



books in brief

David Lorimer

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

SCIENCE/PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

Pneumatology of Matter

by David Gunn

iff Books, 2011, 464 pp., £19.99, p/b

This is a major philosophical treatise elaborating a new metaphysic of subjective materialism that overcomes many of the issues raised by a mechanistic outlook. The word pneumatology is meant to suggest that active spiritual powers are inherent in matter rather than being a property of a transcendental or metaphysical dimension. The author points out that physics has long since discarded mechanism and treats matter in what he calls a more pneumatical way. In the meantime, biology remains solidly entrenched in mechanistic ways of thinking, having initially followed physics down that route. The author now hypothesises that biology will eventually follow physics in moving beyond mechanism. He shows how these issues were also a concern of the ancient Greeks and the role played by Descartes and Newton in reframing the relationship between matter and mind. This was further developed with field theory leading to a decline of mechanism in physics and elaborations in both relativity and quantum theory. Gunn treats in great detail the dynamics of fields, but strangely, systems thinking, self-organisation, autopoiesis and the work of Eddington, Jeans and Prigogine are absent from the index, even though this line of thinking could have reinforced his argument.

The upshot of the 20th century revolution in physics is that Nature can no longer be understood as a machine, but rather that everything is governed from within. This short circuits many philosophical issues arising from a mechanical relationship between mind and matter, where matter is regarded as entirely passive. This in turn opens up the need for a different principle to explain movement and the power to act. Nor, in the view of the author, is there any need to posit a supernatural designer in order to give purpose to Nature when understood as a machine. The final chapter addresses material nature and human nature, elaborating a physical theory of human nature, reason, free will and the soul, which is understood as an anthropic force. According to this view, the soul exists but is material and mortal. This is a very neat philosophical formulation, but it ignores all the evidence that there is a component of the human being that is nonphysical. However, the book usefully points the way towards biology transcending mechanistic thinking, and as such is an important contribution.

Evolution, Games and God

by Martin A. Nowak and Sarah Coakley

John Wiley & Sons Ltd 2013, 400 pp., £25.95, h/b.

I reviewed Martin Nowak's own book on cooperation in the last issue, and this current multi-author volume builds on this work and was supported by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. It provides an antidote to the selfish and competition-driven model of evolution, even arguing that cooperation is a third key evolutionary principle alongside

mutation and natural selection. I had not realised that the term altruism, often elided with cooperation, was originally coined by Auguste Comte. A major corollary of the argument is that conditions of stable cooperation precede evolutionary breakthroughs. It is important at the outset to distinguish between cooperation and altruism: the former is characterised as a form of working together in which one individual pays the cost and another gains benefit, while altruism is a form of cooperation in which an individual is motivated by goodwill or love for another. A great deal of work, as the title suggests, has been done on game theory and cooperation. The six sections address evolutionary cooperation in historical perspective, the evolutionary phenomenon of cooperation, psychology and intentionality in the cultural evolution of cooperation, the significance of evolutionary cooperation in philosophy of biology and philosophy of mind, cooperation, ethics and metaethics, cooperation, metaphysics and God. Contributors come from a variety of disciplines including mathematical biology, history of science, psychology, philosophy and theology. They also hold diverging views within these disciplines, so readers can gain an understanding of the fundamental debates within specialist fields. This is a technical treatment of an important emerging field. The more we understand about cooperation, the better chance we have of achieving it and making a difference to our common future.

The Faith of Biology

by Robert Pollack

Columbia University Press 2013, 125 pp., £15, p/b.

Originally published in 2000, this updated edition includes a new preface about these reflections on order, meaning and free will in modern medical science. Pollack argues that it is now more difficult to find meaning given the discoveries of modern science about evolution and the brain. This includes, in his view, the discovery that the conscious mind is the product of cells in the brain, an assumption that many readers will question. He also addresses the role of the unconscious and our inescapable mortality, both of which we may be inclined to deny in the short term. He nevertheless moves towards the proposition that it is an ethical obligation 'to help scientists accept the validity of their own inner voices and see their research as an expression of their innermost feelings.' The three lectures address order versus meaning as represented by science and religion, the meaning in the order of DNA-based medicine, and meaning beyond order in the unknowable.

Artificers of Fraud

by Peter Jones

Orgonomy UK 2013, 160 pp., no price given, p/b.

This provocatively titled book investigates the work of Robert Brown, FRS (1773-1858) and Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) on the science of life energy. Brown is the originator of Brownian motion and author of a paper called Active Molecules where he described the apparently spontaneous movement of particles with a tendency to form groups. The original 1827 paper is printed here with some additional comments from 1828. Reich is known for his work on bions and describes

motile particles similar to those observed by Brown, implying that this indicated the transition between non-life and life. With its mechanistic philosophy and denial of any kind of life force or vitalism, modern science is antithetical to the kind of concepts elaborated in this book, as the author amply demonstrates. He has also replicated these experiments for himself and claims that orgonomy gives vitalism a scientific basis. He describes how to replicate the experiments and what equipment is required. Those who would like to pursue this can go to www.orgonomyuk.org.uk or email info@orgonomyuk.org.uk

Forgotten Civilization

by Robert M. Schoch PhD

Inner Traditions International 2012, 355 pp., \$18.95, p/b.

Subtitled 'the role of solar outbursts in our past and future', this study claims that the last ice age was brought to an abrupt close by coronal mass ejections from the sun, triggering massive volcanic activity, fires and floods. This set civilisation back by thousands of years. He argues that many sites such as Easter Island and the Gobekli Tepe complex in Turkey are much older than previously supposed. He describes in some detail the effect of the last mass coronal ejection in 1859 and the devastating effects it had on electrical infrastructure, then in its infancy. The corresponding effects on worldwide communications in our time would be quite devastating, as the whole of modern life runs on electricity in one form or another. Schoch introduces the field of cosmoclimatology where the behaviour of the sun plays a critical role. This describes the relationship between climate, magnetic fields and solar activity and has developed as an alternative explanation of global warming. He cites the work of the Russian Alexey Dmitriev about the implications of the solar system entering an interstellar cloud, which could also have an effect on temperature. One of the appendices contains an interesting discussion on politics, money and science and the way in which parapsychology and other disciplines threaten the materialistic consensus. It is clear that governments should be preparing for an event of the magnitude of 1859, but the public does not know what, if anything, is in place.

MEDICINE/HEALTH

Adrenaline

by Brian B. Hoffman

Harvard University Press, 298 pp., £18.95, h/b.

Brian Hoffman is Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School, and is as such very well qualified to write this biography of adrenaline, something that has never been done before in such detail. We all have some passing knowledge of adrenaline, but this book is a comprehensive briefing and history. Adrenaline is a molecule that drives some of our most extreme and powerful experiences. It was discovered in 1894 and it was soon realised that it was a vital regulator of physiological functions, and has been involved in many Nobel prize-winning discoveries. Its biochemical pathways have been applied in the development of new drugs and specifically in asthma and beta-blockers. The author introduces us to the principal investigators and their stories as well as exploring its place in the popular imagination as both life-giving and lethal. Indeed, the book opens with an account of a nurse using adrenaline injections to murder cardiac patients. The story of adrenaline parallels the development of modern medicine into the scientific discipline underpinned by the pharmaceutical industry. An engaging read.

Intentional Healing

by Jennie Sherwin

Changemaker Books 2012, 151 pp., £11.99, p/b.

An inspiring healing journey of overcoming serious symptoms of environmental illness - beginning with exposure to pesticides triggering a variety of debilitating symptoms - over a period of nearly a decade. It is a story of struggle and persistence, of interest especially to those concerned with environmental sensitivities. Gradually, the author comes to realise that she is connected to a higher order of being that underpins her healing. The reader understands the processes and treatments involved and the extraordinary commitment required.

Optimal Detox

by Christopher Vasey N.D.

Deep Books 2011, 170 pp., £12.99, p/b.

Christopher Vasey is the author of a number of books on natural medicine. Here he presents a more detailed account of the benefits of detoxification, based on the naturopathic assumption that accumulation of toxins is the primary cause of illness. He distinguishes between two forms of toxins - colloidal and crystalline - which differ in their effects, and need to be eliminated through different pathways. Colloidal toxins are more liquid and affect circulation and the function of organs, while crystals can damage tissues and accumulate in joints or form stones in the gallbladder or kidney. The terrain represented by the body can suffer either from overload or nutrient deficiency, and there are various outlets for waste, including phlegm, sweat, urine and stools. The primary cause of toxins is diet, so adjustments in diet are necessary for change to occur.

The author includes a number of very helpful charts explaining this important distinction between toxin types, including the fact that crystals are water-soluble, while colloidal substances are not. Later in the book, the reader discovers the different illnesses caused by these two forms of toxin. For example, many problems of the circulatory system are caused by colloidal toxins leading in some cases to a thickening of the blood, which not only slows circulation, but can also lead to clots. Crystal diseases can appear in the skin and manifest as arthritis. The later stages can lead to degenerative disease including cancer. It is well known that degenerative disease is not present to nearly the same extent in indigenous societies unaffected by Western diet. There are also chapters on sources of toxins, drainage methods and ways of regulating your food intake. This is a very accessible and insightful book.

Trust Your Gut

by Gregory Plotnikoff, MD & Mark Weisberg PhD

Deep Books 2013, 234 pp., £14.99, p/b.

Written by two mind-body specialists, this is a practical book for sufferers of IBS and chronic digestive problems. It introduces two new techniques to calm the hypersensitivity of the digestive tract and the nervous system: neurohormonal retraining and ecological rebalancing. The first uses the power of concentration to short-circuit the hypersensitive feedback loop between the digestive and nervous systems, while the second restores the body's natural harmony by alleviating external causes of stress and their internal consequences. The book is structured around four components: Centre, Observe, Restore, Ensure. Patients learn to centre themselves then become aware of their bodily sensations and elements that keep them out of balance, including stresses, diet and sleep. The third part is about restoring harmony in the system, and keeps the patient on track with a sustainable lifestyle. The book could also be useful for practitioners as well as patients.

At the Still Point of the Turning World

by Robert Lever

Handspring Publishing Ltd 2013, 185 pp., £29.95, h/b.

The title of this informative book combines a reference to the founder of osteopathy, A.T Still and a well-known line from TS Eliot. It is about the art and philosophy of osteopathy by an experienced teacher and practitioner. As such, it is more of a textbook of interest to students of complementary medicine rather than the general reader. The three parts explain principles, the art of treatment and the author's own philosophy. He has an interesting diagram with three points of a triangle labelled mind, matter and motion. In the middle is a philosophy of vitalism and homeostasis, which distinguishes it from a more conventional mechanistic approach. This also entails a different understanding of the significance of placebo and ritual in medical treatment. In his chapter on human spirit, the author emphasises the importance of resilience, adaptability and capacity for survival represented in an overall attitude to life; also the importance of forging a bond with the patient and reaching an intuitive place of not-knowing. I liked the quote in the epilogue from Raymond Chandler, saying that there are two kinds of truth: 'the truth that lights the way and the truth that warms the heart.' The practitioner will want to study both.

Mind Whispering

by Tara Bennett-Goleman (foreword by the Dalai Lama)

Rider 2013, 325 pp., £12.99, p/b.

In this compassionate and therapeutic book, Tara Bennett-Goleman marries insights from Tibetan Buddhism, neuroscience, cognitive psychology and horse whispering to present a series of techniques for freeing oneself from of emotional habits based on dysfunctional modes of being. The first part explores these modes of being as a prelude to mind whispering, defined as 'attuning to the subtle habits of our minds and hearts, to uncover the qualities deep within us that can allow wisdom to bloom lotus-like out of the mud of confusion.' The inclusion of insights from interaction with horses brings an extra dimension to communication and understanding. Modes dictate what we focus on and therefore create our subjective world; they consist of triggers, routines and rewards. These can either be maladaptive, adaptive or higher on the spectrum of moving us to 'lightness of being.' The neuroscience of habit helps us conserve energy, and we are all familiar with our habitual responses to everyday situations, and how easy it is to enter a negative mode. Luckily it is possible through mindful habit change to transform these responses and rewire ourselves, overcoming previous patterns of attachment and aversion. A key move is contacting the mindful overseer and paying attention so as to become aware of the mode we are currently in. We can go on to train the mind and educate the heart, both individually and collectively. A central task for humanity as a whole is to find a shared secure base so that we can overcome the us-them division. The mindfulness techniques explained in this book can play a significant role in our evolution towards a wiser and more compassionate society.

Heal Yourself

by Max Corradi

John Hunt Publishing 2012, 159 pp., £11.99, p/b.

This is an unusual book, combining approaches using the subconscious mind and natural medicine. Normally, books specialise on one or other of these modalities, but not both. The author is informed by New Thought thinking and draws in particular on William Walker Atkinson and his writings on cause-and-effect and vibration. This first part is far shorter than the second, but conveys some essential insights, including useful self-healing statements as well as guidance on visualisation and prayer. The second part on natural medicine is much more detailed, beginning with a chapter on detoxification and the importance of the psycho-neuro-endocrine-immune system. He then covers a variety of therapy treatments including herbalism, homoeopathy, microtherapy and nutrition, before setting out detailed general treatment protocols for a large variety of conditions. This section could be of use to practitioners as well as patients, who might find the sheer volume of information almost too much.

Solomon Speaks

by Dr. Eric Pearl and Frederick Ponzlov

Hay House Publishers 2013, 199 pp., £12.99, p/b.

This book is a follow-up to *The Reconnection*, which was about healing others and healing yourself, a theme continued in this current book emanating from a multidimensional intelligence operating on another level of reality. The book recaps the original story and explains reconnection healing. This begins with listening at a deep level so that one can heal and co-create a new evolutionary phase. Each reader will take a different message from the contents and open up to a different aspect of truth. We are each processing the energy of life force in a different way and have to find out our own mission for ourselves. We are encouraged to regard problems as lessons to be learned and see the bigger picture. Whatever happens, the essential connection is to the Infinite, where we will also find answers and be able to navigate any changes that may come in future. This is a book that will make more sense to intuitives and healers.

PHILOSOPHY/RELIGION**Beyond God**

by Emmanuel Papadakis

Iff Books 2013, 141 pp., £9.99, p/b.

This book is the outcome of a decade-long quest into eastern and Western philosophy in the light of modern science. It is carefully written and provides the reader with the means to examine a number of arguments and perspectives drawing on major thinkers from East and West. The author takes the view that specific beliefs are less important than whether we appreciate our existence, what we do with it and how we choose to live. For him, the point of life is happiness, but he emphasises virtue in terms of living honestly, working hard and sharing with others. The first part explores the modern context including the nature of religion, evolution, evil, truth and free will. There is a short section on resolving to pursue enlightenment, which is followed by a series of chapters exploring many philosophical issues. He quotes Schopenhauer as saying that all genuine virtue proceeds from the immediate and intuitive knowledge of the metaphysical identity of all beings. This is not a quotation that I had read before, but I found it congenial. The tone of the book reminded me of Stoics, and in particular Marcus Aurelius:



'the wise attitude is always to retain the calm and balanced reflection that all a man can do is what he thinks is right at the time.' He also argues that the main part of achieving wisdom consists of doing, which includes striving to free ourselves from negative habits and emotions: 'not merely to think of the good, but to be and do good.' He rightly remarks that everything matters so that we should practise virtue in all things. A wise and considerate book.

Power

by **Adonia E. Wylie (SMN)**

Zenith Publishing Group 2008, 310 pp., p/b.

Subtitled 'our evolutionary path to the Divine Creative Field', this book draws widely from science and spiritual traditions, especially the Bhagavad-Gita, to formulate a developmental path for an age that has lost its centre and become absorbed in external distractions. It begins with an exploration of the scientific frontier, principally in physics, observing that there is one unified field of energy, that everything is connected and has an effect upon the entire field. These insights are paralleled in an exploration of religious traditions, both being imbued with a holistic vision. Having set the scene, the author explains her concept of the soul and how important it is to achieve ever-greater alignment and coherence in order to move to higher levels of evolutionary progress at a time when society as a whole seems to be going in the opposite direction. The following chapters discuss love, fear, free will and trust before moving on to a more detailed consideration of the physical, emotional and mental bodies. So far as fear is concerned, we are encouraged to see it as an illusion and hit the delete button before walking on fearlessly. Then we can install a new programme 'based on a loving, unattached, wise acceptance of all'. The culmination of the book is a chapter on the passage to power and the Holy Grail summarising the three things we need to know, namely acknowledging and aligning with our soul, surrendering to the divine will and thence coming to know and love the Divine. There follows an important meditative exercise taking practitioners through the physical, emotional and mental bodies to greater alignment with the soul. The book finishes with a summary of the benefits of relationship with the Divine. It is a long journey, but eminently worthwhile and enriched with many apposite scriptural quotations.

The Unbearable Wholeness of Being

by **Ilia Delio**

Orbis Books 2013, 230 pp., £12.99, p/b.

This is a wide-ranging and inspiring study of God, evolution and the power of love. As Thomas Berry also argued, we need a new story, and for Ilia this is a story of Love as the fundamental energy of evolution, as Teilhard de Chardin contended. The book begins with the history of humans being de-centred by the scientific revolution and proceeds to explore wholeness in nature, Love as a cosmological force, the need for a new conception of God including vulnerability and immanence, the nature of Christian love, education as wholemaking, technology and noogenesis, and contemplative evolution. We have moved from a static and hierarchical conception of life to an evolutionary understanding, as Teilhard so clearly understood; he also reinvented our vision of the end and purpose of life, reformulating doctrines such as original sin in terms of incompleteness. It is also interesting to read about the origin of universities in the light of the School of Chartres, where the curriculum explored the relationship between the self, the cosmos and God. The chapter on technology, citing Ray Kurzweil, shows how this scientific vision of trans-humanism is predominantly

cognitive and totally ignores the domain of the heart and feelings. As Ilia rightly states, 'the wise person thinks with the heart... evolution depends on wisdom and our capacity to love.' This is the spiritual progress of which Albert Schweitzer also spoke. Her vision of contemplative evolution is a conscious one where 'wholeness is the experience of oneness at the heart of being; the "I" knowingly embraced by a "thou", an ineffable bond of love and peace.' This is a bold statement of evolutionary theology and spirituality.

God 'n' Gut

by **Harry S. March**

Pen Press Publishers Ltd 2012, 270 pp., £8.99, p/b.

This book is a powerful statement originating from a near death experience undergone by the author in 1987. Before that time, he had very little interest in spiritual matters, but his life and health had reached a dead end. He had spent some time in the Navy and was trained in electronics. This period also gave him an insight into the machinations of national security and the way in which threats can be used to manipulate public opinion. When he realised he was dying, he felt an urgent need to contact his eldest son to get him to look after the family when he had gone. In this case, the son perceived his father and received the message. He then had a mystical experience of utter love, peace and joy, a direct experience of God. This set him off on a religious and spiritual quest to understand the nature of reality both within and beyond the physical body. In both cases he experiences himself as a conscious, thinking, intelligent energy. At one level, he finds a similar manipulation on the part of the church and religious institutions in general, but on the other a deeper understanding of the hidden, invisible aspect of reality that is accessible to our consciousness. He summarises his experience in eight clear propositions (p. 69).

March sees the purpose of life as reaching contentment, which in turn involves the quest to achieve your potential and develop wisdom. The next part of the book is a wide-ranging journey through religious traditions with a particular emphasis on types of spiritual practice leading to direct insight. He contrasts the teaching of Jesus with many things that had been done in his name, urging the reader to become responsible and free rather than rely on external authorities. He summarises his findings, the essence of which is that each religion provides an explanation of existence and life beyond death, as well as providing a moral and ethical code. What interests him is the internal form of deep meditation as a means of liberating the soul.

This leads into the next part in which readers can practise and find out for themselves. The practice of meditation techniques also opens the more subtle senses. Here, March provides detailed and straightforward guidance based on his own experience. He coins the term Neutralis for this other realm and uses the tree of life from the Kabbalah as his main structure. He also provides suggestions about communicating with one's guardian angel. All this practice leads to greater freedom and potential mastery, the very opposite of determinism and feeling a victim of circumstances. As he puts it, freedom of thought is true freedom, making things happen rather than letting them happen. The last part is an outline of March's theory of Instantaneous Equilibrium, which is quite a technical statement of the scientific side of his argument. This is represented by the proposition that 'the only truly universal concept is one of the timeless coexistence of all things', an idea that he has already established spiritually earlier in the book. It is a direct and no holds barred message with significant implications for how we understand and live our lives.

Letters Across Time

by Stephen Paul Chong

O Books 2013, 231 pp., £12.99, p/b.

Using an engaging narrative about a family of ducks, interwoven with other stories and commentary, Stephen Chong succeeds in imparting a great deal of life wisdom. The background includes an iconic Book of Mysteries, which provides a source of spiritual inspiration and was written by Alfred, the great grandfather of the central character, Monique. The ducks go through many ups and downs, but the Book is always there as guidance. The intent is to enable readers to realise their fullest potential and the chapter headings have suggestive titles such as 'every act in life is an act of self-definition, whatever you wish to create for yourself, create for another, and what would love do next?' The format means that the narrative is interspersed with parables - many involving advice from the old to the young - before the reader returns to the pond and the ducks. At the end, the younger Alfred loses his parents in an earthquake but manages to find the Book in the rubble and reads the perennial message of awakening addressed to every generation. Significantly, the last part of the book is blank with the message that is now our story to continue. As the book's subtitle suggests, it is indeed a journey of enlightenment.

Mary Queen of Angels

by Doreen Virtue

Hay House Publishers 2013, 191 pp., £10.99, p/b.

Mother Mary has exerted enormous influence on Western culture for hundreds of years. This book takes the role of Mary beyond the Church and shows how she has intervened in the lives of people of all ages from different parts of the world. From a spiritual angle, it is fascinating that many experiences speak of a beautiful face emerging from a ball of light with an accompanying atmosphere of love and compassion. Mary has appeared directly to many people, but also in dreams and in response to prayer. This all suggests that we live in a supportive universe with important invisible influences impinging on our lives. As an archetype, Mary is the ideal parent - 'sweet, pure, nurturing, unconditionally loving, accepting, humble, wise, understanding and compassionate.' There are also stories of remarkable healings, some of which have taken place over the centuries in Lourdes. It seems that one of Mary's signatures is the smell of roses - one also find such cases in after death communications. At the end of the book, there are also some beautiful prayers.

Dispirited

by David Webster

Zero Books 2012, 90 pp., £9.99, p/b.

A harsh critique of the 'spiritual but not religious' MBS position, arguing that what the author regards as inclusive woolly thinking in this area should be attacked more than traditional Christianity. The author lectures on Buddhist thought and its relationship to Western philosophy. He argues that there are three main shortcomings of being spiritual but not religious: its impact on critical intellectual thinking, on social and political engagement, and on the potential for happiness and fulfilment. He draws on the research of Jeremy Carrette and Richard King (*Selling Spirituality*) and Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (*The Spiritual Revolution*). He interprets mysticism in an entirely negative light as disconnected with social and spiritual concerns. This is certainly not the case with people like Hildegard and fails to understand the ontological significance of mystical experience, which lies at the basis of all spiritual and religious traditions. There is a corresponding devaluation of holistic science. Many holists are also involved in environmental activism and cannot be characterised as narcissists abdicating personal responsibility, as the author claims. The pursuit of happiness is contrasted with the stark

reality of death, but they need not be as mutually exclusive as is presented here. The author concludes that atheists should seek not only freedom from God, but from the 'meaningless plurality of new-age inclusivity.' Although he claims not to be setting up straw men, many readers will acknowledge some elements of his critique while maintaining that his analysis is incomplete and one-sided.

Dimensions of Love

by Padma Aon

O Books 2013, 343 pp., £17.99, p/b.

This remarkable and far-reaching book outlines the seven steps to the full manifestation of Divine Love. It is effectively three books in one, the middle part of which builds on the mysticism of St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila. The author runs a centre in the south of France near some of the sacred sites connected to the Divine Feminine. His analysis covers five types of love: love of God, love for our soulmate, Self Love, Natural Love and Love for our Friends of the Heart. Much of this work is clearing and healing as we can easily block the flow of this feeling of Love: 'All that stands in the way of you receiving It is yourself, composed of your wounds, both in your soul and in the collective soul of humanity.' He provides a matrix for soul growth so that we can become a Divine Soul, explaining the central role of desire in this process. The middle part of the book is devoted to a detailed account of moving through the spheres and how easy it is to settle for substitutes to Divine Love. The short third part addresses the power of prayer, with two very powerful prayers for Divine Love and Divine Healing, with accompanying commentaries. This is a precious book to live and work with, for those to whom it calls. The Centre website is www.thesoulcentre.eu

Hidden Beauty of the Commonplace

by Philip Pegler

Changemaker Books 2013, 311 pp., £15.99, p/b.

Some readers may be familiar with the work of Clare Cameron (1896 - 1983), nature mystic, poet and long-time editor of the *Science of Thought Review*. This book, written and edited by a friend to whom she was also a mentor, charts her life interwoven with his own reflections on topics in which he also has a deep interest. Throughout, there are quotations from her works and extracts from poems, including a section at the end with more extensive original texts. Clare also had a close association with other well-known writers including Alan Watts and Christmas Humphreys - she was editor of a Buddhist magazine for some years. The author provides useful background and commentary on the many spiritual themes covered. As Jeff Foster observes in his foreword, Clare helps the reader discover how to be ordinary in an extraordinary way, hence the title of the book. The freedom referred to in the subtitle is not an escape, but rather an embrace of our humanity and its ambivalent experiences that take on a new meaning when we live from the centre of ourselves. We all share this same ground of being and can occasionally apprehend its oneness. As she puts it herself, 'the hallmarks of greatness have always been simplicity, modesty, fearlessness - being natural or true to oneself.' She reflects on the visit of clergyman when she was a young girl, which enabled her to realise the comparative unimportance of what people say and do and the importance of what they are. I was also struck by her love of Brother Lawrence, the 17th-century monk who wrote about the practice of the presence of God. She herself writes: 'Be true. Be simple. Stop running hither and thither and be still, so that all action is then harmonious, flowing, rhythmic and integral.' This message is all the more timely 30 years after her death and the book provides a refreshing perspective on the complexities and bustle of modern life.

Path of the Sacred Pipe

by Jay Cleve, PhD

Quest Books 2012, 151 pp., \$16.95, p/b.

This is a fascinating exploration of the Sacred Pipe ceremony in all its dimensions - historical, social, spiritual and symbolic - and based on the author's deep experience of this indigenous tradition. He explains the nature of the Sacred Pipe, the Medicine Wheel, Native American spiritual philosophy and specific ceremonies. The components of the pipe are themselves symbolic: the wood in the stem represents all that grows upon the earth, while the bowl itself represents the Earth and the feathers hanging on it the birds. Praying with the pipe means praying for and with everything. The Medicine Wheel represents the sacred circle, and various charts explain the position of different representative stones. The sweat lodge is a communal purification involving release, cleansing and rebirth. The author also explains the nature of the vision quest and the Sundance. All this gives a precious insight into a way of thinking and being that we need to recover in a new form.

Sufi Talks

by Robert Frager

Quest Books 2012, 293 pp., \$19.95, p/b.

Bob Frager came and spoke at last year's Mystics and Scientists conference. This book is a compilation of talks given in his capacity as a Sheikh deeply immersed in the Sufi tradition. When it comes to the wisdom of life, spiritual traditions have all the resources necessary for the aspirant who chooses to walk a particular path with resolute persistence. The 21 chapters explore different aspects of spiritual psychology, including obstacles on the path, transforming our ego and reducing our narcissism, inner work, hospitality, spiritual poverty and generosity. Throughout, there are telling stories, epigrams and simple injunctions such as learning how to be less selfish and to love. One of Bob's teachers spoke about the importance of listening and practising remembrance of God. These instructions are simple but not easy. One exemplary chapter tells the life of and stories about Ibrahim bin Adhem, and there is another story about two friends: one decided to go to a brothel and the other to a recitation of the Quran. The one in the brothel was thinking of the Quran and the recitation he was missing, while his friend at the recitation couldn't stop thinking about beautiful women he was missing. The ultimate result was that the first man went to heaven and the second to hell - we are measured by our thoughts and intentions as well as our actions. A wise and illuminating book.

Divine Guidance

by Stephanie J. King

6th Books 2013, 72 pp., £7.99, p/b.

This is a remarkable book of inspiration and insight derived from a high source. Its framework is that all planetary life forms, although seemingly independent, 'link and interact together to weave a web of continuous conscious energy and life.' This means that 'all conscious working minds are linked telepathically and energetically to each other' and to the Source. The book is designed to work as a three-way link between your self, your guardian and God/Source. The passages marked 'I am I' claim to be channelled directly from the Source. We are responsible for creating and attracting our experience, adding to the world as a whole as we do so. The style is epigrammatic with many profound insights relating the individual to the One. We are the eyes, ears and thinking mind of life now. We are urged to focus on what we can change, letting go of thoughts about things we cannot change. We can take small steps, then the next step will appear. The text is so concentrated that one page is enough at a time to give a prompt.

PSYCHOLOGY/ PARAPSYCHOLOGY

LSD and the Divine Sciences

by Albert Hofman

Park Street Press, 2012, 113 pp., £12.99, p/b.

This book consists of four late lectures by Albert Hofman (1906-2008), containing much wisdom. He used to say that we were all here to experience happiness, and that it was important to know oneself. The lectures deal with planning and chance in clinical research, the question of whether insight into the truths of natural science can be therapeutically effective in psychology, meditation and sensory section, and the use of psychedelics for the great transition of culture. He is emphatic that, as in indigenous cultures, these substances be taken in a sacred context. He recounts a pivotal experience of his own, when he had been depressed in his late 20s and suddenly made a connection with a tree outside his window, reflecting that the tree were made of the same substance at a biochemical level. This helped him free himself from the vicious circle of his thoughts and achieve a state of serenity and trust.

In the third lecture, he reminds us that there are no colours in the external world, just wavelengths. The perception of colour is subjective and mental, taking place in the inner realm of the individual. The same applies to hearing. We all carry our own personal picture of reality. Using the metaphor of sender and receiver, there is only one sender, but as many subjective world views as there are receivers, which means that we create our own version of reality while being subject to the dictates of the objectively external world. We need to understand the laws of nature and live in harmony with them. This brings him back to the question of consciousness, which eludes purely scientific explanation as tautological by definition - we can only study its correlates. He sees the core of our searching through meditation as a quest for meaning and happiness, as identified by some of our greatest thinkers including Aristotle and Aquinas. He gives a fascinating insight into the difference between possession and property; originally, a possession was something one actually used, such as a chair. We now tend to equate happiness with having, when it is essentially a question of being. The landlord may own the garden, but it really belongs to the gardener. His vision of science and mysticism is that they complement each other to comprise the whole truth and reality of our existence. An inspiring little book.

Live Issues

by Mavis Klein

John Hunt Publishing 2013, 197 pp., £11.99, p/b.

Subtitled 'reflections on the human condition' this book by a psychotherapist specialising in transactional analysis explains the background of these ideas as well as ensuring into a number of other topics such as astrology. TA was invented by Eric Berne, and it is many years since I read his book *Games People Play*, although listening recently to Mary Miller reintroduced these ideas. The main terms are explained in a glossary and explored in the various short essays beginning with the basic ego states of Parent, Adult and Child, and the importance of such terms as the adapted child, a persona developed in the course of self-preservation and socialisation. This moves on to discuss the giving and receiving of strokes in transactions and the five Adapted Child personality types of Be Perfect, Hurry Up, Please, Try Hard and Be Strong. These can also come in compound forms and will clearly influence the nature of our relationships. The author's introduction to astrology came when a patient arrived with a chart analysis containing information that it had taken her over two years to uncover. She sees this

perspective being included in a science of the future, steering a middle way between determinism and choice. In the light of this, her analysis of life stages is very interesting as one is gradually drawn inwards to more contemplative pursuits.

Sixth Sense

by **Stuart Wilde**

Hay House Publishers, 2012 (1999), 223 pp., £9.99, p/b.

Starting from the interesting proposition that ESP is a property of the subtle bio- electrical (etheric) body, the author provides instructions on how to become more aware of this body and its capacities. In the process, this will help close the ego's perceived gap between self and the external world. If one can enter into what he called shamanistic nature-self, then everything is non-locally connected. He identifies the three components of the sixth sense, namely the psychic, the intuitive and the all-knowing. A basic technique is to refine one's powers of observation. Most of us go around noticing very little, both in terms of sight and sound. I don't know whether you, the reader, are also a person who literally stops to smell the roses? We are also encouraged to discipline the mind away from itself and towards silence, energy, other people and life – 'the silent mind is engaged in perceiving energy and the subtleties of life.' Another section in the book discusses how to embrace the shadow, identifying various features that will be present in all of us to a greater or lesser degree. The author provides many pathways through what he calls the etheric doorway, all of which will extend one's perception and creativity. He provides a categorisation of various types of people so as to enable the reader to help them in an appropriate way. A useful book for those seeking a more practical understanding.

Challenges of Meaning, Love & Success

by **Claus Böckmann (SMN)**

Pen Press Publishers Ltd 2013, 190 pp., £12.99, h/b.

The title of this wise book of practical advice is also reflected in its three sections. Each contains a number of reflections on life and experience, drawing out lessons from this. It is a useful reminder of aspects of life that we can easily neglect, such as hospitality and the appreciation of beauty. We are reminded that crises can often turn into gifts and opportunities and that we should not worry too much about what other people think. We are on a journey of enhancing our awareness and realising the energetic nature of life. Death is also important, defining our outlook on life. The path to success is rarely straight or simple, and requires real commitment and perseverance. We can all learn to embrace change and life.

FUTURE STUDIES/ECONOMICS/ ECOLOGY

So Much Wind

by **Struan Stevenson**

Birlinn Ltd 2013, 171 pp., £7.99, p/b.

Given the current policies of the Scottish government, wind turbines are a hot topic. They are springing up all around the countryside and creating great controversy at a local and national level. This book is firmly anti-, and marshals the arguments and evidence in an unashamedly didactic fashion. The main arguments against wind energy are that generation is intermittent, that backup systems are required, that landscapes are despoiled (potentially affecting tourism), that subsidies transfer money from the poor to rich landowners, that there are under-reported effects on health and birds and that it is too expensive, especially offshore. This raises the question of the mix of energy required to meet increasing demand, and the author is not unsympathetic to nuclear energy, although he arguably underestimates the costs. New technologies involving fracking are very much in the news, but their environmental impact has yet to be fully assessed. There is also new technology associated with thorium and the possibility of developing a hydrogen economy as part of a third Industrial Revolution involving a smart grid of decentralised suppliers, including renewables; also much more emphasis on conservation. He is certainly right in claiming that the target of 100% electricity from renewables in Scotland by 2020 is neither economically viable nor environmentally sustainable. We need what some people call a grown-up debate about the future of energy supply and also serious examination of developments in the so-called free energy field - see the Thrive film for examples.

Stories of the Great Turning

by **Peter Reason (SMN) & Melanie Newman**

Vala Publishing Co-operative 2013, 207 pp., £13.99, p/b.

The story behind this inspirational book is itself an interesting story. It developed partly out of a lecture given by Joanna Macy at the University of Bath in which she had spoken about ways in which we could participate in the Great Turning away from the Industrial Growth Society. Joanna contributes the foreword, outlining five principles that form guidelines for the book: come with gratitude, don't be afraid of the dark, dare to vision, link arms with others, and act your age, stepping forward on behalf of the Earth. After trawling through various networks, potential contributors were invited to two writing workshops, which I am sure must have significantly influenced the quality of the writing, a striking aspect of this collection.

The editors were looking for practical stories to engage, enchant and inspire. They have certainly succeeded in this quest, and any one of the stories could be used as an example. At the end, they reflect on the contributions in the light of Joanna Macy's principles outlined above. The honesty and integrity of the contributors shines through, and they have made challenging decisions that many of us might have avoided. One of the most engaging stories is of a couple deciding to move smallholding in Cornwall as a way of devising a more sustainable livelihood. They undergo many trials and tribulations, mainly connected with their livestock, but all this is recounted with delightful humour. Another story relates the persistence required to create a community garden and get past the regulations involved. Still others find themselves changing identity and career in order to be true to themselves. In every case, an inner transformation precedes the outer manifestation in action. The book shows that we can do something significant if we choose.

The Water Footprint of Modern Consumer Society

by **Arjen Y. Hoekstra**

Earthscan Ltd 2013, 204 pp., £ 22.99, p/b.

Arjen Hoekstra is the creator of the concept of the water footprint, and in this new book he analyses and details the water footprint of modern consumer society. As such, this is the most authoritative and up-to-date book on this important topic. Most readers will be familiar with the idea of the carbon footprint from which the water footprint was developed. This consists not only of direct water consumption, but includes the use of water at all stages of production processes of goods we consume. The central thesis of the book is that 'all problems of over-exploitation and pollution freshwater resources in this world relate to what we consume.' Water is a renewable but finite resource and freshwater availability is measured in terms of water volume per unit of time: in a certain period, one cannot consume more water than is available. This applies both to rivers and aquifers, some of which are in fact not rechargeable in the short-term. Freshwater is also a common resource vulnerable to free rider behaviour, as in the tragedy of the commons. Naturally, availability and demand vary a great deal in space and time. The footprint covers both production and the supply chain, and is divided into blue water used in the production process, green water referring to consumption of rainwater, and grey water to measure pollution. These three together constitute the water footprint.

Hoekstra provides detailed case studies of various products, starting with cola with its input of sugar, caffeine etc along with cans, packaging, labels and transport pallets. In addition, there is the water footprint of the factory itself. The sugar footprint will vary according to the country of origin - whether cane or beet. The total comes to 168 L with sugar beet from the Netherlands, as opposed to 309 L using sugarcane from Cuba and maize from India. Hot chocolate has the largest overall water footprint. A typical water footprint just for daily drinks would be 900 L or 10 bathtubs - a 125 g glass of wine is 200 L. Other chapters look at water for bread and pasta, cotton, the water footprint of biofuels and cut flowers and the supply chain footprint of paper. Towards the end of the book, there are discussions of the maximum sustainable water footprint per river basin, water use efficiency and the future allocation of freshwater resources. The overall footprint of meat is staggering given that feed crop production accounts for 33% of total arable land and the area occupied by grazing amounts to a further 26%. Reading a book like this the first step to raising awareness, and I hope the author will produce a popular version. Then, pressure for change will only come from informed consumers, as it has with other issues such as tuna.

The Sustainable University

by **Stephen Sterling, Larch Maxey and Heather Luna**

Routledge 2013, 332 pp., £85, h/b.

The lead editor of this visionary book is Professor of Sustainability Education at Plymouth University, which has been pioneering the idea of a sustainable university since 2005. The book itself originated in a conference at the university and consists of three parts: the context, aspects of the theme, and institutional change. As Sara Parkin observes in her foreword, the bottom line is that it is not nature that needs to change, it is us. Universities have the opportunity to offer the intellectual leadership to shift civilisation off its self-destructive course, so the crucial question is whether they will carry this through. Although there are some green shoots cited in this volume, the overwhelming ethos of universities is neoliberal and market-driven, as John Blewitt points out. Education has become corporatised, using the language of products, customers, mission statements, quality management and value for money. This has pushed

out the original liberal educational philosophy, which itself is unrelated to the need for sustainability.

The sector as a whole can respond in one of three ways to sustainability: accommodative, by bolting on new modules and greening some estate management; reformative, by questioning existing assumptions and practices; or transformative, a deeper response corresponding to the urgency of the global ecological situation. The editors also make the important distinction between designed learning involving courses and institutional learning as capacity building. The overall purpose of the book is to outline progress towards a sustainable university, review key aspects of what it means to develop such an institution, reflect critically on barriers, achievements, strategies and potential, and finally to consider prospects and map out possible new directions. Among the aspects considered are the significance of regional centres of expertise, the importance of leadership, groundwork in pedagogy and curriculum, sustainability research, student experience in Edinburgh, and the importance of well-being. Universities that have already made some headway, besides Plymouth, include Kingston, Bradford, St Andrews and Brighton. There are useful suggestions on sustainability research issues as well as the research process, which has to be interdisciplinary and participatory. There are already some declarations of intent from United Nations organisations, one of which from Committed Deans and Chancellors was tabled at Rio in 2012. There is clearly a great deal to do, but this volume provides a comprehensive handbook of the necessary process.

Wild Earth Wild Soul

by **Bill Pfeiffer**

Moon Books 2013, 325 pp., £11.99, p/b.

Bill Pfeiffer describes himself as a maverick deep ecologist and shamanic guide who has dedicated his life to building an earth-honouring culture. This book is a manual of the 10-day retreats that he conducts to show people that an ecstatic culture is possible and that we can dream a new future for the Earth. An Amazonian Shaman once told John Perkins, who contributes the foreword, that the world is as we dream it. We may think that a culture embedded in nature is a relic of the past, but this book shows how it can indeed re-emerge in the future. People have been through the intensive discover that a place of community, empowerment, meaning wholeness, connectedness and gratitude is possible, out of which wise actions and sustainable cultures can grow. The book itself is highly practical, providing a template for the process and experience. There are guidelines for the facilitator and a series of seven core principles, including that we are tribal species, that the Earth is alive, that humans naturally live in abundance, and that ancient wisdom is mirrored by modern science.

As with many books reviewed in these pages, there is an observation that 'a different model of reality is emerging beneath the surface of mainstream discourse' and that we can participate in bringing this about. The following chapters go into great detail about the various aspects of the Intensive, including listening, feeling and healing, immersion in nature, the power of story and ceremony, play, stillness and the importance of mentoring. There is an important chapter near the end on vision and manifestation, which recapitulates the essential principles involved: surrendering to a higher truth, focusing on and fuelling the vision with inspiration and enthusiasm, aligning with a feeling of well-being, letting go of attachment to the outcome, believing that the vision is possible and acting collaboratively. This is the blueprint for anything radically new, and challenges readers to think about how to manifest their own highest vision, starting today.

Reclaiming Food Security

by Michael Carolan

Earthscan Ltd 2013, 196 pp., £19.99, p/b.

Food security has been much in the news recently, which makes this radical reassessment of the concept all the more timely. Carolan questions current assumptions, especially the agro-industrial and food systems based on providing the cheapest calories possible, with devastating effects on the environment, small holders and health. He argues that a secure food system enables people both present and future to prosper and lead long, happy and healthy lives. In discussing the history of food security, he identifies the most important factors as what he calls the calorie-isation, neo-liberalisation and empty calorie-isation of the concept. The US, where much of this thinking originated, can hardly be held up as an exemplar in terms of obesity, food waste and subjective well-being.

In the second part, the author identifies the missing pieces as well being and nutrition, sustainability, and food sovereignty, safety and access. Just at the time of the green revolution between 1950 and 1970, it is interesting to learn that low income nations went from being entirely food self-sufficient to accounting for almost half of the world's grain imports. In the light of neoliberal trade policy based on comparative advantage, this is thought to be a good thing, but it creates dependency on a massive scale as well as depopulating the countryside with all its attendant social implications. Carolan's analysis makes clear how unsustainable agro-industrial models are in the longer term, but all governments seem to support this kind of future and the science that drives it, powered by immensely influential lobbies. It is these developments that have produced unprecedented concentration in the food industry, resulting not only in monopoly power but also what the author calls monopsony, the corresponding power of large buyers. He creates his own Food and Human Security Index (FHSI) with five indicators: individual and societal well-being, ecological sustainability, potential for food independence, nutritional well-being, and freedom in agri-food chain. He calculates the score for 126 countries, with Costa Rica at the top and the US at 55. It is an eye-opening chart and recontextualises the debate away from the quantitative towards the qualitative. The reader is left realising that food sovereignty is perhaps just as important as food security.

Global Domestic Politics

by John M. Bunzl

International Simultaneous Policy Organisation 2013, 110 pp., p/b.

John has been running the Simultaneous Policy initiative since 2000. His basic principle is that many global issues are impossible to resolve while countries have the option of gaining from opting out of agreements, especially given what he calls destructive competition. This is evident in the global financial markets, where countries, for instance in the Eurozone, are subject to movements of ratings agencies and have to adapt their policies accordingly. John points out that large-scale problems have always been resolved by governance, and that we need a binding world centric system that is neither bureaucratic nor authoritarian and top down. It will also be necessary to articulate a future cooperative context for such simultaneous action and find ways of accommodating non-democratic nations in the process. A key component is subsidiarity as a means of preserving national sovereignty within a global governance regime. John is playing a long game here, gradually building up political support and developing policies. He also incorporates spiral dynamics in his social analysis and is in the vanguard of new political thinking.

EDUCATION**Everything I Know About Success I Learned From Napoleon Hill**

by Don M. Green

Napoleon Hill Foundation 2013, 214 pp., \$22, p/b.

Many readers will be familiar with the work of Napoleon Hill, from whom much of the contemporary success literature ultimately derives, which in turn goes back to an interview with Andrew Carnegie in 1908. The author is executive director of the Napoleon Hill Foundation and has an extensive business background, including banking and studying with legendary W Clement Stone. The book is designed to help readers use the power of positive thinking and provides an excellent introduction to the principles derived from Hill. It is simply set out with key points highlighted in the text and many inspiring stories from pioneers in the field. Clarity and focus of thought, planning, action and self-belief are critical components to success, whatever the project. These are simple steps, but it is easy to neglect them. We must be able to prosper in adversity and learn from failure, persisting in our purpose and belief as well as bringing an intense desire and discipline to the goals we wish to achieve. In each case, the author gives practical advice and draws on his own experience of life and business. Mentors can play a crucial role at all stages of life and we can learn critical lessons from others. The ultimate reward of success is being able to contribute to others and leave a legacy. Don's informative book provides both a theoretical understanding and a practical application of success principles.

Children of the Fifth World

by P.M.H. Atwater

Bear & Company Publishing 2013, 261 pp., £13.99, p/b.

I first came across the work of Phyllis Atwater in the 1980s, when she was part of the American NDE community and had written a very good book on the subject describing her experiences and their implications. Since that time, there has been a rise in incidence of ADHD, dyslexia and autism, which she feels corresponds to a related enhancement of intuitive and creative capacities in children. With a special focus on children, this book gives an overview of what she sees as our evolutionary process in the making. We live in a much more interconnected world, both in terms of technology and socio-economic systems. The author provides a general profile of these new children on both the plus and minus sides, which makes interesting reading. Her survey of trends is wide-ranging and informative, and she is equally at home in describing the spiritual and imaginal dimensions as well as the various causal factors of brain disorders including chemicals and electromagnetic pollution. She analyses generational signatures and gives practical advice to parents on how best to bring up these new children. It is clear that education needs to be restructured in the light of these emerging trends - young people will need to be very flexible in their approach and capacities. She also gives some potential timelines and indications for the future, partly based on astrology. All these scenarios point to The Great Shifting currently underway - this is a bold and visionary account of this process.

Participatory Workshops

by Robert Chambers

Earthscan Ltd 2013, 220 pp., £12.99, p/b.

This is a really useful sourcebook on how to run participatory workshops and how to avoid common pitfalls and mistakes. It begins by outlining the basics before moving on to the structure of a workshop, including ideas for getting started, energisers and ways of finishing and evaluating. There is an instructive and amusing chapter on messing up, which is followed by discussion of forming groups and arrangements for seating. There are also reflections on learning and behaviour, including tips for dealing with dominators and helping the silent speak. Anyone who runs this kind of group will benefit enormously from the ideas in this stimulating book that should be on the shelf of every trainer and facilities.

GENERAL

“the conversations”- 66 reasons to start talking

by Olivia Fane

Square Peg 2013, 261 pp., £15.99, h/b.

Olivia Fane is a novelist and mother who has degrees in classics, social work and theology. In this brilliant and humane series of short essays, reminding me of the journalism of Bertrand Russell in the 1930s (*Mortals and Others*), she poses the question why we stop having a really good conversations characteristic of early phases of our relationships. She questions the assumption that these conversations are bound to peter out as a matter of course. She explains how she initially set up this kind of proper conversation with her husband by reading a couple of pages of Kierkegaard comparing romantic with conjugal love – this process can set the scene for a recovery of both a sense of intimacy and otherness. The range of topics is vast: on happiness, suicide, vanity, loneliness, infidelity, fame, personal space, infatuation, Plato, torture, parties, ghosts, human rights, flirting, immortality, trust, feminism, euthanasia, cooking - this is just a sample of the 66 starting points for conversation, and each is followed by ‘food for thought’ - questions for discussion and reflection. For instance, we are asked if we think happiness has more to do with circumstances or character; how would you devise your perfect break? Is conscience necessary to be truly happy? Do you think torture can ever be justified? Can you imagine setting up a charity? Would you like to be immortal, or an angel? Again, the stimulating list goes on.

Olivia draws on her own experience of family life as well as on her multidisciplinary academic training which brings a refreshing rigour to accompany the eloquence and incisiveness of her style. When she was ill aged 16, she spent the time reading a Greek textbook and Plato’s Republic. Her mother and grandmothers feature regularly as she reflects on various bits of advice they gave at different stages of her life, encouraging her express her individuality and question politically correct assumptions. Her mother gave her advice on flirting aged 13; her maternal grandmother was rumoured to know the whole of the Oxford Book of English Verse off by heart and Olivia was made from the age of 5 to learn a poem every week. In the 1920s, this grandmother won an air race, a motor race and a point-to-point in one year! In the 1960s and 70s, she would go out and shoot the supper - whether a rabbit, pigeon or pheasant - which she would then skin and pluck herself. Olivia sees the world as made up of aspirers and non-aspirers, observing that former like to do well in life but tend to be exhausted by working so hard. This, in her experience, makes them less interesting conversationalists than the non-aspirers, who are more relaxed. Altogether, a hugely enjoyable, informative and amusing read for the whole family.

Do It or Ditch It!

by Bev James

Virgin 2012, 289 pp., £11.99, p/b.

Bev James is founder and MD of the Entrepreneurs Business Academy and of the Coaching Academy, with qualifications in NLP and DISC personality profiling. Churchill was famous for his notes on memos saying ‘action this day.’ Bev helps readers acquire this same attitude, starting with decision-making tools. She introduces the DISC personality profiling technique, and readers can take a test for themselves. This will inform you about your leadership style and sets you are up for a chapter asking where you are heading. The second part is about turning ideas into action and making decisions that count, based on the seven steps of what, why, where, who, how, how much and when. These deal with evaluation, motivation, planning, people, sales and marketing, financial management and managing your business. Although aimed at business leaders, the techniques and tips of this highly practical book can be applied successfully by anyone.

Wordsmith

by Megan Young and Merrilyn Thomas

Medlar Tree Publishing 2013, 94 pp., no price given, p/b.

Megan Young was a fiery spirit – vet, horse lover, poet, dreamer - who died of an unknown cancer the young age of 32. This book, lovingly compiled by her mother, tells the story of her life interspersed with photographs and poems, using letters sent to her family at various stages of her life. She addresses the reader:

This is a gift of my soul.

All that I have, all that I am is here.

I am a scientist, an artist, a Wordsmith.

This is the blood of the Wordsmith, it is pain.

Understand me, Love me and if not,
at least Believe me.

These true words resonate throughout this remarkable volume. As a vet, she saw suffering and often had to administer death. She is realistic about her own demise, penetrating to the core of life, death and rebirth. It is a book to savour and makes the need to reflect on how life is expressing itself them in a unique way. Here is the initial very powerful poem, first written when she was 16, but chiselled since.

For a seagull

Dear God, as resting now I lie,

I pray myself to reach the sky

To fly to green hills yonder nigh,

And swelling seas that scream thereby

To crash on rocks from which I rose

And blue, blue green that someone knows,

Dear God, that in my time of rest

My spirit wanders the West.

And if I die before I wake,

My country, then, my soul shall take.



Collected Poems

by Michael Scott (SMN)

Fisher King Publishing 2013, 134 pp., no price given, p/b.

Michael Scott originally had a background in biology as a field botanist and ornithologist but has worked in a number of fields including management and as a landscape painter. This book contains poems from different phases of his life, and the tone is very direct. He speaks about being spat out of the cosmic vacuum cleaner to find a dead sister, a wounded wife and a fine-shredded self speculating on evolutionary questions. Another poem is an ironic commentary on evangelical fervour called clappybabypsychohappy and refers to the iron grip of dismissive certainty and the believer in unbelief. His encounter with Sir Peter Medawar makes him realise that he was 'unomniscient', and that both science and religion are incomplete, leading him to muse on the supposed supremacy of the gene. All this encourages the reader to think through some important perennial issues.

Sex, Drugs and Techno

by Paul Eldridge

O Books 2011, 205 pp., £12.99, p/b.

After my review of another book about the practice of shaking in Bali, a friend suggested that I review this one to gain a better understanding of the practice. I'm glad she did. Subtitled appropriately 'a journey to the brink - and beyond' this is a real rollercoaster of a book, plumbing the depths as well as scaling the heights. The author describes his background in Australia in the club/party drug scene, hence the title. He recounts many zany experiences and their horrific aftermath, as the hangovers become longer with corresponding periods of inactivity. His first experience of Ecstasy propels him into a loving state, but this is later revealed as an illusion, the mirage of Maya dragging him further down into addiction and dependency. The important point is that a change is brought about in the energetic patterns, which is later explained at a spiritual centre as tuning into what they call the lower astral realms, which characterise so much of today's so-called entertainment.

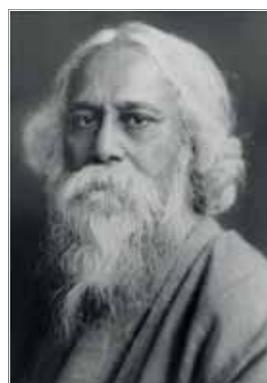
A synchronistic trip to Bali brings him into contact with a spiritual teacher call Ratu Bagus, whose main practice is an energetic process of intense shaking. This helps shift and heal damaged energetic patterns and reconfigure the body following its abuse from drugs. The work requires enormous commitment, pushing through boundaries and extreme physical experiences. There are a couple of talks by Ratu, emphasising the importance of spiritual connection with the soul, not the mind. God cannot be grasped with the mind, so in order to think less, we shake more: 'our mind wants to stop, but our heart wants to continue.' It is about what we feel, rather than what we think. After this retreat, it was difficult to return home, but the author found a new job away from his old haunts. Eventually, he goes back for a further retreat, and meets the woman who is now his wife. He warns that there is a whole generation trashing themselves with no way of knowing how to pull themselves back when reality sets in. He states that drugs are global, clearly destroying lives with greater force than war, as he himself discovered. We are all energetic magnets and transmitters responsible for the vibrations we absorb and emit, so there is a powerful message for every reader, regardless of whether they have travelled a similar path.

DEATH AND DYING**Tap Once For Yes**

by Jacquie Parton

Local Legend Publishing 2013, 128 pp., £8.00, p/b.

Jacquie Parton's son Andrew committed suicide in 2011. This book tells the story of this event and its aftermath where Jacquie researched the evidence survival of death, and conducted a number of experiments of her own, initially with electronic voice phenomena involving tapping. She satisfied herself that real communication was taking place, and a number of incidents, including dreams, reinforce this conclusion. Perhaps the most vivid incident is a lucid dream in which she meets her son, who expresses regret and seems to be getting used to his new state. Towards the end of the book there is a useful diary recounting the key events over the months. It is a message of hope for anyone in a similar situation.



*"The water in a vessel is sparkling;
the water in the sea is dark. The small truth
has words that are clear; the great truth has
great silence."*

Tagore, from *Stray Birds*