Happiness – A Very Short Introduction

Daniel H Haybron

Oxford 2015, 149 pp., £7.99, p/b.

This excellent book is more than a summary of the field and represents an original contribution to it. Happiness and wellbeing have become fashionable topics, especially since the publication of Richard Layard's book in 2004. Haybron explains in the first chapter that there are three main approaches: emotional state theory, hedonism or pleasure, and life satisfaction. He discusses emotional state theories in terms of endorsement, engagement and achievement before devoting a separate chapter to life satisfaction, which involves judgement rather than feelings. It turns out that studies of happiness may exaggerate its degree, and tend to be measured on subjective scales. These sources of happiness are treated in terms of security, outlook, autonomy, relationships, and skills and meaningful activity. Nature can also be important, and there is an interesting relationship between levels of income and happiness - the correlation does not seem to increase above \$75,000 in the case of the US. This leads on to a discussion of wellbeing and the relationship between virtue, meaning and happiness. Consuming is not enough; we also need to develop a sense of appreciation. The final chapter considers the nature of a good life and contains the summary practical advice that you should: 'engage yourself of meaningful activities that interest you, but don't overdo it and forget to relax. Make time for the people you love. Keep the lid on your debts. And make it come out even.' Ultimately, happiness is about a life well lived and worth living.

## One-Minute Mindfulness

Simon Parke

Hay House 2015, 214 pp., £8.99, p/b.

I very much enjoyed Simon Parke's earlier book 'One Minute Meditations', and have used it regularly. This book is arranged in a similar fashion, with one-page reflections or stories with a takeaway message at the bottom. This book is set out in eight sections about becoming simple, aware and present then on trust, impermanence, nothing, oneness and behaviour. It is based on awareness of yourself in the world, living in the present, and acceptance of your situation – that it is about how to live in the moment. All this is introduced very simply and the book can be dipped into on a regular basis. There are some nice analogies, like opening the oven door as a new thought dissipating our attention. To become young is to live and learn rather than confirming our existing understanding. And then the woman who is a walking book of helpful spiritual quotations who seems to know everything, yet understands nothing. An engaging book full of practical wisdom.

## Meditation

Brian Weiss

Hay House 2015, 57 pp., £9.99, p/b.

Brian Weiss is best known for his work on past life regression, from which his interest in meditation arises as a way of achieving tranquillity and inner peace for his patients. He quotes an inspiring message to the effect that 'with love and understanding comes the perspective of infinite patience. What's your hurry? There is no time anyway: it only feels that way to you.' The important thing is to experience the present fully and therefore let the past go. Thinking does not lead to peace. Meditation, as many readers will know from their own experience, enables us to develop spiritually and know ourselves from the inside. The book also includes the transcript of an audio download that can be accessed by readers. It is a simple but useful introduction.

## Contemplative Leadership

Peter Ng Kok Song

Meditatio 2014, 79 pp., no price given – see [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)

Peter Song has had a successful career as an investment officer and also helps run the World Community for Christian Meditation in Singapore. As such, he has incorporated meditation into his busy lifestyle by cutting out unnecessary activities – indeed he argues that meditation enables one to gain time and become more effective in one's everyday work and relationships. This book consists of three talks and an interview covering some of the same ground and quoting from the founder, John Main. The purpose of Christian meditation is to move from self-centredness to God-centredness so that one experiences a sense of oneness through selfless attention. As we all know, there is a danger that busyness and consumerism can extinguish the inner flame. Meditation helps us prioritise being and reach a state of stillness and silence. Song suggests that there are five qualities to contemplative leadership: the will to lead, clarity of mind, humility and the ability to learn, solitude and aloneness, and the wise deployment of energy. He shows how meditation can contribute to these qualities. This is a simple book with an important message.

## Heart of Relating

Carmella B'Hahn

Matador 2015, 250 pp., £15, p/b.

Subtitled 'communication beyond ego', this is a remarkable 52-week course of the art of relating, packed with insights from deep and reflective life experiences. It focuses on our relationships with ourselves, others and life and is built on the premise that if we get the inside right, the outside will fall into place. At the beginning of the book, there are charts on the outside-in and inside-out paradigms of relating, and the course helps readers shift from one to the other. The author gives guidance on how best to use the book and the time commitment that it will require on a weekly basis. Each unit is based on an outline of the opportunity for the week with a page of explanation, a page of story, and a page detailing the practice for the week. Given the number of chapters, the themes are wide ranging and enable readers to work on specifics such as listening, transforming the inner critic, releasing tribal programming, changing unreal niceness, seeing our reflection in others, dealing with unmet needs, understanding anger and dissolving grievances. Many of the stories are from the author's own experience, and there are a couple of striking instances where she calls upon invisible help and immediately knows what to do in order to get herself out of a dangerous situation. Working through the book is sure to help release dysfunctional patterns and connect readers with their core. <http://www.heartofrelating.com>

**Life Loves You****Louise Hay and Robert Holden***Hay House 2015, 238 pp., £8.99, p/b.*

'Life loves you' is one of the best-known of Louise Hay's affirmations, which forms the starting point for this inspirational book arguing that life doesn't just happen to you, it happens for you. This implies the ultimately benevolent nature of reality and is explored in a series of chapters: the Mirror principle, affirming your life, following your joy, forgiving your past, being grateful now, learning to receive and healing the future. It is based on a series of conversations at Louise's house in California, and gives a real insight into the lives of both authors as they relate these principles to their own life experience. There are some delightful stories about Robert's children including an incident where they were choosing treats and an old lady tells them they must have been very good in order to deserve these treats. This conditionality is the antithesis of the book, and, later, Robert's daughter says she would rather be called a lovely girl than a good girl. Trying to be good is an apprenticeship in conformity.

The Mirror principle helps us understand that our relationships reflect our relationship with ourselves. The authors give exercises to help readers get a real feel of being intrinsically lovable and to stop judging themselves negatively. This includes dealing with the inner critic, and Robert recounts an episode of writer's block where he is staring blankly at a page waiting for inspiration when he suddenly realises that the words of his inner critic have never been published. Readers are also encouraged to develop their creativity and intuition, asking for what they need to know, as well as being present and listening. We all need reminding of the importance of trust and gratitude as spiritual practices. There is a great deal of practical wisdom in this book, as the following passage from Louise demonstrates: "we are here to be a loving mirror to the world. The more we love ourselves, the less we project our pain onto the world. When we stop judging ourselves, we naturally judge others less. When we stop rejecting ourselves, we stop accusing others of hurting us. When we start loving ourselves more, we become happier, less defended and more open. As we love ourselves, we naturally love others more." The world would be a happier place if we followed this advice.

**The Fear Cure****Dr Lissa Rankin***Hay House 2015, 297 pp., £12.99, p/b.*

Lissa Rankin is the author of *Mind over Medicine*, which she has followed up with a fascinating book addressing one of the epidemics of our time reinforced by our culture of fear and control - just think of the rising prevalence of anxiety and depression and the psychosomatic implications of this trend. The three parts look at how fear makes you sick, the truth about fear, and the prescription for courage. She incorporates her own experiences as well as those of others (including her mentor Rachel Naomi Remen) into the narrative, bringing it to life. She distinguishes between true fear and the many false fears to which we are subject. She points out that courage is not about being fearless but about being transformed into a right relationship with uncertainty and impermanence. In the process, we can become more free and authentic. We know a good deal about the physiology of fear and how fear can make us ill, partly compromising our immune systems. We all have a choice to operate from what she calls the Small Self or from our Inner Pilot Light. We can realise that uncertainty is the gateway to possibility, that loss is natural and can lead to growth, that the universe is purposeful and that ultimately we are all One. Each of these propositions is explained in depth, and I was moved by her account of her daughter's reaction to losing a dog and saying to her mum that she was ready for another dog to break her heart. The author recommends steps to cultivating courage through belief, support, the development of intuition, identifying the roots of our fears, prescribing courage for ourselves and releasing attachment to outcomes. This is powerful medicine if we are prepared to practise it.

**The Untrue Story of You****Bryan Hubbard***Hay House 2015, 276 pp., £10.99, p/b.*

Bryan Hubbard is editor of *What Doctors Don't Tell You* with his wife Lynne McTaggart, who writes the foreword to this book subtitled 'how to let go of the past that creates you, and become fully aware in the present.' As with many books of this kind, the ideas have emerged from the author's own experience and the ways in which he has overcome his challenges. In common with spiritual traditions, he takes the view that the ego is ultimately illusory and that we spend a good deal of time allowing thoughts to think us and creating our history and identity from this process. This means that our everyday self is a construct of the past from experiences. He suggests that we have three dimensions: our Present time-body or self, our Past time-body or self with three layers of knowledge, narrative and psychology, and finally our Potential centre or self which is universal and outside time and space, witnessing every experience.

While children begin 'time-light', as adults we can become progressively more 'time-heavy' and end up being weighed down by life. An initial realisation is that we co-create our lives and receive 'pulses' from each of these three bodies, which we need to learn to recognise. All this is clearly explained in the book with the message that we should let go of the past and live fully in the present, allowing the Potential centre to manifest through us. The last part of the book is a study course of 21 days involving a series of processes as we learn to look, observe our thoughts and behaviour patterns, create new narratives, deal with resentment, enter a state of forgiveness and gratitude and respond rather than react to life. All of this involves transforming energetic processes - something to which we all aspire and which this book can help us achieve.

**I Love You****Dr David R. Hamilton***Hay House 2015, 233 pp., £10.99, p/b.*

Almost everyone has issues around self-love and self-worth, and the author of this interesting study is no exception. The difference is that he researched biological and psychological insights in order to produce a helpful guide for the rest of us. Although we are biologically wired to seek connection with others, this can easily become a desire to please at any cost. He characterises four stages of self-love: I'm not enough, I've had enough, I am enough, and finally I am. Many of these patterns come from interaction with parents, who themselves have acquired these patterns from their parents - often including blame and shame. The good news is that we can change these patterns through bodily practices and visualisations, many of which are detailed in this book. We all want to be liked, but should not at the same time compromise our integrity and authenticity. Many issues, especially for women, arise around body image. Hamilton shows how there can be power in vulnerability and how self-compassion is an important antidote to self-criticism. He gives guidance on forgiveness and on getting to grips with one's life by leaving our comfort zones. Ultimately, he argues, we are in fact made of love - the fourth stage of I Am that enables us to come from authentic depth. Reading this informative book is one thing, but practising its exercises is another and essential if the reader is to embed and embody the information.



**The Divine Spark****Graham Hancock (ed)***Hay House 2015, 310 pp., £12.99, p/b.*

As readers know, the nature of consciousness is a central concern of the Network. More than that, many of us believe that a transformation in our understanding of consciousness as fundamental rather than incidental is of critical importance. Readers of this volume on psychedelics, consciousness and the birth of civilisation would agree, with some going as far as to contend that the war on drugs is in fact a war on consciousness, keeping us within the left-hemisphere bounds of linear rational thought. Hancock himself characterises our technological civilisation as demonic in the sense that it switches us off from the wider mystery of being alive while 'bombarding our consciousness with sterile, soulless messages of production and consumption, of envy and greed, that never get to the fundamentals of anything.'

As one might expect, there is a huge variety of contributions in this volume, touching on the nature of consciousness, the expansion of the mind, the experience of psychedelics and the status of the supernatural. Shamanic cultures past and present have always used mind-altering substances to gain access to other realms of reality, which they do not regard simply as altered brain states. Among other essays, I was struck by one on the soul cluster – a tripartite division that one finds across cultures as a chart on page 254 indicates. The authors elaborate this with reference to the Kahuna philosophy of Hawaii. The last essay by Gregory Sams asking if psychedelics could save the world is particularly potent. The experience enables us to escape from a single channel reality as many of us realised in the 60s – opening us to a wider perception and connecting us with our inner selves and a world of spirit in a way that threatened to undermine the still prevalent focus on economic growth. Instead, we can throw off our mental straitjacket and realise that we can live fully and harmoniously in an interconnected world where we recognise the spirit in everything.

**Astrological Psychology, Western Esotericism and the Transpersonal****Sue Lewis (SMN)***HopeWell 2015, 203 pp., £18, p/b.*

It was touching to see this fascinating book dedicated to the memory of my friend Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, who set up the MA in Western Esotericism at Exeter University. The title indicates the ground covered in the study, and very few readers will be familiar with all the different elements, which are also part of the author's own journey. The astrological psychology of Louise and Bruno Huber was new to me. Sue describes the genesis of their system and the work they did with Roberto Assagioli, mentioning his connection with the Eranos conferences and their key cultural role. She also describes the differences between astrological psychology and psychological astrology, which leads into chapters defining western esotericism and the relationship between astrology and esotericism.

A key theme is the relationship between the seeker and the scholar along with the influence of Antoine Faivre in defining the field. The assertion by Bruno Huber that their astrology is pure esotericism is elaborated in a historical chapter maintaining that esotericism is a third pillar of Western culture - largely neglected by the mainstream, which is a pity since it provides a ground of reconciliation between science and spirituality as realised, for instance, by Newton. Sue devotes a chapter to explaining the three-chart system (using her own chart and that of Alan Deyermond) and ends with some reflections on the evolving worldviews of science and astrology in terms of an emerging participatory vision. This scholarly book enables readers to understand the significant relationships between the important currents of thought that it discusses.

**ECOLOGY-FUTURES STUDIES****Science, Society and the Environment****Michael R. Dove and Daniel M. Kammen***Earthscan 2015, 163 pp., \$53, p/b.*

This interesting book is the outcome of a collaboration between anthropology and the physics of sustainable environmental systems - between natural sciences and social sciences. The book points out that any belief about nature is also a social fact and that the facts of nature and the facts of our social experience of nature can be usefully elucidated. The authors do this with a series of four case studies involving the everyday science involved in cook stoves and lighting, the management of anthropogenic grasslands, dearth and abundance in resource management systems, and differences in perceptions of climate change between and within nations and involving what one might call a moral ecology. The importance of social facts is particularly highlighted in the discussion of perceptions of climate change between north and south, with a detailed chart of arguments and their development. We have large-scale geophysical change at one end and cultural change at the other where we can see moral ecology as part of human ecology. This collaboration makes use of 'boundary objects' across the disciplines including a recognition of the importance of discourse, the view from below, appreciation of a long historical view, the need to be self-reflexive and the analogies between natural and social processes. The book shows how fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration can be.

**Common Sense****Tom Butler***Astraea 2014, 489 pp., no price given – see [www.abigpicture.com](http://www.abigpicture.com) and [www.astraea.net](http://www.astraea.net)*

Uneasy about the ethical standards he saw around him, Tom Butler left the world of venture capitalism just over 15 years ago to devote himself to an organic lifestyle and researching the many dimensions of our current planetary challenges and the background thinking that informs them. This book is the story of his discoveries as he comes to the conclusion, shared by many others, that we urgently need a universal global system change starting with the individual and based on the very simple premise of doing the right thing in the right way. He takes the view that there is no meaning of life but that there can be meaning *in* life resulting from our general orientation. His central conclusion is that change is coming and that we must learn to live with nature and natural laws or nature will get rid of us.

Many readers will be familiar with the ground he covers and indeed with the recommendations he makes. The real challenge is implementation. For instance, in relation to population he recommends voluntary self-control. The fact that populations are not increasing in developed countries, however, is not principally a matter of self-control - there are many factors involved, including the education of women. Nor is it clear how we will voluntarily limit our consumption as he suggests. It is true that the future is in our hands in terms of the choices we make, but the drivers maintaining the current system are very powerful and unlikely to step aside before a serious breakdown occurs – the 'suits' in charge know little or nothing about ideas such as holonics discussed in this book and tend to take a 'winner takes all' view. Having said that, the author provides some useful personal tools for change at an individual level, and we all have a role to play in the evolution of our collective choices.

**New Magna Carta****Dr Nicholas Beecroft***Go published 2015, 174 pp., no price given – see [www.newmagnacarta.org](http://www.newmagnacarta.org)*

As readers will be aware, this year marks the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta. Nicholas Beecroft, author of *Analyse West: a Psychiatrist Takes Western Civilisation on a Journey of Transformation* reviewed in a previous issue, now provides the sequel in terms of his vision and strategy for rejuvenating Western civilisation in terms of beliefs, values, goals and steps to achieve them. His starting point is that we do not have the choice to keep things as they are but we do have a choice about how we respond to this time of upheaval. The default scenario will probably involve further manifestations of extremism and authoritarianism - we need to do better than that by asking a series of fundamental questions and co-creating a new future on that basis. While acknowledging the shortcomings of Western civilisation, we can also build on its strengths.

Each of 26 chapters begins with a series of questions and is broken into recommendations that are discussed in some detail. He begins from individual psychology and the way we see ourselves, moving on to values and worldviews and a vast number of issues that concern us. Among these are power and leadership, immigration and citizenship, the nature of truth and judgement, the future of religion, sex and gender issues, community, energy, medicine and health, security, freedom, rights and responsibilities, governance, media, democracy, finance and economy, environment and sustainability. In other words, the full spectrum of interrelated issues. All our challenges are magnified by the need for a transition from local tribalism and nationalism to a global humanism. Many of his proposals are eminently sensible, and readers can have their own say by visiting the website above and making suggestions for the next edition. The book is a very good stimulus for creative and constructive thought and a strong antidote to powerless cynicism.

**DEATH AND DYING****The Cambridge Companion to Life and Death****Steven Luper (ed)***Cambridge 2014, 352 pp., £18.99, p/b.*

This volume covers a wide range of themes about the metaphysics of life and death, the significance of life and death and the ethics of life and death, all of which are interrelated. At a biological level, it is suggested that the Programme-Metabolism-Container model explains the characteristic phenomena of life and this leads on to a consideration of the nature of people and personal identity - the brain as opposed to 'animalism'. Our physical identity is constituted as people persisting in time and space, while the nature of death is debated in terms of brain and circulatory respiratory models. The second part considers the nature of the good life, bringing in the Stoic view that virtue is a component of happiness and discussing whether our non-existence prior to life is equivalent that after life (a materialist perspective is maintained throughout). Life's meaning in relation to purpose and identity is set within a model of 'achievementism' (a new term for me). The last part is devoted to the ethics of life and death, discussing enhancement, procreation, abortion, suicide, killing in self-defence, euthanasia, and the killing of animals. The book is more suitable for study purposes but is certainly written at a level accessible to the general reader.

**In the Light of Death****Ineke Koedam***White Crow Books 2015, 154 pp., £12.99, p/b.*

Subtitled 'experiences on the threshold between life and death', this book has a foreword by Pim van Lommel and an afterword by Peter Fenwick, which is a strong recommendation in itself. The author is an experienced hospice worker who helped Peter with his research in Holland. Pim sees the process of acceptance and surrender as essential to dying and a time for reconciliation and resolution by way of inner preparation. The general pattern is one of transition from one reality to another, as also reported in earlier studies. The dying frequently find themselves between two worlds, as becomes apparent from the many extracts in this book. The short chapters cover a wide variety of themes also found in Peter's earlier work but in more detail. Hospice workers have a special role to play, especially if they are aware of the kinds of experiences related in this book. An important insight is the need to slow down and become calm, something we can all apply before we face this transition ourselves, making time for silence. The experiences are charged with meaning and convey a very different understanding of death to contemporary neuroscience. In a chapter on the process of dying, I found it particularly interesting to read about the departure of the five elements from the physical body as it dehydrates and is unable to maintain proper circulation. Air is the final element to leave as we breathe our last. This is a sensitive and highly informative book.

**The Wonder of You****Lynn Kathleen Russell***Ivey Enterprises 2012, 240 pp., no price given ([wonderofyou1@gmail.com](mailto:wonderofyou1@gmail.com))*

This illuminating study is based on the records of the Near-Death Experience Research Foundation ([www.nderf.org](http://www.nderf.org)) and synthesises the messages of what the NDE tells you about life and its real meaning. Those familiar with the literature will probably find confirmation of their existing understanding of the significance of spiritual insights derived in the near death state - certainly this was a timely reminder for me. The chapters highlight central themes, drawing out convergent understandings and illustrated by individual case histories. Death is seen as a transition to another state, which means that suicide is self-defeating. Reality is understood as fundamentally One, so we are all interconnected in the one life, light, love and consciousness. Our understanding of time is very limited - *kairos* brings everything into the present. Perhaps one quote can sum up the overall message of the book: 'I learned a lot. We are all part of one. We should cherish life, all life. I have a greater respect for life. Don't hurt others - they are part of the same One you are. Don't judge - seek understanding and help others.' (p. 204) One of the most powerful experiences that appears in various different chapters is that Deby-Sue Weiler. In common with Eben Alexander and Anita Moorjani she too highlights the centrality of love and the feeling of being cherished and loved - surely the essence of life. This fine book brings together insights from 2,500 experiences and reminds the reader of our underlying spiritual purpose - without the need to undergo a near death experience oneself.

## EDUCATION

### **Aristotelian Character Education**

**Kristjan Kristjansson**

*Routledge 2015, 185 pp., \$160, h/b.*

Kristjan Kristjansson is Professor of Character Education and Virtue Ethics at the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues in the University of Birmingham. The Centre is explicitly devoted to Aristotelian virtue ethics, which this book thoroughly explains. There has been renewed interest in character education around the world, including with the Westminster government, although much of the emphasis has been on performance rather than moral virtues as a means of improving school grades. Aristotelian virtue ethics is explicitly moral and based on his notion of *eudaimonia* or flourishing, where happiness or fulfilment is predicated on virtue. Proficiency in performance virtues is instrumental and intrinsically amoral, since qualities such as perseverance and determination can be used for immoral ends. Aristotle took the view that an action is right 'because it enhances virtue and contributes to a flourishing life.' In the introduction, Kristjan articulates the distinctiveness and appeal of Aristotelian character education as well as explaining problems associated with it, which he proceeds to address in the rest of the book.

Chapter 2 is a very useful rebuttal of persistent myths about Aristotelian character education in terms of concepts and history, political, epistemological and psychological considerations. In summary, he rebuts the charges that character and virtue education is 'unclear, redundant, old-fashioned, religious, paternalistic, antidemocratic, conservative, individualistic, relative and situation dependent.' The other chapters consider the issue of measurement, the nature of *phronesis* or practical wisdom, whether Aristotelian character education can undo the effects of bad upbringing, the use of dialogue, and the moral role of the teacher in relation to professionalism. Considerable progress is being made on the measurement front involving triangulation of different approaches and going beyond self-report and including the use moral dilemma tests in some of the Centre's research projects.

Kristjan's concluding reflections review the arguments of individual chapters and set out four criteria for a paradigm of moral education in terms of widespread social concerns, the political climate and the backing of both philosophical and psychological theory. He highlights specific issues in the psychological area that need to be addressed while also explaining various effective classroom methods and stressing the importance of school ethos. This highly informative and rigorous book gives the best available explanation of the importance and significance of Aristotelian character education, reminding readers that performance is not enough if it is not underpinned by moral virtue and providing a desirable social vision of flourishing individuals in a flourishing society.

### **The State of the American Mind**

**Mark Bauerlein and Adam Bellows (eds)**

*Templeton Press 2015, 260 pp., \$27.95, h/b.*

Some readers may recall the famous book by Allan Bloom - *The Closing of the American Mind*, published in the late 1980s. This new volume of 16 essays takes the general view that the American mind, 'which used to be governed by religious liberty, entrepreneurship, limited government defined by the constitution, and individualism tempered by a civic virtue' - the self-reliant and well-informed citizen - has now lapsed into habits of 'ignorance, narcissism, entitlement, sensitivity, inexpressiveness and distraction.' This amounts to a new anti-intellectualism that also pervades even the culture of colleges where students spend minimal time actually studying with very little input of reading and output of writing.

In the introductory essay, ED Hirsch restates his argument for cultural literacy, which is elaborated in the first part with contributions on low biblical literacy, poor writing skills, a low performing higher education system and the prevalence of overmedication based on the pharmaceutical revision of psychiatry after DSM-III - many more Americans are now on psychotropic drugs that alter the way they think. The second part looks at specific mental behaviours and interests, including not keeping up with the news, scattershot attention, the overvaluing of self-belief in relation to actual performance, and a very tendentious and rather dismissive essay on conspiracy theories that fails to sort the wheat from the chaff. It is revealing to read about the increase in dependency entitlements and the extent of political ignorance. There is also a very interesting essay on the age of feelings where emotional relativism is applied to moral questions. Overall, the book paints a depressing picture of the state of the American mind but it also provides suggestions for recapturing the qualities that defined the American character, albeit from a basically conservative stance.

### **High School Graduation – K12 strategies that work**

**Avis Glaze, Ruth Mattingley, Rob Andrews**

*Corwin 2013, 176 pp., C\$ 34.95, p/b.*

Avis Glaze was an impressive keynote speaker at our recent conference on Character, Culture and Values held at Glasgow University. This book explains the hugely successful Ontario project for sustained school improvement focusing on the twin objectives of excellence and equity. It should be required reading in all education departments. The authors take the reader through key concepts and strategies for implementation applied both to primary and secondary schools. Leadership across the school is a key component and they also explain other factors important in improving graduation rates. The figures speak for themselves with a great deal of supporting detail. It seemed to me that the challenges faced by Ontario can be generalised to many other countries and that the evidence base makes their conclusions robust. There are also checklists as appendices to facilitate implementation.

### **Educating Character through Stories**

**David Carr and Tom Harrison**

*Imprint Academic 2015, 185 pp., £14.95, p/b.*

Literature has been implicitly a means of moral and character education since the Greeks. Aristotle was not only the originator of virtue ethics, but wrote his *Poetics* about the impact of tragedy through *hubris* and character flaws. This book, emerging from the Jubilee Centre at Birmingham, makes a general case for character education as well as for stories as moral knowledge. It discusses approaches to and uses of stories for character education and the development of 'educated sensibility', drawing on a wide range of examples. It then presents the Knightly Virtues programme developed for primary schools and based on the five classic stories of El Cid, Don Quixote, King Arthur (Gareth and Lynette) and the Merchant of Venice. These are used to embody and illustrate virtues such as courage, humility, honesty, self-discipline, justice and gratitude. The feedback to the programme has been really excellent in terms of moral literacy and understanding as well as character formation. It has also encouraged a closer collaboration between home and school. For further details, see [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk) - where you can also sign up to their newsletter.

## GENERAL

### **The Life of Lines**

**Tim Ingold**

*Routledge 2015, 172 pp., \$44.95, p/b.*

Tin Ingold is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen. In this strikingly original book he extends and redefines his field with a fascinating interdisciplinary exploration and building on his previous work, *Lines: A Brief History*. Drawing on the work of thinkers like James Gibson (the ecological theory of perception) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ingold stretches the reader's mind in new directions and with the development of everyday metaphors in new ways. The three parts are entitled Knotting, Weathering and Humaning and are all about what is to be human. In the first part, he shows how the world of life is not built from blocks (or blobs) but is entwined in meshwork, where we are bound and knit together. The joiner is aptly named as one who joins wood together. We experience different forms of surface in mountains, skyscrapers and ground, while our experience of walking teaches us that moving is knowing.

He coins the term 'lineaologist' to describe his study, pointing out that lines are also paths, inscriptions, imprints and impressions. Clouds are designed in whirls or whorls, and we use the word atmosphere both literally and metaphorically. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Ingold sees perception as a double movement of action and passion, inspiration and expiration, fission and fusion even as we breathe - our world emerges from this process. So do sounds, a point that he illustrates by drawing both the sound and giving the score of a Bach cello suite. The premise of the third part is that the word human is in fact a verb. We are always in process, never complete - something that the word invented by Ramon Llull conveys: *homificans*. We are always in the making or in the growing. We lead our lives and are also led, we live and are also lived. Ingold makes a subtle distinction with between and in-between, the former referring to interaction and the latter to correspondence and characterised by attention and care. He concludes that his discipline is one of participant observation with an emphasis on this in-between where observing does not entail objectification but rather attention to persons and things, learning from them. This is surely a ground-breaking study that will enable readers to see social anthropology in a new light.

### **The Wealth Chef**

**Ann Wilson**

*Hay House 2015, 326 pp., £12.99, p/b.*

You may or may not have read a number of books about money and finances, but if you are interested in the subject, as I imagine most readers are, this book is essential reading, more especially if you act on it. Many of us avoid coming to grips with our finances and do not make the most of our opportunities. In this book based on her own experience, Ann Wilson suggests a number of key 'recipes' and strategies to ensure greater financial and indeed overall wellbeing. It is a good book to read at any time of life, but more especially at an earlier stage of one's career so that one has longer to put the strategies into practice. One of the keys is prioritising a percentage of one's income for cumulative investment, limiting one's necessary expenses to 55% of one's overall income. This may seem a long shot for most readers, but Ann shows how one can move in that direction. An interesting strategy is getting rid of credit cards, or only having one for emergency kept in the freezer so that it takes a few hours to defrost, by which time the urge to spend may have worn off! She also encourages readers to invest in themselves in terms of education and makes some very interesting points about the relationship between energy and completing things. I'm sure she is right that incompletions drain energy as one also knows from the effects of an untidy house and how much better one feels when one has cleared things up and indeed thrown things out. The website also contains many useful charts - [www.thewealthchef.com](http://www.thewealthchef.com)

### **The Pleasure of Reading**

**Antonia Fraser (ed)**

*Bloomsbury 2015, 329 pp., £9.99, p/b.*

This book was originally published in 1992, but this new edition contains five younger writers and a new preface by Victoria Gray, widow of Simon Gray, about the charity Give a Book ([www.giveabook.org.uk](http://www.giveabook.org.uk)) to which the profits will be donated. The original idea was for writers to recollect how they had originally taken pleasure in reading, and then recommend their ten favourite books. For readers like me, it is a real pleasure to read about reading from 43 writers, including Stephen Spender, Michael Foot, Patrick Leigh Fermor, Doris Lessing, John Fowles, Melvyn Bragg, Germaine Greer, Carol Ann Duffy and many others. Perhaps Leigh Fermor's is the most extravagant entry as he crams a great many classic books into his narrative. It was reassuring to see so many classics recommended although I would not myself include *Ulysses*, which I found almost unreadable. As one might expect, the quality of writing there is also enjoyable and it is a book to be dipped into with pleasure.

### **Living, Thinking, Looking**

**Siri Hustvedt**

*Sceptre 2012, 384 pp., £9.99, p/b.*

Siri Hustvedt is best known as a novelist and here she discusses some of the ideas with which she also engages in her fiction. The title reflects the three sections of the book drawing on her own life, discussing memory, emotion and imagination, and finally writing about visual art. The width of reference is very considerable and she discusses many implications of the ideas she raises. Two of my favourite essays were one on reading, and another on embodied visions, asking what it means to look at a work of art. In both cases there is an interaction with the product of another mind and an acute analysis of the process. Rereading books elicits new insights that depend on the growing maturity and experience of the reader, and in both cases it is important to be open, to be willing to be changed by what we read or see. They are then woven into the tapestry of our life experience. In art, there is a mirroring and recognition - here she brings in research on mirror neurons as well as the thought of Friedrich Schelling and discussions of intentionality and phenomenology leading to interpretation of meaning - but also freeing us up to play.

### **Every Day Matters 2016 Pocket Diary**

**Dani DiPirro**

*Watkins 2015, £6.99 h/b - pocket edition.*

This is an attractively produced diary with a difference. Each month is devoted to a separate theme such as happiness, creativity, truth, beauty, gratitude and wisdom, with quotations for each week and space for reflection at the end of each month. It certainly beats what one can find in the high street and has plenty of space for notes at the end.

