

# book reviews

Books in this section can be purchased via the Network web site ([www.scimednet.org](http://www.scimednet.org)) from Amazon.co.uk and the Network will receive a 10% commission. In addition, the Network receives a 5% commission on all sales if you log on through our web site!

## science-philosophy of science

### Rediscovering the Mystery?

David Lorimer

#### WHY US?

James Le Fanu (SMN)

Harper Press, 2009, 303 pp.,  
£18.99, h/b –

ISBN 978 0 00 712027 7

Earlier in this issue James Le Fanu introduces the argument of this book, that the Human Genome Project and the Decade of the Brain have shown up the limits of science in penetrating the mysteries of our existence and demonstrating the truth of a materialistic outlook on life based on a random evolutionary process. Some scientific reviewers have criticised the book on the grounds that it does not do full justice to the complexities of the research in question, but Le Fanu addresses the interpretation of this evidence as much as the evidence itself. Written as it is in the year celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Darwin's birth, it questions the commonly accepted picture of the human being that emerged from his work and the debates to which it gave rise.

Le Fanu's answer is that the nature of reality is in fact dual: it is composed of a '*non-material* realm, epitomised by the thoughts and perceptions of the mind, and an objective *material* realm of, for example, chairs and tables.' He sees these as corresponding to philosophic views in the first instance and scientific in the second, arguing that the 'philosophic' view could be said to encompass the scientific, in that objectivity is in fact a phenomenon of intersubjectivity. No science can be done other than by conscious human beings. The triumphs of Darwinism have led us to believe that everything in the universe will ultimately be explicable in terms of its material properties. It is exactly this contention that the author challenges in this book, drawing on

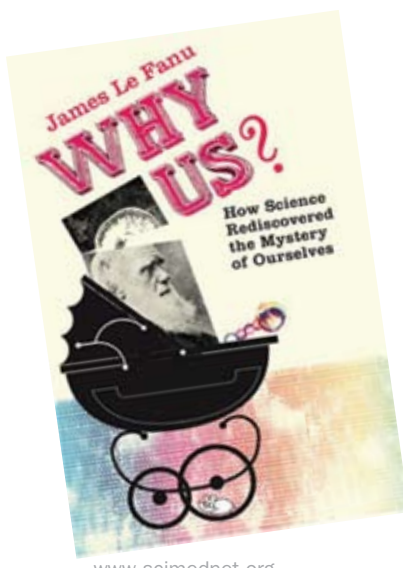
the respective research fields and their histories. Underlying the tension between science and religion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century are competing explanatory schemes: science was anxious to get away from metaphysical religious categories involving purpose and to formulate an entirely naturalistic and mechanistic explanation of human life. In doing so, it has arguably overextended itself, by denying the validity of experiences that call into question its materialistic assumptions – as I argue in my reviews of Charley Tart's and Larry Dossey's books below.

Le Fanu spends some time with technical arguments about whether the mechanism underlying microevolution can validly be extrapolated to explain the phenomena of macroevolution. This is a contentious area where critics of natural selection are accused of being closet creationists, as if this were the only black-and-white alternative. However, it is true to say that 'the ascendancy of science in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century left no space for the reality of that inner first-person self or soul, whose non-materiality both falls outside and poses a challenge to its exclusive materialist claims to knowledge.' Nevertheless, many scientists and philosophers have addressed this difficulty, and among the positions

popular with spiritually inclined neuroscientists is non-reductive physicalism or dual-aspect monism. They do not deny the importance of subjective experience but they insist that it is fully embedded in the physical world. They acknowledge what Le Fanu calls the dual nature of reality, but do not conclude that subjective experience is nonmaterial; in other words, the acknowledgement of duality does not entail an admission of dualism. Thus they seek to salvage subjective experience within the current materialistic framework.

Towards the end of the book, Le Fanu enumerates what he calls the five mysteries: of subjective awareness, free will, the richness and accessibility of memory, human reason and imagination, and the self. The philosopher Colin McGinn suggests that we will never unravel the bond between mind and brain, and that it will remain the ultimate mystery. It is not enough to maintain an absolute commitment to materialism, as the physiologist Colin Blakemore and the biologist Richard Lewontin express it. In Lewontin's words, it is not that the methods and institutions of science compel us to accept the materialist explanation of the world, 'but, on the contrary we are forced by adherence to materialist causes to create an apparatus of investigation that produces materialist explanations. Moreover, that materialism is absolute.' If this is not the statement of a dogma, then what is? It also makes clear that materialism is acting as a 'value' or presupposition that enables scientists to ignore facts that might indeed indicate the reality of a nonmaterial realm.

It is ironic that the motto of the Enlightenment is expressed by Immanuel Kant as *Sapere aude* – dare to know. Le Fanu calls for the reinvigoration of science with a renewed interest in and sympathy for religion, although he points out that this new paradigm does not presuppose a Creator. He does not refer directly to the evidence base



for parapsychological and spiritual experiences, which would have greatly strengthened his case for the realm of mind being nonmaterial, rather than a dual-aspect physicalism. Scientists like Rupert Sheldrake have dared to know, but they are marginalised by their peers who prefer to remain within the safety of received opinions. Not that there are no controversies and disagreements within evolutionary biology and neuroscience, but most of these take place within a materialistic framework and therefore do not endanger the status quo. We will need good evidence to make a case for a paradigm shift. This book gives a good diagnosis of the underlying biases of thinking within biology and neuroscience, but it could go further in proposing a viable reason for 'restoring humanity to its pedestal.'

### The Deep Roots of Mammalian Love and Affection

Martin Lockley

### SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION: A SCIENTIFIC DEFENSE OF FAITH

George E. Vaillant

Broadway Books New York, 2008, \$24.95 h/b -ISBN 978-0-7679-2657-7

Paul Maclean's classic triune brain model shows how, during evolution, the small 'primitive' reptilian brain stem was first surrounded by the intermediate-sized paleo-mammalian 'limbic system' and subsequently enveloped by the large neo-mammalian cortex. Psychoanalyst and research psychiatrist George Vaillant explores these regions of the brain to identify the seat of primitive drives, positive emotions and higher cognitive functions. Vaillant, whose previous books include *A Natural History of Alcoholism* and *Aging Well* has an abiding interest in adult development and regards spiritual maturation as a natural part of the aging process. The first three chapters stress the evolutionary importance of the limbic system in shaping the emotional brain into something like a Neolithic mind. This development is, comparable to the instinctual, affectionate, emotionally-responsive, animistic, magic- and image-laden mind of a four year old before it becomes smothered by

the tyrannical intellect. Developing these themes, Vaillant's next seven chapters stress the 'spiritually important positive emotions' of Faith, Love, Hope, Joy, Forgiveness, Compassion, Awe and Mystical Illumination.

If ontogeny broadly recapitulates phylogeny, it follows that spiritual maturation is part of the evolutionary trajectory. This is the essentially hopeful message reiterated throughout the book. Troubling as war, strife and violence are to human sensibilities, things are getting better. The homicide rate in Europe fell from 40 to 10 per 100,000 from the 13<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and is now down to less than 1 per 100,000, although in Detroit and some Third World regions we are stuck at 18<sup>th</sup> century levels!

Vaillant suggests we can 'work with' the difference between the negative, 'fight or flight' responses of the *sympathetic* autonomic nervous system and the stress-reducing responses of the *parasympathetic* nervous system which lower blood pressure, heart rate and muscle tension by releasing relaxing neurochemicals. Just as both accelerator and brakes help ensure a smooth ride, so we can harness our intrinsic but complementary tensions to better know ourselves and, as Bing Crosby crooned 'accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative.' Although Vaillant does not explicitly adopt this refrain (penned by Johnny Mercer), it serves well as his theme song.

Vaillant reiterates Teilhard's suggestion that 'man is nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself (as noosphere). This theme, familiar to the SMN community, was similarly-stated when Barfield spoke of a conscious stream entering the unconscious stream of evolution. I submit that it is more comforting to think we are conscious than to admit that we are yet to fully awaken and still prone to succumb to ancient mammalian and reptilian impulses. When the small conscious stream enters the mighty river of unconsciousness it is easily overwhelmed by murky waters.

Nevertheless, for those who fear that evolution is a downward *katabolic* spiral, chapter 5 on Love offers considerable hope. We are reminded of Konrad Lorenz's statement that love is 'the most

wonderful product of 10 million years of evolution' and Erich Fromm's conclusion that 'Without love humanity could not exist for a day.' Neuroimaging of individuals in relationships suggests that with time 'all about me' *eros* can evolve into mature, empathetic attachment (*agape*), progressively lighting up advanced, rather than primitive, brain complexes. Even at the level of 'primitive' mammalian evolution deeply positive reserves exist: 'The parasympathetic nervous system is *anabolic*: faith, hope and cuddling build up the body's resources.' Experiments show that the prairie vole benefits from oxytocin - the 'cuddle hormone.' Without it they become a different subspecies: 'heartless, promiscuous, pup-abusing *montane* voles.' But with adequate cuddle hormones, the *prairie* subspecies pops from its burrow singing 'accentuate the positive' - no doubt with a harmonious oxytocin-producing chorus from a happy litter of cute little pups.

On the subject of rodents, and hope, Vaillant notes that rats rescued after swimming to exhaustion will swim further in future than those who have never experienced a rescue. He often refers to such experiments and the role played by neurochemicals and different regions of the brain in producing diverse emotions. He also cites his own experience with anti-anxiety medication, which he later found to have benefited him only through the placebo effect: i.e., hope and faith. In his on chapter Joy he notes that neuroscientists only 'sort of' understand the centres for basic emotions (grief, pleasure, anger fear) and so must acknowledge that 'joy is more complex than a mere pleasure centre' it is 'connection to the universe.' Thus, he takes Freud to task for ignoring joy and cites the novelist Romain Rolland who wrote to Freud to point out that 'joyous, oceanic feeling' not 'cognitive belief in God' was the true source of religious feeling. (Dawkins take note)! Thus, parents should 'be attuned to their children's joy' which, incidentally, like the kitten's purr and the puppy's tail wagging, emerges with the child's smile when the limbic system becomes connected to the forebrain. On Compassion, Vaillant asks would

not want to prevent the grotesque reality of the naked, napalm-scarred Vietnamese child, captured in that iconic photo, and transform terror into security? 'You see, Darwinian evolution intends us all to be Samaritans.'

We enter familiar territory in the final chapters (10 and 11), 'Awe and mystical illumination' and 'The difference between religion and spirituality.' Citing William James we are reminded how the mystical/spiritual experience enriches what Richard Bucke called our moral and intellectual sensibilities: the sense of self transcendence within a larger, universal reality infused with love and intelligence. Ultimately we will benefit spiritually through a parasympathetic resonance with our positive emotions: 'forgiveness imposed by religious duty increases blood pressure, forgiveness mediated by empathy and love does not.' Thus, alcoholics help themselves most by creating a compassionate, spiritual community or 'social cocoon' and defining AA as being as different from a religion 'as spirituality is different from religion.' We mature to love not just friends, family and the green, green grass of home. We also expand our social cocoon to embrace all our human and mammalian, limbic kin and all sentient beings with whom we share deep evolutionary roots and sympathetic and parasympathetic tendrils that bind us to the cosmos as a whole.

*Professor Martin Lockley teaches palaeontology and consciousness studies at the University of Denver.*

### Science and Religion: the Indian Achievement

Ronald Russell

### SCIENCE AND THE INDIAN TRADITION: WHEN EINSTEIN MET TAGORE

David L. Gosling

Routledge 2008, 200 pp., £20 p/b - ISBN 978 0 415 48134 2

Dr David Gosling is Principal of Edwardes College in the University of Peshawar. His may not be the safest job in the world but, as he says, 'as a university college in a troubled part of Pakistan we try to be a sign of hope (in St John's sense) by doing what we are best at as best we can.' In this spirit he has written two remarkable

books: *Religion and Ecology in India and South-East Asia* (2000?), and the present title, now available in the USA, India and the UK.

Gosling was trained as a physicist and lectured in that subject for seven years at St Stephen's College, Delhi. He was ordained in the Church of England and at one time was the Director of Church and Society of the World Council of Churches. This book demonstrates something more, revealing him to be a master of interdisciplinary studies with the ability to find his way through and clarify the varieties and complications of Indian beliefs and traditions and demonstrate their compatibility with the revelations of Western science.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was a remarkable intellectual renaissance in India, intensified by the introduction of the English language into higher education. Gosling outlines the outstanding contributions of Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghose and the Muslim scholars Syed Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Iqbal to both scientific and religious thought, all of whom had no question that the two were not closely interrelated.

Of these influential personalities it was Vivekananda who was best known in the West. A follower of Ramakrishna, he adopted his guru's message that 'each person is potentially divine and should work to release the latent inner power of divinity.' Although he died at the age of 39 his *Complete Works* consist of no fewer than ten volumes. He developed an interpretation of yoga, known as raja yoga, which became widely adopted in the West, and he saw no conflict between science and his understanding of reincarnation. Gosling describes his appearance at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 when he was welcomed with a standing ovation and his declaration 'You are not sinners, you are children of the living God' was greeted with tumultuous applause.

It is Rabindranath Tagore, however, himself a major poet and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, who stands as the most influential Indian philosopher of his time. Tagore suffered much sadness with his wife, three daughters, a son and grandson all dying relatively young, but the strength of his philosophy enabled

him to understand death as the bearer of life, life flowing forward in death's current with no conflict nor opposition between them. Tagore travelled widely in Europe, America and the Far East. Gosling comments that 'Tagore's universal humanism carried forward the best features of Brahmoism – the pervasiveness of rational religion in all our life activities – into a world increasingly fraught by national egotism.' His classic conversation with Einstein on the Nature of Reality is reprinted as an Appendix.

Gosling now moves back in time to devote a chapter to the earlier development of science in India and its encounter with western thought following the introduction of higher education in English. Although Indian science lacked an organised base and a methodology it was in many areas very advanced. Some Indian scientists saw certain Western developments as illustrating a fundamental Indian insight – the unity and interrelatedness of all things. However the introduction into India of Western education, philosophies and technology had a momentous effect on the secularisation of the traditional Indian approach. Universities were established in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, P.C. Roy was universally recognised as one of the leading chemists of his time and C.V Raman was the first Asian to be awarded a Nobel Prize in Physics for his work on light. Raman, like the botanist and physiologist J.C. Bose, strongly believed that the work of the scientists was a religious quest 'whereby we are drawn naturally to search for the wonder that is at the heart of all existence.'



Other eminent scientists of the period include the mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, who collaborated with G.H. Hardy in Cambridge and whose theoretical work Gosling describes as of 'enormous practical value.' Another Nobel laureate was Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar, physicist and astronomer, researcher of white dwarf stars and black holes, who modestly described himself as 'a lonely wanderer in the byways of science.' The physicist Satyendra Nath Bose collaborated with Einstein in the search of a unified field theory and gave his name to the particle known as the boson. Like some other noted researchers he would not accept a degree from a foreign university lest it affected the reputation of his own alma mater.

Gosling comments that with the exception of the astrophysicist Meghnad Saha, who rebelled against his treatment in his youth by caste-conscious Brahmins, these and other great scientists of the past two centuries, 'interpreted their work as the expression of their religious and philosophical beliefs.' While there can be no 'Indian' or 'Hindu' science, as Gosling points out, 'there have been, and continue to be, a significant number of top-rank scientists in all the major fields of science belonging to a variety of religious communities – Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and others – who maintain that their scientific work reflects their religious beliefs. Their contributions as scientists and as religious believers need to be taken more seriously in order to achieve a deeper and more comprehensive understanding between science and religion.'

In recent years research and development in the neurosciences have accelerated to the extent that many believe we are now enjoying 'the decade of the brain'. Explorations into human consciousness appear to bring religion and science into closer partnership than ever before. In recognising this, Gosling comments that while all religions have important things to say about what it means to be human, they need to dialogue more effectively with the scientists whose new discoveries are forcing the pace of change. And within that dialogue representatives of the non-Western world must be invited to play a major role.

*Ronald Russell's biography of Robert Monroe is reviewed in the last issue – see Books in Brief.*

## SECRET LIFE OF THE UNIVERSE

James Lyons

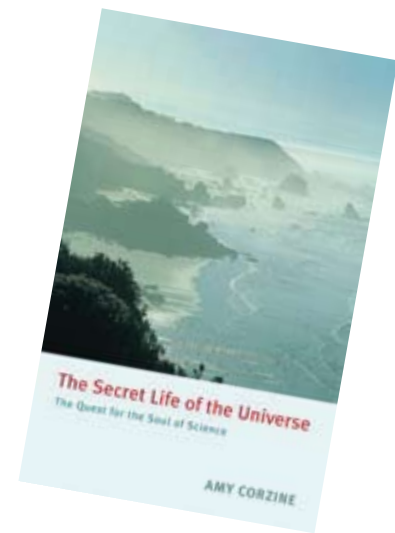
## THE QUEST FOR THE SOUL OF SCIENCE

Amy Corzine

Watkins, 2008, 272 pp., £10.99 p/b  
- ISBN 978 1 905857 65 4

We live in times when the foundations of science are under enormous threat. Yet it was only in the early 1990s that Stephen Hawking declared in essence that a little tidying up of physics should provide us with a solid framework to allow us to continue honing our understanding of nature in general. This is not unique; the same was said at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by no lesser a prestigious figure than Lord Kelvin, among others. The optimism for a 21<sup>st</sup> century Theory of Everything - TOE has been based largely on the theoretical considerations pursued by the advocates of string theory. Like the current rapid collapse of the financial systems, we are seeing a similar, if somewhat slower, demise in the very foundations of physics. String theory is pursuing the incredible scenario of multi-dimensional space, despite not yet having made even one experimentally testable prediction. We await with baited breath to see if the results of the Large Hadron Collider yield what is euphemistically termed 'the God particle'.

Despite all this, there is a rapidly growing band of scientists from numerous disciplines who are somewhat clandestinely pursuing a back to basics approach. The emerging consensus is that science has thrown the baby out with the bath water. The emerging theme is that a real TOE should embody both you and I or at least our thought processes seen as immersed in a universal energy field. This is a definite return to a pre-Cartesian view of the cosmos. Observing how all this is emerging is a major task for those able to communicate these developing ideas. It is in this context that this new perspective needs careful, open minded and above all a clear presentation of the existing evidence needed for a true TOE. The author Amy Corzine is offering us such a perspective in this recent publication. Unlike many writers now tackling these questions, Amy presents a very wide



perspective indeed. This is a real scene setting book. It is certainly not just about physics – it goes much further. The key message is the interconnectedness of everything, mostly at a subtle level. Indeed, there is a chapter dedicated to specifically this question. Reading this provides encouragement that there are indeed many groups and organisations working towards creating a better world for everyone. The key as always is collaboration and not conflict. The bottom line for us all is that, unless we follow this path, there will be no life on earth even to pursue such a topic. Man is intimately tuned to the cosmos and this perspective is highlighted throughout the book. Our health is a recurring theme throughout the book and in particular there is an excellent chapter on how the human body connects to the universe. Needless to say, it strongly decries recent attempts to legislate against well proven techniques such as acupuncture and homeopathy. Support for traditional techniques e.g. yoga and meditation is well presented.

When it comes to technology to avert impending disaster, it is interesting to read the chapter dedicated to this topic. It lays emphasis on our consciousness connection with the material world and how we, as humans, can have a significant influence on the outcome of what we consider physical reality. There is no doubt that technology based on what is termed 'subtle energies' will emerge from the laboratory. Accessing the universal energy field for both domestic and industrial use is nigh. Its recognition also as the source of creation and

evolution, known at least since the flourishing of the Vedic tradition is once again an emerging concept. This will dramatically change the world, hopefully for the better.

The book itself is not for the casual reader. The assembling of such a comprehensive database and careful selection of key points is very much to the credit and dedication of the author. The book really does emerge from the soul as is reflected in the wide ranging linking of all the presented topics. For those seeking an in depth presentation of where mankind currently is in his quest to find a real TOE, then this is an excellent place to start.

*James Lyons is a former aerospace engineer interested in physics and consciousness.*

### Well Tried, But ?

Max Payne

### CREATIVE EVOLUTION

Amit Goswami

Quest Books, 2008, 337pp \$26.95, p/b - ISBN 978 0 8356 9

Those who seek a reconciliation between science and spirituality will warm to this vision which explains the biological evolution of life on this planet as the expression of an immanent spiritual purpose; in this way scientific materialism and naive Creationism are both disposed of with one blow. The key beginning of Goswami's argument is the collapse of the wave equation. Quantum theory dictates that the ultimate particles of matter exist in a state of alternative possibilities until an observation collapses one of the possibilities into physical actuality. This is a problem for any philosophy of materialism since the physical

reality of the material world seems to depend upon an act of observation which is, by definition, conscious. Goswami considers ordinary human consciousness as a nest of already collapsed wave equations, but the act of creative intuition is where the non-local cosmic consciousness is breaking through and bringing into actuality a previously unrealised possibility. Paranormal experience in the form of telepathy, near death experiences, and the evidence for Rupert Sheldrake's morphogenetic fields, all are witness to this non-local consciousness which Goswami equates with God.

Goswami considers this non-local cosmic consciousness to be the driving force which directs biological evolution. In this he acknowledges his debt to Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin. His central argument is that the Darwinian process of natural selection is not adequate to explain the evolutionary progress of life on this planet, the fact of which he in no way disputes. Natural selection does not explain what life and sensation are from within the organism, in the same way as brain chemistry does not explain the mind. One of his central arguments is that Darwinism does not explain key gaps in the fossil record between new families and species. These mutations require a special intervention of creative purpose. This is an unconvincing argument. The random chance of fossilisation, the patchy geological record, and small population of any new and original species, are all sufficient to explain the gaps; and in any case many of the gaps have been filled in during the 150 years since the publication of *The Origin of Species*. Above all the idea is inconsistent with Goswami's original vision. If there is an overshadowing spiritual nusus for the whole process of evolution, there is no need to postulate particular interventions, since there is intervention all the time.

The idea of a non-local consciousness driving evolution may solve the problems of biology, but it creates huge problems for theology. The same force which is leading humanity upwards to an omega point of enlightenment, is also the force which drives the evolution of a parasite which inflicts a lingering and unpleasant death on its host. Whatever this force is, it is not the Christian God. The obscurantist Pope who forbade Teilhard to publish at least had a point.

Goswami takes the evidence of paranormal phenomena for granted, but this really is the central issue. There are two alternative standpoints. The first is that it is wrong to build vast metaphysical cloud castles on the shaky foundations of a few uncertain experiments on alleged telepathy. The second is to say that the evidence of paranormal phenomena is like a few smudged photographs of the transit of Venus in 1919. Just as they brought in the replacement of Newtonian mechanics by Einstein's Relativity, so paranormal phenomena suggest an even greater paradigm shift; that is the recognition of a non-local spiritual consciousness that overshadows all. Those who agree with this will approve of his strategy in the war against materialism, though they may be less happy with his tactics.

### Do Numbers Count?

Max Payne

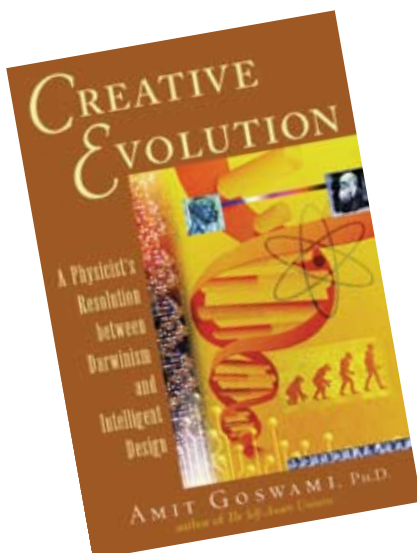
### THE ENIGMA OF NUMBERS

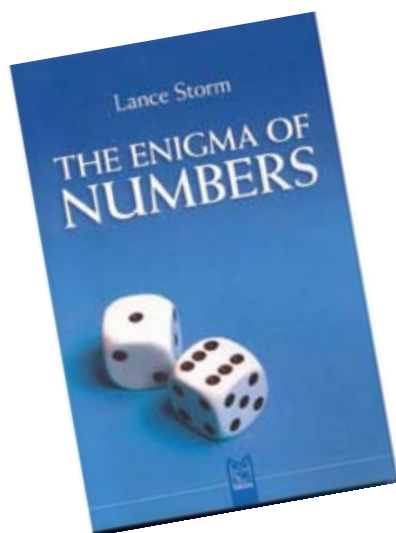
Lance Storm

Imprint Academic, 2007, 553 pp., £17.99, p/b - ISBN 978 88 956040 0 8

This is a very informative, highly readable book which sometimes invites the reader to dismiss its contents as piffle, yet on the next page raises the profoundest questions about the nature of human knowledge. From the days of Pythagoras mankind has been fascinated by the relation between number and the world of experience. The simple numerical relation between the length of a tuned string and the notes of a musical scale suggested a deep harmony between mathematics, beauty and the workings of the universe. Plato held that mathematics could reveal the ideal forms of which this world is only a shadow. Number and geometry are things that at the same time are understood from within the mind, but yet also apply to the outer world of experience and give deeper understanding of it. It would seem to follow therefore that the imaginative exploration of the meaning of number might reveal the inner structure of reality. Music, mathematics and astronomy could perhaps combine to give a profound mystical symbolism.

This book gives a wide ranging account of the numerological ideas that have arisen in various cultures,





Egyptian, Classical Greek, Chinese, and the mediaeval Kabbalah. In this it is quite a useful book of reference, but Lance Storm goes further. He thinks that numerical symbolism does not only relate to ancient myth. The unity of one, the *yin* and *yang* of two, and the Holy Trinity of the number three are not only historical symbols: in a Jungian analysis they relate to archetypal structures in the collective unconscious.

At times the author has allowed his subject to run away with him. The history of the 20th century is interpreted in terms of the rhythm of decades. Under the heading of the 'Forties' it omits the 2nd world war and the founding of Red China. At this point the limit of empathetic credulity is passed, and the reader is inclined to dismiss the whole topic as nonsense. Modern science has shown that nature cannot be understood in terms of simple arithmetical relations. Yet as Lance Storm points out, the deep issue remains. The distances of the planets from the sun are not in a simple ratio as in Bode's law, but mathematics is wider than just arithmetic, and the aesthetic urge for mathematical simplicity still dominates our search for physical understanding. The relation of mind to matter is still a puzzle. Why is it possible for us to understand the world at all? Why is it that the most abstract of mental activities can give the deepest understanding of the nature of physical things? We seek to find a 'theory of everything' in which one formula unites all the fundamental forces of nature, and we believe our aesthetic urge for formal simplicity will reveal the basic structure of things as they are. This seems to assume a basic holistic unity in which mind and matter are two

sides of the same coin. It could be that exploring the imaginative possibilities of mind may help to reveal the inner nature of things after all.

## medicine-health

### Vaccines: Science versus Sense

Peter Mansfield

### AUTISM'S FALSE PROPHETS

Paul A Offit MD

Columbia, 2008, 298 pp., \$24.95, h/b  
- ISBN 978-0-231-14636-4

This book is written by someone acknowledged widely in the USA as expert in the field of vaccination. He rails against a battalion of people he considers to have misled the public and profited from the doubts they sowed. I suppose, if he knew I existed, he would include me.

I find it impossible to address his case line by line. It rests on a blow-by-blow account of the passage through committees and the media of claims and counter-claims for the safety and/or efficacy of various vaccine combinations. These are themselves legion, and it was always improbable that a simple conclusion could be drawn from the tale. There is, rather, a simplistic mood running through: that vaccine critics are fanatical, threatening, unscientific and wrong.

My own position started in 1988 when the MMR combination was introduced. As a GP I took against this development, but needed time to realise why. It was because MMR combines three live vaccines representing acute systemic viral diseases, i.e. they attack the whole body rather quickly. However these viruses have another property, which is mutual intolerance: they can only colonise a particular body one at a time. Forcing not two, but three of them on a child simultaneously created a challenge potentially harder to overcome than what nature might have posed. It created a new situation, analogous with the more extreme forms of genetic manipulation: it broke the basic rules.

Vaccination should, surely, always be a safer and more convenient than accepting the natural risk, or else why do it? Why should we ever risk the health of a child in the name of a health service?

Dr Offit neglects this question. He assumes that infection is always bad,

and believes that vaccination is one of the great pillars of public health practice. I don't entirely disagree, but each vaccine deserves to be appraised in the light of this question.

Very few of our current offerings pass that test with flying colours. Most are against diseases which had been defeated by public hygiene before vaccines came along. Dr Offit's two main contentions fall at the first hurdle.

He does not question that manufacturers no longer wish to make single vaccines against measles, rubella or mumps. The reasons why not are commercial, not health enhancement. Were the option available, more people would accept some or all of them, and the total vaccination rate would be more acceptable to the powers that be. In any case combining these three at age one is seriously ill-conceived: only measles can be justified. Rubella and mumps protection can and should await the onset of puberty, when the diseases begin to be hazardous. Mumps occurs only once but the vaccine needs a boost about every ten years, which now causes a substantial number of students to catch mumps in their late teens. The Department of Health still attributes this to inadequate vaccination in infancy: it's actually because most children formerly had the disease, and life-long protection, before school entry.

His other major topic is the use of mercury compounds to preserve killed vaccines. The practice has now ceased, but he believes the evidence does not demonstrate medium-term harm from multiple injections of small doses of mercury.

But is that the point? Why choose something so dubious, and why persist once the original need (protection of multi-dose vials, now superseded by single dose packs) has fallen away? Chiefly, I suspect, because manufacturers and public health bodies cannot afford to admit it was a mistake.

This book fails to dissuade me that public health authorities in the USA and UK are now shamefully uncritical of what companies wish to market. Our public health policy is dictated by share price. No amount of well-meaning science can bring that to book.

*Dr. Peter Mansfield is the Founder of the Templegarth Trust, which encourages direct action for health.*

## philosophy-religion

### A Book for Our Times

Oliver Robinson

### POSTSECULARISM

Mike King (SMN)

James Clarke, 2009, 324 pp.,  
£25.00, p/b -  
ISBN - 978-0227172476

*Postsecularism: The Hidden Challenge to Extremism* is the sequel to *Secularism; The Hidden Origins of Disbelief*. This second book puts forth the idea that postsecular spirituality is a potential palliative to a world in which extremist views flourish. The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 orientates the reader to key principles underlying postsecularism, and to the origins of secularism as described in the first book. Postsecularism is defined as an engagement with 'questions of the spirit' that employs the critical habits of thought of the secular mind, and therefore can be distinguished from more faith-based presecular religion. Mysticism (the search for religious/spiritual experience), rather than scripture or faith, is put forward as the foundation for the postsecular sensibility, and King proposes Gould's concept of NOMA (non-overlapping magesteria) is a credible basis for science and religion to co-exist in a postsecular world.

Postsecular spirituality is defined as having both a singular core and a pluralistic manifestation; its singular core is the search for, and experience of, 'profound connectedness'. The spiritual pluralities that are all seen as different but valid expressions of this spiritual connection, and are a key focus in this book, are *bhakti* (devotion/worship based) versus *jnani* (insight/wisdom based), and *via positiva* (towards the world) versus *via negativa* (away from the world).

Part 2 deals with the context of two opposing groups that currently dominate popular discourse on the religion question: the *new atheists* and *new defenders of the faith*. King sees these groups as providing a polarised and narrow debate on the issue of religion, out of which any resolution is impossible, and fuelling antagonism and extremism in the process. This part of the book takes a very personal approach - it reviews

22 individual thinkers in turn, twelve from the new atheism camp and ten from the new defenders of faith. The contributions of each person are reviewed briefly, given between two paragraphs (Philip Pullman) and five pages (Christopher Hitchens). This is not the most engaging or succinct way of presenting ideas I have come across, and my attention waned slightly in Part 2, although I appreciated the importance of setting the contemporary scene for the presentation of postsecularism.

Part 3 picks up the pace again, and in 100 pages covers emerging postsecular signs in physics, consciousness studies, transpersonal psychology, the new age, the arts, postmodernism and feminism. The chapter on physics is one of the best in the book, and shows Mike King's talent for translating complex scientific ideas into accessible and lyrical prose. The chapter on the New Age is another strong chapter - King reviews the philosophical and historical origins of the movement, differentiates the 'shallow' from the 'deep' New Age, reviews the theoretical contributions of Ken Wilber and shows how postsecularism can be found in this territory, but differentiated from it. Some of the other chapters in Part 3 feel a bit threadbare - a consequence of surfing over such huge territories in such a short space. The 10 page chapter on transpersonal psychology, for example, provides useful bitesize summaries of Maslow, Grof, Assiglioli, Wilber and Ferrer, but there is little of additional value for the reader who is already aware of this area.

Towards the end of the book, the role of NOMA in King's postsecularism becomes more explicit. He argues that the key error of new atheists, new defenders of faith and new agers is to attempt some kind of systemic *integration* of knowledge and spirituality, to make science, philosophy and religion bound to the same rules or the same methods of enquiry. Such a view is described as 'a monoculture of the mind' (p.236). Instead of this, King's postsecular solution is for science and religion to be accepted as separate magesteria. So what does define the scientific magesterium,

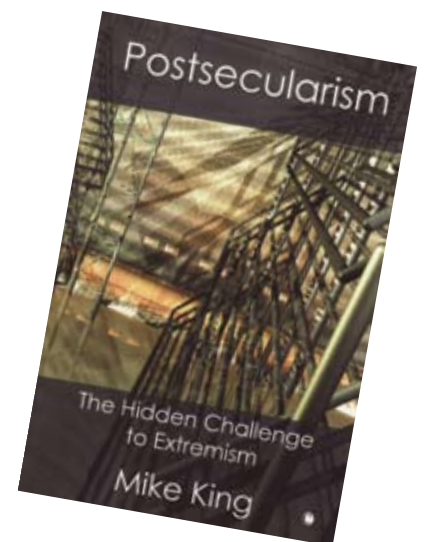
which demarcates it from the spiritual magesterium? In the final chapter King makes his view explicit:

'Galileo set this out: a questioning of the behaviour of lifeless matter in terms of primary qualities, which are mass, length and time. The magisterium of science is defined by this narrow remit, put beautifully and succinctly by Descartes as the domain of 'extended stuff'. But mind, consciousness, love, beauty, and ethics - for starters - do not belong to that domain and not within the remit of science...' (p.237).

This is a definition that of course precludes a science of consciousness or a science of psychology (other than brain science or behaviourism).

*Postsecularism* is an important introduction to a concept that is intimately linked to the SMN's remit and vision (The SMN gets an explicit mention on page 140). The book provides erudite and wide-ranging fuel to counter the antagonistic arguments that stupefy and subvert nuanced discussion on religion. Occasionally, the book feels like a rather bumpy ride on a roller coaster around Dr King's encyclopaedic mind, but overall it is worth the jolts and hairpin bends. Whether or not the reader is in accord with the particular version of the NOMA argument advanced or not, there is much to recommend in the book and much to take away. But has King sacrificed a potential classic, in making it as contemporary and relevant to the zeitgeist as it is? Only time will tell.

**Dr Oliver Robinson** teaches psychology at the University of Greenwich.



## Does Accepting you will Die Make you Happy?

Peter Fenwick

### HUMAN IMMORTALITY: DEATH AND ADJUSTMENT HYPOTHESES ELABORATED

*A methodological analysis of the phenomenon of death from human mind to mortality*

**Mohammad Samir Hossain**

Booksurge Publishings, 2008,  
411 pp., £12.95, p/b –  
ISBN 978 1 4196 8942 0.

This is an interesting book and argues that the great paradox of Freud concerning death has wide and fundamental effects on our psychic life. Freud pointed out that whenever we talk about death, we always talk about someone else's, and never our own. This is because it is difficult for us to contemplate our own death and we naturally turn away from it with a strong impulse of inner fear. Dr. Hossain, an assistant professor of psychiatry in Dhaka, Bangladesh, has set out to investigate this paradox.

Dr. Hossain studied five groups of people (30 in each) who he measured for their religious observation. The most intensely religious were those Muslim preachers who say their prayers regularly. Next non-preachers who regularly say their prayers five times a day. Then those who say their prayers five times a day but not regularly. Next those who say their prayers between one and five times a day. The final group is a catch-all for those who do not pray many times a day and have little or no faith in religion. These groups were given a rather uncomfortable measure derived from DSM4 and listing a large number of symptoms. They were then asked to tick if they had any of these symptoms. Because they are taken from DSM4 they go widely across many of the neurotic categories, and none of the diagnoses featuring psychoses were used. He calls this a 'neurotic symptoms score'. The final scoring instrument was a death rejection score check list constructed by the author, based on the work of Elizabeth Kubler Ross and the stages she gave of death and dying.

What the author showed was that those who believe in an after-life have the lowest neurotic symptoms score and the lowest death rejection score. Or, put the other way round, failure to

believe in an after-life is correlated with a high neurotic symptom score. He argues that belief in an after-life is protective against neurotic illness, and he goes on to analyse this in the book.

His analysis suggests that fear of death is essentially destructive and impacts on many areas of personal function but is mitigated by acceptance of an after-life. His view is not too different from those studies which have already shown that religious practice is protective against mental illness. In 2000 the Templeton Foundation brought out a book by Harold Koenig and co-authors called *The Handbook of Religion and Health*, which points strongly to the fact that people who hold strong religious beliefs and carry out religious practices tend to be healthier and live longer. This also now is in agreement with many of the recent studies on mindfulness meditation and the study of religious groups in close institutions which point to the same conclusions.

An important question remains. Is it the rejection of an after-life and the consequent psychological conflict which ensues that leads to higher rates of mental illness, or is it possibly the associated factors which may go with a religious life such as reduced drug and alcohol consumption, a tighter social group and more community support, which produces the beneficial effects of religious belief and practice? The author is clear in his book that it is the former. Could it be, asks the author, that this is also a major drive towards religious belief.

Unfortunately, the author has been let down by his publishers who should have copy-edited his manuscript much more carefully, as the English is at times not always clear and sometimes leads to ambiguity. But overall this is an interesting book because it has grasped Freud's paradox firmly and shown that it may not only have implications for a Western culture, but be a universal human fear.

**Dr. Peter Fenwick**  
*is President of the Network.*

### Realising the Self

David Lorimer

### THE WISDOM OF PATANJALI'S YOGA SUTRAS

**Ravi Ravindra (SMN)**

Morning Light Press, 2009,  
221 pp., \$14.95, h/b –  
ISBN 978 1 59675 024 8

This new edition of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras will surely become a classic, and establishes Ravi Ravindra as a translator and editor of the stature of Radhakrishnan, a number of whose editions I have on my shelves. The book contains an introduction, translation with commentary, a sequential translation without any intervening commentary, suggestions for practical exploration and an excellent glossary of technical terms. It draws widely on other spiritual sources, especially those closest to Ravi: Krishnamurti and Madame Jeanne de Salzmann, Gurdjieff's successor about whom Ravi wrote the book *Heart without Measure*.

He begins by putting the text within the central concern of all spiritual seekers: 'how can our whole being be in harmony with universal truth?' and how can we become a suitable instrument for the Truth to be expressed? Within the Indian tradition, this search is based on the assertion that Brahman is Atman, the 'wholly other is intimately myself'; the self needs to fuse with the self. The real is not to be identified with the sensory world and the body, but rather with a more subtle level of expression. In order to perceive this, a disciplined attention is required that overcomes the natural distraction of the mind and the inertia of the body.

As Ravi points out, 'the real obstacle on any spiritual path is the passivity of attention, in our own lives and towards our lives.' We need active attention in order to take responsibility for our lives and wake up from the mechanical nature of everyday life. Then we realise that we are not what we might be and that there is a gap between what we know and what we are. Madame de Salzmann explains that human beings are energetic links between two levels of reality, and that our work in the physical body is to be a means whereby the energy of life evolves, so that it can advance to a higher level at death. She speaks about deep passivity and the need to struggle against it, making the body are available in service to a higher energy. This is the real meaning of work.

At a metaphysical level, as Hermann Hesse also observed, we are a meeting point between Prakriti – nature and matter – and Purusha, the transcendent person. The former principle is the externalising force



of creation and manifestation; while the counterforce, *nivritti*, seeks the centre, the source of life. This mirrors the relationship between the seen and the seer, between time and eternity, form and essence. Yoga reverses the outward flow of nature with the inward orientation of attention, moving from dispersion and distraction towards concentration and focus. Thus Ravi is able to state that everything in Prakriti ultimately wishes to serve the purposes of Purusha. This entails preparing the body mind 'so that a window of consciousness can be opened.' And then the human being wakes up, sees through the illusion and beyond the mind with a form of intelligence that goes beyond thought.

The development of wisdom is always accompanied by a corresponding awakening of compassion: 'Enlightenment has no meaning unless it is accompanied by compassion.' Likewise, the development of consciousness implies a matching development of conscience. A sublime expression of this truth is quoted from Vivekananda: 'All expansion is life, all contraction is death. All love is expansion, all selfishness is contraction. Love is therefore the only law of life. He who loves lives, he who is selfish is dying. Therefore, love for love's sake, because it is the only law of life, just as you breathe to live. This is the secret of selfless love, selfless action, and the rest.' This is a book for contemplative reading, for savouring a few pages at a time, since it deals with the most profound aspects of human consciousness inherent in the human condition in every generation.

### Is this the Holy Grail?

Max Payne

### SCIENCE & RELIGION AT THE CROSSROADS

Frank Parkinson (SMN)

Imprint Academic, 2009, 162 pp., £8.95, p/b - ISBN 978 1 845 401 511

For many members of the SMN the holy grail of philosophy is some vision of the unity of science and spirituality. In this book Frank Parkinson aims to provide it. The crossroads in the book's title refers to his belief that both science and religion are at the end of their current paradigms and facing disjunctions which perfectly exemplify the thesis of Thomas Kuhn

that paradigm change is traumatic. Readers are likely to differ widely about Parkinson's thesis that after the change is made, science and religion will become not just harmonious but symbiotic.

The vital beginning for both theology and science is self-awareness. Theologians should become aware of the historical evolution of doctrines they thought eternal. In that way they may be released from rigid dogmatism. Scientists should become self-aware of the creative process of scientific discovery, and that way become sceptical of the equally rigid dogmas of materialism. Both can then begin an open inquiry into spirituality. The direction of the inquiry may be given by religion, but the methods have to be the open self-critical ways of science.

It is easiest for theologians to begin with other religions than their own. Christians do not find it difficult to discern elements in Islam which come less from a revelation from God, and more from the cultural limitations of mediaeval Arabia. They can be a little disdainful about the way in which the agnostic scepticism of primitive Buddhism transmuted into the exuberantly complex metaphysics of the Mahayana. Then, if they have the nerve for it, they can read John Hick's *The Myth of God Incarnate*. After reading that, it is difficult for anyone to recite the Creed on a Sunday in church with a straight face and honest belief. And yet, despite the words that are no longer valid, the worshipper yet knows that collective worship in a community of faith is somehow profoundly valuable. Self-awareness leads religion to towards spirituality.

Can an equally honest scientist be led to acknowledge the spiritual dimensions of reality by questioning the foundations of science in the same way? Frank Parkinson has no difficulty in showing that Richard Dawkins' militant atheism is unscientific, but can self questioning lead science any further? He suggests that a key issue is the Big Bang. According to current cosmology our universe emerged in a vast explosion from an infinitely tiny particle of energy. At this point all quantum theory and all science stops. Was it due to a wobble in a cosmic zero quantum state? Was it just one of many splurts from a multidimensional multiverse? We do not know. Since mind cannot

be reduced to matter, and as all consciousness as well as all matter was contained within the primal particle, it is argued that the initial impulse behind the Big Bang has to be a conscious purpose. Frank Parkinson is chary of using the word 'God'. The central issue here is whether mind really is the irreducible surd which cannot be reduced to material energy. This is the key issue, and the honest scientist may choose to stop at this point.

Dark matter and dark energy show that we do not know the full range of the properties of matter. The need for an open quest into spirituality suggests that we do not know the full range of the properties of mind either. In what way can this be carried forward? After extreme austerity and the achievement of exceptional sanctity saints, mystics and yogis have had experiences of the transcendent. However this is an uncertain way for an elite few. To make the inquiry more open to more people the idea of using mind altering chemicals is toyed with, but the obvious dangers are admitted. Another route is that inquiry into the spiritual dimensions of reality should not depend upon the dramatic insights of the few, but rather on the gradual advance of the many. Insight into spirituality is something that may be gradually achieved by communities of people living in harmony with each other and the environment, and striving after enlightenment while undertaking works of unselfish compassion. The first stage in the open inquiry into spirituality is the achievement of wisdom. The beatific vision comes later.



Does this book provide the holy grail of the unity of science and religion in an encompassing spiritual vision? The answer has to be 'no', but it is pointing in the right direction.

### What Really Happened on the Road to Damascus?

Gunnel Minett

### THE JESUS MYSTERY: ASTONISHING CLUES TO THE TRUE IDENTITIES OF JESUS AND PAUL

Lena Einhorn

Robert Hale, 2007  
www.halebooks.com,  
279 pp., £16.99, h/b -  
ISBN 978 0 7090 8397 0

In this book the Swedish author and film-maker Lena Einhorn presents a new and quite different hypothesis about the origin of Christianity. By examining contemporary texts, as well as what is written about Jesus in the Bible, she arrives at a very different conclusion than the official Christian version.

Einhorn starts by asking the perhaps most important question - if Jesus really did exist. Was he a real person or simply a mythological fiction? Her conclusion is that Jesus really did exist. There is sufficient evidence in contemporary historical texts, she argues, to say with certainty that Jesus was indeed a historic figure.

Having established that he actually lived seems to be the easy part, however. The accounts in the various gospels vary so much in places that they absolutely contradict each other. This leaves much room for speculation, in particular as regards the perhaps most essential part of Christianity, the crucifixion. This is also the starting point for the Einhorn's own hypothesis.

By comparing the different accounts of what really took place during the crucifixion, Einhorn speculates that Jesus' life may not actually have ended the way Christians are taught. Rather than dying and being resurrected Jesus may actually have been saved to re-appear in public years later in the shape of Paul.

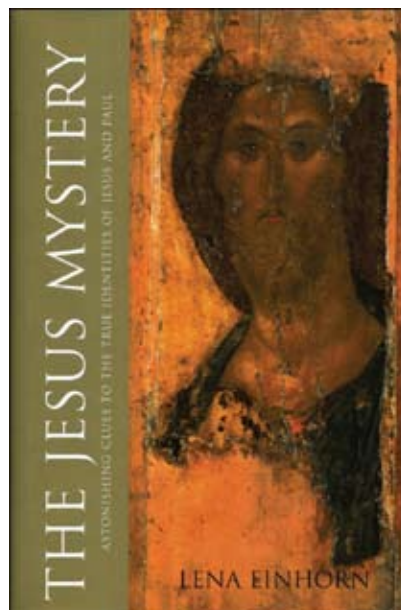
An interesting observation here is that although Einhorn draws on the same texts as another recent book on the same topic, Barry Wilson's *How Jesus Became Christian*, their conclusions are very different.

Although both books present equally compelling arguments, Wilson's conclusion is that Jesus and Paul were completely different and did not preach the same message at all. Wilson argues that Jesus' message was for Jews to follow the Torah in order to bring about the prophecy of God's kingdom on earth. Paul on the other hand, preached only about his personal inner (holotropic?) experience that he referred to as meeting Christ. Wilson's suggestion is that the marriage of the two stories was made much later in order to form a solid basis for Christianity.

Although both books are equally convincing in their conclusions, it is obvious that they both can't be right, which brings the question of the role of contemporary Christianity into focus yet again. With so many problems caused by disagreements between religions around the world, this is yet another example of how the time for a complete review of the world religions is well overdue. Rather than relying on historical events that, most likely, will never be established with absolute certainty, it may be time to start looking for the similarities rather than differences. To extract the essence of all religions (which for the most part is the same) and focus on what we all have in common as one humankind.

*The Jesus Mystery* is well written and reads very much as a fact-based version of the kind of historic mystery books that the DaVinci code has come to represent.

*Gunnel Minett is author of Breath and Spirit.*



## psychology-consciousness studies

### The Reinvention of Religion

Chris Clarke

### THE PARTICIPATORY TURN: SPIRITUALITY, MYSTICISM, RELIGIOUS STUDIES

edited by Jorge N Ferrer (SMN) and Jacob H Sherman

State University of New York Press, 2008, 395 pp., h/b - (Approx £56.25) ISBN 978-0-7914-7601-7 (NB now also out in paperback)

In 1991 Richard Tarnas ended his *The Passion of the Western Mind* with an essentially hopeful assessment of the point that humanity had reached after an extraordinary wandering during three millennia of culture. In the Epilogue, he recalled how the three successive revolutions of Copernicus, Descartes and Kant had left us with the knowledge that 'there are no perspective-independent facts' and that 'the world beyond the mind ... cannot even be justifiably postulated.' Subsequent thought stemming from Schelling and Hegel had, however, brought to this dilemma the realisation that 'the relation of the human mind to the world was ultimately not dualistic but participatory.' This was truly liberating: it meant that 'from within its own depths the [human] imagination directly contacts the creative process within nature, realises that process within itself, and brings nature's reality to conscious expression.' This participatory baton carried by Tarnas was then taken up in 2002 by Jorge Ferrer (*Revisiting Transpersonal Theory*) from the standpoint of the study of religion. Now in *The Participatory Turn* he is joined by 10 other authors to present a powerfully convincing picture of what may be the most significant philosophical turn since Kant.

Ferrer's work stands amongst modern reactions to the scandal of religious diversity. How can it be that the major religions claim access to absolute truth, and yet appear to teach contradictory accounts of what this truth is? Indeed, how is it that respected teachers such as the Dalai Lama and Thomas Merton

can be deeply versed in interfaith studies and still advocate their own distinct path? The standard answer in the past has been that the religions are many paths ascending the same mountain; that as each path progresses towards increasingly general concepts, so these concepts converge into a single apprehension of reality. Ferrer, however, has summarised with great care and academic rigour the shift towards the position that this is not the case. Rather, the paths remain essentially different. He quotes the Dalai Lama's view that even within Buddhism the ultimate goals of different spiritual schools are essentially different. Unity does exist, but it is achieved only after the path has ended and all concepts and linguistic expressions have been deconstructed and one is left not with 'reality' as it has been classically understood in the West, but mystery. Rather than 'many paths up one mountain', Ferrer advocates the metaphor of 'many rivers leading to one ocean', an ocean that represents not 'things as they really are' but rather 'the overcoming of narrow self-centredness and thus a liberation from corresponding limiting perspectives'.

From this viewpoint religious diversity is not a scandal that invalidates religion, but it becomes the essential clue to the world. Following this clue, Ferrer proposes that diversity is a necessity, because existence is not pre-given, but is always a creation in which we participate, in diverse ways. More precisely, Ferrer and his co-editor Jacob Sherman argue for

'an *enactive* understanding of the sacred, seeking to approach religions phenomena, experiences and insights as cocreated events.' In other words, they 'suggest that religious and spiritual phenomena are "participatory" in the sense that they can emerge from the interaction of all human attributes and a nondetermined spiritual power or creative dynamism of life.'

Presented baldly, as I have just done, without the context that the editors carefully develop, this formulation is hard to grasp; so I will enlarge on some of their concepts. 'Enactive' is a term drawn from the influential work of the biologist Francisco Varela on the evolutionary of organisms. The word describes the way in which an organism, when sufficiently complex, can manifest a

genuine agency, initiating a particular response to a particular selection of external stimuli. The organism thereby breaks open the chains of cause and effect with a novel causation, and at the same time asserts its own particular sensitivity to the selected stimuli, thus creating a primitive form of 'meaning' within the relationship between the organism and its environment. In the human case, the word 'enactive' emphasises the active nature of what is being done, in contrast to the passive sense usually carried by 'experience'. Varela's emphasis on action is also echoed in Ferrer and Sherman's phrase 'all human attributes' in the quotation above: we are not just speaking here about a mental experience, but it could be any combination of attributes such as intuitive, emotional, bodily and so on.

The use of the words 'cocreated' and 'nondetermined spiritual power' are an attempt to express the idea that this action extends outside oneself, but without presuming in advance anything about what exists outside oneself. The action is not a purely internal imagination, but neither is it an interaction with any external entity to which one could ascribe in advance any existence or any nature. The act of participation itself defines and specifies what it is that is other than the self. 'Participation' introduces a category that goes beyond the older philosophical concepts of thing-in-itself and reality. It describes an action of the whole person that transcends the duality between self and other.

It becomes clear as the book unfolds that, though the editor's definition of the participatory turn is phrased in terms of 'religious experience', its implications extend to a domain much wider than that which is traditionally implied by these words. This particular sense of participation engages with science and complexity theory through the idea of enaction. The stress on multiple human attributes reflects a celebration of multiplicity that links with feminist spirituality as well as body-based and indigenous spirituality. The approach not only challenges previous philosophical concepts but reconstructs them. And it reunites the internal (contemplative) and external (active) spiritual paths. Clearly many books would be required to do justice to

all this, yet this volume does an excellent job of at least touching on all these, and exploring quite a few in detail. I can mention only part of this below.

Jacob Sherman, the co-editor has a chapter in his own right surveying the history of the multifaceted term 'participation' from Plato to the present day, which helps a lot in fleshing out the idea. Aquinas plays a pivotal role in this history by exploring the dynamic act-of-being (*esse*) as distinct from 'being' as 'what something is' (*essentia*), a distinction that he obtained from Avicenna and Al-Farabi. According to Aquinas, everything has being (*esse*) through participation in absolute being, which is of course identified by him with God. Sherman stresses that this participation is dynamic, and not a merely a logical matter: as Aquinas puts it, 'the act of being is the most intimate reality in any being, and that which is most profound in all things.' Since being comes from participation, and participation is a movement out from oneself, 'to be created is to be fundamentally ecstatic'. Participation flows through the chain of being (as Dionysius had described earlier) so that 'beings are dyadically constituted as an inseparable polarity of substantial existence *in themselves and for others.*' Participation thus builds a universe that is fundamentally relational.

At this point in the history, however, participation is unidirectional, with 'being' descending from God as the sole creator. Meister Eckhart takes this one step further in recognising that human artistic activity is in itself creative, and that by participating in God the human and God 'work one work'. On this conception we give being as well as receiving being in a two-way participation. Sherman then traces this line of thought to Schelling and thence to modernity. (This theme of humanity participating *with* God in the evolution of creation is fascinatingly taken up in detail by Les Lancaster in a chapter on Kabala.)

Although the image of the ocean with many rivers emphasises plurality, it is definitely not the case that anything goes. Ferrer insists that there are genuine ethical distinctions to be made in terms of 'a variety of markers and practical fruits.' There is a whole area here of relating

ethics to the concept of participation which is only sketched at this stage, principally through the chapter by Beverly Lanzetta on feminine theosis (deification) in the writings and life of St Teresa of Avila, and by Donald Rothberg in a chapter on relating inner and outer transformation in Buddhism. Ethics also arise implicitly from the notion of participation in Ibn al-'Arabi's teaching, paraphrased here by William Chittick in the saying: 'the divine face turned towards each thing is identical with the thing's face turned towards God' (reminding us of Eckhart's 'The eye with which I see God is the same with which God sees me'). This suggests that in a participatory, relational cosmos the only alternatives may be either to love others as ourselves or to hate others as ourselves.

The scholarly approach here may not be to everyone's taste, but I found it riveting reading which added substantially to my understanding of the world. I thoroughly recommend it.

*Chris Clarke was Professor of Applied Mathematics at the University of Southampton and currently works freelance on Science and Spirituality*

## Bringing Science and Spirit Together

David Lorimer

### THE END OF MATERIALISM

Charles T. Tart

Noetic Books, 2009, 397 pp., \$29.95, h/b – ISBN 978 1 57224645 4

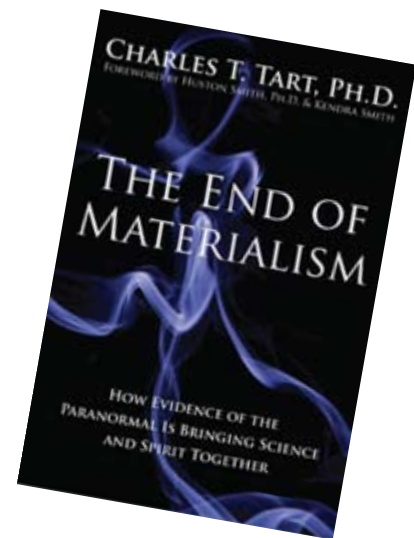
Charley Tart will be known to many readers and some may even remember his superb talk at the first Beyond the Brain conference in Cambridge where he introduced the notion of 'endarkenment'. Here he brings together in a masterpiece 50 years of research and thinking at the parapsychological interface between science and spirituality to provide his own evidence-based synthesis of science and spirit. I remember him saying at an earlier Mystics and Scientists conference that the conflict between science and religion was one between second-rate scientists and second-rate theologians.

The title is an ambitious one, but the book fulfils it in its own terms. We are all familiar with the resistance of scientific materialists to both spiritual experience and parapsychological experiments. Strictly speaking this is not science

so much as scientism, an ideological position which not only takes materialism for granted but resolutely refuses to countenance any evidence against it. Huston Smith, who contributes the foreword, has written extensively about scientism, but one scientist astutely observed to him that there was only one problem with his analysis: that many scientists did not make the distinction and were not aware of it. This reinforces the argument for philosophy of science to be a standard component of scientific training and goes to the heart of why the Network was founded with the conviction that the philosophical assumptions of science need not necessarily be materialistic. We hear much about evidence-based medicine, but the challenge here is to persuade scientists to look at the evidence base for parapsychology and spirituality.

Part of the framework from the book is provided by the well-known mystical experience of Richard M. Bucke. What is one to make of it? Does it tell us something essential about the nature of consciousness and the universe? Or is it simply the result of disordered brain functioning? Charley has made it his business to seek the spiritual as a scientist, distinguishing here spirituality from institutional religion, which he himself also rejects. Again, this is a distinction not generally made by atheist intellectuals. Charley proposes an original approach in terms of what he calls the Western Creed, a formulation of the materialist worldview, which he invites readers to recite while taking note of their feelings. He then sketches out his models for a materialistic and spiritual understanding of life and consciousness, adding a sophisticated discussion of ways of knowing and 'ways of not knowing', leading to distortions of science and intelligence. He has a section distinguishing between scepticism and pseudoscepticism, reserving the latter term for those who argue that parapsychological results must be wrong because they are scientifically impossible. In other words they contradict the pseudosceptic's basic assumptions about the nature of reality.

Charley introduces what he calls the 'big five' – telepathy, clairvoyance or remote viewing, precognition, psychokinesis and psychic healing – with an experience of his own in which he found himself saying the



phrase 'coup d'etat' to himself, only to find waiting for him in his office the next day a letter from Mrs Coudetat about her son, who was one of his students. In writing this up, Charley discusses issues of analytical and theoretical overlay in interpreting such cases. Sceptics would just dismiss this as coincidence, so cases of this kind provide an interesting litmus test of one's underlying attitude. The major chapters that follow report on his own research and that of other leading parapsychologists like Dean Radin, arguing that these phenomena are genuinely nonphysical and cannot therefore be accounted for within a materialistic framework. All the more so, when it comes to other experiences outside the 'big five' such as postcognition, out of body experiences, near death experiences, post-mortem survival and after death communications, mediumship and reincarnation. As I remarked in my review of the Fenwick's book *The Art of Dying* last summer, one cannot even begin to make sense of such experiences within the materialistic framework of scientism which simply attempts to dismiss or explain away the evidence rather than trying to understand it. It is superficial and disingenuous to write the whole field off in terms of hallucinations or psychopathology; indeed, William James said as much 100 years ago.

Charley provides a helpful summary at the end of chapter 13, highlighting some of the key points pointing to a wider model of human nature, a version of which is essential if one is to make sense of these experiments and experiences. A particularly striking case concerns the post-mortem return of the wife

of a sceptical psychology professor, Joseph Waldron, which contains all the hallmarks of an unexpected but genuine communication. This and other cases can be viewed on Charley's website, The Archives of Scientists' Transcendent Experiences, [www.issc-taste.org](http://www.issc-taste.org) - and short of describing Waldron as deluded on this particular occasion, a possibility which he himself discusses, it is hard to dismiss out of hand. The chapter on the mediumship provides a fascinating account of the 1930 R-101 airship disaster, where Eileen Garrett received accurate technical - and classified - information, ostensibly from the deceased captain H.C Irwin.

Chapter 18 reviews the empirical findings of the book and asks what kind of picture of human beings emerges. It is one indicating that we are 'more than just our physical bodies, that we can sometimes communicate mind to mind, sometimes clairvoyantly know the state of the physical world' and have other capacities for precognition, psychokinesis and psychic healing. Traditional spiritual worldviews tell us that physical life is part of a larger reality, and that we have an essence or soul which is the core of our real self. It seems that we have 'non-physical aspects of mind embedded in and interacting with the characteristics of the body, brain and nervous system.' Hence Charley's observation that he won't be surprised if he regains consciousness in some form after he dies, but he expects that his sense of 'I' will have changed.

All this brings him full circle back to the Western Creed exercise: are we human beings a meaningless accident in a meaningless cosmos, a meat-based computer that will soon die? Or are we spiritual creatures with greater capacities alongside our biological and physical existence? Charley provides his 'best bets' on the basis of his previous analysis, which open-minded readers will find eminently reasonable. The final chapter returns to Richard Bucke, whose experience is compared with the more modern account by Allan Smith, which resembles it in a striking manner. He records that our deepest questions are fully answered in a state of cosmic consciousness that they cannot be resolved in terms of everyday language. There is a strong indication, however, that

Bucke's experience really does tell us something essential about the nature of life and consciousness. In this case, scientific materialism suffers from a limited view of reality and needs to remove its blinkers. It is no exaggeration to say that this book, along with others, actually overturns the dominant scientific paradigm. However, because so few leading scientists have considered this kind of evidence, the paradigm apparently remains intact. The fortress of scientism still stands, so we need to find new ways of engaging scientists with this evidence base. Books like this and *Irreducible Mind*, reviewed in the last issue, form part of the necessary wider picture.

### The Greatest Superstition

David Lorimer

### THE POWER OF PREMONITIONS

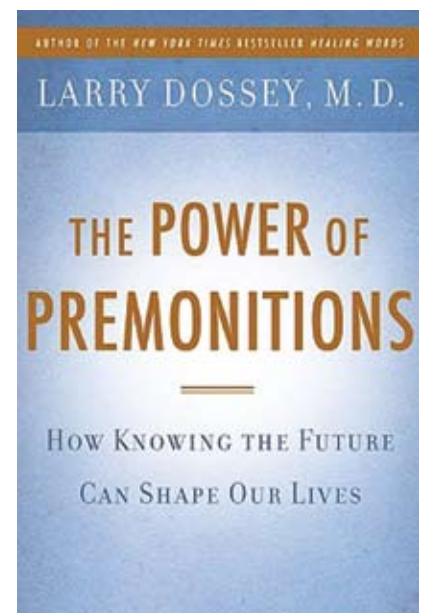
Larry Dossey, M.D. (SMN)

Dutton, 2009, 288 pp., \$25.95, h/b  
- ISBN 978 0 525 95116 2

Larry Dossey is the author of a series of groundbreaking books written in the last three decades - I first read his *Space, Time and Medicine* as far back as 1982. He has always pushed the boundaries while adopting a scientific approach and making the case that we should extend our understanding of reality beyond the physical world. This book is no exception, containing as it does 60 pages of notes and references. The greatest superstition, referred to in the title of this review, is that the brain generates consciousness or is identical with it. Like Charley Tart and many others, Larry takes the view that consciousness or mind is in fact non-local, and that the evidence for this view is robust and must be reckoned with. However, up until now, an insufficient number of scientists have mustered the courage to take a thorough look at the kind of evidence presented in this book. Furthermore, the kind of experiments they conduct and the research questions they ask fall almost exclusively inside the materialistic framework, which therefore goes unquestioned. In addition, scientists are no less zealous than their mediaeval counterparts in seeking out heresy, and few researchers relish the prospect of being burned at the metaphorical stake.

As with other books of this kind, there is evidence both from life and from the laboratory. The book begins with a striking and well-known account of a mother waking up in the middle of the night at 2:30 AM with a dream that the chandelier hanging above their baby's bed in the next room had fallen into the crib and crushed the infant. In the dream, the clock on the baby's dresser and read 4:35 AM. In spite of of her husband's scorn, she went next door and brought the child back into their bed. They were then woken by a loud crash as the chandelier fell into the crib at 4:35 AM. This case raises all the pertinent questions about the nature of premonitions: are some events predetermined, or are we occasionally able to avert disaster as in this case? What about cases in which disasters are not averted? What is the nature of human consciousness? How should we understand time? Do we really have free will? One can see that from an evolutionary point of view such premonitions might be life-saving, as in this instance; and it is clear that many precognitions or premonitions are warnings of death or disaster, as with the larger scale events of Aberfan or 9/11, both of which feature in this book.

Larry's personal experiences, dating back to his first year in medical practice, sparked his interest. He dreamed a sequence of events involving the four-year-old son of one of his colleagues, which he saw actually happen the following day. One suspects that these kinds of experiences are far more common



than is generally admitted, as Jeff Levin discovered in his research on spirituality and health. He gave a talk on his work to his medical colleagues, at the end of which he reminded them that almost all had unburdened themselves of a private paranormal experience in his office. In other words, 'the people sitting either side of you have had such experiences that are unwilling to talk about them in public.' Their concern about their public persona was so great, even in these circumstances, that they could not drop their pretences and be honest with each other. The social conditioning of scientists and doctors is so strong that it overwhelms their capacity to be honest and open about experiences that do not fit neatly into their training. Larry quotes Upton Sinclair and his book *Mental Radio*, with which he engaged Einstein. Einstein took Sinclair's work on telepathy very seriously, remarking in another context that physicists have no right to rule out a priori the possibility of telepathy, adding that 'the foundations of our science are too uncertain and incomplete.'

One interesting reason for resistance to premonitions is the evidence that people unconsciously repress premonitions of a looming disaster; almost by definition, it is only with hindsight that they can be validated, as was the case with Abraham Lincoln's famous premonition of his death. Larry speculates that this resistance may account for why many passengers on the Titanic disregarded premonitions of doom. A number of cases cited here will convince any open-minded reader that valid premonitions do occur, including the remarkable dream on June 28, 1914 by Bishop Lanyi (p. 159) in which he had opened a letter from the Archduke (he had once been his tutor) in which there was a picture with some accompanying text as follows: 'I herewith inform you that today, my wife and I will fall victims to an assassination.' The bishop was careful to write all this down immediately and before the event had occurred or been made public. Larry comments that there is a spectrum of accuracy in premonitions, of which this is a striking example, but even here the bishop had seen two assassins rather than one as actually occurred. Nevertheless, he is right to point out that 'when premonitions are

rejected as anomalies and outliers, we misconstrue the nature of our own consciousness. The result is a mangled, cheapened, narrowed concept of who we are – which, at our species' precarious state of existence, we can ill afford.'

After an interesting discussion on why and how we might wish to cultivate premonitions, Larry directly addresses the issue of premonitions and our worldview. He cuts to the chase by stating that 'we can work our way toward the possibility of premonitions by readjusting our vision of time through new models of physics; by giving up the illusion of a flowing, one way time through meditative approaches; by rethinking the nature of consciousness, or by some combination of these alternatives.' This is pretty radical, but necessary, and readers will have their own approaches and draw their own conclusions. We can't say that premonitions contradict the laws of nature, but only that they contradict our assumptions about reality. Larry's own conclusion is that consciousness is not a thing or substance, about a nonlocal phenomenon, by which he means infinite: nonlocal events are immediate, unmediated, unmitigated, omnipresent and eternal. This may sound like a stretch, but Larry contends that this is the image of consciousness required in order to accommodate the evidence for premonitions. One could add that much of the evidence from other fields discussed in Charley Tart's book requires a similar model. Personally, I don't believe that we have to jettison free will, but rather that we live in a universe of multiple possibilities in which we play our own creative part. This eye-opening book will help you work through some of these seminal issues.

## A Transcendental Philosophy

Peter Fenwick

## ZEN BRAIN REFLECTIONS: REVIEWING RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN MEDITATION AND STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

James H. Austin

MIT Press, 2006, 586 pp., \$42.95, p/b – ISBN 0-262-01223-5

It was with great pleasure that I unpacked my copy of *Zen Brain Reflections*. This is Jim Austin's second book, following *Zen and the Brain* and looks comprehensively at the latest research into meditative states and altered states of consciousness. Jim is the ideal person to write this book as he combines a perceptive and enquiring mind with an interest in altered states of consciousness that led him to find his own Zen teacher and spend a considerable time in the Zendo of a temple in Kyoto. He is a knowledgeable academic who has sat at the feet of many of the great neurology teachers who were practising in England and America after the second world war, and importantly, he also has the artistic capability of the true creative genius.

I have always maintained that a scientific understanding of consciousness can only be achieved through an understanding of the wider states of human experience, especially by those people who have studied with precision and care their own inner states of mind and the way that these can develop into wide expansions of consciousness.

As Jim says in his introduction, this is the second book in a quest for the inconceivable, and he introduces it with the quotation from Andre Gide 'One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time.' The first part of the book is devoted to Zen and the brain, bringing us up to date with current neurophysiological research, brain imaging, and the mechanisms which underpin alterations in consciousness. It is a mine of well presented data, comprehensive in its range, which allows both the initiated and the uninitiated to gain an understanding of where our current neuroscience is with respect to the correlates of altered states of consciousness. If you have no knowledge of neuroscience this half of the book is not for you. You will soon be lost in a maze of alpha-2 receptors, norepinephrine dopamine, PET and MRI scans, and some wonderful accounts of cerebral rhythms, for which you need to understand the scientific rather than the popular concepts of alpha, gamma and delta rhythms. But for the neuroscientist, this is a treasure trove of current literature that is easy to read, never claims to be all encompassing, but does show how far we have got in our understanding of

the mechanisms of consciousness.

This section also explains some of the main features of Zen. For example, why pay attention to the tanden (the lower part of the abdomen where the Zen initiate focuses his breath while doing Zen counting)? What is a koan and how does it work? He gives a number of characteristics and I fully agree with them all, but resonated with 'The koan is frustrating. Carefully calibrated degrees of emotional frustration can help stir the pot. For example, 'Who am I?' is a standard koan. 'What is my original face?' and 'Where is one?' are others. All extraordinarily powerful koans that the author has used.

The latter half of the book is the most interesting for the general reader. It takes as its basis the kensho (flash of awakening) that Jim had while on a station platform waiting for a London tube train. He analyses this flash in considerable depth and spends some time explaining why the moon is so prominent in Zen and the experience of moonlight so widespread in Zen philosophy. He describes how the experience of moonlight on a bright summer's day in London, was part of the onset of his kensho state. He analyses this in terms of visual pathways, and suggests that those pathways carrying colour are turned off in the experience, leaving a black and white softer illuminated world.

An important facet of this book is Jim's ability to move from scientific observation to the wonderful world of allegory and the extension through poetry into alternative states where consciousness can be grasped in a different way, and explained in metre and rhyme. He goes on to describe poetically, with his very wide knowledge of Zen, references to moonlight throughout Zen literature. Here is a poem which followed the awakening of Chang Chiu-Ch'en when he heard a frog croak:

'In a moonlight night,  
on a spring day,  
The croak of a frog  
Pierces through the  
whole cosmos and turns  
it into a Single family.'

The book shows that Jim has moved from the position of Zen initiate, kensho experiencer, Western neurologist, to that of the transcendental philosopher. It reflects the insights of Ralph Whitman, Wei Wu Wei, Merrell Wolff, Eckhart Tolle and others in our Western culture who have

bridged the gap from the ordinary to the transcendental. In discussing the fields of unity he says 'At present, you and I are still trapped inside our usual self/ other mode. As long as we are, we cannot step out of our own skins and deeply realise that this individual self is an integral part of that whole vast other universe.' And this is the message of the new transcendental philosopher. Our mode of perception is wrong. The subject/object split which we use in our daily life leads to the false self which does not exist and which covers over and prevents the move to awakening, the sudden insights of kensho and the heredity that we all potentially have as humans.

### The Path of Pollen

David Lorimer

### THE SHAMANIC WAY OF THE BEE

Simon Buxton

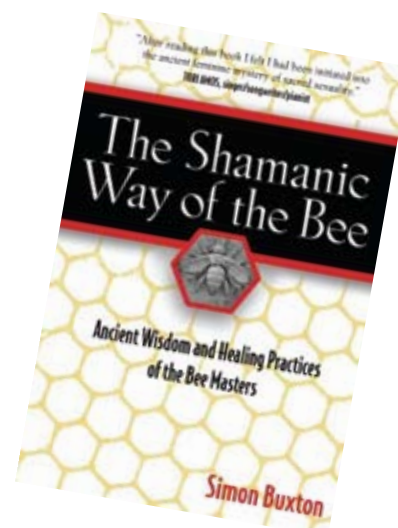
Destiny Books, 2004,  
206 pp, £12.95 p/b –  
ISBN 978 1 159477 119 4

The key feature of initiation is death and rebirth. In this extraordinary epic, Simon Buxton takes us through the various ordeals through which he passed. The story begins in Austria when a neighbouring bee shaman cured him of a serious bout of encephalitis, encouraging him to embrace life rather than to fear it. The experiences he describes do have the effect of what he calls spiritual osmosis in which one comes to appreciate the underlying truth of what he says. His teacher was a beekeeper appropriately named Bridge, who calls his student Twig, and his first encounter dates back to 1986, when he strays into an orchard alive with bees and receives his first initiatory sting on the hand and on top of the head, like an acupuncture needle. The Bee Master observes this and so his initiation into the world of the bee begins, and the reader also starts to appreciate the extraordinary nature and contribution of the bee. They offer a model of community and a powerful example of alchemy in producing honey with its many curative and nourishing qualities. Knowledge of the bee is one thing, but interacting with them is another, yet these aspects are closely intertwined.

The gate of transition links the visible and invisible worlds, creating a space of bridging between-ness. With this insight, the training

begins, in which the rational mind is transcended and counterintuitive tasks performed, such as the insistence on doing everything with the left hand over a period of time. In the first journey, he moves in and out of time and space, shamanically entering the life of the bee and the hive, which culminates in merging with the Queen and subsequent rebirth. This prefigures later episodes embodying the feminine mystery of sacred sexuality. Melissa is the goddess of intoxication and sexual passion, which represent the communion with the whole of life; in this sense the bee is intoxicated with the flower as its lover. Melissa is also the Bee Mistress, whom we encounter later in the book, and who knows the mysticism of the hexagram, representing as it does perfection of fit using the golden proportion. The other characteristic shape of the bee is the symbol for infinity, representing its dance. For 23 days, Buxton is cooked and incubated until he emerges free from his past but not as yet established in a new identity.

The next chapter introduces the veiled Bee Mistress and the Melissae, who are her six apprentices; together they represent the feminine potency of nature, and the bee itself is the copula between the male and female elements in a flower. This meeting leads to symbolic dreams where Simon as candidate suckles on her breasts, with milk coming from one and honey from the other. It also leads to a deeper understanding of the power of giving birth and sensual sweetness of honey, through which we are told that we can potentially enter into communion with the forces



of the cosmos that have already passed through the bee. Later, this is enacted in a ritual dance of sacred sexuality in a heightened state of consciousness. Next comes a searing account of the candidate killing a stag with his bare hands. Again, dreams prefigure reality, and the act is recounted dramatically as life and death, struggle and surrender intertwine and the candidate confronts the violence upon which much of our civilisation has been based; in addition, we are reminded that life is nourished by death in the form of dung and even dead bodies. The following episode describes a journey to Nightshade Isle and a further ritual where the bees and Melissae come to witness the candidate's dance. Stripped naked, he is covered in honey by the Melissae, which includes covering his genitals. When Vivienne reaches this point, she remarks that he will ride his broomstick tonight, a cryptic reference evoking Halloween rituals. She then sprinkles him in pollen, and the bees arrived to lick it all off. It is an extraordinary scene, right at the frontiers of the reader's reality. Meanwhile, Simon has to stay awake and hears the profound song of creation affirming the oneness of life, of which we are sparks.

One more ordeal remains, being buried alive in a sacred place in Cornwall. This represents a descent into the darkness corresponding to an ascent towards the light, life confronted with death. The lesson is that life should be lived as if each day is one's last, which will one day be the case. Our body will be embraced by the Earth. Simon digs his own grave, then Bridge shovels soil on top of him and he is left with a breathing bone as his only contact with the air above. He drops into the womb of the Earth and confronts what is at times a terrifying vision. The outcome reaffirms the lessons of near-death experiences that we should not waste our precious time and put things off to tomorrow. If we fulfil our purpose, he writes, 'we will leave this world and return to the pure essence of ourselves.' Death will then be a sacred moment of ultimate achievement. At the end of the book, Bridge dies, and his body is found lying next to the hives. He then sees Bridge in his subtle form, moving from hive to hive, blessing the bees and saying his farewells.

In her, dare I say it, seminal book *Sacred Pleasure*, Riane Eisler explains the consequences of repressing sexuality in Western culture. Religion has effectively accomplished this for the last 2000 years, but in the last 40 years since the 1960s, sexuality has been unleashed in the West, but we have been culturally unable to appreciate its sacred dimension (the same applies to drugs). Instead, there has been a vast expansion of pornographic material available on paper and on the web (sex is in fact the largest component of e-commerce, but this is never officially recorded). Not only did we cut ourselves off from sexuality, but also from Nature herself, becoming objective observers and economic manipulators while repressing the feminine and subjugating women. All this is changing, but much remains below the radar. This book is at one level an important contribution to the reinstatement of sacred sexuality, as well as an ethic of initiation leading to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of life and death. If we are able to evolve to an understanding of sacred sexuality, we may at the same time resolve corresponding patterns of violence embedded in our culture and bring together head and heart, outer and inner, masculine and feminine into a new level of integration.

### Getting a better balance

Julian Candy

### MADNESS, MYSTERY AND THE SURVIVAL OF GOD

Isabel Clarke (SMN)

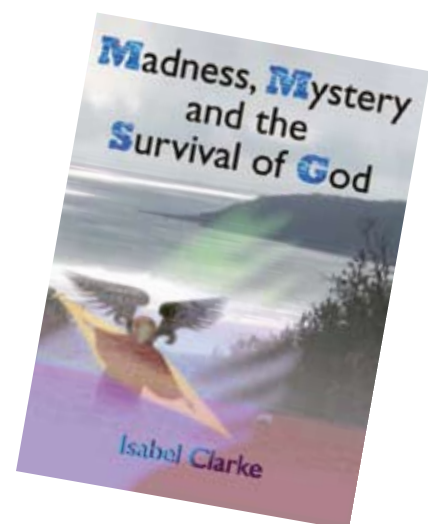
O Books 2008, 175 pp., £11.99, p/b  
- ISBN 978 1 84694 147 4

As a trainee psychiatrist during the 60s, I was required to make some study of psychology. I remember being particularly impressed by the Repertory Grid, a tool developed by Donald Bannister and based on the Personal Construct Theory of George Kelly. The theory illuminated our capacity to make sense of our environment by elaborating and maintaining conceptual frameworks of various degrees of rigidity and variously amenable to growth. Further, by providing a means for scaling and comparing such constructs, the Grid pointed to therapeutic opportunities beyond those offered by impractical psychodynamics and sterile behaviourism.

Isabel Clarke rightly draws out that although the RG itself has maintained only a small but persistent following, PCT has had a much bigger and continuing influence behind the scenes, forming a major part of the theoretical backdrop to today's Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, widely used in the NHS.

She builds on this work as she begins to answer her question: how is it that belief in God and religious and spiritual practice still persist in our materialistic age? She points out that behind everyday assumptions may lie hidden constructs that when brought to light can be seen to be incomplete or misleading. Two of these are the Rationality Assumption: that ignorance and illogicality will inevitably be dispersed by rationality; and the Billiard Ball Mind Assumption: that the mind is the brain and both are confined within the skull, and thus we have no direct access to other brains, into which we must bump as we go through life. Moreover, experience, which as a way of knowing she contrasts with logic, tells us that there is more to life than the rational: human relationships, the supernatural and psychosis all point to a reality not graspable by logic.

She develops her thesis by the analogy of two adjacent rooms that are both separated and linked by a threshold. One room cool and orderly, brightly lit, everything in its place; the other mysterious, shrouded in colourful mists that reveal and conceal shifting vistas and dark places. The first is the home of the rational, of 'either-or' logic; the second of the transliminal, of 'both-and' thinking. Each room, each mode of being in the world is





necessary to us and valuable for us. They are complementary, not in opposition.

Moreover, specific tracts in the brain provide the neural substrate responsible for these modes. Two psychologists, Teasdale and Barnard, have described a detailed model of cognitive architecture, the Interactive Cognitive Subsystems (ICS), which describes the Propositional subsystem (speech and language, relatively logical and orderly), and the Intentional, or as Isabel prefers to call it, the Relational (the rest, colourful and messy). Though reminiscent of the right brain, left brain distinction, and of that between male and female preferred casts of mind, she asserts that these distinctions are little more than misleading half-truths, and that her more complete and detailed formulation does fuller justice to the neuroanatomical and psychological complexity that goes to form the person.

So Isabel puts mystical experience, empathic relationships, certain personality structures such as schizotypy and psychosis itself in the second room. This is neither to devalue the mystical nor to deny the reality of madness and the suffering it can cause. Rather are they all part of that necessarily untidy yet essential aspect of ourselves from which creativity may arise. She provides extended accounts from people who have spent significant time 'beyond the doorsill', mentioning here the significant contribution made by Peter Chadwick (SMN), not least in his *Schizophrenia: the Positive Perspective* (1997). Her account of the transliminal is informed by her earlier studies of the mystical life in medieval times, by her own more recent experience in an environmental protest movement and in running conferences on related themes, and by first-hand descriptions of the creative process.

In the light of this, God's survival need not surprise us. Rationality cannot destroy Him or Her, since our experience not our logic testifies to His or Her existence, and to the significance of the spiritual life.

While the main text of the book comprises a carefully structured exposition, thus appealing to the Propositional subsystem, the frequent insertion of poems, songs and CD recommendations provides plenty of nourishment for the Relational.

Her call for us to tolerate, indeed to welcome, apparent contradiction and contrast in modes of thinking and being is all part of her struggle to overset the Western hegemony of the rational in favour of a more balanced acceptance of both the Propositional and the Relational. This should surely be a fun programme as well as a wise one. Let's swing along with Isabel!

*Julian Candy is a retired psychiatrist.*

## ecology-futures studies

### Organic Philosophy

*David Lorimer*

### FARMING & GARDENING FOR HEALTH OR DISEASE

**Sir Albert Howard**

Soil Association, 2006, £8.95, p/b – ISBN 1 904665 09 8

### THE LIVING SOIL

**Lady Eve Balfour**

Soil Association, 2006, £8.95, p/b – ISBN 1 904665 09 X

### THOUGHTS ON FEEDING

**Lionel Picton**

Soil Association, 2006, £8.95, p/b – ISBN 1 904665 10 1

These three books have been published by the Soil Association in their series of organic classics, thus bringing to a new generation of readers some of the seminal contributions made to the organic movement during the 1930s and 40s. Sir Albert Howard is the most important source of organic agricultural philosophy, all of which is based on his extensive experience in India over three decades. His method came to be known as the Indore Process of composting. He was a contemporary of Sir Robert McCarrison, who did for nutrition what Howard did for agriculture. I first came across his work when researching the agriculture chapter of my book about the Prince of Wales, who contributes the foreword to Howard's book. The Prince writes that Howard was impressed by the traditional agricultural systems which worked in harmony with nature and maintained the long-term fertility of the soil. He was very clear about the chain of health leading from soil to

plant to animal to human, as explained in his last work *An Agricultural Testament*.

Philip Conford, an expert on the history or the organic movement, contributes an extensive introduction to the book, describing Howard's life and career and charting his influence for an agricultural thinking during the 1930s. Partly due to the war and the need for a sharp increase in yields, what Howard called the 'artificial' approach triumphed, and Howard himself died in 1947, the year after the establishment of the Soil Association by Lady Eve Balfour. Interestingly, Howard condemned capitalist farming as banditry, commenting that it destroyed a vital form of capital in the form of soil and encouraged environmental degradation. I will take up this theme again in the next review below. The book begins with an extensive autobiographical introduction, and the end of which Howard states his philosophy of agriculture and health. He comments that the widespread existence of pests and diseases indicates a failure in the plant and animal links of the chain, which will lead to impaired health of human populations, as has become increasingly apparent as our food becomes more and more processed and laced with chemical additives.

The book is vast in its scope, beginning with the historical account of the part played by soil fertility in various forms of agriculture with specific reference to the UK. He then moves on to the prevalence of disease in present-day farming and gardening with sections on various staple crops as well as livestock. Interestingly, none of his own healthy animals caught foot and mouth disease, even though they lived in adjacent fields to diseased animals. The third part describes the problem of manuring and his own composting process. In his conclusion, he suggests that our civilisation needs to be refounded on a new basis, which will guarantee the health and resilience of the population. Fresh produce from the fertile soil confers both health and resistance to disease through enhanced immune function. Hence this philosophy of agriculture is also philosophy of health, corresponding to a holistic rather than reductionist approach to science.

The second book is perhaps the best-known – *The Living Soil* – but it owes a huge intellectual debt to

Howard and McCarrison. Lady Eve Balfour was the niece of Arthur Balfour, the only Prime Minister to give the Gifford Lectures. She was a practical farmer and founder of the Soil Association in 1946. She understood and expressed the essential philosophy of both man and the implications of this approach for society. Her concept of health emphasises the importance of nutrition, and in particular of fresh unprocessed natural whole foods grown in healthy soil, which will be biologically active. She believed that natural soil fertility is maintained and enhanced by the addition of compost, an essential part of the cycle of life and death. She also adopted a holistic approach, referring to 'mutuality of action'. She was a supporter of the Peckham Project, which translated this philosophy into a viable model of community health. Tragically, the National Health Service failed to adopt positive health promotion in favour of disease management. Lady Eve conducted a long-standing experiment on her own farm at Haughley, which is described in a separate section by Lawrence Woodward. The book itself has chapters on soil ecology, science, diet and agricultural practice. It is written for the general reader, but there is a certain amount of technical material. It remains a classic statement of organic philosophy.

The third book is less well-known – indeed I had not heard about it until it arrived. The foreword here is written by the nutritionist Patrick Holford, while Philip Conford contributes an introduction to this book as well. As the title suggests, the book concerns the relationship between diet and health and contains a prophetic stance in view of today's knowing that developments. Picton is also influenced by McCarrison and Howard in formulating the key chapter of the book entitled *Medical Testament*. He was an early critic of processed white bread, tracing the degeneration of this staple food to the introduction of roller mills in the 1870s; indeed disintegrate wheat into its component parts, enabling the bran and wheat germ to be sold off separately. As a medical doctor, Picton was convinced that many diseases were the outcome of a lifetime of poor nutrition. He reiterates Howard's philosophy of health, explaining the biological action of the mycorrhiza in the roots of plants and the benefits

of breastfeeding. There are a number of chapters comparing different forms of bread, but always the bottom line remains the intimate connection between nutrition and health.

These three books provide a pretty comprehensive account of the early principles of the organic movement. The relevance of connecting the soil, food and health is becoming increasingly apparent, but one does not appreciate the full force of the argument until one has read this material firsthand, in particular the writings of Sir Albert Howard. The connections he makes make a great deal of sense, and are embedded in the cyclical workings of nature itself in contrast with the linear and mechanistic thinking characteristic of industrial agriculture with its emphasis on input packages and quantity of output. The philosophical debate between organic and agro-ecological approaches on the one hand and what is now called conventional agriculture (it didn't used to be) continues, but the focus on human health will surely become increasingly important. This may encourage people to think more deeply about the nature of health and resistance to disease.

### Revisoning the Global Food System

David Lorimer

### LET THEM EAT JUNK

Robert Albritton

Pluto Press, 2009, 259 pp., £9.95, p/b – ISBN 978 0 7453 2806 5

### GLOBESITY

Francis Delpuech et al.

Earthscan, 2009, 180 pp., £17.99, p/b – ISBN 978 1 84407 667 3

Three years ago I reviewed a major book by Thomas Campbell called *The China Study*, which tracked a large number of Chinese people in terms of their health over a considerable period of time. One of the major findings was that developing countries went through a 'nutritional transition' where the focus of their efforts changed from preventing large-scale starvation to coping with diseases of civilisation, including their association with obesity. These two books consider the world food system as a whole, starting from the diagnosis that it is dysfunctional: despite vast increases in output since the Second World War, we still have 850 million people starving. In

addition, the latest figures show that 1.3 billion are overweight or obese (around 33% of the world's adult population), and that this figure is set to rise to 2.3 billion by 2015. Governments are becoming aware that there is a real crisis on hand, but it will not be easy to resolve, given the tension between economic growth and healthy lifestyles in view of the current power structures in the food system and their enormous influence on political processes.

Two key drivers of capitalism make the situation intractable, and call for political action. First, the trend towards consolidation, with large companies buying up smaller ones and diversifying their revenue streams. For example, the cigarette manufacturer Philip Morris has diversified way beyond tobacco, but is employing similar marketing techniques with junk food. The giant conglomerate Cargill is becoming the world's leading supplier of food commodities, buying up chocolate factories in Europe, the vegetable oil refinery in Russia, olive oil presses in Italy and the largest sunflower oil plant in Romania, all in 2005 alone. Secondly, and this is a key theme in Albritton's book, capitalism is geared to short-term profit, regardless of the long-term consequences. Hence capitalist rationality may be entirely irrational when considered in the long term. This proposition is particularly clear with reference to tobacco, an addictive substance leading to the premature death of millions of people. Having been prevented from extending markets in the developed world, tobacco companies are now acquiring millions of young smokers in the developing countries. Moreover, the social and environmental costs of junk foods are externalised: the profits remain with the corporations, while the taxpayer or the planet pick up the tab.

The scale and power of food corporations and supermarkets mean that they can heavily influence political processes. They fund political parties during election campaigns and have a powerful lobby presence around the world. They commission research, which frequently puts scientists in a compromised position, especially if the results do not come out in favour of the product. They sit on regulatory boards and can effectively prevent health legislation from being passed. For instance, and the American sugar

lobby threatened to have the US Congress cut off funding to the WHO and the FAO if they implemented a guideline recommended in their report to limit the daily average intake of added sugars to 10% of total calories.

Another important trend is the way in which developing countries, especially China and India, are moving up the food chain and adopting American dietary habits. This means increasing intake of junk food as well as eating more meat, what Albritton calls 'meatification'. This has considerable systemic implications: more cereal has to be grown for animal feed, which means that the crops can no longer be fed directly to people. In the case of soya, large swathes of rainforest are cut down in order to grow the crop. Livestock are responsible for a considerable proportion of the contribution by agriculture to global warming. More food processing requires increased energy input and is also associated with greater transport costs. All of this places further strain on the Earth's already extended ecosystems. It also highlights the imperative of thinking systemically about these issues and relating, as I suggested in the previous review, environmental and human health.

Already, in the litigious US climate, food corporations are becoming concerned that they may be sued by consumers in a similar way to tobacco companies. The film *Supersize Me* put the wind up McDonalds, who have not only sponsored the Olympic Games since 1976, but in 2004 launched a new slogan 'Go Active'. The clear implication is that consumers of their products need to take more exercise if they are to avoid becoming overweight. The second book explains how this is quite difficult in technical terms, given the mismatch between intake of calories and expenditure of energy. And exhorting people to eat less and exercise more has not proved very effective. The move that these companies are making is to shift responsibility to the consumer. The US House of Representatives approved a bill in 2005 called The Personal Responsibility in Food Consumption Act, otherwise known as the Cheeseburger Bill because of the way in which it looked after the interests of the fast food industry by preventing consumers from being

able to sue them. Philip Morris has taken this further by setting up a bill of rights of smokers, which is backed by the so-called Centre for Consumer Freedom. They naturally back consumers' right to choose, even though these very consumers are being manipulated by mass marketing techniques and are hooked on addictive substances; needless to say, it is these same people who complain about food cops and the nanny state. They appeal to people's instinctive sense of freedom as a façade for business as usual.

So what can be done about all this? The books take a slightly different approach but come to the same broad general conclusions. Within the food system, we are closer to a command economy than a free-market economy, given the power of the largest corporations and the reach of their influence.

They have the capacity to squeeze the margins of their suppliers, so that the average take of the producer has declined from around 30% to 3% in the last 60 years. Supermarkets reinforce this trend. There are some grassroots movements moving in the direction of family farmers grow nutritious food for local consumption, but the current system encourages consolidation of farms and rewards the largest farms with the most generous subsidies; incidentally, this then leads to overproduction and a drop in the price which affects farmers worldwide. So reducing these subsidies is part of the answer. In addition, corporations need to be made more publicly accountable, which means changing their legal status from the current 'legal persons' situation. Markets need to be made more democratically accountable by internalising social and ecological costs, which means a revision of accounting practices. The second book makes many further specific suggestions, but they both agree that a raft of measures will be necessary so as to make it easier for people to make healthy choices. This is where the 'nudge' comes in. Of course industries will resist any form of taxation on junk food and will argue that it penalises the poorest people most. It is unfortunate that much cheap food also lacks nutritional value or 'nutrient density'.

There are many other themes that I could have taken up, especially in Albritton's book, which is not only brilliantly argued, but also provides

a wealth of statistical backup and information and a historical perspective on how we have reached our current predicament. It will be interesting to see if a more concrete connection emerges between intensive livestock farming and the outbreak of pandemic viruses – another potential systemic link. Intensification also implies acceleration so that animals are nothing more than a commodity in receipt of inputs to produce a given output. It is pretty staggering to read that dairy cows in 1900 yielded around 5,000 pounds of milk per year and are now forced to produce 22,000 pounds. Similarly, beef cattle are brought to slaughter in a quarter of the time that it takes a grass-eating animal, with the help of huge quantities of corn, soy, hormones and antibiotics. Needless to say, the resulting meat contains a higher concentration of fat and fewer micronutrients. I could go on, but would encourage readers in particular to study *Let Them Eat Junk* (a marvellous title) consider its far reaching implications. Kunstler's notion of 'the long emergency' certainly applies to our food system, which will require major restructuring over the next decade, especially when one considers that many of the same companies responsible for a toxic food environment are also involved in the dieting, pharmaceutical and medical industries – so they can continue to profit from treating conditions they helped bring about.

## general

### Silver-Branch Perception

David Lorimer

### WHAT THE CURLEW SAID

John Moriarty

Lilliput Press, 2007, 376 pp.,  
£30 h/b – ISBN 978 1 84351 124 3

Last autumn I was privileged to give the first John Moriarty Memorial lecture at the Clifden Arts Festival in Connemara. We landed at Shannon airport and drove up into the sunset towards the wild west coast of Ireland where the skies and the sea speak of the freedom of the human spirit. I am convinced that John will eventually be recognised as the greatest Irish writer of his time. Few people have plumbed the

depths of themselves and of our culture, its literature, poetry and myths as deeply as John. The first volume of his autobiography, *Nostos* (Homecoming) runs to nearly 700 pages, intertwining the journey of his life with that of the evolving human being. This book continues the story up until his death in 2007. A brilliant student at University College Dublin, he taught English literature at the University of Manitoba for six years in the late 1960s, returning to Ireland in 1971 at the age of 33 in order to find what he calls his bush soul. For the rest of his life he worked as a labourer in gardens, living in a small cottage and writing in the evenings. As his work became better known, he would travel by bus or hitchhike to conferences at the weekend, returning to his gardens the following week.

Working in gardens on his own in nature enabled John to reach the silence within himself and in his surroundings. In this book he describes the work he did in three different gardens, which leads to the title of this review - Silver-Branch perception - a direct apprehension of nature without the intervening screen of the rational mind. This perception is reflected in the title of the book itself. How do other species apprehend the world? For John, the call of the curlew is an opening in the world, an opening 'not into somewhere beyond the world, rather is it an opening into a mode or mood, mostly unvisited, of the world itself.' Sitting silently for long hours in an oak wood, he came to know that 'all elsewhere, supernatural and natural, are where we are.' With such eyes, mortality becomes a sometimes wonderful, sometimes dreadful way of experiencing our immortality, leading him to the insight that 'Time is Eternity living tremendously, living dangerously.' On another occasion, he is watching a heron, as I did myself in Wales only this afternoon. John falls into his 'fishing-silence, his fishing-stillness' which reveals to him that the knowing mind is 'obstruction between us and things, between us indeed and our own being.'

The poet is initiated into what John calls sympathetic knowing. This is the knowing of Wordsworth rather than Darwin, the knowing of Goethe rather than Descartes, romantic or poetic contemplation rather than detached and objective observation. This leads John to ask

how much of what is in the bills of Galapagos finches did Darwin see or not see, 'and if he saw little of what is in them, what does this mean for his account of how life has evolved?' The universe, John concludes, is not fully penetrable to human intelligence, and he asks if Wordsworth in his little boat did not row himself further out into things in a skip than Darwin sailed out into them in a ten-gun brig. In other words, poetic insight perhaps penetrates more deeply into the nature of things, and yet the empirical knowledge of science holds the privileged position within our society; quantitative analysis prevails over qualitative perception. However, as John has already observed, these subtle and unknown modes of being are not beyond the empirical mode, they are immanently and wholly coincident with it. We just need to use both modes of perception together.

Another central theme of the book is represented by the layers of archaeology within the human psyche, which John calls the phylogenetic ancient regime. He asks if we can in fact be redeemed. The hammerhead shark will not and cannot be redeemed, nor can *Tyrannosaurus rex*. For John, perhaps we cannot be redeemed either, so Paradise regained can be forgotten. History is not encouraging in this respect. Revolutionaries try to take a detour around the phylogenetic ancient regime, but the beast repressed emerges powerfully as a result. The ideal of reason is drowned in a bloodbath of extremism. Only by journeying by night boat through the underworld, by harrowing the shadow, can this regime of the guillotine and the gulag be transcended. Mythologically, for John, only the Christian revolution does not take a detour around this regime, around the reptilian brain. It passes through the olive press of Gethsemane, the crucifixion, the harrowing of hell. This is both an individual and a collective process.

Towards the end of the book, we live through John's experience of cancer, his tiredness, his chemotherapy, his realisation that he has to take his leave of the mountains of Connemara, so that his homecoming, his *nostos*, is also the leavetaking. His body has turned against itself, he is now engaged

on the journey of death; and, as he observes, there is physical death and mystical death. Physical death does not remove the obstructing ego, only God can do this for us. The self, as Eckhart and Marguerite Porete discovered, can disappear or be lost in God. Taoism would express this in terms of subtraction, Christianity as kenosis or emptying of the self. As John puts it: 'We subtract perception. We subtract cognition. We subtract the dualising mind. We subtract all sense of self and other-than-self. We subtract all sense of the solitary self. We subtract the will to do, the will to be. We subtract desire. It is when we are completely out of the way that it happens.' This formulation brilliantly catches the surrendering aspect of the human condition where instead of grasping we let go, instead of acquiring we release, instead of adding and accumulating we subtract and diminish. By doing this, we arrive at and express the core of the soul, the ultimate destination of existence, which John reaches, expressing it as trackless dark infinity, going home, journeying to the heart of being. The particular is to be found in the universal, and the universal in particular, the human life in the divine, the divine life in human. In John's life and journey, in his vast and profound understanding, the human spirit has taken an important step, not burying and denying its violent inheritance, but rather transforming it alchemically into a realisation of essence. What a book, what a man, what a life!

*My John Moriarty memorial lecture can be downloaded from the SMN site as with other Members' Articles.*

