



books in brief

David Lorimer

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SCIENCE/PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

Before and After Darwin

by **M.J.S. Hodge**

Ashgate Publishing Limited 2008, 270 pp., £65, h/b.

A very interesting specialist volume consisting of 14 journal articles about the background of Darwinism. The subtitle of 'origins, species, cosmogonies and ontologies' goes beyond the obvious meanings of the first two terms since views on origins necessarily imply different approaches to cosmology and ontology. The contrast between the Platonic form and the atoms of Democritus goes right back to Greek times and influences interpretations to this day. The cosmological and cosmogonical refer to the nature and origin of orderliness, while the ontological concerns 'the being of the origins and the constituents of that order.' All of these categories inform the series of essays, which look at the development of the arguments over time beginning with the background in Buffon, Lamarck, Whewell and Chambers. The largest section of seven essays examines the structure and content of Darwinian theory since Darwin broadly takes a causal explanatory view of natural selection. An invaluable resource for specialist readers.

On the Origin of Species

by **Charles Darwin**

Penguin/Viking Books 2009, 516 pp., £25.00, h/b.

This is the 150th anniversary edition with an extensive introduction by William Bynum, notes of further reading, a glossary, and a biographical register of 18th and 19th century scientists. It has what some people will regard as a hideous cover by Damien Hirst featuring a skull and a knife, and the publishers warn us that other modern artists will be commissioned to design covers for their favourite classic books. However, the book itself has been beautifully produced. The introduction covers both his life and the circumstances of his writing the book, as well as a brief analysis of the four principal guiding theories: descent with modification, natural selection, population thinking and gradualism. For readers who do not already own an edition of this book, this can be highly recommended.

Darwin's Sacred Cause

by **Adrian Desmond & James Moore**

Allen Lane 2009, 485 pp., £25, h/b.

Subtitled 'race, slavery and the quest for human origins', this interesting book by specialists in 19th-century science widens the lens on the background to Darwin's work in the context of his commitment to the abolition of slavery. The authors show how this view permeates his family history and contributes to his belief in human racial unity and brotherhood. Tracing a common origin of life provides an underpinning framework for his work on evolution. By giving all races a common origin and arguing against the claim that blacks and whites had originated as a separate species, Darwin emancipated his age from various forms of special creation. The book is a tour de force of scholarship, drawing on many unpublished family letters and a large quantity of manuscript material.

Why Evolution is True

by **Jerry A Coyne**

Oxford University Press 2009, 309 pp., £14.99, h/b.

A comprehensive and less than militantly polemical account of evolution, despite its title. The author is Professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolution in the University of Chicago, specialising in evolutionary genetics and the origin of species. He is also a frequent contributor to public debate concerning evolution and creationism. The book usefully explains the six key components of Darwin's theory: evolution, gradualism, speciation, common ancestry, and non-selective mechanisms of evolutionary change. He clarifies the status of the theory in scientific terms, challenging the notion that it is 'just a theory'. The author explains all the evidence supporting it, drawing together the various threads. The last chapter contains a helpful discussion of the implications of Darwin's ideas, arguing that we should feel ennobled to be part of such a wondrous web of life. As he points out, 'evolution tells us where we came from, not where we can go'. And while he defends its basis in naturalism and materialism, he does not feel that our lives need have no purpose as a result. A particularly interesting observation arose from a presentation he made on evolution and creationism or group of businessmen. At the end, a member of the audience came up and said that he had found the evidence for evolution convincing, but still didn't believe it! This tension between belief and evidence also happens in the quite different context of parapsychology, where scientists committed to materialism can't bring themselves to look at the evidence. The relationship between belief and evidence is complex and subtle.

Shapes

by **Philip Ball**

Oxford University Press, 308 pp., £14.99, h/b.

This is the first of three books on the patterns of nature. Its starting point is the great work by D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson *On Growth and Form*, which Sir Peter Medawar regarded as the finest piece of scientific literature. The author writes that science has vindicated Thompson's approach of searching of universal physical causes of pattern and order, 'offering us a glimpse of the kind of natural harmony that pervades and structure of the whole world'. He defines a pattern as a form in which particular features recur recognisably and regularly, created from groups of these features. The book ranges over a wide variety of forms, exploring the broad principles that underpin the formation of patterns such as shells, beehives, pine cones and even the human body. Although the book contains many black-and-white illustrations and a few colour plates, I did feel that it would have benefited from being a large format and more glossy production since the patterns illustrated are so striking and beautiful.

Questions of Truth

by **John Polkinghorne (SMN) & Nicholas Beale**

Westminster John Knox Press 2009, 180 pp., p/b.

This book is the outcome of collaboration between Sir John Polkinghorne and Nicholas Beale, who has for many years and run a website concerned with Sir John's ideas on which users can raise issues and pose questions. Over the years, they have built up an archive of the issues that are of concern to people and the responses they had made, which form the basis of this book of 51 responses to questions about God,

science and belief. There are seven sections with questions grouped around feelings such as God, the universe, evolution, evil, the human being and religion. Sometimes replies are joint, while on other occasions the authors Comment separately. Needless to say, some responses are more detailed than others, and they both write from an explicitly Christian point of view. A special feature of the book are three appendices on anthropic fine tuning, brain and mind and evolution. These cover the major position is and their interactions, and are wonderful introductions to important questions. Some responses also tackle head-on arguments raised by Richard Dawkins, and readers are also referred to Keith Ward's recent book *Why There Probably is a God*, which will be reviewed in the next issue. As Alister McGrath rightly says, this is a highly accessible and informative book, making an ideal starting point for those new to the field as well as a great stimulus to discussion. It could also usefully be used in schools.

Subjectivity and Being Somebody (Human Identity and Neuroethics)

by Grant Gillett

Imprint Academic, 2009, 286 pp., £17.95.

The author of this stimulating work is a neurosurgeon who is also professor of medical ethics at the University of Otago. He uses a neo-Aristotelian framework to consider human subjects as embodied beings in relationship, drawing on a wide range of thinkers, notably Kant and Wittgenstein. He outlines five layers of narrative about the human subject, arguing that it is not amenable to a purely reductive analysis. The arguments are laid out in a satisfyingly systematic fashion but the author also draws on his own extensive practical experience.

Memory - A Very Short Introduction

by Jonathan K. Foster

Oxford University Press 2008, 142 pp., £7.99, p/b.

A succinct survey of the latest neurophysiological and psychological research on memory. It begins with the historical background involving William James, Ebbinghaus and Bartlett, reminding the reader that 'the mechanisms underlying memory of best characterised as a dynamic activity or process rather than as a static entity or thing'. Various chapters cover mapping memories through models, inaccuracies, impairment of memory, real and imagined memories, memory and the brain and memory techniques. Some of the illustrations are a little contrived, such as a knotted handkerchief, but the book is exceptionally well-informed in conventional terms, while failing to mention anomalies in memory such as children who remember previous lives and evidence for survival of consciousness. These considerations would entail a radical rethinking of conventional models and would enrich the field, raising interesting new questions.

Atomic - The First War of Physics

by Jim Baggott

Icon Books Ltd 2009, 576 pp., £20.00, h/b.

A gripping tale of science, politics and espionage over the 10 years when the atomic bomb was developed from 1939 to 1949. We experience developments through the leading players and their interactions, not to mention their misgivings at various stages of the process. The whole episode necessarily transformed the relationships of scientists to the military, which persist to this day and soak up a disproportionate amount of scientific funding. The triumph of science may have helped defeat what the author calls the evils of arrogance, ignorance and dogma, but they unleashed a primordial force on the world, 'the threat of which would endure long after the perpetrators of evil were gone'. An interesting footnote is the interrogation of David Bohm and the termination of his contract at Princeton. The book addresses and answers many outstanding questions in a highly readable style.

MEDICINE/HEALTH

The Animal Healer

by Elizabeth Whiter

Hay House Publishers 2009, 236 pp., £12.99, h/b.

This is the touching story of how the author developed the capacity of the healing when her horse was seriously injured. She also noticed how Wow took steps to heal himself, a practice known technically as 'zoopharmacognosy'. The most striking example of this practice comes from primate researchers who have observed them ingesting a toilet brush shaped plant whole, which then travels through the stomach and digestive tract before being excreted intact, covered in worms and parasites. For Elizabeth, spiritual practice in the form of meditation is an essential part of her approach to healing, and helps develop the necessary sensitivity to the needs of the animal. Written in an easy style, this book will change the way you understand animals and healing.

Biodynamic Gardening

by Hilary Wright

Floris Books 2009, 144 pp., £16.99, p/b.

A beautifully illustrated book outlining the principles and practice of biodynamic gardening. Readers are taken through various stages of understanding, and is encouraged to develop an intuitive sense of the processes going on in their own gardens as well as within themselves. There is much practical advice about composting, pest control, cooking and preparation of dynamised fertilisers involving the meditative activity of stirring for an hour. It takes a little time to get to grips with this method, but the results, according to the author, will speak for themselves.

PHILOSOPHY/RELIGION

Essential Writings of Thich Nhat Hanh

by Robert Ellsberg (ed)

Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. 2008, 163 pp., p/b.

Thich Nhat Hanh it is a well-known Vietnamese Buddhist teacher, who is still travelling and teaching in his 80s. Here we have a distillation from his collected works, which deserves a place on every spiritual bookshelf. The extracts are divided into five sections. although he recognises that life is full of suffering, it is also filled with many wonders, like the blue sky, sunshine and the baby. It is crucial to be in touch with the wonders of life, which are all around us. He offers the following short poem while breathing and smiling:

Breathing in, I calm my body.

Breathing out, I smile.

Dwelling in the present moment

I know this wonderful moment.

He also reminds us to be fully present in our everyday actions, commenting that if we are incapable of washing dishes joyfully, wanting to finish them quickly so that you can have a cup of tea, you will be equally incapable of drinking the tea joyfully. You will simply be rushing from one thing to the next without enjoying any of it. With awareness, each of our daily acts can take on a new meaning. This is an opportune reminder of something we all know but only too frequently forget.

A Scripture for Mankind

by Christopher Mark Hanson

Author House 2008, 241 pp., p/b.

The Scripture in question is the revelation of St John the Divine, on which this is a scholarly commentary. Interestingly, it is inspired by Sri Yukteswar's book, *The Holy Science*, which I reviewed in the last issue. Sri Yukteswar was the guru of Yogananda. The basic approach here is not that Revelation is a prophecy of cataclysmic events to come, but rather describes the nature of the inner Path back to the godhead, progressively unfolding the spiritual centres, as St John actually experienced

it, namely the supreme union between the soul and God. At the beginning of the book, the reader will find a glossary explaining the meaning of various terms of imagery. On this basis, the exposition is systematic and detailed, as befits an author who was originally trained in science. This is another book to be studied at length, and will be of particular interest to readers who have already taken an interest in Revelation.

The Kundalini Concept

by **Mary Scott (late SMN)**

Jain Publishing Inc 2006, 274 pp., h/b.

Mary Scott was 100 when the revised edition of this book, first published over 25 years ago, reappeared. Endorsed by Ravi Ravindra and with a foreword by David Fontana, this is a serious work examining Tantric cosmology and the growth of understanding of kundalini in relation to developments within Western science, which have strengthened its case over the last 20 years. As David Fontana remarks, the book provides a wide ranging and perceptive enquiry into the very nature of reality that goes beyond the reductionism characteristic of much modern thought. Particular attention is given to the nature of energy and the ways in which it is understood within different contexts. The subtle aspects of Tantric philosophy concern how to channel the energy systems within our being. I don't believe that anyone has written a comparably serious book in this field, so it can be strongly recommended to those with an interest in the interface between Eastern and Western psychology.

Creative Intelligence and Self-Liberation

by **Ted Falconar (SMN)**

Crown House Publishing Limited 2007, 137 pp., £12.99, p/b.

The revised edition of a book first published in 2000 and which builds on the work of Count Alfred Korzybski on what he called non-Aristotelian thinking and the Structural Differential. His basic contention is that we mistake verbal and abstract knowledge for the intuitive and visual insights that form the basis of real knowledge based on direct contact with reality. Ordinary thinking is analytical and associative, dominated by memory and reliant on noticing similarities. Non-Aristotelian thinking knows that words cannot capture objects and that nothing is like anything else. It looks for differences not similarities and tries to perceive things more subtly. In this respect, it resembles Goethe's scientific method. The world is represented in pictures, which is how Einstein thought and is the basis not only of creativity but also self-liberation: 'reality is structural, not verbal. It has form, pattern and shape.' And we ourselves are the universal light of consciousness, by which we perceive and which we can perceive. All this is very clearly explained within a wide frame of reference that includes poetry, mysticism and the thought of Krishnamurti and Maslow. It also has interesting applications for organisations in terms of releasing the creative potential of employees, which the author successfully accomplished when the managing director of Tetley Tea.

The Reflective Life

by **Valerie Tiberius**

Oxford University Press 2008, 222 pp., £30.00, h/b.

Subtitled 'living wisely within our limits', this is a carefully crafted book about the nature of practical wisdom. It defends a first-person, process-based account of how to live, as opposed to 'an impersonal, and goal-based theory of the good life'. The reflective self has to relate to the nonreflective self, which the author likens to a little rider sitting on top of an elephant. The traditional approach whereby we identify exclusively with our rational capacities is limited. After a discussion of reflective values, the author focuses on four particular themes: wisdom and flexibility, perspective, self-awareness and optimism. Perspective is close to proportion and includes the ability to relate the experience of others and their values to our own. It was interesting the author also seemed to want to put limits on the development of self-knowledge, although she is correct that we need to know both our capacities and

our limitations; however, the spiritual journey requires deeper knowledge than she allows here. The discussion of optimism is very useful, relating as it does to realism, pessimism and cynicism. It is surely important to have a positive and hopeful view of human nature and human potential. The book will be of particular interest to those concerned with philosophy and values education.

Religious Fundamentalism

by **Peter Herriot**

Routledge 2009, 325 pp., p/b.

Essential reading for anyone who would like to understand the many dimensions of fundamentalism in our time. The book takes a psychosocial approach and deals with various levels of the phenomenon with special reference to culture and identity. The author begins by identifying five key features of fundamentalist movements: that they are reactive, dualist, believe in the supreme authority of their holy book, but their interpretation albeit is selective; finally, they take millennialist view of history. It is interesting to note that fundamentalism is by definition a modern phenomenon since it is a reaction against modernity. The book consists of nine main chapters dealing with globality, cultures, social movements, organisational considerations, the centrality of identity, beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour (the last few items are grouped together as so-called BVNs). The analysis is exceptionally clear.

Each chapter is divided into two parts, theoretical and practical, with a bullet point summary in the middle. Many practical examples relate to Islamist groups including Al Qaeda, but there is also a section on fundamentalist religion in Bush's America. A key conclusion is the importance of the differentiation in identity provided by affiliation with fundamentalist groups. At its simplest, the dynamics are those of an in-group and in out-group, but this is frequently reinforced by a sense of threat, which in the case of Al Qaeda and the US is mutual. Hostility is likely to perpetuate fundamentalisms since it reinforces a differentiated sense of identity. The author suggests that instead of seeking only to change fundamentalists, we need to change ourselves and our society, especially since fundamentalisms thrive on opposition. We have to find other ways of meeting central human needs for self-esteem and certainty, so the author stresses the importance of justice, which he thinks would result in equity, transparency and respect. I'm not convinced that this is the whole answer, but it does provide a direction of travel and a source of hope.

Liturgy and Architecture

by **Allan Doig**

Ashgate Publishing Limited 2008, 224 pp., £15.99, p/b.

This remarkable book covers the relationship between liturgy and architecture from the early church to the Middle Ages. Liturgy represents the essential act of worship that takes place inside the building, and the buildings themselves gradually evolve to reflect the role of the church itself. For instance, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, there arose corresponding official and Imperial forms in its architecture. The book extends to eastern forms of architecture, and traces the evolution of styles through the Romanesque into the Gothic. Romanesque churches were associated with monasticism and pilgrimage, and buildings were simplified with the influence of Cistercian thought in the 11th century. Special attention is paid to the Abbey of Cluny and the origins of Gothic architecture at St Denis in Paris. It is interesting to note that the church of St Martin in Tours was regarded as the ideal pilgrimage church as pilgrims can continue to circulate during monastic offices. In the final chapter, we learn how Protestantism with its criticism of indulgences 'struck at the very root of the financial basis of the Church and its building programmes', as relics and shrines were swept away. Even the large number of side chapels was partly related to the need for simultaneous services to be held to honour obligations towards the dead. A series of simple illustrations add texture to this fascinating study.

The Gift of Years

by Joan Chittister

Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. 2008, 222 pp., p/b.

Subtitled 'growing old gracefully', this book is full of wisdom on every page. The author is executive director of Benetvision: A Resource and Research Centre for Contemporary Spirituality. Her book is divided into about 40 short sections on topics such as regret, meaning, possibility, mystery, time, solitude, loneliness, forgiveness and outreach. And she says herself, she writes about the transition into the last period of human growth, and the way it can be lived as a summit time of life. It also involves embracing the blessings of this time and overcoming the burdens; indeed, at the end of each short chapter is a reflection on the respective blessings and burdens related to the theme. A particular balance to be struck is that between being and doing; of course, this applies to all phases of life, but more especially to old-age. The author reminds us that religion is not essentially a topic or a body of beliefs, but rather a process of becoming. I would encourage readers of all ages to buy this book – they will find that it is one they want to pass on and even buy for friends and family.

This Sunrise of Wonder

by Michael Mayne

Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. 2008, 340 pp., £12.95, p/b.

Michael Mayne, who died in 2006, and whose last book *The Enduring Melody* I reviewed in December 2005, was head of religious programmes at BBC radio, vicar of the University Church in Cambridge and Dean of Westminster. He is an extraordinary penetrating writer with a deep understanding of life and literature. This book takes the form of a collection of 24 letters written from Switzerland to his two grandchildren expressing his vision of life. A crucial leitmotif is to develop our capacity for looking and wonder, opening not only our physical eyes but also what it calls the inward eye: 'learn how to see, to see is the beginning of wonder'. To see is also to give attention and to experience gratitude. Each of the letters contains many apposite references, and they are preceded by two or three striking quotations. I can only echo the enthusiasm of the original reviewers, for instance A N Wilson, when he writes that 'this is a generous, life enhancing book, to cherish and to keep'. Definitely one to add to your library.

Mind, Brain and the Elusive Soul

by Mark Graves

Ashgate Publishing Limited 2008, 244 pp., £50, h/b.

The word 'elusive' in the title gives an indication of the tenor of this book. The author begins with the proposition that there can be no single coherent view of the person, and that 'understanding the complexity of the human person requires multiple coherent views that unify only in their relationship to each other', and which must embrace the latest research findings across a number of disciplines. He builds on the Aristotelian idea of soul as the form of body and embarks on a long journey through philosophy of mind, systems theory, emergentism, spiritual relationships, American pragmatism and process philosophy. The author concludes that 'the soul consists of the dynamic form of the body and serves as a nexus of relationships across all six levels of human existence'. This enables a certain squaring of the circle as the soul is 'information carried by the arrangement of relationships in a system', enabling a nonmaterial construct to exist within a non-reductive physicalist worldview. Personally, I have always been uneasy with the notion of non-reductive physicalism as it fails to engage with the evidence for survival of consciousness, presuming that the human system comes to a complete end with physical decomposition. Nonetheless, the discussion is extremely sophisticated and well-informed within its own framework.

The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

by Edward Fitzgerald - edited by Daniel Karlin

Oxford University Press 2009, 167 pp., £9.99, h/b.

This is surely the definitive version of this classic text, with which many readers will be familiar. It apparently sold no copies at all on its appearance in 1859 (unlike Darwin, whose bicentenary the translator shares), but it was discovered two years later and its first readers and admirers included Rossetti, Swinburne and Ruskin. The poem is described as a lyrical meditation on human death and fate in the tradition of Epicurus. Contemporary reviewers felt that the sentiment of the translation corresponded to the Victorian Zeitgeist, and that this may have influenced the translation. The edition includes lengthy introduction, and sections on the life of Edward Fitzgerald, the publication history, Victorian critical responses and even a letter from Tennyson and detailed explanatory notes. Those who are unfamiliar with the quatrains, here is one of the most famous:

The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes – or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Deserts dusty Face
Lighting a little Hour or two – is gone.

The Healing Word

by Bishop Basil of Amphipolis

Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. 2008, 198 pp., p/b.

Bishop Basil of Amphipolis is the senior patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church in the UK. With a foreword by Rowan Williams, this book examines different levels of healing within the individual, the church and in relation to the earth. His premise is that the universe is ultimately a single integrated whole, and that in God each part of it is linked with every other. Readers new to this tradition are introduced to the thinking of Dionysius and St Maximus in a meditation on our place in the cosmos. Bishop Basil skilfully integrates Dionysian levels with the structure of modern science, while insisting on the centrality of spiritual intellect or nous as a significant mode of cognition. There is a particularly good chapter on ecological crisis and objectification of nature. His key contention is that we have created an objectified thought world in which the inner world of humanity has no place. It follows that what starts from inhuman premises will end with inhuman results. Basil sees the need to reinstate qualities and purpose into the overall picture, based on turning inwards to the love of God and outwards, philanthropically, to our fellow creatures and the world as a whole. This will enable us to establish a harmonious relationship with creation. And in order to establish the relationship between culture and science, we need to acknowledge the deeper and more subtle aspects of our humanity. This is a profound and timely work.

Learning to Hope

by Kenneth Wilson

Epworth Press 2006, 138 pp., £9.99, p/b.

Subtitled 'the church and the desire for wisdom', this book focuses on the church as a learning community in a conversation that both talks through and lives out faith in the world. Taking a wide view of learning, and its outcomes in terms of intellectual, moral and social virtues, the book is an invitation to extend our curiosity and horizons. It considers six dimensions of human experience: history, the natural world, morality and law, argument, suffering and hope, moving from the Old through the New Testament. The author takes the view that the three key products of our conversation are wisdom, the nourishment of love and hope; the conversation itself implies attention and respect to the other, whether the other be God, the world or a person. An accessible and yet searching book.

Popular Spiritualities

by Lynne Hume and Kathleen McPhillips

Ashgate Publishing Limited 2009, 203 pp., £55.00, h/b.

Subtitled 'The Politics of Contemporary Enchantment', this book explores a wide range of spiritual expressions, some pretty exotic and far out, on the basis that the last 50 years have seen a reaction against secularism and instrumental rationality towards a re-enchantment of the world. The editors also maintain that traditional religions in the West have largely lost their spiritual efficacy and rely on either ageing populations or fundamentalist agendas. Contemporary people seek experience beyond ideas and beliefs, which the editors see reflected in the rise of interest in Buddhism, the rediscovery of the esoteric, and the revival of Romanticism. Much of the discourse revolves around issues of meaning, identity and community and reflects an accompanying concern with social change. The reader is plunged straight into the world of vampires, leading on to spiritual feminist rituals reflecting mediaeval romance, pilgrims as spiritual tourists on a goddess tour, the relevance of superheroes and the context of the Internet. The second part looks at other religious borderlands including entheogens, 'priestessing' (yes, this is actually a verb), gay communities and drumming. The last part considers enchantment as a political response, and contains an interesting essay by Steven Sutcliffe on the relationship between epistemology, soteriology and instrumental rationality, with reflections on the role of guidance, meditation and healing in new age circles. Unfortunately, the price of the book puts it out of range for individual readers, who should have it ordered by their libraries. The volume certainly adds a new dimension to the study of contemporary spirituality.

Understanding the Dalai Lama - A Simple Smiling Monk

by Rajiv Mehrotra

Hay House Publishers 2009, 265 pp., £9.99, p/b.

The subtitle here only reflects one aspect of the Dalai Lama, who is one of the great figures of our time. It is true that he gets up very early every morning for meditation and study, so that the basis of his life is contemplative, which distinguishes him from other political leaders. The value of this book lies in the many perspectives from over 20 authors, some of whom are well known in their own right - Matthieu Ricard, Daniel Goleman, Raimon Panikkar and Jeffrey Hopkins. The editor hosts the long-running talk show in India, and the final piece is a dialogue. It is interesting that the Dalai Lama says that when he was very young, he expressed clear memories of his past life, which, like the children studied by Ian Stevenson, have since disappeared. This is part of the lesson in impermanence. One of the striking things about the Dalai Lama is the way in which he returns constantly to basic spiritual principles including simplicity, kindness, compassion and joy. In our complex world it is good to be reminded of such things.

Ashram Diary in India with Bede Griffiths

by Thomas Matus

O Books 2009, 156 pp., £11.99, p/b.

A Journal in three parts covering different visits to Shativanam Ashram between 1984 and the death of Bede Griffiths in 1993. The entries provide a vivid picture of life at the ashram as well as of Father Bede himself and some of his travels within India. They also share aspects of his own spiritual search in reconciling Christianity with Indian culture (he himself was initiated into the Kriya Yoga of Yogananda at an early age) and ultimately deepening the spiritual search to 'the one Reality beyond names and forms'. There is a moving account of Father Bede's last days, and one is left with the distinctive flavour of his work.

The Christian Creed - A Meditative Path

by Hans-Werner Schroeder

Floris Books 2009, 109 pp., £5.99, p/b.

A new approach to the Christian creed, based on the reformulation by the Christian Community. It reproduces the structure of the classical versions in 12 basic propositions. These are then elaborated in the following sections on themes such as the birth of Christ in the soul and death, the seed of a higher life. In this last chapter there is a remarkable passage quoted from Jacques Lusseyran, who nearly died in Buchenwald, which I visited in 1983. He encounters the breath of life and comes to the realisation that he must not allow his body to be taken by fear, 'for fear kills, and joy maintains life'. On reviving, he heard a person whispering in his ear that he didn't have a chance, to which his spontaneous response to the amazed onlooker was a burst of laughter.

Free from Dogma

by Tom Ravetz

Floris Books 2009, 143 pp., £14.99, p/b.

Here the theology of the Christian Community, a religious movement arising out of the work of Rudolf Steiner, is considered the first time in a systematic way. The two parts examine the experience of God and the nature of the new community. There is some sensitive discussion of key theological issues about the Trinity, the nature of Christ, the holy spirit and the relationship between evil and redemption. For instance, the image of the wounded healer reminds us that superheroes are inhuman in the invulnerability. The celebration of the new community often takes place around the meal, sacramentally the Last Supper involving consecration and communion. Underlying the philosophy of the book is the idea of primordial unity, out of which life was manifested and towards which it returns in cycles that involve community and ultimately communion.

Finding Heaven Here

by John C. Robinson

O Books 2009, 186 pp., £9.99.

A remarkable and practical book that has the capacity to transform the reader's perception and understanding. Many people are familiar with the mystical experience in which the world is seen as transfigured with the light of consciousness, the same consciousness as the perceiver; universally, this experience is regarded as more real than normal perception. John Robinson took this very seriously, and has developed a series of exercises in which the reader can come to realise and appreciate that the omniscient divine awareness is all around us, and is suffused with tenderness and love. The author develops a spiritual compass with four quadrants: man and darkness on one side, with heaven and earth and divinity on the other. The aim is to experience Presence and see that heaven is already on earth if only one can perceive it. John gives detailed instructions, and quotes some of his conversations with the Presence, which are arrestingly similar to Neale Donald Walsch. The keys are to stop thinking, intensify awareness and perception in the present, to experience the world exactly as it is, and to come into the Presence from your own Presence. This is not just a lecture on heaven, but an invitation to readers to open the door for themselves.

Toward Awakening

by Jean Vaysse

Morning Light Press 2009, 157 pp., \$16.95, h/b.

Jean Vaysse was a medical doctor born in 1917 who followed the teaching of Gurdjieff, whose own writings are notoriously obscure. Not so this account, which is both systematic and lucid in explaining the structure and progression of the teaching. The reader is led step-by-step through the exacting process, learning about the structure and functions of the human being and the various states of consciousness, along with the necessity for self-observation in reaching a more self-conscious state. There is a particularly good chapter on the difference between essence and personality, commenting on how the latter has

eclipsed the former in modern life. The essence grows into being, the core of individuality. In the view of the author, the aim of education should be the harmonious development of being and personality together. However, comparatively few people are spiritually awake, and many are satisfied as they are. To step onto the path demands real effort and commitment to this process of self remembering, an indication that we are giving proper priority to the inner life.

The Transparency of Things

by Rupert Spira

Non-Duality Press 2008, 253 pp., £11.45, p/b.

Subtitled 'contemplating the nature of experience', this is a profound meditation on the capacities of human consciousness and the Presence that underlies it. As the author himself says, the book is written like a piece of music 'in which a single theme is explored, questioned, modulated and restated'. However, the exercise does gain depth and resonance, as each insight reflects and refracts the others. The underlying knowingness is beyond the analytical mind, hence formulations of insight into experience condition rather than express it. Given the identity of Consciousness and Reality and Non-duality of subject and object, real knowing can only be implicit.

There are about 45 sections, each of which consist of a number of individual contemplations or reflections titles such as 'abide as you are', 'consciousness is self luminous', 'there are not two things', 'we are what we seek', and 'consciousness only knows itself' indicate the seeds from which further contemplations grow. The book can be opened at almost any page, where the reader will find further expressions of the one insight, for instance 'knowingness is not what I do. It is what I am.' 'Meditation is simply the natural presence of Consciousness, ever present, all embracing, unchanging, unending, unlimited, Self-luminous, Self-knowing, Self-evident.' This is not a book that could be read at a sitting, but rather one to savour over a number of months, reading only page or two a day. In this way, the reader's sense of Self will be polished and enhanced.

Science & Islam, a History

by Ehsan Masood

Icon Books Ltd 2009, 240 pp., £12.99, h/b.

This is the book accompanying TV series which describes the Islamic scientific revolution between 700 and 1500 CE, the very period normally described in the history of philosophy as the Dark Ages, an age in Islamic culture when religion and science had a close relationship. The first part describes the rise of science within Islamic culture, moving on in the second part to a consideration of engineering, astronomy, mathematics and chemistry. One amazing anecdote relates that the poet Omar Khayyam (see elsewhere in this section for review of his Rubaiyat) was able in 1079 to calculate the length of the year as 365.24219858156 days, which means that he was out by less than the sixth decimal place from the figure we have today with the aid of radio telescopes and atomic clocks. In his conclusion, the author suggests that there are three preconditions for science to return to the nations of the Islamic world. First, massive investments in educating people and institutions; second, a climate in which there is freedom to enquire and innovate, and lastly, that science must never be used to attack people's freedom to believe. This will be an interesting challenge, but the book demonstrates unequivocally the enormous contribution made by Islamic science in an earlier era.

The Pattern of the World

by Salamah Pope (SMN)

Hilltop Farm Press 2007, 368 pp., p/b.

30 years ago the author - an anthropologist - attended a class that gave her the seminal insight for this book: that the pattern of patterns within nature and ourselves entails chaos, separation, union and transcendence, forming an open-ended spiral of development. Everything is the same and yet everything is different, the universe is a living whole and we are all parts of it; everything matters and everything works together; there are boundaries but no separation. This forms the basis of a fourfold

cosmological vision of wholeness and connectedness, which we need to embody and apply. The philosophical roots of this work can be found in Whitehead (creative advance into novelty), but also in various Oriental philosophies and in Subud. This thesis is elaborated with respect to planetary development, energy and the human being, leading at the end to a consideration of human values and education. Here the question is how we can become more conscious and truly human, which necessarily involves self-knowledge and ultimately the inner journey, where we have many exemplars who have trodden the path before us and left some directions. They have discovered how the inner and outer aspects of life are related and beckon us to do the same, thus enabling and empowering the necessary changes in our outlook and planetary systems. This is an important and substantial work that repays close study.

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 had a huge 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, Singh, 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 uncongenial.

PSYCHOLOGY/PARAPSYCHOLOGY

Peak States of Consciousness - Theory and Applications

by Grant McFetridge

Lightning Source UK Ltd 2004, 322 pp., \$39.95, p/b.

A self published book giving a great deal of background about the theory and practice of peak states of consciousness. The author himself has extensive personal experience, and was led to this work by losing his habitual peak state at the age of 29. The book makes fairly dense reading but it is clear and well set out, with definitions, summary key points and recommended further reading in each chapter. Much of the material will be familiar to those in the field but there are also some interesting new approaches based on Paul Maclean's discovery of the triune structure of the brain. The author experiences these as independent forms of self-awareness, and remarks that traditional understandings of chakras and meridians were unable to take this into account. There is an excellent section near the end of the book by Jacquelyn Aldana on happiness and the flow state, which is also based on her life experience. The secret for her is love, gratitude and appreciation, and she gives some very helpful instructions as well as some sound caveats.

The Incarnation of the Spirit

by Mary Scott (late SMN)

Jain Publishing Inc 2007, 180 pp., p/b.

Mary Scott died last year at the age of over 100. I read this book originally over 20 years ago, and it is good to be reminded of the important research that was uppermost in people's minds at that stage, for instance *Breakthrough to Creativity* by Member Shafica Karagulla, which I also remember reading and discussing with Peter Leggett. Mary had a wide range of interests and experience as a clinical psychologist and a nurse who had degrees in philosophy, psychology and social studies. She was also brought up in India. The subject matter is central to the concerns of the Network in terms of widening science, extending perception and trying to understand eastern models of subtle anatomy. Much of this is covered in the excellent foreword by David Fontana. It was also good to be reminded of the work of the artist and philosopher William Arkle, who

was a member at that time. His model of three vectors of consciousness is very useful and is fully explained in his book *A Geography of Consciousness*. The message of the book is that we are here to grow in wisdom and ability under the direction of our subliminal selves.

Le Moi et L'Esprit

by Jacques Arenes

Mediaspaul Editions 2008, 329 pp., p/b.

Subtitled 'a journey to the heart of psychotherapy', this is a subtle and wide ranging analysis of the relationship between the self and the spirit. In this sense, I take the French word 'esprit' to mean spirit rather than mind in this context. The book falls into two main parts, the first dealing with different conceptions of the human being including Freud, Carl Rogers and Victor Frankl as well as some figures less well known in English-speaking countries. The second part of this section is a critical analysis of psychological and biblical anthropology, showing how much they have in common and pinpointing a number of key psychological themes. In the second part, the author turns his attention to the therapeutic encounter, illustrating his case with many examples. This is then followed by a further critical analysis of key concepts. The author identifies a central tension between the development of the self and the more transcendent goal of self-realisation and our relationship to the divine. At the heart of human life, he finds biblical foundations involving the truth that liberates, our need for love and drive towards metanoia or transformation. This leads to a psychology of levels which is adequate to the depth of the human being. Partly for cultural reasons, there is no mention of the work of Ken Wilber, with whom the author would have much in common and who could provide further mapping with his integral psychology models.

The Origin of Consciousness in the Social World

by Charles Whitehead (ed)

Imprint Academic 2009, 316 pp., £17.95, p/b.

The argument behind the title of this book is that Western individualism has delayed scientific recognition of the essentially social nature of consciousness. The editor is an anthropologist well aware that collective assumptions which frame worldviews are taken for granted and never critically examined. He asserts that individualism, ethnocentrism, sexism and the valuation of work over play are a tangle of collective deceptions, as are physicalism, cognitivism and genocentrism. Although many scientists would be horrified at such assertions, Whitehead backs up his case with an analysis of possible ways of subdividing experience into self/other, inner/outer, showing that qualities that can be measured are only a part of the picture. This will come as no surprise to readers of this Review. The three parts are entitled the social brain, social mirrors and collective consciousness and reality. This last section is focused on an article by Allan Combs and Stanley Krippner and the concluding piece on beliefs about consciousness and reality by Imants Baruss. Needless to say, beliefs about reality condition and are related to beliefs about consciousness, which Baruss divides into a spectrum of three positions, namely materialist, conservative transcendent and extraordinary transcendent; many Network members adopt the third position. It is interesting to discover that these are precisely the people who tend to have a more rational and curious approach. In addition, the emphasis on the importance of consciousness increases along the spectrum from the by-product to 'all there is.'

Worlds Apart?

by Bernard Carr (SMN)

SPR 2008, 96 pp., p/b.

This SPR Presidential Address delivered in 2002 asks the question if psychical research can bridge the gulf between matter and mind, replying in the affirmative. Bernard Carr will be known to many members as a physicist and cosmologist with a lifelong interest in psychical research. Here he brings both his disciplines together by arguing that most phenomena currently labelled psychic require for their explanation a different physical paradigm which must assign a central role to consciousness,

rather than regarding it as merely a by-product of the brain. The address ranges widely over the history of the subject and sets out a useful classification of psychic phenomena which helps clarify different types and levels of explanation required. A central theme developed involves higher dimensional space and a new model uniting physical and perceptual space that can explain phenomena such as apparitions and out of body experiences. This leads on to a more comprehensive theory uniting matter and mind and first and third person modes. This is a very important contribution to the theoretical debate about the scope of both parapsychics and parapsychology which will surely form the basis of further work, in view of the fact that no theory of mind and matter can be complete that ignores the findings of over 100 years of parapsychology research.

FUTURE STUDIES/ECONOMICS/ ECOLOGY

The Transition Timeline (for a local resilient future)

by Shaun Chamberlin

Green Books 2009, 190 pp., p/b.

This is effectively the sequel to *The Transition Handbook*, with a foreword by its author Rob Hopkins. It contains a great deal of useful material centred around the relationship between peak oil and climate change. The first part sets out the different scenarios for the future, depending on how quickly we take effective pre-emptive action. The second part looks at various aspects of what they call the transition vision in terms of population and demographics, food and water, electricity and energy, travel and transport, health and medicine. It also contains an overview of systems thinking and speculative wild cards which may alter things radically. Interestingly, all the wild cards are for negative impacts, and the book does not consider a scenario whereby there is a real breakthrough in free energy. In other words, the premise is towards a more limited and local lifestyle including what they call an Energy Descent Plan. This may of course entail more contentment that there may be other creative possibilities that we cannot yet envisage. However, in current circumstances, the analysis is a realistic one. See www.darkoptimism.org

How to Get Your Ideas Adopted (And Change the World)

by Anne Miller

2009, 224 pp., £9.99.

I reviewed the original edition of this work in Network 95 (p. 44) - under the title 'The Myth of the Mousetrap'. This new edition shares something of the reception of the book, enthusiastically received by a wide variety of individuals from different backgrounds. Interestingly, people with more understanding of creativity and innovation found the book more significant, while one BBC presenter found the notion that new ideas are resisted cognitively dissonant, when widespread resistance to ideas is exactly the thesis of this book, which is also highly practical in suggesting ways in which these ideas can be communicated and put into practice. The paperback will enable a new set of readers to benefit from her analysis and hands on experience.

EDUCATION

Unlearning (Or How Not To Be Governed)

by Nader N Chokr

Imprint Academic 2009, 92 pp., £8.95.

A stimulating essay that takes its subtitle from Michel Foucault. It proposes a third way of education beyond filling students with knowledge and producing well-trained critical minds, namely 'unlearning' based on the Greek notion of paideia and representing a training in freedom, autonomy and virtue. Foucault distinguishes between dominant and subjugated

knowledge, while other languages distinguish between tacit and explicit knowing; these form starting points for the discussion and the definition of education based on learning how to learn independently, in other words not being taken in. Arrestingly, he sees this approach as the antidote to a rising tide of mediocrity and bullshit, which he proceeds to define and excoriate. His final agenda turns out to be wider still, consisting of the development of a radical ecological vision to challenge the 'fundamental logic of a globalising capitalist system based on exploitation, profit, growth, accumulation and the manipulation of needs'. It is a bracing breath of fresh air.

Education Towards Freedom

by Frans Carlgren

Floris Books 1972, 242 pp., £14.99, p/b.

This must be the definitive book on Waldorf education, first published in 1972 now in its ninth edition. It begins with an account of Rudolf Steiner's ideas on education, then outlines some basic features of the method before giving more detail on the timetable as it develops through 12 years of school life. Interestingly, there were only about 220 Waldorf schools in the mid-1970s, while there are now more than 1000 worldwide. One can see how the agenda of education has in one sense moved towards Waldorf themes such as creativity, emotional learning and child well-being, but on the other hand there has been a rigorous development of assessment, benchmarking and outcomes. A unique feature of the book is the way in which it is illustrated throughout with full-colour artworks from pupils, which helps bring the whole system alive.

GENERAL

Trust

by Marek Kohn

Oxford University Press 2008, 150 pp., £10.99, h/b.

We know from international surveys that there has been a general decline in trust in societies in the last 30 years. Interestingly, Scandinavian countries score highly and lead indicators are ethnic homogeneity, good governance, even distribution of wealth and Protestant religious traditions. The author argues that trust is desirable in itself and enhances relations of all kinds, as well as being associated with increased levels of health and happiness. The book draws on many disciplines, including evolutionary biology, economics, philosophy and sociology. New forms of relationship are emerging, but all depend for their quality on trust. Using many examples, including episodes from the First World War, the book provides plenty of food for thought. A key insight is that contracts are substitutes for trust, and no amount of regulation can replace it. We therefore ought to be actively addressing ways of enhancing trust within our society at all levels.

Fractal Time

by Gregg Braden

Hay House Publishers 2009, 254 pp., £10.99, p/b.

Our dominant model of time in the West is a linear one. Ancient and agricultural cultures have a cyclical understanding of time, and the spiral resolves these two models. Much has been written about the Mayan calendar and the anticipated end of the age in December 2012. During the 20th century, Arnold Toynbee developed a model of the rise and fall of cultures, which also has a cyclical character. This book explores how the rhythmic flow of time is mirrored in fractals, arguing that sequences of history reflect patterns in nature. This gives what he calls different time codes, applying to various epochs: the end of an age does not therefore represent the end of the world, but rather the beginning of a new world. Time Code 5, for instance, states that 'if we know where we are in a cycle, then we know what to expect when it repeats'. Time Code 6 elaborates that we might expect the conditions of the past to repeat, but not the events themselves. Different cultures count different numbers of world ages, but they each tend to end

in a cataclysm, which is not an appealing prospect. However, this represents a cleansing process whereby a new cultural impulse can arise and is a reflection of the universal cycles of creation and destruction, and death and rebirth. The author also hypothesises that individual events give rise to further cycles. He also cautions that 2012 is part of a larger process and will not necessarily represent an apocalyptic event. The last chapter provides an overview of the thesis, positing that we are at a major turning point in human affairs. Many of us sense this, and the book provides a map to correspond with this intuitive feeling that we are entering a process of breakdown and breakthrough in which human intention will play a critical role.

Free Speech

by Nigel Warburton

Oxford University Press 2009, 114 pp., £7.99.

This is the 200th title in the 'Very Short Introduction' series, and a fitting tribute to the series as a whole. It begins with a well-known quotation from Voltaire: 'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it'. This is a statement of the value of free speech rather than an indication of its potential limits. Beginning with some wide definitions of free speech (and free expression), the author moves on to consider the main features of the classical liberal defence of free speech, then the issue of causing offence, particularly where religious belief is concerned. This, of course, is a central topic. The next chapter considers issues raised by pornography and the final chapter looks at free speech in the context of the Internet. The author concludes that a democratic society needs access to a wide range of views in order to inform choice. A very balanced discussion that would also be useful in educational contexts.

The Last Amateurs

by Mark de Rond

Icon Books Ltd 2008, 239 pp., £8.99, p/b.

Subtitled 'to hell and back with the Cambridge boat race crew', this is a gripping narrative charting the ups and downs of the rigorous preparations over a period of several months leading up to the University boat race, in this case in 2007. The author is a Cambridge fellow who became almost part of the team as he was writing the book. We see the struggles and rivalries, and come to appreciate the extraordinary grit required to undertake a training regime of this kind. There are bitter disappointments for those who don't quite make the boat, then the crushing experience for the losing crew. The book is chronologically reported, and includes e-mails from the coach as well as character sketches of many of the oarsmen. The elusive quality for the crew as a whole is rhythm; if they can find this magical rhythm, then they are almost unbeatable. In the event, Cambridge prevails, having lost the previous three races. And behind each crew are the 650 or so oarsmen who have had this same experience of pushing themselves to the limits. One additional aside: the splendid letter by Charles Wordsworth of Oxford to his Cambridge rival Charles Merivale in preparation for the original race of 1829 is worth the price of the book alone.

Independent

by Richard Berry

Imprint Academic 2009, 154 pp., £8.95.

A detailed analysis of the rise of the non-aligned politician in British politics at local and national levels. Some regard this as heralding the demise of the political party, although it is too early to say if this is the case. There are certainly many people who do not wish to subscribe to the system of belief or common ideology espoused by political parties. However, there is considerable freedom of manoeuvre, and Tony Blair is cited as a leader who consistently endeavoured to distance himself from his own party; arguably David Cameron is now doing the same. So there is perhaps an interesting debate to be had about the relative roles of the individual and the collective. The many local examples certainly bring the thesis to life.

Maurice Bowra - A Lifeby **Leslie Mitchell***Oxford University Press 2009, 185 pp., £25.00, h/b.*

Maurice Bowra was for 32 years the Warden of Wadham College, Oxford and one of the most colourful characters of his time. A life of Bowra is inseparable from Oxford itself and prominent figures such as Sir Isaiah Berlin, who gave the eulogy at his funeral. Bowra's allegiance was to Greek culture and its ideals and he lived through a period where homosexuality gradually became more acceptable. He was a witty and erudite man, as this biography attests, and there are many stories, even legends, surrounding him. His dinner parties at Wadham were carefully orchestrated, and undergraduates learned that 'life could be about what was possible, rather than what was allowed.' The author relates that Christopher Sykes was given a drawing of a nude by Matisse at the end of one party, and Bowra was highly amused to hear that his present had caused a moment of crisis between the young man and his mother. This beautifully written book conveys a vivid portrait of the man and his time.

Organic Places to Stay - UK & Irelandby **Linda Moss***Green Books 2009, 335 pp., £12.95.*

Updated edition of this illustrated 'Bible' of over 700 beautiful places to stay throughout the country. Each entry is illustrated with appropriate description, costs and contact details. Some are hotels or B & Bs and others are camp sites or self-catering cottages that can be rented on a weekly basis. An accompanying map shows the exact locations, which is helpful when some places are so remote. As one would expect, the emphasis is on organic food. Quite a few people grow their own vegetables and most will use local produce rather than imported food. This edition contains almost 200 new entries and includes the first time a selection of organic places to stay in the Republic of Ireland.

Temenos Academy Review 2008by **edited by John Carey***The Temenos Academy, 268 pp., £10.00, p/b.*

As ever, the Temenos Academy Review contains a feast of contributions including articles, poetry and book reviews. Of particular note in this edition is 'The Knowledge of the Heart', by the Prince of Wales, Kathleen Raine on Cecil Collins, India Russell on Friedrich Holderlin, Elemire Zoalla on John Ruskin, Jeremy Naydler on the new crusade against God, and Rowan Williams on the mystical tradition in Anglicanism with reference to George Herbert and Henry Vaughan, some of whose poems are reproduced. As if this were not enough, the star piece for me was Keith Critchlow's lecture on their School of Chartres. The School was established by Fulbert in the last year of the 10th century. Fulbert himself had studied at the Cathedral School in Reims where his teacher was Gerbert, one of the greatest scholars of his age who later became Pope Sylvester II. It is fascinating to discover that Gerbert studied at the great Islamic universities in Seville and Cordoba. The curriculum of the School is fundamentally engaged with the transformation of the soul and the building itself is an expression of the number and geometry at many levels, illustrated in a series of plates. It also embodies the feminine principle at the heart of its theology, which was subsequently lost with Protestantism, reminding us of the ultimate unity underlying human existence.

DEATH AND DYING**Easeful Death**by **Mary Warnock & Elisabeth MacDonald***Oxford University Press 2009, 155 pp., £7.99.*

This book asks if there is a case for assisted dying and, as one might expect from the pen of Mary Warnock, it is a brilliant and comprehensive analysis of the many complex issues involved.

There have been four recent attempts to introduce a Bill in the House of Lords, but each has been set aside, the last one subsequent to a report by a select committee chaired by Lord Mackay of Clashfern. The basic question is whether it is morally justifiable in some circumstances for a doctor or another person to end someone's life or help him to end it. Other countries like Belgium, Switzerland and Holland have also grappled with these issues and have managed to introduce some legislation. The book examines fundamental principles, types of euthanasia, and especially the claim that human life is sacred and that any infringement of this principle invariably leads to a slippery slope. The authors show that the sanctity of human life argument is in fact rarely as absolute as people think, since they almost inevitably move to empirical considerations after stating the claim. Moreover, we tend to seesaw between private and public morality, between compassion and public policy. They argue that changes in legislation will only arise from a changing attitude towards the prolonging of life. From a spiritual perspective, the prolonging of physical life may even be undesirable insofar as it prevents release into a new form of life beyond physical suffering. The book is required reading for legislators, physicians and philosophers, and for anyone wishing to consider the arguments in some detail.

A Social History of Dyingby **Allan Kellehear***Cambridge University Press 2007, 297 pp., p/b.*

A comprehensive text which will be of interest to anyone working in the field of death and dying or who is interested in its history. The book is divided into four parts of three chapters each. The first chapter describes the economic and cultural character of the time in relation to its patterns of health, illness and death. The second chapter considers the dominant style of dying at the time, while the third focuses on the social psychology of dying during the period. Overall, one appreciates how there has been an accumulation of features but equally an emergence of new factors. In modern times, this includes the hospitalisation and even stigmatisation of death, an erosion of support for the dying, which is partly based on denial. Although the author has also written about near death experiences, there is not much hint, as in the latest book by the Fenwicks, of a new narrative and meaning for death. However, he does focus on the human capacity to lend support, which we must maintain at all costs.

The Journey of Robert Monroeby **Ronald Russell (SMN)**, foreword **Charles T. Tart***Hampton Roads Publishing Company Inc 2007, 378 pp., £24.95, h/b.*

A comprehensive biography of one of the pioneers of deep consciousness research. The story begins with his success as a writer and producer of radio shows, then, at the age of 42, he suddenly found himself having spontaneous out of body experiences. Monroe was lucky enough to come across Charles Tart, early in his career, who provided him with background understanding to his experiences and has supported his work ever since. I read and reviewed his three books as they came out, and they convey an extraordinary insights into the invisible worlds, comparable perhaps only to the descriptions of Swedenborg. During his lifetime, Monroe established a successful Institute, which continues his work with a variety of techniques and training seminars. The author has been deeply immersed in these for over 20 years, and is in a unique position to convey the significance of this work. The philosophy is summarised at a number of points during the book and raises fascinating question of the relationship between consciousness and energy. Monroe himself equated consciousness with focused energy and personally experienced the way in which this energy enters the body before birth and leaves it at death. We ourselves are part of the mystery we try to explain, so it is apposite that the most subtle formulation of his findings is conveyed in a poem on page 244. The first two lines are: 'there is no beginning, there is no end, there is only change.' An authoritative introduction to the man and his work.