



# books in brief

David Lorimer

## SCIENCE/PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

### **Grand Unification of a 2 Photon Universe**

by H.S. Akrongold

Quantum Science Books LLC 2007, 238 pp., \$24.95, h/b.

*Issy Benjamin writes:* Akrongold's development of the process of creation unfolds like an adventure story. Nowhere before have I come across such a clear and graphic technical exposition. I'm not a specialist in the field, but following Akrongold's clear step-by-step exposition of the creation of the universe unfolding from The Singularity. His unique Two Photon postulate (particle-type and wave-type) cutting away with one masterstroke the ambiguity of the long held belief in the single photon possessing unpredictable wave or particle properties was for me a life changing experience, an adventure as thrilling and as gripping as any first-rate novel.

### **The Historicity of Nature**

by Wolfhart Pannenberg

Templeton Foundation Press 2008, 242 pp., p/b.

Wolfhart Pannenberg is one of the most influential living German theologians. This Pope sense a number of his essays on the relationship between the natural sciences, philosophy and history within an interdisciplinary context. They cover methodology, creation and nature's historicity, religion and anthropology, and meaning and metaphysics. Many key themes are elaborated, underpinned by the thesis that human existence is shaped by historical decisions and cultural turning points, while nature has an irreversible history during the course of which new complex structures are continually brought forth. Of particular interest is an essay on consciousness and spirit drawing on the work of Karl Popper as well as patristic theology and analysing the two tendencies of human beings towards self-centredness on the one hand and a fuller participation in the Spirit on the other.

### **Dazzle Gradually**

by Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan

Chelsea Green Publishing Company 2007, 260 pp., \$25, p/b.

A wide-ranging book by the star mother and son team subtitled 'reflections on the nature of nature' and representing the biological scales of bacteria and Gaia. Their view of nature is highly intertwined and complex, moving beyond current mechanistic understandings. Some essays are joint, others by each of them, and one with James Lovelock. Elegant and provocative, driven by passionate curiosity, the authors are in full creative flow as they explore scientific and philosophical questions connected with larger themes. The section on Gaia will perhaps be of most interest to Network readers, but there is also a lively treatment of Eros. Each part has its own introduction, but the essays can stand largely alone.

### **Naturalism**

by Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro

William Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2008, 132 pp., £8.99, p/b.

This closely argued book considers the promise and perils of contemporary naturalism, taking into account the various definitions both strict and broad. Its arguments, in a nutshell, indicate ways in which various forms of naturalism 'lead us to highly limited or problematic philosophies of consciousness, the self, agency and values'. Beginning with the strict variety of naturalism, closely allied with scientism, they expose the difficulties of accounting for our conscious, intelligent, psychological life in terms that are non-conscious, non-mental and non-psychological. They consider arguments advanced by Dennett, Churchland and Crick, moving on to the nature of the person, the question of the soul, values and the alleged incoherence of theism. They state naturalist positions before subjecting these views to incisive criticism and proposing others that

they regard as more convincing. Quite apart from exceptional human experiences, it is questionable whether a convincing account of consciousness, intention and values can be coherently formulated in purely reductive physical terms when subjective mental operations are required in any event. A masterly analysis of the shortcomings of naturalism and indeed of materialism in general.

### **Proust and the Squid**

by Maryanne Wolf

Icon Books Ltd 2008, 310 pp., £8.99, p/b.

This is the story and science of the reading brain by a teacher of child development and cognitive neuroscience, who is also a researcher into language, reading and dyslexia, as well as a parent herself. This gives a rich variety of perspectives. We may not realise how comparatively recent the skill of reading is, and how it has also shaped the brain in specific ways; indeed, different languages use distinctive neural pathways. The reading brain has influenced cognitive development and has helped us think, feel, infer and understand people in a specific way. We are now making a transition from reading into a more digital mode, which will have far-reaching implications yet to be uncovered. The book deals with the history of reading, ways in which our reading capacity develops, and the science of dyslexia. As the author points out, our capacity to make new connections among neural structures and circuits is central to the development of reading. As she expresses it: 'Reading can be learnt only because of the brain's plastic design, and when reading takes place, that individual brain is forever changed, both physiologically and intellectually.' Proust makes an appearance in the book with his own reflections on reading, which in turn enable the reader to begin to understand the process. A fascinating read for anyone interested in gaining a better understanding of reading.

### **Science in Civil Society**

by John Ziman

Imprint Academic 2007, 361 pp., £17.95, p/b.

The late John Ziman, FRS, wrote a number of books on the philosophy and sociology of science, of which this is his last. Science has many faces and contexts, which Ziman explores in this stimulating and engaging book. We are accustomed to looking at the instrumental aspects of science and technology, but he reminds us that there are many non-instrumental functions such as the generation of world pictures, of which Gaia is a good contemporary example. Science plays an important part in producing knowledgeable people or experts in their fields, who then play a wider social role as well as being responsible for the production of codified knowledge. He discusses the implications of the bureaucratisation and industrialisation of academic science over the last 30 years, which has rendered it less independent but more embedded in the normal structures of society. However, science is only one institutional source of knowledge, which the author keeps in its place with his scepticism about scientism. Ultimately, the aim is 'to establish a fruitful and harmonious relationship between the citizens of a pluralistic polity and their science', which means strengthening connections between academic science and civil society. Scientists interested in understanding their broader role will find this book an invaluable source of ideas.

### **Cosmos**

by Ervin Laszlo and Jude Currivan (both SMN)

Hay House Publishers 2008, 239 pp., £9.99, p/b.

This book is a development and convergence from previous work by both authors, who have a common interest in the physical world, language and the inner world, and the necessity of major shift in human consciousness and structures. The first part sums up the current state of physics and cosmology, building up a picture of the world as interconnected harmonic processes embodying fractal order and holographic principles. To this, they add Ervin's Akasha-

Field hypothesis as an information field. The next major theme depicts the world as exquisitely fine tuned to enable consciousness to gain understanding through exploration of many levels of experience. The final part proposes a number of principles and approaches to enable us to overcome our planetary challenges. There are some signs that this is all happening, and the fundamental impulse is one of co-creation. If the authors are right that the world we live in is information-imbued, essentially intelligent and radically interconnected, then we are part of a co-evolving whole, a thought which can encourage us to go beyond our existing limits. A timely and important book.

## MEDICINE/HEALTH

### **How Your Mind Can Heal Your Body**

by David R. Hamilton

Hay House Publishers 2008, 291 pp., £9.99, p/b.

With his unusual background in the pharmaceutical industry where he worked as a biochemist, David Hamilton builds a bridge between mind and body in this well-informed book. The first part reviews scientific studies showing that the mind can heal the body in terms of positive thinking, belief, the placebo effect, visualisation and affirmation. The second part tells the stories of people who have successfully used their minds to heal themselves of cancer, heart conditions, pain, viruses and chronic fatigue. Each story is followed by a commentary saying why the technique seem to have worked in this particular case. An appendix gives suggestions for a wide range of conditions. The whole is a balanced blend of science and human experience. All his work is underpinned by a passionate belief in the power of love, which includes gratitude and kindness. A wise doctor is said to told a younger colleague than the best medicine is love, and if it doesn't work, then the dose should be doubled.

## PHILOSOPHY/RELIGION

### **Walking an Ancient Path**

by Karen Tate

O Books 2008, 393 pp., £11.99, p/b.

A significant book arguing that the Sacred Feminine has been stripped out of cultures and now needs to be reinstated or rather reborn. Many readers will be familiar with this theme but the scope of this study sheds new light on it. The author uses the four elements (with spirit at the centre) to represent an understanding and embodiment of the goddess through sacred landscape, ritual, transformation and creativity. Two of these signs are feminine and two masculine. This framework provides a context for reflection on the many qualities of the Goddess, especially those relating to nurture, abundance, love, beauty and embracing diversity and tolerance. Many European sacred sites are described, along with rituals, prayers and invocations. The book is a rich resource for people who would like to delve more deeply into the nature of Goddess.

### **Who Holds the Moral High Ground?**

by Colin Beckley & Elspeth Waters

Imprint Academic 2008, 122 pp., £8.95, p/b.

A slightly misleading title question, to which the authors' answer is no one. They ask if there are universal moral principles or whether they are simply the product of a particular society or culture. By means of a pretty comprehensive survey, they review a great many approaches. The word 'spectrum' in connection with religion is somewhat pejorative, but this is a small cavil. The text covers arguments for and against positions held by the ancient Greeks, Kant, David Hume, utilitarianism, relativism, virtue ethics and particularism. The text is succinct and well argued. In the final chapter referring to the 'ethical stew', the authors identify nine criteria to apply in ethics. These include engagement, consideration of others, evaluation of future consequences, critical thinking and no absolute principles. This is an excellent introduction to moral philosophy, and will sharpen the thinking of general readers interested in working out a more systematic philosophy.

### **Progressive Secular Society**

by Tom Rubens

Imprint Academic 2008, 136 pp., £8.95, p/b.

The author defines a progressive secular society as one committed to the widening of scientific knowledge and humane feeling. He sets

out the assumptions of secularism, and navigates skilfully within these, covering a wide range of issues. However, he does not question his basic assumptions - for instance a mechanistic approach - with which many readers will surely disagree. Nevertheless, it is refreshing to find someone writing so broadly and referring to Camus, Sartre, Schopenhauer, Weber and Montesquieu. One of the most interesting essays analyses the parallel thinking of Russell and Santayana as early apologists of what is now called the new atheism.

### **Seeking Meaning and Making Sense**

by John Haldane

Imprint Academic 2008, 148 pp., £8.95, p/b.

John Haldane takes an approach more or less diametrically opposite to that of Tom Rubens reviewed above. He is professor of philosophy at St Andrews and directs the Centre for Ethics, Philosophy and Public Affairs. He is a frequent contributor to 'thought for the day' and these pieces reproduce essays written for a number of journals and newspapers. Lucid and stimulating, they range accessibly - like his Edinburgh predecessor John MacMurray - across philosophy, politics, culture, science, religion and art, with special reference to aspects of Scottish intellectual life. As humans, we are constantly seeking meaning and attempting to make sense of the world, a process in which John Haldane is fully engaged. One essay relates an encounter with Antony Flew, who famously renounced his atheism, much to the dismay of his colleagues. Haldane's final reflections are suitably humble, when he notes that making sense is available business and that seeking meaning in tails presupposing some objective standards as well as admitting human fallibility. Hence, the most modest position is one that 'postulates a destination without assuming that be on the right road towards it, or that having set out we must arrive.' It is hard to disagree.

### **The Landscape of Humanity**

by Anthony O'Hear

Imprint Academic 2008, 242 pp., £17.95, p/b.

The fifteen essays in this volume are divided into art, culture and politics. Anthony O'Hear is Professor of Philosophy and head of the Department of Education at the University of Buckingham as well as director of the Royal Institute of Philosophy. Most pieces have been published in journals and books, but in bringing them together they illustrate both the depth and breadth of the author's thinking, especially in some of the juxtapositions reflected in titles such as art and censorship, democracy and openness, science and religion. His perspective is traditionalist, while also interpreting human experience as pointing to other dimensions of existence. Important themes include beauty, the subjective and human as the heart of culture, and the political philosophy of Karl Popper, with his insistence on the value of the open society. He usefully compares Popper with Hayek and Oakeshott. The essays are informed with a wide erudition, marking the author out as a significant contemporary link in a long chain of Western thought.

### **Faith in a Hard Ground**

by G.E.M. Anscombe

Imprint Academic 2008, 273 pp., £17.95, p/b.

Elizabeth Anscombe was professor of philosophy in Cambridge and a lifelong practising Catholic. Along with Mary Midgley and Iris Murdoch, her contemporaries at Oxford, she has had an important influence on modern philosophy. With an informative introduction by her daughter Mary Geach, the themes are wide ranging - some religious and others with more social implications. She writes on miracles (including an essay on Hume), transubstantiation, sin, contraception and chastity, the early embryo, the moral environment of the child, and Christians and nuclear weapons. The essays are searching and analytically brilliant, even if non-Catholics may find some of the arguments unconvincing.

### **G.R.S. Mead and the Gnostic Quest**

by Clare Goodrick-Clarke and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (SMN, eds)

North Atlantic Books 2005, 236 pp., \$15.95, p/b.

G.R.S. Mead is not a well-known figure outside esoteric circles, so this book is very welcome in introducing him more widely. Mead was initially a leading member of the Theosophical Society, from which he parted, and founded the Quest Society. The book is divided into five parts: universal philosophy, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, esoteric Christianity and initiation. The extensive introduction discusses his life and influence as one who recovered many early texts and made

them available to the public. He influenced Carl Jung, W.B. Yeats and Hermann Hesse. The main body of the book consists of an annotated anthology of his most important writings, and those provides the ideal introduction to his ideas and work.

### **Enlightenment - The Path Through the Jungle**

by Dennis Waite

*O Books 2008, 186 pp., £11.99, p/b.*

A polemical and rigorous work defending traditional approaches to non-dual teaching against modern western shortcuts advocated by neo-Advaita and the Satsang movement. It is not sufficient to understand intellectually that one is not separate from the source or that one can be the peace that one seeks. Denying the reality of the seeker and the path is a useful insight at one level, but does not take one anywhere, and the danger lies in equating what one is with how one feels. The genuine path is a great deal more arduous and lengthy, and is set out with great clarity in this book. All the paragraphs are numbered, rather like a Wittgenstein tract. Enlightenment is defined as always knowing that reality is non-dual despite the seeming duality of the world. It is an unshakeable certainty far beyond belief. The book is a stern corrective to superficial distortions of traditional non-dual teaching.

### **Our Life Together**

by Jean Vanier

*Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. 2007, 565 pp., p/b.*

Jean Vanier is best known as the founder of the international movement of l'Arche communities as well as Faith and Light, organisations bringing together people with developmental disabilities and friends who share their lives. His basic contention is that marginalised people can teach us great things and that true spirituality arises from our relationships with the less fortunate. This book is a collection of letters written from 1964 onwards, which chart the development and progress of these movements rooted in love. In 2005 he writes that he is 'happy to use these last years of my life to announce the vision of Jesus: his love of the weak and the poor.' At the end of the book, he describes a meeting with Pope John Paul II in Rome where the Pope said that people with disabilities can help us to discover new world where love is stronger than aggressiveness. Just a few months later, in Lourdes, he addressed the Pope, saying: 'our Pope is poor. He is fragile, but he is the glory of God. God manifests Himself in him.' It was remarkable moment of mutual recognition, after which the Pope gave him a rosary he had been using, which Vanier carries with him every day. There is a transformative and challenging power in these letters.

### **The View Through the Medicine Wheel**

by Leo Rutherford

*O Books 2008, 216 pp., £14.99, p/b.*

Here Leo Rutherford distils 30 years of study and experience of the Medicine Wheel, explaining the shamanic understanding of how the world works. It is a powerfully liberating message based on a deep understanding of nature and the cycles of life as represented in both space and time. A key element of the spiritual journey is to transcend the Egoic self and enter the circle of the Authentic self through a process of discovery, training and development. The book explains creation myths and the symbolism of fourness, which comes out in the many diagrams in the book, with a circle in the centre. This leads on to the four directions and a detailed discussion of the Warrior's journey. This encourages us to live life to the full and to move into a larger understanding of life and ourselves, not forgetting that external reality is less real than the inner world and that there is no separate self to preserve. This complex and sophisticated tradition can realign us with the life force from which many of us have been separated.

### **God Without God**

by Michael Hampson

*O Books 2008, 250 pp., £9.99, p/b.*

The thrust of this radical book is that if we remove the God defined by the atheist - the arbitrary, the autocratic, vengeful and wrathful king - we can liberate the Western spiritual tradition into a new and more contemporary form. The author examines the main strands of Christianity in terms of God, ethics, the status of the Bible, creed, prayer, Community and Sacrament, and finally Eros and the seventh sacrament. The vengeful God is replaced with Yahweh Elohim, characterised as 'the ground of all being and the essence of all that is good.' The notion of sin is similarly redefined, and the status of the Bible and the creeds historically explained. Fundamentalist literalism is seen as a terrible idolatry in view of the fact that there is neither a definitive text nor a definitive translation, and that the

book was compiled over decades by committees from a range of sources. The longest chapter is devoted to the self giving love of Eros. The epilogue reflects on the experience of conducting funerals, and asks if there is anything to hope for beyond. The author's view is not entirely clear in his statement that we return to God and to the mystery from which we emerge. The important point, however, is to live the fullness of life; for Hampson, this means defining love as God and recognising the spark of Divinity in everyone and everything. Many who define themselves as spiritual rather than religious will find themselves agreeing with this reformulation that appeals to both heart and mind.

### **The Holy Science**

by Swami Sri Yukteswar

*Self-Realization Fellowship 1990, 109 pp., \$12.00, h/b.*

Some readers will know that Sri Yukteswar was the teacher of Yogananda, who writes about him extensively in his classic *Autobiography of a Yogi*. This text consists of a number of sutras with commentaries explaining the essence of his teaching with parallel passages from Hindu and Christian Scriptures. Liberation is equated with salvation and ignorance is the supreme obstacle in the way as we identify ourselves with our material bodies and 'fail to find repose in the true Self'. The Self is understood as a fragment of the Universal Holy Spirit with which one can become one; this corresponds to Spiritual Light, which Sri Yukteswar defines as the Real Substance in the universe. The book ends with a vivid portrait. Although short, it focuses on the essence of the spiritual path.

### **Eco-Theology**

by Celia Deane-Drummond

*Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. 2008, 240 pp., £14.95, p/b.*

Celia Deane-Drummond has done much to put eco-theology on the map as a professor of both theology and biological sciences. Here she provides a comprehensive resource book on the subject, which has developed alongside the mounting ecological awareness of the last 30 years. The premise of the discipline is that it is possible to combine concern with the environment and an understanding of God. The book begins with ecological trends, moving on to the relationship between economics and environmental justice. Then there are number of chapters on different approaches to eco-theology from a variety of cultural perspectives. The author then turns to the Bible, Christology and theodicy, concluding with eco-feminist theology and eco-eschatology as well as suggestions for eco-praxis. A valuable book for both students and interested general readers.

### **The Life and Times of Rudolf Steiner**

by Emil Bock

*Floris Books 2008, 221 pp., £16.99, p/b.*

This is the first volume of biographical essays, first published in German in 1961. It covers his life in Vienna, Weimar and Berlin until the turn of the century, evoking the spiritual and social atmosphere of these cities and the people with whom he interacted, many of whom appear in corresponding photographs. There is a striking passage describing his first encounter with the already sick Friedrich Nietzsche and prompting the study of the author's work that led to his 1895 book. The final essay gives an overview of the occult movement in Germany at the end of the 19th century. A fascinating book for those who would like to find out more about Steiner's early background.

### **Modern Life - As Good As It Gets?**

by Richard Docwra

*Green Books 2008, 184 pp., £10.95, p/b.*

The answer to the rhetorical question in the subtitle is negative. The structure of the book is straightforward, consisting as it does of an analysis of problems, causes and solutions. Problems include the fact that our lives are too rushed, that are natural spaces are under threat, that shopping is hell, that we are dominated by consumerism and that people are not flourishing. Docwra lays the main responsibility for these conditions with our economic system with its neoliberal focus on unfettered markets, financial capital, profits and growth. This analysis is a good deal more complex than these headings suggest. In the third part he asks how we can change our society, putting forward a new form of economics based on sustainable communities. He also advocates updated mental tools focusing on the art of living, acquiring perspective, intellectual independence and abstract thinking skills. The final chapter proposes a programme for changing our own lives based on

addressing the problems outlined in the first part. This is a useful tool for self-reflection and gives the reader a better understanding of our psychosocial condition and how we can contribute to its transformation.

### **The Charismatic Path**

by Dr. Alex Reichel (SMN)

St Francis Community 2008, 328 pp., p/b.

A mathematician by training, Alex Reichel now runs the Academy of the Word, which is a Christian think tank and the teaching arm of St Francis Community. This book is based on their course, which has an evangelical and devotional slant, while also criticising the excesses of fundamentalism. He explains variety of approaches, also discussing hermeneutics and the nature of faith. The last chapter is the most extensive, and is entitled 'life in the body of Christ', an explanation of seven injunctions concerned with the spiritual life. Two appendices cover the structure of a prayer meeting and an exposition of the Jesus Prayer. There is a deep spirituality here, but one which will appeal more directly to Christians.

### **The Magician's Tale**

by Mark Townsend

O Books 2008, 70 pp., £7.99, p/b.

Mark Townsend is the author of 'The Gospel of Falling Down', which I enjoyed reviewing last year. This book recounts 12 encounters with Jesus through the eyes of the magician priest, representing the author himself. The stories are familiar enough from the Bible but they are told in a new way that adds a new and personal perspective, highlighting the vivid impact of the event on people who might have been there.

### **Awakening Consciousness**

by Sir George Trevelyan (late SMN)

Godstow Press 2008, 290 pp., £14, p/b.

These 28 lectures by Sir George Trevelyan given over a period of 25 years recapture the spirit and range of his interests. He had a remarkable grasp of the underlying realities of our time. He was quick to appreciate the significance of the Gaia hypothesis, realised the centrality of the evolution and expansion of consciousness, and was committed to a thoroughgoing holism in all his activities. He internalised and integrated these insights into his own vision, which he articulated with the potent help of inspirational poetry. The lectures are cleverly grouped as they move through key themes of spiritual awakening, death the great adventure, Shakespeare, music, architecture and education. Less familiar are lectures on the deeper symbolism in heraldry and birds in imagination and poetry — there are new nuggets to discover even for those who knew George well. Running throughout is his unquenchable sense of hope, even if he thought that we were due for a period of uncomfortable transition. His message of awakening consciousness rather than religious revival will surely resonate with a new generation of readers.

## PSYCHOLOGY/PARAPSYCHOLOGY

### **The Pursuit of Unhappiness**

by Daniel M. Haybron

Oxford University Press 2008, 357 pp., £30.00, h/b.

Subtitled 'the elusive psychology of well-being', this is a brilliant and comprehensive philosophical treatment of happiness in the psychological sense. The four parts address the fundamentals of prudential psychology, the nature of happiness, nature of well-being, and pursuing happiness. The author distinguishes happiness and well-being, and articulates an emotional state theory of happiness, which forms a major part of his self-fulfilment theory of well-being. This emotional state theory is defended against hedonistic and life satisfaction views in the second part. His central thesis is that people 'do not enjoy a high degree of authority or competence in matters of personal welfare', a statement which challenges the assumption of liberal optimism that people can relatively easily discern what is good for them. He writes in more detail about the three faces of happiness in terms of endorsement (the joy-sadness axis), engagement (energetic-listless) and attunement (the tranquillity-anxiety axis) (p. 121). The book calls us to rethink our assumptions about the good life and the good society, raising many of the questions explored by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* and *Island*. All this raises interesting and complex questions for politicians and educationalists as they grapple with introducing happiness studies into the curriculum.

### **You Can Only Achieve What is Possible**

by Dawn Mellowship

O Books 2008, 259 pp., £11.99, p/b.

A refreshing book advertised as self-help antidote to self-help culture. Each section is headed up with a truism that has become a new-age cliché about themes such as the equation of material and spiritual success, manifesting anything you like, the new global spiritual consciousness and not taking responsibility for everything. The author begins with a 'tall tale' illustrating the theme from her own experience, for instance as a workshop. There follows a commentary section headed 'Seriously Thought' and some practical exercises and techniques. Her own view is that one should trust one's intuition rather than rely on the judgement and opinion of others, although intuitions can also be wrong. A useful cautionary book on the spiritual path.

### **The Supernatural Occurrences of John Wesley**

by Rev. Daniel R. Jennings

Sean Multimedia 2005, 153 pp., p/b.

An intriguing compilation of experiences derived mainly from Wesley's journals. They are divided into a number of chapters and include experiences of healing, the gift of tongues, prophecy, visions and dreams, and angels. Other chapters are stranger in modern terms, such as experiences of divine retribution against his enemies and his experience of spiritual warfare. However, some of the individual experiences are quite fascinating, for instance of dreams that foretell events, one even involving a wife dreaming that her husband would be drowned in the afternoon. Another relates the case of breast cancer miraculously healed, which ends with following remark: 'Now here are plain facts: 1. She was ill: 2. She is well: 3. She became so in a moment. Which of these can with any modesty be denied?' Yet another case relates how a murder was prevented by premonitory dreams from three separate family members. There are resonances with many more modern cases from the literature.

### **Brainstorming**

by Shaun Gallagher

Imprint Academic 2008, 276 pp., £17.95, p/b.

A journey of views and interviews on the mind closely tracking the concerns of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. The author is a philosopher and cognitive scientist who has read widely in the field and met many of the key thinkers. The format of the book is original, in that it combines analysis, interview and commentary; indeed, in some chapters dialogues are created with the likes of Descartes and Merleau-Ponty. Every aspect of the field is covered, starting with a chapter on how to study the mind then moving on to the nature of consciousness, intersubjectivity, empathy, language, cognition, self-consciousness, free will and moral responsibility. As one would expect, the discussion is very well-informed and the reader is exposed to a number of perspectives. This makes it more interesting not only to general and specialist readers, but also potentially to psychology and philosophy students.

### **Transpersonal Development**

by Roberto Assagioli

Inner Way Productions 2007, 297 pp., p/b.

This is the last book published by Roberto Assagioli, 14 years after his death in 1974, and translated into English for the first time. It consists of a number of essays written over a long period, which have been grouped into three main parts: the study of the superconscious, spiritual awakening and spirituality in everyday life. Such was the range of Assagioli's penetrating insight, that this book is full of gems. Many of the essays represent important distillations of lessons learned on the spiritual path. The second and third parts are of greatest practical value in describing such topics as the stages and crises of spiritual awakening, the purification of the soul, and obstacles to spiritual development such as fear, attachment, aggression and criticism. The final part reviews elements of everyday spirituality such as the sublimation of emotional and sexual energies, money, the tension between action and contemplation, and various spiritual elements in our personality such as beauty, love, joy, power and will. A hugely valuable addition to the literature on transpersonal psychology in terms of both theory and practice.

## FUTURE STUDIES/ ECONOMICS/ECOLOGY

### **Climate Change**

by **Jon Clift & Amanda Cuthbert**

*Green Books 2008, 92 pp., £4.95, p/b.*

A small book of simple everyday things you can do to make a difference. It covers heating, lighting, cooking, washing, electronic appliances, rubbish, travel, water and renewable energy. Each section explains the link to climate change and make specific suggestions, ending with a tip if you want to do just one thing. A useful book to keep around as a reminder of one's personal responsibility.

### **The Final Energy Crisis**

by **Sheila Newman**

*Pluto Press 2008, 324 pp., p/b.*

A gap of only a few months makes an enormous difference to commodity prices in our current situation. On the back of the book, we read that oil has reached \$125 a barrel; we now know that it peaked at \$147 and has slumped to around \$40. This vast fluctuation makes little sense except in terms of extreme speculation on both up and down sides. The starting point of this book is unusual in that the contributors engage with depletion trends not only in oil, gas and coal, but also in uranium, soil and biodiversity. It is pointed out that the per capita peak in production is different from the actual peak, and that the per capita peak has already passed in many cases. Reflecting the work of Richard Heinberg reviewed in previous issues, the authors highlight the relationship between the use of fossil fuels and the growth of population, and anticipate transition to a post-oil era. In the meantime, an energy crunch seems likely, especially if we manage to return to anything resembling business as usual. Naturally, geopolitics is part of the picture, and the whole section is devoted to these topics, with special reference to the situation in the Caspian Sea. A key issue is whether we have the capacity to change our collective behaviour or whether, as in previous civilisations, we will overshoot before we crash. The difference, this time, is that we have plentiful analyses of upcoming challenges and an unprecedented communications system so we can theoretically change direction. However, before that seems possible, we will need a new vision of human fulfilment that does not depend on endless economic growth.

### **Rekindling Community**

by **Alastair McIntosh**

*Green Books 2008, 112 pp., £8.00, p/b.*

Subtitled 'connecting people, environment and spirituality', this Schumacher Briefing considers the implications of living as if all life is interconnected — which it is. The author supplements his insights with those of a number of associates from the Centre for Human Ecology, whose work is described in a series of boxes. Following the example of Schumacher himself, Alastair adds his diagnosis of our metaphysical disease before considering the way that community reflects the interdependence of the psyche. The satisfaction of fundamental human needs must take these factors into account. He gives a number of case studies of rural regeneration and presents some useful methodological tools, including the relationship between head, heart and hand, the cycle of belonging and the wheel of fundamental human needs. What makes Alastair's work so important, as will be apparent from my full review of his climate change book, is that he brings together the metaphysical and practical, the mystical and the everyday. A short but significant book.

### **In Tune with the Moon 2009**

by **Michel Gros**

*Findhorn Press 2008, 112 pp., £8.99, p/b.*

An annual calendar similar in concept to its biodynamic equivalent for specific influences of the Moon on both plants and our own bodies. Readers are invited to experiment for themselves to test the Moon's influence on plants by sowing at ostensibly favourable and unfavourable times, and noting the differences. Some surprising details are added, such as favourable and unfavourable days for surgical procedures, and guidance for the keeping and winegrowing. The book is nicely illustrated and can be used in conjunction with Maria Thun's reviewed below.

### **The Biodynamic Sowing and Planting Calendar 2009**

by **Maria & Matthias Thun**

*Floris Books 2008, 64 pp., £6.99, p/b.*

This annual publication is the practical guide for who want to farm and garden biodynamically. There are useful notes for new readers and a number of special features, including this time the care of bees with monthly notes for beekeepers, how to work with biodynamic preparations, a recipe for rye bread and answers to questions from readers concerning potato and tomato culture. The book is illustrated with a number of small photos as well as charts and is based on nearly 50 years of search and practice.

### **The Earth After Us**

by **Jan Zalasiewicz**

*Oxford University Press 2008, 251 pp., £14.99, h/b.*

This book asks what legacy humans will leave in the rocks, projecting forward 100 million years to a scenario where alien explorers land on Earth. This is real geological time, which is a big stretch for the human imagination when we are used to seeing ruins of previous civilisations only a few hundred years old. This perspective puts the human enterprise in proportion, asking what traces will be left of our great cities and works of art. The author tells us how the rocks reveal their story and imaginatively reconstructs what future explorers might think of us and the impact we have made on our environment. It is a reflection that may encourage us to limit our footprint, lest we be seen by these explorers as 'amazingly clever and utterly foolish two-legged apes.'

### **Prophets of Nature**

by **Gordon Strachan (SMN)**

*Floris Books 2008, 156 pp., £14.99, p/b.*

Subtitled 'green spirituality in romantic poetry and painting', this book is about the 'essentially mystical experience the spirit of nature as well as the spirits in nature and of the Creator Spirit', based on the traditional idea that nature was the second Bible. Gordon enters a cautionary note about the relationship of St Francis with nature in that he is seen preaching to the birds rather than learning from them. Hence he prefers William Wordsworth as his patron as one who developed what we would now call ecological awareness. He takes as its point of departure the vision of Ezekiel, moving on to the influence of water on Rousseau, Wordsworth and Wagner. He then devotes a chapter to Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* before turning to the paintings of Blake, Samuel Palmer, Caspar David Friedrich, Turner and Pre-Raphaelites. In discussing Gerard Manley Hopkins, Gordon feels that the Victorians suffered from an increasing inability to perceive that 'the world is charged with the grandeur of God'; hence, in his view, a principal reason for falling off of faith in that era. Many of these figures felt that the increase in material prosperity with technological development was leading to a loss of spiritual roots and ethical integrity. The lesson for today is that without a redevelopment of our sympathetic imagination we are unlikely to be able to turn around our exploitative attitude to nature.

### **Q. Will the Human Species Survive? A. No!**

by **David P. Anderson**

*David P Anderson 2008, 471 pp., h/b.*

The title says it all, although one could not necessarily infer the exact content, since the thesis is concerned with our images of God and their consequences - principally those of the three monotheistic religions. The God of Love is also a God of Anger, in contrast to the picture emerging from the Gospel of Thomas and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The author does not pull his punches in his analysis of exclusivism in general and extreme Islam in particular, although the same patterns are present in Christianity and Judaism. The crucial problem is the image of the ancient punishing God pattern of behaviour which is among primary causes of present world conflict. Opponents are evil by definition, people are either for or against us in these apocalyptic times. This dichotomising is certainly a significant source of conflict. The book is well informed, even if it could have done with some editing at nearly 500 pages long. The author's approach is based on a series of a thousand questions relating to the Western image of God. He is very strong on the rigidity of these archaic belief systems, but less so in placing them in some kind of evolutionary picture, whereby many people have already moved beyond these forms. See also my review of Michael Hampson's book for a different slant on a similar issue.

## EDUCATION

### **Holistic Education**

by Anne Phillips

*Green Books 2008, 141 pp., £9.95, p/b.*

Subtitled 'Learning from Schumacher College', this book by its first Director charts its development and progress since the early 1990s. Set within the wider context of Dartington Trust, the college has emerged as a leading educational initiative, with its strap line of 'transformative learning for sustainable living.' Many leading green thinkers have taught there and appreciated its strong sense of community. Satish Kumar has been an inspirational force from the beginning, and contributes the preface. The great value of the book lies in its distillation of experiences likely to occur in similar contexts. Hence, anyone thinking of setting up a parallel initiative should draw on the insights and lessons gleaned. It is a book that will interest anyone concerned with a more holistic and creative approach to education that turns ideas into action.

### **The Great Books**

by Anthony O'Hear

*Icon Books Ltd 2007, 465 pp., £10.99, p/b.*

Philosopher Anthony O'Hear has produced a masterly introductory overview of some classics of Western literature, starting with Homer and going up to Goethe's Faust. It is a book about the great books, but also includes the way in which earlier works influenced later ones and are referred to by them. O'Hear guides the reader through the narratives, quoting occasional extracts and commenting on the progression of the story. The Greeks and Romans have five chapters, with Homer, the great tragedians, Plato on the death of Socrates, Virgil and Ovid. Moving on rapidly in time we come to St Augustine's confessions and then a few more centuries on to Dante and Chaucer. The book continues with Shakespeare, Cervantes, Milton, Pascal, Racine and Goethe. The selection is to some extent personal but the coverage of extensive. This makes it of interest to the general reader, but also to the student looking for a wider context.

### **Children's Games in Street and Playground - Volumes 1 and 2**

by Iona and Peter Opie

*Floris Books 1969, 221 pp., £9.99, p/b.*

Reprint with a new introduction by the editor of the natural parenting magazine. This quite fascinating research was carried out in the 1960s into games that children play by themselves between the ages of six and 12, out of sight of adults and with no props like bats, balls and skipping ropes. It shows that adults have no real need to structure the play environment of children and that, by implication, play parks may in fact constrain the variety of games played. The first volume details games involving chasing, catching and seeking, while the second elaborates on eight further themes including daring, guessing, acting and pretending. The authors found variants of games and their names across the country, for instance tig in the north becomes touch in the south-west and he in the south-east. In addition, many of the accompanying formulas and rhymes used by children are given, with regional variations. The authors comment on which games were in decline and which are on the increase. I don't know what kind of research is going on in this field currently, but it would be fascinating to know some more up-to-date results. Of course, many new kinds of game have been developed in the intervening period, especially those involving new technology, many of which are less social and involve little or no exercise and fresh air. I hope that publication of this book will revive the debate about the kinds of games our children play.

## GENERAL

### **Nelson Mandela - A Very Short Introduction**

by Elleke Boehmer

*Oxford University Press Inc 2008, 204 pp., £7.99, p/b.*

We are all influenced by the power of the Nelson Mandela icon. This short biographical essay considers the multifaceted nature of Mandela's achievements in the contexts in which they came about. The strength of the book is that it considers the processes of meaning-making which have caused his achievements to be admired. This involves questions of character and style (he was always an elegant dresser and a consummate public performer) as

well as the many experiences and people that shaped his life. Comparisons with Gandhi and Nehru provide historical antecedents, but his approach was also pragmatic in recognising the limitations of nonviolence in his situation. The final chapter on his ethical legacy observes how he came to understand conversation and dialogue as essential means in bringing about change.

### **The Love That Does Justice**

by Michael A. Edwards & Stephen G. Post

*Unlimited Love Press 2008, 235 pp., \$9.95, p/b.*

Subtitled 'spiritual activism in dialogue with social science', this book is the outcome of a conference in 2004. It falls into two parts, with 20 contributions from spiritual activists, and a similar number of perspectives from researchers. The work of each contributor is described along with insights derived from their respective experiences. The title bringing together at love and justice is the key to the book, making as it does an explicit connection between inner transformation and outer action whereby we must be the change we want to see in the world.

### **2012 and the Galactic Centre**

by Christine R. Page (SMN)

*Bear & Company Publishing 2008, 233 pp., \$16, p/b.*

Christine Page, trained as a doctor and homoeopath, is also an astrologer, intuitive and seminar leader on energy medicine. This book focuses on the time of transformation through which we are currently living, between 1987 and 2023, which she sees as a window of opportunity for the creation of a new era of expanded consciousness. The pivotal point, according to a number of traditions, is the year 2012, when the sun will be aligned to the Galactic Centre for the first time in 26,000 years. Christine sees this alignment as one of the manifestations of the great mother, heralding a rebirth of the Divine feminine in terms of intuitive capacity and emotional creativity. The book begins with a passage of revelation, a message that we must transcend our limited identities based on fear and separation. She discusses the rhythms of the Moon and the nature of the hero's journey before embarking on a detailed exploration of transformative path based on passing through the signs of the zodiac in an alchemical process leading to the wisdom of the heart and a sense of our true identity and connection to the source.

### **Batu-Angas**

by Anne Cluysenar

*Poetry Wales Ltd 2008, 78 pp., £8.99, p/b.*

This is a series of poems based on Alfred Russel Wallace's vision of nature, with an introduction by Charles Smith. The poems are all preceded by a quotation from Wallace and many are illustrated by the object of the poem, for instance a butterfly. Some conjure up visits to the Natural History Museum or encounters with fellow Wallace enthusiasts. Anne seeks to enter into the mind of Wallace the collector, the thinker, the artist - many of his drawings are exquisite. One striking poem he evokes the capture of a completely new form of the bird of paradise by Wallace's assistant. The flutter of the bird is likened to a metallic quiver as the poet reflects on the centuries before the bird was discovered by science. The 19th-century context where Wallace shot a few orangutans is compared with the 20th century wholesale destruction of their habitat by logging companies. The trials of Wallace's travels are vividly depicted — insect bites, long periods of illness or inactivity and lack of civilised company. Civilisation, however, is a double-edged sword since the natives are unperturbed by what she calls the longing after gold. A charming and perceptive series of poems.

### **Short and to the Point**

by Jolyon Connell

*Dennis Publishing Ltd 2007, 142 pp., £9.95, h/b.*

*The Week* readers will also have enjoyed Jolyon Connell's terse and entertaining editor's letters, of which this is a selection of over 100. The fascinating introduction explains with self-deprecation and humour the genesis of the magazine and the perils of a new start-up in the highly competitive magazine market. I was not surprised to read that word-of-mouth is the best marketing tool as this has been true of me and my friends who recommend it to others as a way of keeping information overload at bay; indeed, the existence of *The Week* is one reason why I no longer take a daily newspaper. The pieces tend to begin with a pithy observation which is illustrated and clearly elaborated, leading to logical and often wry conclusions. One of my favourites, a reflection on short-term memory, involved Jon trying to get his neighbour to turn off an opera recording which was

keeping him awake, and which he discovered in the morning was coming from his own car. Immensely entertaining and stimulating.

### **The World's Best Books**

by Jolyon Connell (ed)

Dennis Publishing Ltd 2006, 177 pp., £9.99, h/b.

Readers of *The Week* will be familiar with the regular feature of six best books chosen by well-known people. This book collects over 150 selections, some of which are more specific than favourite books such as favourite thrillers or books to be re-read on the beach on return from hospital. The contributors write couple of sentences about the book, which may prompt readers to purchase it. Of course, the total selection is interesting in the same way as the Desert Island discs. At the back are two interesting tables, one with the top authors and the other with the top books. Interestingly, the top author selected is Evelyn Waugh, followed by PG Wodehouse and Charles Dickens; then Jane Austen, Anthony Trollope and William Shakespeare. Correspondingly, *Scoop* is the top book, which perhaps reflects a choice by journalists. Not far behind are such classics as *Anna Karenina*, *War and Peace*, *Proust*, *Jane Eyre*, *Gibbon* and the life of *Doctor Johnson*.

### **Pandora's Panacea**

by Carole Sawo

Hebe Publishing Company 2007, 121 pp., £9.99, p/b.

An unusual book that begins with a reflection on an incident when a blackbird tumbled down the author's chimney into her living room. She puts herself in the bird's position of falling headlong into what seems to be a disaster; there is nevertheless an interesting reciprocity and parallel between bird and human as we too fall down in the course of our lives, and get up again. This is what she calls the work of transformation, of seeing an opportunity in every event, however challenging. The introduction is a commentary on a number of holographic works of art, including *The Scream* and two of Michelangelo's sculptures. She then explains the structure of the volume as the poetry moves through the different phases of life, which psychologists and those who have seen more deeply into their experiences will recognise. There is an interesting parallel here with the initiate restructure of Alastair McIntosh's poetry reviewed below. The tone of the poems is very variable so it would not be possible to pick one out as typical. However, one of my favourites was *In Honour of the Death of the Ego*, which begins with a picture of isolation, sorrow, anger and disappointment and metamorphoses into a feeling of peace and rebirth, expressing surprise that 'that I would live past my dying/ that I could be truly free.' A later poem is entitled *The Comedy of Life*, At the end of which 'when feelings stopped but eyes perceived/ I found in front of me/ no tragic consequence of fate/ but Divine'st comedy.' We open Pandora's box of life, according to the author, not out of curiosity, but rather in faith, fortitude, wisdom and love, the very qualities we need in our work of transformation. This book is an inspiration along the path.

### **Love and Revolution**

by Alastair McIntosh

Lucis Publishing Company 2008, 92 pp.

It is unusual to review three books by the same author in one issue, but this one is rather different as a volume of poetry. The three parts reflect the hero's journey of departure, initiation and return. The title invites the reader to consider that spiritual politics entails an erotic union of love and revolution. There is a Scottish texture and context to the volume, reflecting the land campaign on Eigg as well as a sense of belonging rooted in Alastair's upbringing on the Western Isles - some poems have explanatory notes at the back, and there is also a glossary. He suggests a new beatitude: blessed are the passionate, they shall be lovmakers in eternity. *Blessing*, from the third part, gives a flavour of the whole: In the Februaries of your life/ may you find warmth/ by blazing hearths/ of honest kindness/ congregated choirs /of sparkling logs/ that kindle one another/ to community And may the sap/ of all you yearn/ be limpid pressed/ with peaty nose/ and flowing poured/ to raise a glass/ that sparkles in rainbows/ round your eyes The volume reflects a passionate commitment to life, love and justice,

### **The Power of Stories**

by Horst Kornberger

Floris Books 2006, 256 pp., £9.99.

Traditionally, we have all been brought up with stories and fairytales, but television and the Internet are increasingly taking up the psychological space of children. This book is about nurturing children's imagination and consciousness by means of stories, The

author calls this 'story medicine' whereby ancient traditions used stories as a means of transformation and healing. So he defines the role of the story to regulate the household of our soul, to transform, heal and educate the psyche, and via the psyche the world. We are shaped internally by stories — consider the impact in the UK of the non-stop stream of stories about the recession or the death of baby P. What counter-nourishment are we offered for the soul? Only the stories we choose to read ourselves. The book allows stories to reveal their messages, drawing on many well-known tales such as the *Odyssey*, *Parzival*, *Oedipus*, the prodigal son and the Arabian nights, leading to a phase of creative, active story making. The second part uses sample stories matched to age groups to illustrate their potential effects. These include the three Billy goats gruff for four-year-olds, *Hansel and Gretel* for 6 to 7-year-olds and Norse myths for 10-year-olds. This leads on to a consideration of *Harry Potter*, *Narnia*, *Winnie the Pooh* and the *Lord of the Rings*. The popularity of these books shows that there is still a hunger for role models of the hero's journey. The third part applies these insights to the making of stories in which parents can participate. This is a very important study of the role of stories in shaping our culture, reminding the reader of their central role.

### **Don't Get Fooled Again**

by Richard Wilson

Icon Books Ltd 2008, 279 pp., £12.99, h/b.

Subtitled 'the sceptics guide to life', much of the content and tone of this book is predictable, but it is a corrective to many human foibles and inconsistencies. The author asks why people get fooled by ideas that turn out to be nonsense. He rightly warns against wishful thinking, over-idealisation, demonising enemies, moral exclusion and groupthink, and excoriates fundamentalism, relativism and pseudo-scholarship. One of the places where I parted company with him was in his treatment of the 9/11 Truth Movement, which is only partially informed. He has clearly not read any of the serious analysis of David Ray Griffin, who refutes every point he makes. We need a more sophisticated approach to conspiracy theories than found here.

## DEATH AND DYING

### **Gentle Dying**

by Felicity Warner

Hay House Publishers 2008, 209 pp., £8.99, p/b.

Subtitled 'The simple guide to achieving a peaceful death', this book lives up to this description. The author is founder of the Hospice of the Heart Trust and her methods are used by many health professionals. This book outlines these in a clear and readable fashion, inviting readers to reflect on the manner of their own deaths and the circumstances in which they would like to pass over. It is full of wisdom and compassion, describing patterns of events around dying and relating experiences by way of illustration. The work of so-called Soul Midwives is explained in terms of a toolkit. This volume should be in every hospice and on the reading list for nurses and other medical professionals. See related websites: [www.gentledying.com](http://www.gentledying.com), [www.hospiceoftheheart.org](http://www.hospiceoftheheart.org), [www.soulmidwives.co.uk](http://www.soulmidwives.co.uk)

### **Meditations on Living, Dying and Loss**

by Graham Coleman (ed)

Penguin/Viking Books 2005, 144 pp., £8.99, p/b.

A remarkable book drawn from the first complete translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* by the editor. Many readers will be familiar with this text, but here it is presented in an accessible form, divided into three sections of living, dying and loss. The introductory commentary by the Dalai Lama is worth the cost of the book alone. He explains that the Tibetan teaching on the nature of consciousness, memory and death, distinguishing between gross and subtle manifestations. He comments that if material things are composed of cells, atoms and particles, then consciousness is composed of moments. Each extract is then preceded by an introduction, which puts the text in a modern context. Compulsory reading for a greater insight into life and death.

