book reviews

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science-philosophy of science

A Distance Between

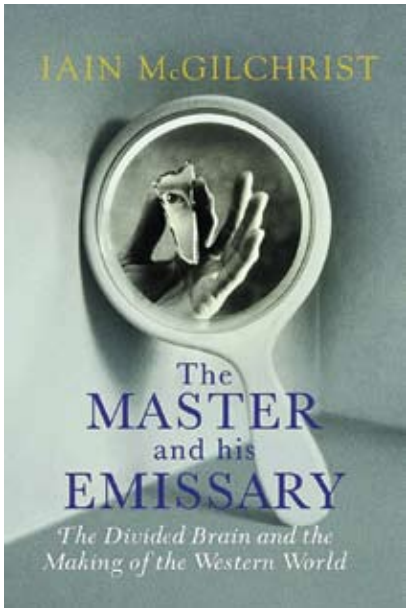
David Lorimer

THE MASTER AND HIS EMISSARY: THE DIVIDED BRAIN AND THE MAKING OF THE WESTERN WORLD

Iain McGilchrist (SMN)

Yale, 2009, 597 pp., £25, h/b – ISBN 978 0 300 1 4878 7

Twenty years in the making, this seminal book has been well worth the wait and could scarcely have been researched and written in less time. It has to be one of the most significant books published in 2009, since it addresses so directly the ways in which we understand the world and the systemic predicament of Western culture. I first met Iain in the early 1980s when his brother, like myself, was teaching at Winchester College. Iain was coming to the end of his seven-year prize Fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford. In 1982, he published his first book, *Against Criticism*, in which he argued against what he saw as the destructive analytical tendency in literary criticism, which failed to recognise that the initial apprehension of a work of art or literature was intuitive, on which subsequent analysis was built. This theme reappears in his new book, as will become clear below. The present book is arguably the most important contribution to come out of the interdisciplinary brilliance of All Souls in a generation, and is a tribute to the possibility of wide reading that the fellowship enables. Ironically, the dreaming spires are mainly focused on what Iain characterises as left hemisphere thinking, and yet this book is a triumph of the integration of both hemispheres, which is as education should be.



Readers will have read the articles based on the book, published in April and in this issue, and will be familiar with the outline of the argument. To recap, the book falls into two parts, the first of which deals with the neuroscience of the two hemispheres, and the second with the cultural implications of the relative dominance of one particular hemisphere in a historical period. The divided brain of the title indicates that human beings have two distinctive takes on the world, mediated by the left and right hemispheres respectively. There are evolutionary reasons, explained in the book, for why this should be the case, right the way through the animal kingdom.

Iain explains that the right hemisphere gives the overall context, apprehends things as a whole and is able to take in the new. The proper co-operation of the hemispheres involves the grounding and integrating role of the right hemisphere, with detail added by the left hemisphere and returned to the right for a further integration, or, as the Germans put it, Aufhebung. This means that philosophy should begin and end in the right hemisphere rather than being a purely left hemisphere activity as it tends to be, especially in Oxford. A particularly striking chapter argues for the primacy of the right hemisphere, an idea which may initially come as a surprise to the reader, who is used to hearing the left brain referred to as the dominant hemisphere. The primacy of the right hemisphere implies the primacy of the whole over the part, of the implicit over the explicit and of experience over abstraction.

Philosophy (and indeed science) as practised, however, is a largely left hemisphere activity. As Iain points out, philosophers spend a good deal of time inspecting processes that are normally implicit, unconscious and intuitive, which means that they examine life of the right hemisphere from the standpoint of the left. This leads to a startling observation that philosophers, like schizophrenics, have a problem with the sense of self, a theme which is elaborated at length later in the book on the relation between madness and modernism. The left hemisphere, although it uses mechanistic metaphors, does not really understand the nature of metaphor, which can carry us across (as is its real meaning) a gap that language itself creates: 'metaphor is language's cure for the ills entailed on us by language.' Philosophers like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Scheler and Wittgenstein were aware of the limitations of linear, sequential analysis and sought to go beyond it, with descriptive philosophy, in a sense, giving way to evocative poetry.

Science, too, as ordinarily practised, is largely a left hemisphere activity. The very metaphor of the body and brain as a machine is quintessentially left hemisphere, as it makes the organism into a non-living thing, abstracting it from the immediate world of experience. Moreover, the left hemisphere is self-referential, only comfortable dealing with familiar ideas and intensely suspicious of the new. This has far reaching implications for paradigm shifts, with which most readers will be familiar: a rigid dogmatism that refuses to countenance a new way of understanding, and is inordinately sure of itself. As Iain remarks on a couple of occasions, 'the only

certainty is that those believe they are certainly right are certainly wrong.' All this means that the basis of the mechanistic metaphor is not questioned by the left hemisphere. The absurdity of this is revealed in some split brain experiments where it becomes apparent that the structure of a syllogism is more important as a criterion of truth than the components of the argument. It is the right hemisphere that understands jokes, irony and context.

None of this should give the impression that the book is simply an apologia for the right hemisphere, and that Iain does not believe in the crucial importance of rigorous analysis. If his points come across strongly, it is because we are in a severely unbalanced cultural situation. A further critical theme is that of empathy, another quality intrinsic to the right hemisphere. As Iain indicates, empathy is intrinsic to morality, linking us to others so that we may 'imaginatively inhabit' their experience, which is the lived basis of imitation. Anglo-American philosophers and scientists do not understand empathy, untouched as they are by European phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty, who understand mutuality, reciprocity and fellow-feeling as expressed through the body and the emotions. All this helps the reader realise that the category of Being is critically absent from British philosophy, which has confined itself to (a rather disembodied) mind. Culturally, if we had an empathic connection with Nature, then we would be incapable of devastating our habitat in the way we have. Here, the left hemisphere science of manipulation meets the economics of exploitation and the politics of short-term expediency.

It is hard in a short review to convey the staggering erudition and scintillating intelligence of this book. There are 135 pages – in small print – of notes and bibliography. In the first half, the reader not only learns about functions of left and right hemisphere thinking, but also considers the origins of language in relation to music, the nature of time, and the way in which Greek logical paradoxes are resolved by a right hemisphere perspective which does not divide time up into discrete points. The arguments for the primacy of the right hemisphere are I believe persuasive, as are his explanations for the triumph of the left hemisphere. We realise that a sense of depth is incompatible with cold detachment, as illustrated in a commentary on the 18th century paintings of Claude Lorrain. Lorrain is one of a great many artists referred to and indeed illustrated.

In the second half, which is a book in itself, the reader is taken on a journey through the evolution of Western culture, beginning with the ancient Greeks, moving through the Renaissance and the Reformation, then to the Enlightenment, Romanticism and the Industrial Revolution, before arriving at the modern and post-modern worlds. One understands how the primacy of the hemispheres as understood in particular cultures has alternated, usually between a more or less balanced situation and over-predominance of left hemisphere thinking, which reflects our current cultural situation. There are etymological digressions on the meaning of Greek terms referring to knowledge, reflections on pre-Socratic philosophers, especially Heraclitus, the implications of Plato's separation of the eternal from the phenomenological, the association of Cartesian philosophy with schizophrenic attitudes, the scientific work of Goethe and the parallels between the Reformation in which the 'Flesh became Word' - the triumph of the literal - and the rise of scientific materialism and the infallible Word of Science, which has inherited a corresponding dogmatism unless allied to the subtle reconciling properties of the right hemisphere.

One remedy lies in the notion of betweenness or transparency; for mediaeval Catholics, the symbol was transparent to the transcendent, but Protestants swept this all away as idolatry, rejecting metaphorical understanding. Wordsworth and Hopkins understood this relation of betweenness, as did Goethe, whose poetry and scientific writings are quoted. Also Hegel, whose articulation of individuation within union is extraordinarily acute. Music provides an exemplar of betweenness in its interplay between silence and sound. The right hemisphere pays attention to the other, generating this relationship of betweenness, which turns out to be crucial to our happiness, depending as it does on the breadth and depth of our social connections. Interestingly, betweenness imply what he calls 'necessary distance', the foundation of empathy. So, for instance, in the development of Greek culture, both these processes proceeded together, with a remarkable development of empathy and philosophical acumen.

Reflecting on our somewhat bleak contemporary cultural landscape, Iain shows how the predominance of left hemisphere thinking has pervaded the visual arts, music, philosophy and science. Modernist concepts and mechanistic metaphors are rife, as is reductionism, alienation, fragmentation and decontextualisation. The parallels between madness and modernism, featured in the work of Louis Sass, are particularly striking, especially given the increase in mental illness over the last 50 years. Our bureaucratic systems are impersonal, aiming at control and manipulation, dehumanising the individual and imposing a drab uniformity. Body, spirit and art are all under attack, as is beauty; however, the sense of beauty is not culturally bound, but is rather intrinsic to human perception.

It is no exaggeration to say that this quite remarkable book will radically change the way you understand the world and yourself. Ironically, some left hemisphere dominated reviewers of this book have already unwittingly proved its thesis by reacting to it in exactly the way in which the book predicts, taking exception to the legitimate criticisms of exclusively left hemisphere thinking. It must be obvious to most readers that our culture is seriously out of balance, not only in itself, but also in relation to Nature. More of the same kind of thinking will not move us forward. We need less detachment and more empathy, recovering our connection to ourselves, each other and the world around us. As Iain observes, both science and art need to become more human and humane. Reading this book, to which you will want to return on a regular basis (one reading cannot possibly exhaust its multifaceted insights) will help you better understand reality and the way we experience and represent it. It is a genuine tour de force, a monumental achievement - I can think of no one else who could have conceived, let alone written a book of such penetrating brilliance.

Exploring Complexity Country with a Local

Max Boisot

COMPLEXITY: A GUIDED TOUR

Melanie Mitchell

Oxford University Press, 2009, $29.95, 347 pp., h/b - ISBN 978 0 19 512441 5

Although complexity is strongly associated with the emergence of life and intelligence, it constitutes a dimension of all phenomena: the purely physical, the biological, and the social. The vast increases in computing power achieved over the past four decades have allowed researchers to tackle complexity in its own right rather than artificially reducing it so as to achieve conceptual and computational tractability. This timely book by, Melanie Mitchell, one of the main players on the complexity scene, offers an elegant and accessible guide to the subject.

The book subdivides into five parts. In Part I Mitchell defines a complex system either as one '… in which large networks of components with no central control and simple rules of operation give rise to complex collective behavior, sophisticated information processing, and adaptation via learning or evolution' or as one '… that exhibits nontrivial emergent and self-organising behaviours'. The first definition takes us from order to complexity, the second from complexity to order. Mitchell then offers some background on four of the subject areas that make up the complexity field: information, computation, dynamics and chaos, and evolution. She points out that since people will vary in the complexity that they will impute to an object or process, no one has yet been able to come up with a general measure complexity.

In Parts II to IV Mitchell describes how these four subject areas relate to each other, and in particular, how life and evolution can now be simulated in computers. In chapters 8 and 9, she shows how life and evolution might show up inside computers and in chapter 10 at how far computation might itself be said to occur in nature. With the development of self-reproducing computer programmes and genetic algorithms, the notion of *computation* is increasingly being invoked to explain the behaviour of natural systems. This, of course, is hardly a new idea. What today we call 'complex systems' can trace its ancestry back to the work being carried out in the 1950s and 60s in cybernetics and the related

field of systems science. Both dealt with systems, with their boundaries, and in the case of cybernetics, with their information-driven feedback processes.

Mitchell usefully points out that the major thrust of complex systems research has been the exploration of simple *idea* models, designed to gain insights into general concepts without the need to make detailed predictions about any specific aspect of their behaviour. This exploratory way of using models is relatively new and one of the fruits of the increased computational power at our disposal. Mitchell therefore looks at the prospects for the computer modelling of complex systems, as well as at some of the perils involved in applying such models. The power of computational modelling is further illustrated in Part IV of the book, where Mitchell explores the new science of networks. She brings out the deep commonalities being discovered among systems as disparate as social communities, the Internet, epidemics, and metabolic systems in organisms. Some of these commonalities have even suggested to the theoretical biologist Stuart Kauffman that natural selection is in principle not necessary to create a complex living creature.

Finally, in the last concluding Part, V, Mitchell discusses the search for general complexity principles. The book comes across as more focused on the natural than on the social sciences. Given that this is where complexity thinking has so far enjoyed its greatest successes, this seems reasonable. One criticism that a Europe-based (but not necessarily Eurocentric) reviewer might make of the book, however, is that the European contribution to the field is seriously underplayed. The Santa Fe Institute, created in 1984 to study complex systems, takes centre stage, and key figures like Prigogine, Haken, and Von Foerster, barely get a passing mention. At the end of the book, Mitchell briefly refers to Prigogine and Haken as the authors of 'more recent approaches to general theories of complex systems'. More *recent* approaches? Their work predates the creation of the Santa Fe Institute - in Prigogine's case by more than a decade. Indeed, Prigogine was awarded a Nobel Prize for his work in non-equilibrium thermodynamics.

One the positive side, the book is clearly written and well furnished with examples. Mitchell explains the sophisticated concepts that underpin representations of chaotic systems such as the logistic map or bifurcation diagrams clearly and simply. She also offers a straightforward presentation of the second law of thermodynamics. Another merit of the book is that it introduces a historical and biographical element into the story of complexity together with photos of the individuals who contributed to it. This lightens up the text for those whose concentration might flag. It presents complexity as emerging naturally as a dimension of a range of problems that scientists in various disciplines are engaged with.

Complexity research is a broad church, accommodating a wide variety of interests. This is not really surprising since, in the absence of some single, overarching theory, it is not yet a unified discipline. Mitchell has provided a valuable overview of the diversity of its practices and practitioners in an accessible language that will appeal to academics and practitioners alike.

Max Boisot, *ESADE, University of Ramon Llull Barcelona*

The Milton of British Physics

William Waldegrave

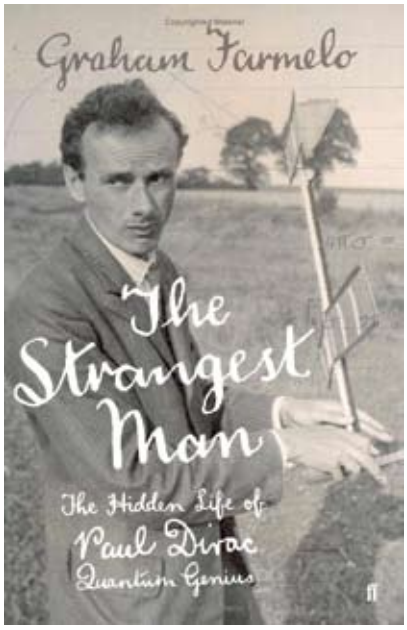
THE STRANGEST MAN: THE HIDDEN LIFE OF PAUL DIRAC, QUANTUM GENIUS

Graham Farmelo

Faber, 2009, 560 pp., £9.99, p/b – ISBN 978 0 571 222865

In 1933, when Albert Einstein became the first staff member of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, he was asked who he wanted to join him. The first name on his lips was a British physicist – Paul Dirac.

A few months later, Dirac, at 31, became the youngest theoretician to win the physics Nobel Prize.



Although he is little known today, he is quite possibly the greatest British mind of the 20th century. If Newton was the Shakespeare of British physics, Dirac was its Milton, the most fascinating and enigmatic of all our great scientists. And he now has a biography to match his talents: a wonderful book by Graham Farmelo. The story it tells is moving, sometimes comic, sometimes infinitely sad, and goes to the roots of what we mean by truth in science.

Dirac was an odd and difficult man. Born in Bristol in 1902, he had a troubled relationship with his father, and with his brother, who committed suicide. The anecdotes about his lack of empathy are legion: at St John's, the Cambridge college where he spent most of his career, he was asked where he was going on holiday. After some 20 minutes, he replied: 'Why do you want to know?' On another occasion, answering questions after a lecture, an audience member said, 'Dr Dirac, I didn't understand the equation on the top-right of the blackboard.' Dirac said nothing. After a minute, he was asked if he'd like to answer the question. Dirac replied: 'It wasn't a question, it was a comment.'

Dirac's overwhelming concern was mastering not social niceties, then, but the fundamental laws of nature. As Farmelo puts it, the discovery of quantum mechanics knifed open a sack of mathematical gemstones – and it was Dirac who gathered the most diamonds. Whereas Newton spent the majority of his life researching alchemy, or Christian doctrine, Dirac was obsessed with his equations, despising subjects such as philosophy. (His verdict on Wittgenstein, a contemporary at Cambridge, was: 'Awful man. Never stopped talking.')

And yet Dirac's brand of theoretical physics, and the way he saw the world, was so close to philosophy. He was convinced that the more beautiful an equation, the more likely it was to be accurate – in other words, he saw a picture of the world that was of such beauty that it had to be true.

His great equation for the electron – an improbable marriage of relativity and quantum theory – only worked if you assumed that there was such a thing as an 'anti-electron'. His colleagues mocked the idea, but Dirac stuck to his guns: the maths was so harmonious that reality had to reflect it. He was dramatically proved right: the anti-electron was soon discovered experimentally, and shortly after the concept of 'anti-matter' became a cornerstone of physics.

Such achievements should have brought lasting fame – but, as Farmelo illustrates, Dirac made things difficult for those wanting to lionise him. When he arrived to collect the Nobel Prize in 1933, there was a marvellous kerfuffle. He and his mother sat quietly in the station's waiting room, failing to realise that the host of – increasingly alarmed – grandees lined up along the platform were there as his welcoming committee.

I had my own encounter with Dirac a few decades later. As a parliamentary candidate in his home town of Bristol, I was shocked at how obscure he had become, compared with Brunel. So I set up a prize for maths at the local school, and wrote to Dirac asking to use his name. He was pleased, and asked also for some pictures of his alma mater. When I came to St John's to deliver them, however, I saw that he had the outer door closed, which signalled that he didn't want to be disturbed.

Knowing his reputation, I was too timid to knock, and so missed my chance to meet the greatest British mind of the century. Thanks to Graham Farmelo's wonderful new book, a new generation will have the chance to realise just how foolish I was.

***Lord Waldegrave** is chairman of trustees at the Science Museum and Provost of Eton College. This review, reprinted by kind permission, first appeared in the Daily Telegraph.*

MEDICINE-HEALTH

Health Care is America's Big Moral Issue

Martin Lockley

THE HEALING OF AMERICA

T. R Reid

Penguin Press, New York, 2009, 277 pp., $ 25.95, h/b - ISBN 1 978 1 59420 234 6

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) America spends far more on health care, as a % of GNP, than any other developed nation. One might expect good results, but the WHO ranks America only number 36 among the 'best health care systems' in the world. When measuring the 'fairness' of the system America ranks 54th out of 191, behind Bangladesh and the Maldives, and just 'slightly ahead of Chad and Rwanda.' Worse, the Commonwealth Fund (a private U.S foundation) ranks America 23rd out of 23 among developed nations when it comes to 'universal coverage' (and neonatal infant mortality). In no other developed country are insurance companies allowed to deny coverage, and in no other nation do people go bankrupt as a result of astronomical medical bills. In America 'the annual figure is around 700,000,' while annual deaths from treatable maladies, as a result of lack of insurance, reaches at least 20,000.

Although the American health care system is in dire straits, and burdened by extraordinary costs, complexity, unfairness, greed, immoral business and lobbying practices and strident political wrangling, *The Healing of America* is a model of clarity, among the ever-growing list of titles lamenting this strange American sickness. The author T.R. Reid, a former *Washington Post* chief of both the Tokyo and London bureaus, speaks with considerable authority on comparative health care systems. Having lived in France and Germany as well as Japan and the UK he structures his book around his personal experience with health care systems in these countries, as well as in India, Canada and the USA. He used his own old shoulder injury as a controlled experiment, taking it to doctors in a half dozen countries to find out what they would recommend and what it would cost to treat.

The comparisons are revealing

rather than odious, and despite the distracting and misleading propaganda put out through the American media, by special interests, it is clear that Americans are finally aware that they face a political problem that has reached crisis proportions. They see that other developed countries have better and cheaper systems that give their citizens greater security and significantly increased longevity. Reid stresses, therefore, that the crisis is fundamentally a moral one. 'Should we guarantee medical treatment to everyone who needs it? Or should we let Americans …die from lack of access to health care?' He frequently cites Chinese born Harvard Professor William Hsiao, author of *Getting Health Reform Right* who specialises in advising countries on setting up health care systems and insists that 'you have to know that country's basic ethical values.'

In making his comparisons Reid gives us interesting potted histories of the origin of health care systems beginning with the German Bismarck system, in 1881, which the famous 'Iron Chancellor' called 'a programme of applied Christianity' creating a means for the 'more fortunate Germans to care for the least of their brethren.' As Japan emerged from mid nineteenth century isolationism, emperor Meiji looked around the world for models of reform in agriculture and education, and by the end of the century had settled on the Bismarck Model for health care. In describing the origins of the British National Health Service (NHS) through American eyes Reid labels it the Beveridge model and credits Lord William Beveridge and Nye Bevan for coming together from the 'opposite poles of the British class divide' so that Beveridge – 'a reforming intellectual' - could 'design,' and Bevan 'muscle into existence,' an NHS system of which most Brits are 'enormously proud.' Americans may not know their hit series *ER* (no connection to the Royal Family) derived from the British TV drama *Casualty*, and that 'Mills and Boon, the nation's biggest publisher of romance novels, has a division that specialises in NHS love stories.' Alas, love and pride are in rather short supply in America's health care systems.

For a European, Japanese, Canadian, Indian or even a Cuban patient living in America it is difficult to understand that the system here is so broken. Americans have been trying to fix it without success since the end of World War II. Resistance at first came from the doctors, but now mostly comes from the insurance companies and their powerful lobbyists. Ever since the war, opponents of reform have used the bogus label of 'socialised medicine' to scare a gullible public into thinking that somehow the government will take over and so reverse America's hard won independence. This 'term was popularised by a public relations firm working for the American Medical Association in 1947.' Ironically, the most popular and efficient American health care programmes are Medicare, the Veteran's Affairs Dept., and the services provided to Native Americans — all government run programmes!

Thus concludes Reid that America labours under five myths about health care systems overseas. 1) It's all socialised medicine elsewhere. 2) They ration care and choice creating long waiting lists. 3) They are wasteful, bureaucratic systems. 4) Health insurance companies have to be cruel, and 5) Other systems are too foreign for the USA. Frankly, as Reid implies, all this is utter nonsense attributable to ignorance on the part of the populace and wilful ignorance on the part of politicians and lobbyists, all reluctant to admit the failure of a system that the rest of the world would never tolerate.

Ironically America already has at least four different systems. For Native Americans, veterans and those in active service America is Britain or Cuba! For those over 65 the USA is Canada. For working people under 65 it is, in principle, Germany, France or Japan. But for the 45 million currently uninsured America is like Cambodia or rural India. The problem in a nutshell is that 'the United States maintains so many separate systems for separate classes of people …[and]… relies so heavily on for profit private insurance companies to pay the bills. All other [developed] countries have settled on one model for everybody, on the theory that it is simpler, cheaper and fairer.' This again is doubly ironic in a country that prides itself on having abolished the class system. The problem is evidently the shadow class system and callous greed created by the almighty dollar and unregulated free enterprise.

Reid brings necessary clarity to this complex problem. If his clear exposition of the problem were understood by enough Americans, who were swayed by the moral imperative of 'fairness' and the benefits of prevention, longevity, increased efficiency and substantial GNP savings, he might just play a part in *The Healing of America.* Watch this space for the debate is in full swing, and everyone agrees something must be done. It may just be true as Leonard Cohen once wrote that in America 'the heart has got to open in fundamental way… [and]… democracy is coming to the USA.'

Professor Martin Lockley *teaches palaentology and consciousness studies at the University of Colorado.*

Overkill: the Dangerous World of American Medicine

Martin Lockley

OVERTREATED

Shannon Brownlee

Bloomsbury 2007, 350p., $25.95
h/b – ISBN-13: 978 1 58234 580 2,
$16.00 p/b –
ISBN-10: 978 1 58234 579 6

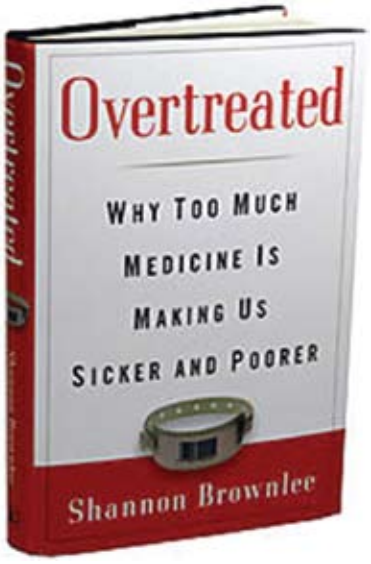
Given the raging debate over American health care, I might have titled this review 'Who Killed Michael Jackson?' Is it really true that 50,000 Americans are killed every year by iatrogenic disease, as Deepak Chopra claimed in *The New Physics of Healing* (1990). In *Overtreated*, Shannon Brownlee gives the lesser total of 30,000 victims of unnecessary (i.e., lethal) over-treatment – still twice the annual murder rate! Moreover, Americans pay a huge individual and collective ($700 million) price for the dubious privilege of often 'brutal, dangerous and extravagantly-priced' treatment such as 'high dose chemotherapy with bone marrow transplant' given to 40,000 women for breast cancer. According to Browlee 9,000 died as a direct result before the procedure was found to be 'no better than standard treatment.' 'No better' evidently may again mean lethal.

The plot of the Hollywood thriller

The Fugitive (Warner Bros 1993) has a pharmaceutical corporation covering up test evidence of the dangerous side effects of their powerful drugs. Brownlee's first chapter chronicles just such a real-life, 1960s episode involving David Wennberg who tried to blow the whistle on Orabilex. This drug was linked to 25 cases of kidney failure in Washington DC hospitals alone, but the corporation never passed on hospital reports to the FDA (Food and Drug Administration), nor did the FDA respond when Wennberg reported to them directly. The drug was only withdrawn after Wennberg took the evidence to the Senate and White House. As I write Pfizer has just been fined 2.3 *billion* by the FDA for marketing unapproved drugs

Continued failure to institute universal health insurance and health care is deep rooted, and began in the post war decade with strong AMA opposition. Wennberg again made doctors 'mad as hell' by exposing far too many unnecessary procedures. 'Practically every woman over the age of fifty' in the area around the University of Vermont Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology 'had been relieved of her uterus.' Wennberg dubbed such local medical industries the 'surgical signatures' of a region. As doctors began raising fees, Medicare costs and insurance premiums rose until, today, the inflationary spiral is out of control driven by for-profit hospitals and insurance lobbyists. A sure sign of trouble manifests where hospitals 'began hiring vice presidents for marketing and branding, and approving construction of VIP suites.'

Chapter 2 brands the hospital as 'the most dangerous place' to find oneself. Conservative estimates



put 'preventable,' unforced hospital error as a leading cause of death, ahead even of >43,000 automobile fatalities. Wrong drugs, wrong dosages and lethal cocktails do the most damage. California Cardiologists Chae Hyun Moon and Fidel Realyvasquez performed such aggressive, invasive and unnecessary operations that '167 patients died during cardiac surgery or shortly after.' Eventually, in 2006, the State Medical Board revoked these doctor's licenses, and the practice's parent company paid some $60 million to settle charges of Medicare fraud, and another $395 million in restitution to victims. Meanwhile between 1993 and 2003 hospitals closed 425 Emergency Rooms that were losing money through treating too many uninsured patients. Frighteningly, those who attempted to bring costs down, or expose fraud, as in the California case, were punished or ostracised while the 'for-profit' culture continued to blossom.

Emil Frei and William Peters were ardent advocates of high dose chemotherapy and bone marrow transplants, which only rarely arrest or cure cancer. Treatments costing between $150-500K caused insurance companies to balk. When patients trawled the medical literature to find justification for the efficacy of procedures the floodgates were opened. But as insurance companies were forced to pay they raised premiums and denied coverage to high risk patients. Meanwhile lawyers learned that most patients did not need the procedures and that they would virtually all die within a few years.

American medicine loves expensive gadgets and has a 'slavish belief in technology.' Hospitals demand the latest CT and MRI equipment. Drug and equipment reps encourage patients to ask for scans and drugs, paying some doctors – labelled 'drug whores' — to give public lectures promoting corporate products. Although, in the 1980s most pharmaceutical companies were against direct advertising to the consumer because of the 'very real possibility of causing harm to the patient. ' lobbyists 'whittled' away the rules in the name of 'commercial free speech' until legislation actually allowed corporations to fund the FDA!!. By 2005 drug companies were spending $3 billion a year (more than the 2009 Pfizer fine) on direct advertising to consumers. 'Calling [this] "advertising" is like calling D-Day a bunch of guys wading in the surf.' The profit potential by 2002 gave the top 10 pharmaceutical companies profits equal to all other 490 *Fortune 500* companies. This is irresistible to unscrupulous and unregulated corporations. Soon the gullible public was warned that it was suffering from a slew of new diseases ranging from insomnia, restless leg syndrome, social anxiety disorder and yes! – even erectile dysfunction. The latter is soothingly and euphemistically labelled as E.D., with the ambiguous message read rapidly in the ad's final seconds 'consult your doctor for an erection lasting more than four hours.' (Great prime-time T.V viewing for the kids)! In case such arousal creates a social anxiety disorder, there is always the possibility of a cocktail of drugs that could quite literally terminate both conditions by inducing heart attack or liver failure!

All this 'corporate creation of disease' begins as a marketing ploy and ends in a lethal reality for which the perpetrators are not held responsible (though perhaps Michael Jackson's doctors will not get off scot-free). It is ironic and frightening that the medical profession is responsible for such new vocabulary as 'elder abuse' and for ignoring the fact that 'the challenges of the very old are spiritual, not medical.' The problem is that 'somebody needs to keep watch on the whole patient.'

Such a broken system highlights the urgent need for change, and thank goodness we see signs of what Leonard Cohen called America's 'spiritual thirst' for authentic democratic 'change.' This manifests in films, outrage, books like this one, and *Overdo$ed America*, (Abramson 2004), journals that at last begin to root out and reject bogus corporate-funded studies, and constructive grass roots efforts to create evidence- and patient-based medicine. Some systems like the Veteran's Health Administration actually work well, and recently desperate Americas have looked to Europe and Canada to find systems that actually work, and in comparison with America, save their nations as much as 10% of GNP. Without radical change America could spend 50% of its GNP on health care by 2050. Yet 68% of Republicans and 32% of Democrats claim the country had the 'best health care in the world.' What world is this? A world where revered artists like Michael Jackson are killed by drug overdoses administered by their own doctors - who then face murder charges!?

To Hell and Back on SSRIs

Beata Bishop

DYING FOR A CURE

Rebekah Beddoe

Hammersmith Press Ltd, 2009,
284 pp., £12.99, p/b.
ISBN 978 1 905140 25 1

'In whose interest are these drugs prescribed?' asks the author on p.114 of her riveting book, but the question should also appear on the cover. The whole story adds up to a fully documented, searingly honest indictment of drug-based psychiatry that often causes worse problems than the ones it is supposed to cure.

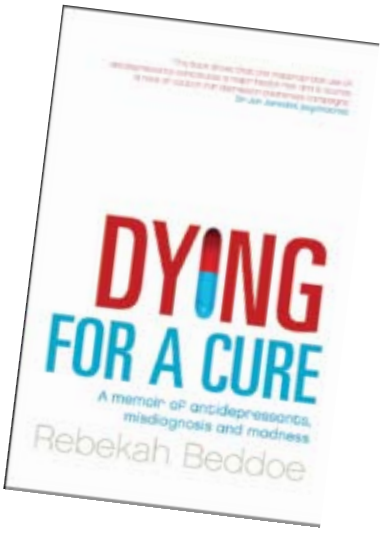
The Australian Rebekah Beddoe was 28, living happily with her partner and moving up steadily in her career when she became pregnant. It was a blow, with her partner being less than pleased, but she went through with it and in 1999 gave birth to a beautiful, healthy baby girl. Unfortunately the baby cried and screamed much of the time, breastfeeding was difficult, and eventually the inexperienced new mother became exhausted enough to ask for help from her GP. He offered to refer her to the mother and baby unit of a local general hospital for respite and training in coping strategies with fractious babies, which she was happy to accept, but as she was leaving, the GP also handed her a small box of antidepressant tablets 'to set you back on track.' Without any formal assessment, prescription or much knowledge of the patient, he just issued a snap 'diagnosis' of post-natal depression and put her on drug treatment.

That's how Rebekah Beddoe's three year long nightmare began. At the hospital she was put in the care of Max, a weird psychiatrist who broke all the rules of professional conduct: he insisted on close body contact, hugged and cuddled the patient and convinced her that she needed to exhume and confront some dreadful childhood trauma in order to get well. Meanwhile the first lot of medication had begun to work, clouding her perception so much that she became dependent on Max and accepted his instructions and prescriptions unquestioningly.

Things quickly went from bad to worse. After her first panic attack her medication was increased. This established a cast-iron pattern. Every time she showed signs of deterioration or a new symptom, more and more new drugs were added to her daily intake, until she was on eight different kinds – and on the verge of madness. Baby Jemima had to be cared for by Rebekah's mother and long-suffering partner, while she gradually sank into repeated savage self-harming, heavy drinking, chain-smoking, overdosing and violence, alternating with apathy and a sense of deadness. In and out of several hospitals, emergency wards, prison-like locked high risk sections, undergoing ECT, getting involved with a heroin addict and taking some stuff herself – hers was an increasingly fast descent into a lonely inferno, where death seemed to be the only way out.

Meanwhile she also developed diabetes mellitus and akathisia, a distressing condition of feverish restlessness, anxiety and excitement, marked by rapid walking up, down and in circles, unable to relax. Max, perhaps realising his errors in treating Rebekah, suddenly withdrew and refused to see her again. His successor, Dr Maartens was cold, austere and unresponsive, and diagnosed her suffering from bipolar mood disorder (formerly known as manic depression), a serious lifelong condition normally controlled with lithium.

At this apparently hopeless moment something unexpected intervened. One of the drugs caused the patient to put on 8 kg in two weeks; shortly afterwards she gained 20 kilos and found her obesity so disgusting that she went on a drastic diet. Weeks later, although half starved, she still hadn't lost any weight, and driven by ordinary feminine vanity – can it be the last quality we women lose when all else is gone? – she checked the side effects of her drugs and found that all eight of them were likely to cause weight gain. So she decided to cut out two without letting on, and not only lost 5 kilos in a week, but her blood sugar levels became normal, too. As she went on reducing her intake in secret, against doctor's orders, her agitation and anxiety subsided, she could once again sleep, sit still and read a book, and experience the return of her normal abilities. Withdrawal symptoms varied. Some drugs caused hardly any, others left her distressed, but eventually she became almost drug-free – and after reading 'Toxic Psychiatry', a whistle-blowing work by psychiatrist Dr Peter Breggin, she realised that her psychiatrists, especially the current one, had actually *caused* all her life-threatening problems, first by misdiagnosing her



condition and then by treating her with a cocktail of powerful, addictive and totally unnecessary SSRI drugs.

It was a shocking, barely credible discovery, but it spurred her on to research the damning evidence of the harm done by psychiatric drugs. She amassed a huge amount of material – the references alone fill 23 pages. Her findings are interwoven with the main narrative; so are her mother's diary entries, recording the suffering and incomprehensible personality changes of her daughter. The effect is distressing yet almost hypnotic; this book should be required reading for medical students and – some hope – practising psychiatrists.

Rebekah's story has a happy ending. Now in her thirties and fully restored to health, she lives in Melbourne with her husband and two children. But she is one of the few lucky ones. If she hadn't dared to take responsibility for her own life and go against her dictatorial psychiatrist's orders, she could still be one of the hapless thousands struggling with the side effects of psychotropic drugs. (In Britain some two million people are taking them at present; according to official estimates, 2 per cent, namely 40,000 patients have a 'severe negative reaction' to them.)

This is powerful stuff, likely to evoke searching questions. How, when, and on whose authority have normal human emotions been turned into chemical imbalances in the brain, needing drug treatment? Sadness, depression, anxiety, worry can hit anyone, and with good reason. As a psychotherapist I know that in most cases all that is needed to relieve such justified painful emotions is total attentive listening, patience, time, empathy, common sense and good boundaries. But counselling is hard to obtain on

the NHS on the grounds of cost (as if antidepressants were for free), at present a patient has to wait for eighteen months to see a therapist, and even then may be limited to a few sessions of CBT (Cognitive behavioural therapy), not always the right modality.

In his foreword Professor David Healy, director of North Wales Department of Psychological Medicine, states flatly that 'drugs like antidepressants …(cause) the greatest amount of damage to the greatest number of people; these are the real abuses, the real dramas.' Which leads on to the true villain of the piece, the pharmaceutical industry with its relentless, merciless expansion into more and more areas of medicine, medical training and research, supported by an army of lobbyists and by well paid unethical doctors and scientists who lend their names to articles and studies that the drug companies themselves have produced. New products are described as safe and beneficial, the negative results of clinical trials are not mentioned. 'This practice is well-known, scandalous and outrageous. It is a perfect illustration of deceptive authorship practices for commercial reasons', wrote M.Larkin in The Lancet (July 1999).

Doctors are also to blame for the severe overuse of SSRIs, a practice strongly encouraged by Big Pharma, but they have neither the training nor the time to deal with depressed patients in any other way. Also, as some GPs freely admit, receiving a prescription reassures most patients and makes them compliant – or, with a bit of bad luck, suicidal.

The only hope against a worsening culture of over-medication for depression and other emotional problems is the emergence of the so-called expert patients, the ones who research their condition and the available options of treatment, who dare to ask questions and voice doubts in the surgery and take responsibility for their own health. Let the last word belong to Rebekah Beddoe:

'Of course, the decision to take or not take a medical treatment for your emotional issues must ultimately be yours – I would never wish a person be denied the relief a medication might bring them – but each and every one of us deserves to be able to base this decision on the facts, not just on drug company marketing dressed up as medical science.'

Beata Bishop *is author of* ***A Time to Heal****.*

philosophy-religion

What is Enlightenment?

Mike King

AMERICAN GURU: A STORY OF LOVE, BETRAYAL AND HEALING – FORMER STUDENTS OF ANDREW COHEN SPEAK OUT

William Yenner

Epigraph Books, 2009, 170 pp., £10.37, p/b - ISBN: 098 2453051

11 DAYS AT THE EDGE

Michael Wombacher

Findhorn Press, 2008, 512 pp., £11.69, p/b - ISBN: 184 4091368

What is enlightenment? (That is, enlightenment of the kind pursued by the Buddha, rather than the Western philosophical movement.) This question has occupied me for over thirty years, so I was interested to receive two books about Andrew Cohen, the American guru and founder of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine (now re-launched as *EnlightenNext* magazine). The first book, by William Yenner, is a compilation of writings from ex-students of Cohen lambasting him as a failure and fraud, while the second book is the account by an enthusiastic student of a Cohen retreat held in 2005. The first book is a short and easy read, while the latter is long and will probably only appeal to the hardened aficionado of such literature. When discussing the project with Cohen Wombacher told him that the two books that had left the greatest spiritual impression on him were Irina Tweedie's *Daughter of Fire* and Nisargadatta Maharaj's *I Am That*. Wombacher's book is indeed in that tradition, and I would add one more: *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*. These works all give a day-by-day account of life with the guru, though of course the question posed by

Yenner's book is whether Cohen should be included amongst the ranks of 'respectable' gurus or not. Yenner was with Cohen for thirteen years, and his book is perhaps the third serious work to attempt to debunk Cohen, the first and most remarkable of which is the one by Cohen's own mother (Luna Tarlo), called – with superb irony – *Mother of God*. Yenner's book includes an interview with Tarlo, and sections by other disaffected students. Right at the outset Yenner states that he joined willingly, but his commitment turned into an 'enforced enlistment in the service of an individual bent on total control.'

Yenner sets out the questions at the heart of the guru phenomenon, including: 'What is the nature of enlightenment, and is devotion to a guru the surest way to attain it?' The fact is that the guru principle has not travelled well from its natural environment in the East to the West. If we turn to seventh-century Hindu sage Shankara, we find it uncontroversial in his setting for him to state that the three greatest advantages in life are human birth, the longing for liberation, and discipleship to an illumined teacher. An examination of the Indian guru tradition shows that it rarely fell into the controversy that Western gurus are prone to, but there is a rich Western literature on the failings of the modern guru. So what are the charges that Yenner levies at Cohen? Is Cohen merely on a control-trip? Certainly the evidence he puts forward is compelling, and many people on finishing his book will be persuaded that Cohen is a fraud. But, on turning to Wombacher's book – if one has the patience to complete it – one is left with a quite different impression. What then can one use to arbitrate between the two claims effectively put forward in these books?

I would suggest two factors are important here. Firstly, how seriously does one take enlightenment in the first place? If it is anything less than a passion, then one might be perfectly safe to accept Yenner's warning and have nothing to do with Cohen. On the other hand, if one finds it a really serious question then one might need to look more closely at both books. Yenner's book has a foreword by the well-known author on Buddhism, Stephen Batchelor, who claims that his early acquaintance with Cohen led him to foretell that it would all end badly. Yet, if Cohen is as arrogant and domineering as is claimed, why did he publish an interview with Batchelor in an issue of *What is Enlightenment?* It is clear that

the two men have very different views on enlightenment, but the discussion is courteous, and readers are left to make their own minds up. Indeed the eighteen years of the magazine provide a resource for enlightenment unparalleled in the modern world, and, although Cohen is the editor and appears in articles and interviews, practically every contemporary voice on the subject has been aired at one time or another. If one is serious about enlightenment, one would at least have to acknowledge Cohen's contribution here.

The second clue comes from Yenner, and, I have to admit it was a surprise to me. He suggests that we should consider Andrew as a teacher in the 'crazy wisdom' tradition, which would include gurus like Gurdjieff and Rajneesh. I first encountered the term 'crazy wisdom' in Georg Feuerstein's excellent book on gurus, *Holy Madness*, but it had never occurred to me to apply it to Cohen. Yenner comes to the conclusion that 'crazy wisdom' gurus are inclined to apply all kinds of bizarre pressure on their students, but that Cohen, even if he is to be included alongside such teachers as Gurdjieff, is 'exceptionally ham-handed' in wielding authority. Wombacher's book shows otherwise, but of course the retreat is effectively a public forum, and only Cohen's closer students know what goes in private. Perhaps Cohen is as arbitrarily cruel as the accounts suggest. From Cohen's point of view however, we gather that students like Yenner are seen as those who can't take the pressure, and are collectively labelled the 'shadow sangha'.

Now, perhaps we are deeply committed to the idea of enlightenment, but are not drawn to the 'crazy wisdom' tradition. Further, the allegations of bullying by Cohen's former students – and mother – suggest to us that he should be discounted as a significant figure in the field of enlightenment. Is there then anything more than Cohen's admittedly ground-breaking magazine series, particularly for the SMN to be interested in? Wombacher's book illustrates what this could be. It is Cohen's insistence on *evolution*. Cohen was invited to speak at the SMN Mystics and Scientists conference in 2004, but, as I recall, said little about this, concentrating instead on an account of his own 'awakening'. His presentation seemed to divide the conference almost equally for and against him, but the relation of his thought to evolutionary science and the work, for example of Teilhard de Chardin, got lost. However in Wombacher's book this issue crops up again and again. (I have to admit being divided over the question, for example how is it possible that enlightenment has 'evolved' since the time of the Buddha?) Cohen's own spiritual lineage is through his master Poonjaji to the world-renowned Ramana Maharshi, and mingles perhaps with his Judaic heritage. Hence in a dialogue with Rupert Sheldrake (an extract of which can be found on You Tube) the question of evolutionary *telos* is explored in both scientific and East-West religious terms. In this and other sources we glimpse the possibility that Cohen's thesis is both deeply considered and significant for our time. Wombacher's book gives many examples of where the implications of evolutionary enlightenment are worked out on the spiritual path that Cohen teaches.

In conclusion I would say that these two books between them pose a problem worthy of attention. If Cohen were only a guru with some disgruntled former students, the issue would be of little interest. But, because of his magazine series, and because of his exploration of evolutionary enlightenment, we are left with this question: does his brilliance in reframing enlightenment in the modern context suggest we should have sympathy with discontented students but somehow ignore them in considering his work, or do their complaints suggest that we should discount the work as the product of a deeply flawed man?

Dr. Mike King's *most recent book is* ***Postsecularism: the Hidden Challenge of Extremism****, reviewed in the last issue.*

Transcendental Materialism?

Chris Lyons

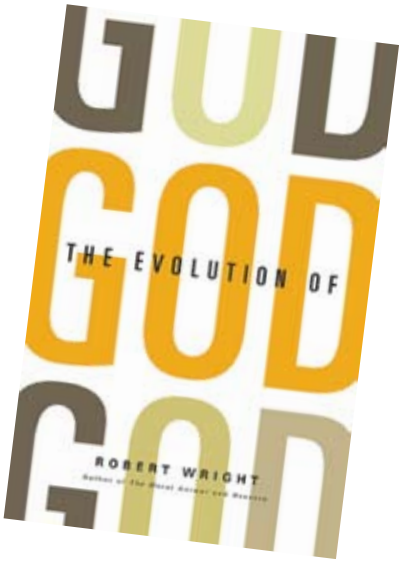
THE EVOLUTION OF GOD

Robert Wright

Little, Brown 2009, 567 pp., $25.99, h/b – ISBN 978 0 316 73491 2

This is the third book in which Robert Wright expounds his idea that, beginning from a purely materialist standpoint, meaning, teleology and even divinity, can be discerned in the world.

In his book *The Moral Animal* (1994), he showed how love and compassion can be plausibly explained by evolutionary theory alone. Beginning with a mother's loving feelings for her children, empathy extends to other family



members through the mechanism of kin selection, and then, through the process of reciprocal altruism, to include friends and neighbours. In Nonzero (2000), he traces the development of human societies from hunter-gatherer groups to villages, chiefdoms, city-states and empires, to demonstrate how Game Theory, particularly the dynamics of non-zero-sumness, can explain that, as technological advances bring people into ever closer contact, and with it the opportunities for co-operation, their circle of consideration and compassion gradually, if fitfully, expands, till becoming global.

In the present book he turns his attention to God, and asks whether 'religions in the modern world (can) reconcile themselves to one another and to science'. He believes they can, and contends that if the ever expanding circle of human compassion is driven by natural selection and game theory, it suggests that the moral sense is transcendent of humans and built into the fabric of the universe itself. He sees in this an intimation of something that might be called 'God'. It's a different idea of God from the theistic one held by most believers, but it provides some compass for orientating our moral direction. It also avoids the problem of how an omnipotent, loving God can allow evil, and it's congruent with our scientific understanding of the world.

But if science can be reconciled to a world-view that can be legitimately described as religious, there remains the problem of how the different religions, particularly the three Abrahamic ones, can ever be reconciled with each other. To tackle this he embarks on a history of religion that fills most of the

book's five hundred plus pages. He starts with the shamanic practices of hunter-gatherer communities, but thereafter focuses mainly on the development of Judaism, Christianity and Islam with only occasional references to Hinduism and the religions of East Asia. The author is erudite, and the book well researched. The style though is easy, and the text peppered with his wry wit, (in reference to a tribe in central Australia, he quips 'one of the shaman's jobs was ensuring that solar eclipses would be temporary—nice work if you can get it.').

His thesis is that when people feel threatened – are in zero-sum relationships with their neighbours - their gods (and scriptures) are belligerent, but when they have something to gain from being co-operative – are in non-zero-sum relationship – their gods and scriptures take on a more tolerant tone. Thus in the age of Josiah, the Book of Deuteronomy has Yahweh saying of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites and Perrizites 'you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them'. Whereas later, after the Exile, when Israel and its neighbours had all been pacified and become part of the Persian Empire, we have a kindlier Yahweh saying to Jonah, of their ancient foes, the Assyrians, 'Should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons…' He gives similar examples in the life of Muhammad, contrasting his gentler pronouncements during the Meccan period with the more intolerant ones when, in the Medinan period, he'd acquired political clout. He likewise explains the rapid spread of Christianity (which he regards as largely the invention of St Paul) to the well developed communications of the Roman Empire and the additional opportunities for non-zero-sum relationships that they facilitated.

His conclusion is that throughout history humans have invented gods in their own image, and that whether they were tolerant or belligerent depended not on eternal truths, but on what was going on 'on the ground'; principally, whether they were in zero-sum or non-zero-sum relationships with their neighbours. Furthermore, in our own day, and in like manner, the scriptures of these ancient faiths will be cherry-picked for their tolerant or belligerent passages for the very same reasons. The way to avoid religious strife, therefore, is to not worry too much about the theology, but to get the right political conditions operating on the ground.

His further conclusion, however, is that whilst the gods were human inventions and illusions, the idea has been so modified and refined throughout the ages that it has taken on transcendent validity.

> On the one hand, I think gods arose as illusions, and that the subsequent history of the idea of god is, in some sense, the evolution of an illusion. On the other hand: (1) the story of this evolution itself points to the existence of something you can meaningfully call divinity; and (2) the 'illusion', in the course of evolving, has gotten streamlined in a way that moved it closer to plausibility. In both of these senses, the illusion has gotten less and less illusory.

The book is an ambitious attempt to reconcile religion with science, and religions with each other. Whether it succeeds will depend upon the extent to which the author's perspective is attractive to either the scientific or religious communities. Nevertheless, it's an engaging perspective, and one, I think, that thinking people should try on for size.

Dr. Chris Lyons *is a GP and a member of the SMN Board.*

God: The Case for the Defence

Max Payne

GOD AND THE NEW ATHEISM

John F. Haught

WJP Press, 124 pp., £11.99, p/b - ISBN 10:0 664 23304 X

FAITH AND ITS CRITICS

David Ferguson

Oxford, 195 pp., $16.99, p/b - ISBN 978 0 19 956938 0

A FINE -TUNED UNIVERSE

Alister E. McGrath

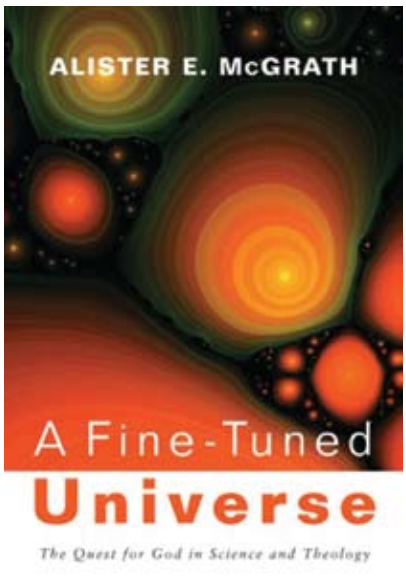
WJP Press, 262 pp., £26.99, p/b - ISBN-10: 0 664 23310 4

Here are three vigorous counter blasts to Richard Dawkins' militant atheism. Ferguson is the most philosophical, McGrath the most theological, and Haught the most polemical. All argue that belief in the personal Christian God is not inconsistent with modern science, and that the deepest human values point require a Divine being to validate them. After considering these arguments in defence of God, an impartial agnostic may be inclined to return the canny Scots verdict of 'Not Proven'. The prosecution's case has been undermined, but this does not mean that the defendant is innocent.

Both Ferguson and Haught argue that a systematic materialism must destroy human values. Haught mocks Dawkin's apparent assumption that the values of Liberal democracy could survive his soft line atheist world view. Real hard line atheists like Nietzsche and Sartre openly proclaim that the death of God leads to moral nihilism. Not only does moral goodness go, but scientific truth as well. Michael Polanyi pointed out long ago that hard scientific material objectivity depends upon the prior personal moral commitment of the scientist to self critical impartial truth.

McGrath suggests a new approach to natural theology. Traditional natural theology in the style of Paley's Divine Watchmaker argued from the presence of design in nature to the existence of a Divine Creator. McGrath accepts that this argument does not work, but reverses the direction. Given the standpoint of orthodox Trinitarian Christianity it is possible to declare that not only is it consistent with modern science, but that it can give a meaning and purpose to science, which science itself lacks. His point is the so called 'Anthropic principle'. The whole universe as we know it requires that the fundamental parameters of the forces of nature have to be precisely as they are for human life on this planet to exist. The possibility against chance of these parameters being exactly so is a number larger than the number of subatomic particles in the entire universe. The materialist thinks we are here by a fantastic statistical fluke, but Trinitarian orthodoxy proclaims that we, the universe and everything are all here by God's design. It is a good argument, and better than materialists give it credit.

But is Trinitarian orthodoxy consistent with modern science? The elephant in the living room is the Fall. The religion in question is not Jesusism, the religion of love preached by Jesus of Nazareth. It is Christianity, the religion invented by St. Paul. Christos is a Greek word never used by the Aramaic speaking Jesus. Christos is the Son of God who was sacrificed on the Cross to atone for the sin of Adam, and for which God punished all Adam's descendants. The whole doctrine of the Atonement



is scientifically false, morally objectionable, and theologically confused. There never was a separate creation of man in the Garden of Eden. Mankind is the product of 2 billion years of biological evolution. Sometimes simple people see issues plainly, while the sophisticated hide away in a tangle of details. American fundamentalists see a clear conflict between science and scriptural Christianity, and choose scripture. McGrath has a 35 page index to his bibliography, and dodges the issue.

Haught solves the problem of scripture at the end of his book with the argument that demolishes much of that which went before. God is loving and also vengeful. He presides over the wasteful process of biological evolution with its suffering and extinction of entire species, and is also the loving Father of mankind. He defiantly proclaims that scriptural truth far transcends the limited, pedantic, rational intellectual questioning of materialist science. Which is precisely what Dawkins is saying from the opposite direction.

Ferguson has a more subtle answer to the scriptural question. In à laudable attempt to persuade Christians and Moslems to regard each others' scriptures with respect, he argues that sacred writings have to be interpreted according to high spiritual principles. What matters is faith, not the detailed words that arouse faith. The question then arises of what these higher spiritual principles are? Are we left with nothing but a vacuous religiosity?

What is significant in these three books is what they do not say. They all leave aside any detailed consideration of the fundamental question of whether or not mind can be totally reduced to matter. If it can, then all question of religion disappears. If it cannot, then further and higher dimensions of reality beckon. All scripture is only a second or third hand account of the spiritual experiences of saints, prophets, seers or Incarnations. In defending the possible existence of the Divine, none of these authors go on to examine the nature of first hand mystical experience from which such scripture derives. All of them consider God in terms of the Anthropomorphic Deity of the Abrahamic tradition, and so they go through elaborately casuistical arguments to make biological evolution consistent with a Bible that starts with the book of Genesis. None examine alternative Eastern answers to the nature of the Divine, yet the Vedantic kalpas and mahakalpas, and days and nights of Brahm, accommodate evolutionary biology, and modern cosmology very easily.

Faced with the looming problems of the 21st century, there are those who seek for a spiritual vision to inspire mankind to face the future. The evidence of these books is that traditional orthodox Christianity will find it difficult to provide the answer.

Max Payne *is a Vice-President of the Network. As you read this, he will be in New Zealand to celebrate his 80th birthday.*

Not Good Enough

Lance St John Butler

REASON, FAITH AND REVOLUTION: REFLECTIONS ON THE GOD DEBATE

Terry Eagleton

Yale UP, 2009, 200 pp., $25, h/b – ISBN 978 0300 151 794

The Network has always been a place to be brave in and we should welcome this extraordinarily brave book. I read it twice straight through and I haven't felt impelled to do that since John Gray's similarly iconoclastic *Straw Dogs*.

Eagleton was the paid-up Marxist scourge of university English of the 1980s. His *Literary Theory: An Introduction* of 1983 sold a million copies mostly to undergraduates bemused by Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Cultural Materialism and the rest. It wasn't the best book in the field but it was well-written (read *funny*) and took a comprehensible line; even if this was dubious (after all, the ongoing socialist experiment that Eagleton appeared to be endorsing was about to collapse under the weight of its own mountains of lugubrious yet murderous piffle) it has the huge merit that even undergraduates could actually understand it.

Talking of brave, Eagleton left Oxford (how many dons ever quite manage *that*?) and went a bit quiet after the fall of European communism, but now he has redeemed himself triumphantly by managing to bring off the amazing trick of re-thinking the Enlightenment, Christianity and the Way We Live Now while still remaining consistent with his earlier positions. This is thinking of no mean order.

This book shows us that we need to think harder and better – perhaps some of the softer edges of the Network approach need to be sharpened up for instance. Eagleton will not let us away with a religion involving just niceness; he points out our persistently superstitious view of God (and that's just the agnostics and atheists among us); he asks what the Enlightenment actually did to the notion of Reason; and he never lets us forget the forgotten or forbidden arenas outside the pale of rationalist thinking: the body, politics, experience, suffering, the marginal, our laziness, our self-loathing.

Here is a heady, unfamiliar world of self-contradiction (ours, not Eagleton's) in which the Christian Right clamours for war, the Dawkins atheists set up a Satanic mirror-image of a God not to believe in, we support one illiberal and 'vilely autocratic' regime after another in the name of protecting 'freedom', values are just the decoration that we add to the market, and globalisation has taken over from any other form of universal or catholic faith while pretending somehow to be in congruence with those faiths themselves.

It is above all the figure of Jesus that bestrides this intoxicating book like a colossus. Or rather, not at all like a colossus, more like a piece of tortured meat. Pages 19 to 29 of the volume (it consists of four essays, originally lectures, very much a la Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*), in the section entitled 'The Scum of the Earth', are a real tour de force of theological writing. I don't think anything has ever given me a better insight into what Jesus could and should mean for us. He is not a ruler, not a lawgiver, not powerful (far from it), not bourgeois, not even pleasant, not easy, not soft. He is a bleeding carcase through whom we can see, as very few of us do

see, that it is in our squalor, our scumminess, that we reveal our frailty and our need for a god quite other than that of the Judaism of the time or of Dawkins today, and that we are caught up in 'The Law' (rather than the Lacanian 'Real' that is Desire.) God's true law is justice and compassion but 'The Law' will not tolerate that and inclines to reduce adherents of the true law to 'the flayed and bloody scapegoat of Calvary'. The 'primary masochism known as religion' yearns for 'The Law' and for punishment both in the sense of being punished and of course, of punishing. But the secret god that is Jesus is quite the opposite of this.

So Eagleton is a Blakean, turning us away from Nobodaddy to that other god, the helpless, vulnerable animal that is Jesus and ourselves. Eternal life here would be the escape from 'The Law', self-liberation from the self's desire to hug its chains, and participation, perhaps literal participation, in Jesus' death as well as his life. His death was 'an act of solidarity with the destitute and dispossessed'. As Eagleton points out, 'Crucifixion was reserved by the Romans for political offences alone' and the political gesture of Jesus is on behalf not of 'humanity' and its 'sins' ('Jesus has very little to say about sin at all') but on behalf of 'the shit of the earth – the scum and refuse of society who constitute the cornerstone of the new form of humanity known as the kingdom of God.'

This is astonishingly well-put and it feels, quite inexorably, a more Jesus-like take on the Jesus story than is usually proposed. Beside it Dawkins and his ilk (Christopher Hitchens is Eagleton's other main target) seem pale, defensive optimists.

It took an astute and passionate thinker to see through the truths of evolutionism and the truths of reason, which *are* truths after all, and, with immense energy, to break almost all moulds of thought at once and lead us to a place that in our hearts we have always known was there, the place caught in Kurtz's famous cry 'The horror! – the horror!', and force us to look at it steadily and look at it whole, but without despair.

I cannot recommend this book strongly enough. If you think that reason or benevolent agnosticism or human comfort or the market or Sunday religion are, well, anyway, good enough, you will think again.

Prof. Lance Butler *is Professor of British Literature at the University of Pau.*

Practical Spirituality

David Lorimer

LIVING DEEPLY

Marilyn Mandala Schlitz et al (eds)

Noetic Books, 2007, 231 pp., $16.95, p/b – ISBN 978 1 57724 533 6

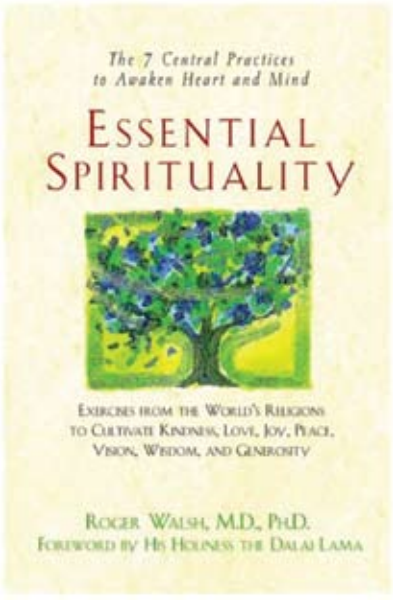
ESSENTIAL SPIRITUALITY

Roger Walsh

John Wiley, 1999, 305 pp., $15.95, p/b – ISBN 0 471 39216 2

Living Deeply summarises the results of a research study conducted by the Institute of Noetic Sciences, involving 150 hours of interviews with leading spiritual teachers**.** Writing in the foreword, Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman observes that each of us has the capacity to move from a dominator worldview to one where we regard life as a precious gift. This involves an enhanced sense of unity and connection and the management of one's mind. With consciousness transformation, we can become more aware of how interconnected we are with all other beings. At one level, this is at a move from a left to right hemisphere function, since it is the right hemisphere which mediates our sense of connectedness and empathy. The fact that we are living in a left hemisphere dominated society is amply demonstrated by Iain McGilchrist's book reviewed above. It is also the message of the book and speech by Jill Bolte-Taylor, with which many members will be familiar (see TED talks).

The most important shift is one of identity discovering who you



really are at a deeper level. The researchers tried to probe this question over a 10-year period and report their findings in a series of chapters containing extracts from many interviews. These include the various doorways to transformation including pain, hitting the bottom, noetic experiences, psychedelics, experiences in nature or just seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary: 'the awakening state is very ordinary. It is falling in love with the ordinary. It doesn't need to be special. The ordinary is the divine. We also need to prepare the soil through attention, intention, repetition, curiosity, creativity and silence. These will provide the best conditions for seeds to grow. Then there are descriptions of paths and practices, along with a discussion of the importance of practice and even regarding life as practice and practice as life. As we progress, we become more aware of the universal within us, the 'I' becomes 'We' and we regard everything as sacred. In addition, as Stan Grof points out, ' you realise that the roots of global problem are built into the very structure of human personality, and to work out problems in the world we have to start from ourselves, undergo deep psychospiritual transformation.'

Roger Walsh's book has been on my shelves for a number of years, and makes a wonderful complement to *Living Deeply*. It proposes seven central practices to awaken heart and mind, exercises from the world's religions to cultivate kindness, love, joy, peace, vision, wisdom and generosity. The book was rightly widely acclaimed when it came out, and Roger sent me a copy. There is a foreword by the Dalai Lama in which he points out that striving for power and possessions drives us further from inner peace and happiness. The qualities that form the focus of the book are to be found in all the living religions and the path enables us to find a deeper level of identity, our true Self. The approach is underpinned by some core claims from the perennial philosophy, that there are two realms of reality in which we partake, that human beings can recognise their divine spark and sacred ground, which can then be realised. In a normal state of consciousness we are only half awake or half-grown, depending on which of the many metaphors one uses.

There is a Buddhist slant in the book owing to the author's background, but then there is a great

deal to be learned from Buddhist contemplative practices. Each of the seven practices has a number of chapters devoted to it, with a series of practical exercises to pursue as one refines one's consciousness towards a state of wisdom and service, which is why generosity and spirit in action come at the end of the book. Returning to the theme of the ordinary already referred to above, one suggestion is to transform daily activities into sacred rituals, something that one finds in the Celtic tradition and also in the writings of the 17th century French monk Brother Lawrence, who simply practised the presence of God.

Both books contain valuable advice for practitioners: one is to make a start, or restart if you have left off. Making practice the first priority of the day is also extremely important before other things take over. And, if you can keep this up for about 25 days, then you will have formed a new habit and continuing practice is much easier. Finally, we can dedicate our practice to all beings, expanding our circle of kindness and compassion in the process. Either or both of these books will get you started on a transformative journey.

psychology-consciousness studies

Imagination, Values and Culture

Rowan Williams

CHILDHOOD, WELL-BEING AND A THERAPEUTIC ETHOS

Richard House (SMN) and Del Loewenthal (eds)

Karnac Books, 2009, 254 pp., £19.99, p/b – ISBN 978 1 855 756335

No-one can now ignore the fact that a serious debate about the welfare of children has at last begun in our society. And, appropriately, it has started to open up a wider debate about the nature of learning and even the nature of human maturity. The essays in this collection are significant not only for what they say about childhood but for what they invite us to think about human growth and well-being in general.

So in this volume you will find some searching reflections on what we do to the growing human consciousness by certain styles of education. Several contributors make a powerful case for resisting the pervasive drift towards measurable skills and tightly defined goals for (especially) primary schoolchildren. Richard House, in a very challenging piece, appeals to Rudolf Steiner's theories to underline the dangers of treating the child's consciousness as simply a limited and inadequate version of the adult's, and argues that the best way to keep therapists in work indefinitely is to perpetuate this error. And whether or not the reader will share the Steinerean perspective, it seems undeniable that one of the roots of the expanding and well-documented unhappiness of children and young people in our culture is the sheer impatience we exhibit with the long period of latency that characterises the human animal. We want to supply a storehouse of useful skills and to measure their acquisition at every step. But what if that biologically unusual latency is in fact itself a treasury for human well-being? What if hurrying children through it is one of the most effective forms of deprivation we could devise?

If 'therapy' is one of the key words in this collection, the other is 'play'. Therapy, so the editors argue, is not a matter of damage limitation—nor does it necessarily imply that we begin by assuming a state of 'victimage' or diminution on the part of all young people. Rather, it is to do with attempts to heal an entire social climate that is unduly obsessed with outcomes and panicky about wasting productive time, focused overwhelmingly on fantasies of individual success and damagingly clumsy in most of what it seems to think about relationships. And in this light, the connection of therapy with play becomes clear. Play (as the essays in Part IV particularly show) allows the growing consciousness to establish a very particular kind of relation with the world of physical stimuli: it allows you to think that it might be different. It develops the 'what if…?' function in the mind—the function that in the long run permits art, science, and even politics, and a bit paradoxically, strengthens our awareness of what is specifically in front of our noses by challenging us to think it away and 'remake' it. This is not a matter of acquiring skills that will enable us to solve problems, but of nurturing the imagination that will make us constantly wonder if we are asking the right questions of our world. And it is in this imaginative maturity that we discover what is distinctive in our humanity and why our humanity, with all its pain and frustration, can be an opportunity for joy.

The freedom of the imagination, the freedom to ask whether we are asking the right questions and to reconstruct the world in speech and image and vision, is of course an essentially spiritual thing. For the Christian believer, 'spiritual' is not a word that designates simply some distinct quality or 'territory' in the individual subject; it is a word deeply imbued with resonances to do with connection or communion. A spiritual education is not one in which we are shown how to cultivate certain highly satisfying and even useful private experiences, but one that exposes us to connections, possible and actual, with other subjects, with the material world we inhabit and ultimately with its source. The discussion in these pages of spirituality in education assumes, refreshingly, that the capacity to rethink the world, to see it differently through the imagination, is bound up with the capacity to see yourself as connected in ways you did not choose with a whole environment, human and non-human. Behind the back of the conscious ego lie all sorts of links, life-giving and also at times frightening, which make us who we are; imagination allows us a glimpse of that rich and elusive hinterland, and without it we shall both wreck our own selfhood and ravage our environment and our human relations. Whether or not all this opens on to the wider horizon of relatedness to the ultimately mysterious life of the creator is something about which these authors will not agree, any more than readers will. But it is important that the question be recognised for what it is, a serious one that asks about the framing of our whole imaginative life.

Kathryn Ecclestone casts a sharp and sceptical eye on an approach which, disturbed by all that we have identified so far, comes to see education and nurture as fundamentally problem-driven — so much so that it casts children in the light of helpless and shrunken souls who require endless therapeutic attention. Education, she argues, is thus distorted into a constant struggle to make the world easier for its injured and hyper-sensitive subjects. It is, as the editors acknowledge, a salutary warning. Talk about 'emotional literacy' *can* turn into a recipe for emotional illiteracy if it refuses to deal with the challenges of managing the reality of others, the inevitability of frustration,

and the tough edges of choice. But the concern of other authors here is certainly not to collude with the idea of a 'diminished' self or to propose that the ideal educational process is one in which individual emotional states are to be cosseted or indulged. Properly understood, there is much in common between a good deal of what Ecclestone argues and the rest of the book: education is how we equip children for transforming their thinking and acting and for relating with both celebration and critique to the world they inhabit.

Sue Palmer and Sue Gerhardt summarise their invaluable researches in their contributions here, showing in different ways the complex interweaving of patterns of imaginative and affective deprivation with neurophysiological problems and behavioural disorders. For those who apparently want to trivialise the question of children's well-being (young people have always said they're unhappy; children just *grow* up however you bring them up; we can't over-protect our children by going along with their complaints; and so on), the concrete evidence, medical and statistical, represented in these as in many other chapters ought to give pause.

But the resistance to such evidence suggests the uncomfortable conclusion that quite a lot of commentators in the UK at the moment are still reluctant to approach these issues with care and openness — and that this is sometimes expressed in terms that imply a positive dislike or fear of children and young people. Why this should be is a question that deserves a whole series of further essays. But here is one way into the issue. Our uneasiness with our children — that is to say, the uneasiness over-represented in public comment and media rhetoric, if not corresponding very exactly to how any one of us is likely to feel with particular young people — is rooted in our own uneasiness as to what it is we want to communicate to the next generation. The presence of the young reminds us painfully that we have little or no 'wisdom' to transmit. As a culture, we are individualistic and focused on short-term gratifications — or at least that is the public rhetoric we allow and indulge in advertising or entertainment. But not to have any clarity about what we believe worth transmitting is a sobering and unpleasant condition. The threat that so many claim to see in the young is in fact, as much as anything else, the threat of the void we suspect in ourselves as modern or postmodern adults, unclear as to whether we really have anything to *value*.

Which may mean that we ourselves, modern and postmodern adults, have been deprived of some of that spiritually serious playfulness that allows us to approach the world as if it were a place of possibilities and unexpected affinities, as well as a place of profound challenge and potential pain, to be reworked through the imagination. If this excellent collection helps us think through not only the needs of our children but our own often unacknowledged needs, it will have achieved a very great deal. But meanwhile we owe much to the authors and editors of such a varied, engaging, and outspoken guide to our ills and puzzles, and to what we might need to address them, at last, with greater honesty.

Dr. Rowan Williams, FBA, *is Archbishop of Canterbury. Foreword reprinted with permission.*

Groundhog Day in Perpetuum?

Robert Charman

IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH? THE EXTRAORDINARY SCIENCE OF WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE

Anthony Peake (SMN)

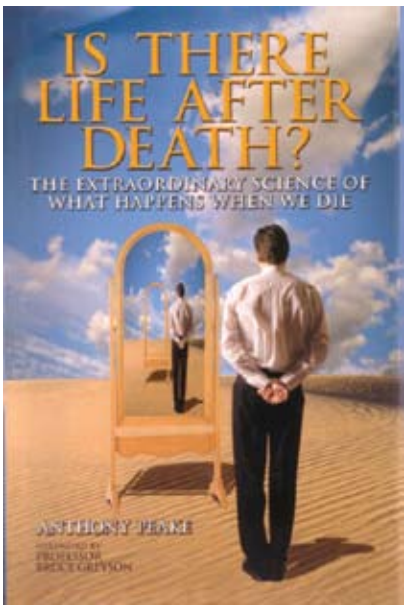
Arcturus Publishing Ltd, 2007,
416 pp., £9.99, p/b -
ISBN 978 0 572 03227 2

THE DAEMON; A GUIDE TO YOUR EXTRAORDINARY SECRET SELF

Anthony Peake (SMN)

Arcturus Publishing Ltd. 2008,
336 pp., £9.99, p/b -
ISBN 978 1 84837 079 1

Wikipedia tells us that 'Anthony Peake (1954 -) is a pseudoscientist and parapsychologist'. To be one is bad enough, but to be both together! Before he went to the academic bad Peake obtained a dual honours degree in sociology and history from the University of Warwick, with subsequent postgraduate qualifications in personnel management and labour law. He is a qualified psychometrician, working in business over many years. His stated interests do include parapsychology, along with the



sociology of religion and the sociology of language, but in these two books he also undertakes a masterly, fully referenced, review of the wider fields of the neurosciences, clinical psychology, particularly concerning strange experiences in epilepsy, parapsychology, OBEs and NDEs, the nature of time and the implications of quantum physics before putting forward an intriguing, and therefore controversial, theory as to our continuing existence. The following summary does not do justice to his gift for lucid exposition.

Although we each experience ourself in the singular as 'I', a wealth of research in clinical psychology and the neurosciences, especially in split brain research, has demonstrated beyond all doubt that we are composed of two separate selves, one based in the left hemisphere of the brain and the other in the right hemisphere. The two hemispheres communicate through a transverse bridge of nerve fibres called the corpus callosum. This bridge is cut in split brain operations for some forms of intractable epilepsy, and it has been found that each hemisphere remains as a separate, conscious, self. Peake has called our everyday self the *Eidolon* or 'lower self', from the Greek *eidos* meaning 'form' or 'phantom'. The Eidolon lives in our chattering, rationalising, organising, getting things done, left hemisphere. This is the 'I' of everyday life that interacts with the left brained 'I's' of everyone else. The quieter, non chattering, musical, artistic, spatially perceptive, intuitive, right hemisphere houses, says Peake, the *Daemon* or Higher Self, from the Greek *daimon,* meaning 'knowing spirit', as in Socrates's *daimon* that he would

often turn to for advice. The Daemon is the all seeing, all understanding, all remembering partner of the Eidolon who plays a crucial role in his theory of repeated survival.

Mind, says Peake, is not a separate entity from brain. Mind as a noun may be convenient shorthand, but it is a misnomer, implying a static object, whereas it should be the verb 'minding', as in walking. Mental activity is a continuing process generated by the brain and dependent upon the brain. Peake supports Karl Pribram's theory that the function of the brain is to convert sensory input into the changing imagery of a subjective hologram that is our immediate reality because it is, quite literally, us. Pribram links his theory with David Bohm's proposal that the universe itself is an ever changing, informational hologram, in which each is related to all. We take time, especially clock time, as a given, comprised of past, present, and future in endless flow, and it is true that we have various brain and body clocks that synchronise our body's metabolic functions in a daily cycle. Physicists, however, talk of time as a dimension, not as a flow because time, like length, breadth and height, just is. Peake explores the fascinating literature of case histories and psychological research demonstrating beyond all reasonable doubt that time is a very variable form of subjective experiencing, controlled by the changing chemistry of the brain. In sudden danger time can stand still. Alternatively, when we are absorbed in something it can pass in a flash.

Central to Peake's survival hypothesis is the Many Worlds, or Multiverse, interpretation of reality in which there is not just one universe but an endless plurality of universes whereby whenever a quantum choice is made in one universe, the alternative is worked out in other universes and so ad infinitum. Peake quotes physicist De Witt as saying 'Every quantum transition taking place on every star, in every galaxy, and in every remote corner of the universe is splitting our local world on earth into myriad copies of itself'. Many experiments appear to confirm this statement. Schrodinger's Cat is alive in one universe and dead in another as at the point of death in one universe, the universe splits into two for life in another universe. The multiverse interpretation is now a mainstream hypothesis in theoretical physics, especially in cosmological speculation. Allied to this theory is physicist Wheeler's 1983 proposal known as 'Wheeler's Participatory Universe' whereby the conscious observer brings about the universe they are conscious of, even to the many preceding events that must occur to make this possible. This gives consciousness a central role in the universe. These interpretations run counter to the commonsense 'given' of our everyday world in which time flows, night follows day, and cause is followed by effect.

Now we turn to Peake's controversial theory of repeated personal survival. To the age old question of Self and Death - What Survives? There are two age old answers - 'Nothing', because death equals total extinction, or 'A disembodied self', the latter allowing for endless speculative variants on possible outcomes from ghosts, communication through mediums, spiritual journeys, heaven, hell, or reincarnation. Peake has proposed a third answer to the effect of 'Nothing in this universe but everything in another universe, and another, and another'. Peake's theory, therefore, stands or falls in the first instance upon whether the many-worlds, or multiverse interpretation of the quantum universe is correct. As conscious beings we are an integral part of the universe, says Peake, so this interpretation must apply to ourselves at the moment of death. We can never die because the option of not dying must be realised in another universe. Our brain and body will die and dissolve back into its constituent material elements, but we will 'die out of' this universe to be reborn in another universe. Contrary to spiritualist belief we have no ability to operate in a brainless, bodiless state as we are dependent upon our brain, so we need to integrate ourselves into a new brain and body, and we will find that in a parallel universe that operates on the same physical principles, looks the same as this one, and is at a parallel moment in time as our conception and birth.

How is this life-preserving transition from one universe to another achieved? What happens when we are seen by observers as about to die in this universe? During the brief moment preceding brain death the brain releases a flood of opioid neurohormones that causes a dramatic slowing down of subjective time to a point of suspense where we disengage from, or 'fall out of' (Peake's description), the timeline of conscious observers in this universe to realise the option of life and a new timeline in another universe. At the moment of brain death and psychic transition the Daemon comes into its own, rewinding its Eidolon's Life Review into a new beginning in which it is transported back to the point where the embryo becomes a person and the you-to-be becomes the baby-to-be in another universe. In this universe your life sequence from birth to brain death will operate in subjective real time as it does now. You will relive the same sequence of your life as if for the first time with, for most of us, no memory of a previous life. The Daemon that silently shares your life unwinds from its memory your Life Review in a new real time but can intervene to provide opportunities for change.

To recapitulate. In this universe your body and brain die in the sense that they stop functioning and so, to living observers, do you. Your funeral takes place because, as far as your friends, relatives, and the community are concerned, you have disappeared from this universe and are therefore dead, but in another universe you, as combined Eidolon and Daemon, are reborn from brain A into brain B as a new you. Referring to Greek myth Peake terms his theory 'Cheating the Ferryman'. The film *Groundhog Day,* in which weather man Phil Connors endures endless 7am repeats, but whose options change during each rerun, affords a useful analogy.

The Daemon, as richly explored in his second book, guides and prompts our life, and is the agent of repeated survival. Psi, in all its forms, is a function of the Daemon. Precognitive and *déjà vu* experiences, or an apparently irrational urge to do A instead of sensible B which, in retrospect, turns out to have been the right course of action, are when the Daemon intervenes in this life from its memory of what happened in the previous life. It feels like precognition but is actually memory. From the many examples of Daemon intervention as Peake interprets it, I will quote one intriguing instance. In 1749 the opera composer Christolph Gluck was visiting friends in Ghent and had enjoyed a very convivial meal at the local tavern. Bidding his friends good night he started to walk back to his lodgings and suddenly noticed a strangely familiar figure walking not far ahead of the same height and shape as himself and wearing the same clothes. His rising sense of uneasy alarm turned into outright fear as he saw, in a momentary full glimpse, that it was his double. He then saw his double take out a key and enter his lodging house. Rushing back to the tavern he told his friends what he had seen and begged a bed for the night from one of them. Next morning they met and made their way to his lodgings,

only to find a large commotion going on inside with people peering into his bedroom. As they looked in they saw a massive hole in the ceiling through which a huge roof beam had fallen and crashed onto his now smashed bed. According to Peake, Gluck's Daemon remembered that in his previous life it had been the real Gluck who had met this untimely death. To avoid this fate and allow him to fulfil his musical potential the Daemon had created in Gluck's mind an image of his *Doppelganger* to frighten him into returning to his friends and seek a bed elsewhere. In 1749 Gluck was 35, had not yet married, and had not yet fulfilled his creative potential in reforming the rather moribund opera of his time by composing his *Orfeo ed Euridice, Alceste,* and *Iphigénie en Tauride* masterpieces. In this life, thanks to his Daemon, he lived to do so.

Peake's *Cheating the Ferryman* theory challenges our traditional thinking on life, death, and possible thereafters, and will raise many questions in your mind. For example, does this multiverse theory apply to all animals, whether apes, mice, birds or fishes? It should do in principle as the final option is the same for them as it is for us. Alexander the Great must, surely, ride Bucephalus again. Does it really account for apparent mediumistic communication? Whatever your views I do urge you to read his two books because, whether his theory stands up to scrutiny or not, his ability to present and explain findings drawn from across the sciences and interweave them with fascinating case histories is truly impressive. Maybe Wikipedia needs to revise its somewhat dismissive assessment of his academic standing and, by association, its similarly dismissive assessment of parapsychology.

As Far As We Can Get

Lance St John Butler

LIFE AFTER DEATH: WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT?

David Fontana (SMN)

Watkins Publishing, 2009, £10.99, p/b – ISBN 978 1 905857 97 5

In the matter of Life After Death I think we have got as far as we are going to get under present circumstances, and David Fontana's book, coming on the heels of his own *Is There an Afterlife?* (and Anthony Peake's *Is There Life after Death?*) demonstrates pretty much where that is.

Since the 1840s and the advent of modern spiritualism, and a *fortiori* since the founding of the various Psychical Research bodies in the 1880s and 90s, a fairly coherent picture has built up of the possibility and possible nature of survival. We have mediumistic and channelled evidence, NDE accounts, Death-bed Visions, After-Death Communications, the reincarnation material and Instrumental Transcommunication. Some parts of this seemed to loom large in the earlier period, other parts had to wait for developments which came later in the 20th century such as dedicated scholarly research (Ian Stevenson's studies of reincarnation), or technological advances (improved resuscitation techniques in hospitals for more NDEs).

These bodies of evidence have become steadily more voluminous but the overall picture we have of the afterlife has not greatly changed. Communications from the other side have neither become laughably old-fashioned, thin and dubious (there is new material coming in all the time after all) but nor have they become gleamingly modern and solidly convincing to all observers. They have been in a more-or-less steady state. The result of this is that Fontana is able to range freely over 150 years of evidence and research, quoting William James and the Scole Report for instance, separated as they are by a good century, almost in the same breath.

That's fine – indeed, that is simply how it is - but it is a little odd. How many other fields of research show that kind of consistency, or should one say stasis? In Survival Studies there is new evidence and new material, and there are new ways of gathering that evidence and material, but the arguments between sceptics and those who think there is something real being investigated stand almost exactly where they did. One side can point to paranormal phenomena of a convincing kind, the other side can either ignore them (parapsychology not being part of mainstream serious discourse) or propose alternative explanations which, although often rather sketchy, will satisfy most sceptics.

Fontana takes us through some of the material with a focus on what life after death might actually be like. It seems to be a thought-world in which, for instance, on the lower levels, we seem to have bodies, but in which, as we ascend, we learn that they are only thought bodies or a species of illusion. His emphasis is both on what is suggested by the evidence (gleaned from good mediums, convincing NDEs and children) and what has been the opinion of religious thinkers over the centuries – so St Isaac the Syrian and Severus of Ravenna rub shoulders with Erlundur Haraldsson and Kenneth Ring , and we get the Bardo Thodol alongside Helen Wambach and Tom Harrison. I think this eclecticism is justified among the open-minded but I fear it will cut little ice with those whose noses are already hard; the good logic of arguments based for instance on evidence that is unknown to anybody present at a séance, or unknown to a reincarnation claimant before he has made his claim, might stagger the sceptic, but the quotation of sayings from St Luke probably only dubiously attributable to Jesus will not.

So Fontana is perhaps, and perhaps deliberately, preaching to the converted. After all, he is probably the best-informed expert on survival in the country if not on the planet and he is in the strange position of being engaged in a field that, while it produces a lot of evidence, might not refer to anything at all. This book will send those seeking more information to many good sources but it will send those who are unconvinced back into their corners still growling.

It is worth asking why Survival Studies (in spite of recent developments in certain universities in the UK and US I think I have invented those capitals) should be in this strange static position where it has grown in size for so many decades without moving on at the level of paradigm or convincingness. I think the answer, interestingly, tends to support the notion that there is something in it all. If there were *nothing* in the theory of Survival, as for instance there was nothing in Phrenology, then, like Phrenology, it would have died a quiet death. The fact that it has not been dispatched by the mainstream intellectual consensus is significant. On the other hand the fact that it has such difficulty in operating as a convincing discourse is attributable to a particular quality in the evidence. To give only one aspect of this peculiarity: science demands the replicability of results and it may just be that dead people communicate accurately one day, falsely the next and not at all the

third. NDEs are hard to repeat at will or in the laboratory.

Perhaps, then, we need to move to a different logical paradigm altogether here, one in which the vague (for much of Fontana's book is about the vague, the temporary, the illusory as they are manifested both here and on the other side) must be allowed its place. After all, 'strict' science of the 19th-century kind is not the only show in town. The poststructuralist attack on certainty, for instance, is not a Gallic conspiracy against Anglo-Saxon pragmatic realism; it is the most profoundly radical philosophy since Plato. We may need to learn to think differently, with less 'certainty', and in that different thinking notions of 'otherness' or 'death' or 'life' are already under heavy fire.

ecology-futures studies

The Reality Revolution

David Lorimer

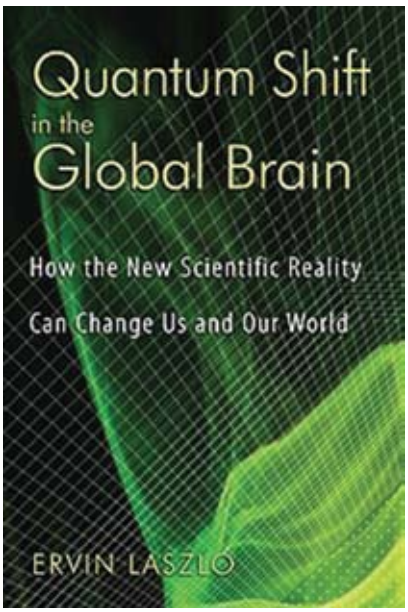
QUANTUM SHIFT IN THE GLOBAL BRAIN

Ervin Laszlo (SMN)

Inner Traditions, 2008, $14.95, p/b – ISBN 978 1594 77233 7

Written before the full force of the financial and economic storm hit us, this book assumes even greater relevance for *Resurgence* readers trying to understand the underlying dynamics of our situation and see beyond the 'repair and continue' or business as usual perspective. Newspaper pundits are displaying more humility than a year ago, and now admit that they don't know how it will all end. They struggle to understand the current crisis in terms of previous crises such as occurred in 1929, 1987 or in the early 90s. However, we also need to assess the extent to which the current crisis is unprecedented. Population pressure was far less intense and natural resources far more abundant 80 years ago than now.

In a series of books published over the last 10 years, Ervin Laszlo has refined and extended his understanding of our predicament. In this book, he examines the possibility of what he calls a quantum shift in the global brain, defining the global brain as the 'quasi energy- and information-processing network created by 6



1/2 billion humans on the planet' interacting on many levels. A quantum shift in the global brain is a 'sudden and fundamental transformation in the relations of a significant segment of the 6 1/2 billion humans to each other and to nature', what he calls a macroshift - not only in society but also in our understanding of the nature of reality through a paradigm shift in science. It is these two shifts together that constitute what he calls a reality revolution.

The book is divided into three parts: the first describes macroshift in society, the second looks at paradigm shift in science and the third explains the ways in which the Club of Budapest is initiating 'Globalshift'. This gives the reader both a theoretical and practical understanding of our situation and its possibilities. The question we are facing is one of evolution or extinction. Business as usual is inherently unsustainable and is likely to lead to increasing instability and breakdown in all spheres of human activity – social, financial, economic, political and ecological. However, another scenario describes timely transformation in which we create a sustainable and co-operative world. We all recognise that global problems demand global solutions, but there lurks a danger that the solutions will be imposed from above rather than evolving from below. It is increasingly apparent that we have reached a bifurcation point in which the elements of breakdown can potentially be transmuted into the components of a breakthrough. Ervin explains this in terms of five phases of a macroshift, namely trigger, transformation, critical or chaos, breakdown and breakthrough. Needless to say this is an uncomfortable process but the roots of unsustainability make it almost inevitable.

Reflecting on our current modality of extensive growth based on conquest, colonisation and consumption, Ervin analyses nine outdated beliefs and six dangerous myths (e.g. nature is inexhaustible and is like a giant mechanism) before suggesting 10 new commandments of a timely vision and the path towards a planetary ethic. These values and perceptions will be familiar and congenial to *Resurgence* readers, who will also appreciate his maximum code of acting so as to maximise the sustained persistence of the biosphere and the minimum code of living so that others can also live. This reflects the emergence of a new culture of ' Holos', corresponding to the worldview of the cultural creatives.

Significantly, both spiritual and scientific perspectives are coming together in a new vision of wholeness involving the cosmic plenum, non-locality and coherence. The old picture of isolated atoms and particles is now being replaced by a more integrated and interconnected view, which intrinsically includes the nature of human consciousness. Here, Ervin proposes a new theory of the Akashic Field incorporating the totality of information and consciousness. In an intriguing annex, he extends this theory to discarnate communication, which he experienced at first hand. He is reluctant to envisage the idea of surviving soul, but rather proposes that our memories live on as an autonomous hologram leaving a trace in the plenum. This is a more sophisticated version of the 'psychic soup hypothesis', but I don't think it successfully accounts for real interactions between the incarnate and the discarnate, which imply continued development of consciousness. The overall message of the book, however unlikely this seems at present, is that humanity is a system capable of rapid transformation. We will soon enough discover whether this is true.

This review first appeared online in Resurgence.

general

Bringing Learning to Life

David Lorimer

WHAT'S THE POINT OF SCHOOL?

Guy Claxton

Oneworld, 2009, 210 pp., £12.99, p/b – ISBN 978 1 85168 603 2

Guy Claxton has been active at the interface between psychology and education for many years. In this groundbreaking book, he brings these fields together to propose a new culture for education based on the development of enthusiastic learners rather than students skilled at reproducing content under exam conditions. His starting point is that schools are currently failing students, not only because only 44% reach the target of five A-C grade GCSEs, but also the disaffected attitude towards school among many young people and their deteriorating mental health, as indicated in a number of recent reports. Interestingly, the overall rhetorical framework now contains many sound principles, originally emanating from the Scottish system with its emphasis on the four capacities of successful learners, confident individuals responsible citizens and active contributors. However, the real difficulty is translating these principles into the culture of schools themselves. Guy shows how a century of educational reforms has failed to do this, and that headteachers do not believe that the aims of education are currently being achieved.

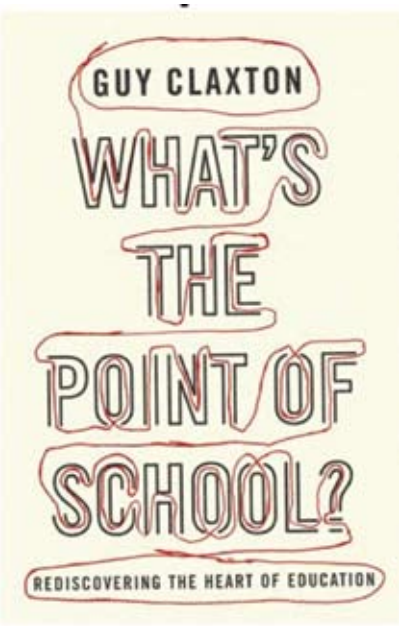
Underlying the issues we now face is a series of outdated metaphors of the school as monastery and factory. The second metaphor is the most damaging, as it encourages a production line analysis of education in terms of input and output to the extent that 'the tail of assessment wags the dog of teaching and learning.' In universities, students are now treated as customers on the receiving end of transferable skills. It is all very well to emphasise the role of education in producing a world-class workforce, but this neglects the essential dimension, which is about how to expand the capacities of young people. In this respect, Guy finds models of fixed ability unhelpful in that they classify students instead of focusing on expanding their capacity to learn; this means a shift from a content-driven to a learning-driven approach. Instead of the factory, Guy proposes two new metaphors, that of the Learning Gymnasium and the Exploratory, suggesting that we see education as a form of 'epistemic apprenticeship.' And, even if 'not all are cut out for academic success, all can get better at learning.'

In these new contexts, he puts forward a series of character traits and qualities that can be cultivated by schools: curiosity, courage, exploration and investigation, experimentation, imagination, reasoning, sociability and reflection. These qualities are able to relate the life of the school with real life after school and model ways in which successful learning actually takes place. Prof Joan Rudduck of Cambridge has found that secondary school students are hungry for what she calls the three Rs and the three Cs: responsibility, respect and 'real', and choice, challenge and collaboration. This does not mean solving problems of carefully graded difficulty, as Guy puts it, but rather a challenge to get something useful done, probably in collaboration with other people. Moreover, the sense of satisfaction and happiness is derived from overcoming these kinds of challenges; and I know from my own work that young people admire those whose achievements require vision and perseverance.

As Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester, Guy has had a chance to test some of these ideas out in schools, and early results indicate that the change of culture also improves exam performance. Young people themselves are very clear about the kind of school they would like to see, and it corresponds closely with the ideas in this book. In addition, the very force of new technology encourages them to carry out their own research; of course, this has its own dangers of plagiarism, but with the development of the eight qualities students will be able to make good use of Internet resources. The structural obstacle comes in the form of politicians trying to improve the system, which is usually interpreted in terms of content and assessment frameworks rather than fostering the language of learning throughout the education system.

Towards the end of the book, there is a useful chapter of tips for parents to enable their children to become successful learners. Guy warns of the perils of praise, suggesting that we concentrate on effort rather than attainment. He also points out some interesting research findings in the way in which results are interpreted for boys and girls. Boys who are good at maths tend to be told that their results are because they are good at it, while poor performance is taken as an indicator of lack of effort. For girls, however, the remarks receive an 'effort attribution', while low marks are interpreted as a lack of ability. The net effect is that boys tend to improve more, so we really have to be careful about our feedback.

Encouragingly, the book has already been endorsed by many leading educationalists, and one can only hope that ministers and opposition politicians concerned with education will pack this book into their holiday reading. They should heed the warning given by Sir Al Aynsley-Green, the Children's Commissioner for England, when he asks what is the purpose of education? 'Is it for the attainment of government targets, or is it to provide children with the life skills to become confident adults?' In our fast moving world, we need to take account of the most recent findings in psychology and neuroscience and incorporate these in our models of learning as applied in schools. This brilliant book shows the way, as its subtitle puts it, that we can rediscover the heart of education.



Thompson Transforms into Teacher

Martin Lockley

TRANSFORMING HISTORY: A NEW CURRICULUM FOR A PLANETARY CULTURE

William Irwin Thompson

Lindisfarne Books, 2009,
157 pp., $20.00, p/b
ISBN 1 978 1 58420 069 7

In *Transforming History* Thompson turns teacher and proposes a curriculum adhering to Haeckel's 'biogenetic law' that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny: i.e. aiming to 'match the stages of the child's cognitive evolution to the stages of cultural evolution.' Thompson proposes that the entire (American) school curriculum, from Kindergarten through 12th grade, should review the history of the human species from pre-Ice Age origins to the present era of globalisation. While this ambitious 12-13 year-long history lesson could be construed as a historian's bias, Thompson envisions all traditional subjects, woven into an epic history-of-humanity tapestry, calibrated with sound Waldorf-style child developmental principles. Hopefully a healthy awareness of physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual dynamics would mitigate insidious developmental problems ranging from Attention Deficit Disorder to math anxiety. As Swiss psychologist Remo Largo said. 'You can't make the grass grow faster by pulling it upward.'

Anyone familiar with his previous work, will find the introduction to this book 'vintage Thompson.' He reminds us of the accelerating tempo of evolution through Hominisation (4 million -200,000 B.C.E), Symbolisation (200-10K), Agriculturalisation (10-3.5K), Civilisation (3.5K B.C.E- 1500 C.E.), Industrialisation (1500-1945) and Planetisation (1945 – present). Here, Teilhard's term Planetisation is given appropriate, historical priority over the now-more-familiar term 'globalisation.' Like Teilhard, and even Einstein who advocated a world government, Thompson is among a growing number of 'integral' cultural philosophers looking beyond nationalism, patriotism and other factionalisms to a more coherent planetary culture that celebrates our common humanity. Thompson also defines seven evolutionary cultural ecologies: Sylvian (primate evolution), Savannahan/lacustrine/coastal (*Australopithecus* to *Homo erectus*), Glacial (archaic to modern *Homo sapiens*), Riverine (ancient civilisations), Mediterranean or Transcontinental (classic civilisations), Oceanic (modern industrial nation states) and Biospheric (planetary noetic polities). He supplements these 6- and 7-fold evolutionary schemes additional 5-fold schemes including Gebser's Archaic, Magical Mythical, Mental and Integral consciousness structures, its several corollaries or equivalents like Marshall McLuan's modes of communication (Oral, Script Alphabetic, Print and Electronic), what he calls 'identities' (Sanguinal, Territorial, Linguistic, Economic and Noetic) and what he terms 'artistic-mathematic mentalities' (Arithmetic, Geometric, Algebraic, Galilean Dynamic and Complex Dynamic). For good measure the complex dynamical systems exhibit three possible modes or 'attractors:' point, periodic and chaotic. Though some may find these lists repetitive (I don't), they have the advantage of being easily blended and shuffled to give us a rich overview of how humanity is a multi-layered, evolutionary, organism or system made up of a dynamic and creative flux of individual, collective linguistic and cognitive faculties, identities and consciousness structures.

Thompson's entertaining but light scholarly erudition betrays his Celtic love of language. Words like 'fabulation,' 'angelology,' 'thaumaturgical' (=miraculous) and 'amphyctyony' (= a league of Greek states) embellish his pithy turn of phrase and his digs at the monolithic establishment. So the 'History Channel…is really the War Channel' and speeches by Lynne Cheney calling for the 'elimination of multiculturalism in our public schools and a purified curriculum of 'America First'… [make the] … school systems the battlefield in which the dying ethnicities of the past fight for three dimensional space in a scientific world that has already moved beyond into the multiple dimensions of astrophysics.' Thompson has already foreseen and described the 'heat' of the phase shift that is causing the 'meltdown' or 'catastrophic restructuring' of the biosphere, the ever-more-helpless territorial nation-state, and the human body, under assault from pharmaceutical, industrial and genetic pollution. Even poor Edward Wilson, Harvard's ant specialist and biodiversity guru, is depicted as so unable to comprehend Stuart Kauffman's science of complexity mentality, that their dialog is like a 'Catholic cardinal and Descartes discussing the Renaissance,' with cardinal Wilson dogmatically insisting that the outmoded 'scientism' mentality is 'adequate for all times and circumstances.' Perhaps William doth protest too much, and Edward's other contributions deserve better approbation.

Thompson never explicitly states whether this curriculum is designed only for American schools, where it is undoubtedly needed, as parts of the country are 'stuck in pre-Enlightenment religious mentalities' or, as the book's subtitle would imply, is it for the entire planetary culture. Thompson's soaring and idealistic intellectual vision is undoubtedly holistic and well-intentioned but, one wonder's how quickly and widely it could be implemented, given the huge variability in cultural mentalities across the planet. Presumably implementation would require Waldorf-style teacher training programs, and fundamental changes in the administration of educational infrastructure. Although Thompson does not discuss the global growth of Waldorf schools, from less then 100 in the 1970s, to about 1000 today, the trend is very promising and verifies Steiner's prescient predictions about achieving critical mass.

I would be the last to decry Thompson's visionary idealism. Indeed, I was tickled to find that his appendix appears under the label of 'An evolution of consciousness curriculum.' (The same title as the university course I've taught for 10 years in Colorado)! His vision is more high-falutin, intellectual and global than that embodied in grass roots programs like *Learning for Life* which aim to 'build and strengthen character in the contexts of the family, education and employment' thus making 'a real difference to the lives and character development of both learners and the professionals.' (www.learningforlife.org.uk). Nevertheless there are undoubtedly many interesting convergent threads. Perhaps Thompson is right about the complex dynamical system's instability that he has often discussed in reference to the weather, biosphere and financial systems, not to mention 'mentalities' and 'consciousness structures.' Ideally inducing a consciousness paradigm shift in early education could have rapid and revolutionary results. If so, Thompson's desired and much needed transformative revolution may come about sooner that we think.