



# books in brief

David Lorimer

## SCIENCE/PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

### **Seeing through Illusions**

by **Richard L Gregory**

Oxford University Press 2009, 253 pp., £16.99, h/b.

Written by one of the foremost researchers into the nature of illusions, this book provides fascinating insights into how the brain perceives the world, conditioned as we are not only by our own previous experience but also by the process of evolution itself. Earlier ways of seeing still remain embedded in the brain, and can be revealed by careful experiments. The scope of the book includes philosophy and art as well as neuroscience and psychological case studies. The key lies in our interpretation of the world. Gregory examines paradigms of perception, blindness, various forms of ambiguity such as 'flipping' (the Necker tube is a well-known example), and different types of cognitive distortion. Authoritative and compelling.

### **Branches: Nature's Patterns, A Tapestry in Three Parts**

by **Philip Ball**

Oxford University Press 2009, 221 pp., £14.99, h/b.

This is the third in a series of books (the last two have been reviewed in earlier issues) about patterns in nature. Branching and interconnection are found throughout nature, for instance in snowflakes, trees, rivers and crystals; and many patterns of fractal, recurring at many scales. The book examines the underlying principles that produce such patterns or moulding factors that shape the world, revealing striking parallels between different phenomena. The six chapters discuss different aspects of branching, beginning with the nature of the snowflake and moving through water, trees, leaves and web worlds. The result is a fascinating tour. Like the other two books, I feel that the study could have been produced in a different and more attractive format with more illustrations in colour and fewer black-and-white diagrams.

### **Space and Counterspace**

by **Nick C. Thomas**

Floris Books 2008, 128 pp., £14.99, p/b.

This is a book building on the work of Rudolf Steiner on counterspace, which formed part of his scientific approach incorporating a deeper level of perception and based originally on his understanding of the science of Goethe. In particular, modern science is a science of quantities rather than quality, and has great difficulty dealing with qualia, which, after all, form the basis of our everyday experience. The author discusses our experience of seeing blue as an example, maintaining that this cannot be dismissed as merely subjective. Quoting Heisenberg on Goethe, it is clear that the physicist understood that Goethe's more direct contact with nature would have to be foregone in the interests of clearly understanding a wide range of mathematical relationships. This book probes more deeply and its content is relatively technical and more easily understood by trained scientists, who will appreciate the wide range of application of these insights in relation to gravity, time, chemistry, astronomy and cosmology.

### **Thinking in Systems**

by **Donella H. Meadows**

Earthscan Ltd 2008, 218 pp., p/b.

Donella Meadows (1941-2001) was a well-known systems theorist who worked for three decades on the limits of growth agenda. This book was completed in the mid-1990s and is based on seminars she gave in universities and elsewhere. It is an excellent introduction to the field, and one that should be read by politicians around the world. Just as it suggests in the first chapter, managers do not solve problems, rather they manage messes – complex systems of changing problems that interact with each other. This requires systems thinking if one is not to be caught up in unintended consequences. There is an important chapter on leverage points, or places to intervene in a system. Interestingly, Jimmy Carter tried a systems approach when he was president, but found it difficult to get across to the public. At the end there is a useful glossary and summary of systems principles.

### **The Selfish Genius -**

### **How Richard Dawkins Rewrote Darwin's**

by **Fern Elsdon-Baker**

Icon Books Ltd 2009, 282 pp., £8.99, p/b.

This study by a philosopher of evolutionary theory enables the general reader to understand more about the history of evolution, the nature of neo-Darwinism and the scientific disagreements within the field in relation to Richard Dawkins's position. The author writes as a fellow scientist from a secular background, and whose main contention is that the public understanding of evolutionary theory has been overly influenced by Dawkins's work, and that there are other competing explanations, for instance from Stephen Jay Gould. Within the context of the Network, Brian Goodwin's main argument was against the narrowness of the Dawkins selfish gene, contending that the organism had been forgotten and that a science of qualities was necessary to counterbalance the emphasis on quantity. The strength of the book is in enabling the general reader to understand the wider scientific context of the debate and the sterility of a stand-off between science and religion. It was surprising that the publishers did not see fit to provide an index; indeed, there are only references within the notes rather than a separate bibliography.

## MEDICINE/HEALTH

### **The Reconnection - Heal Others, Heal Yourself**

by **Dr. Eric Pearl**

Hay House Publishers 2001, 222 pp., £9.99, p/b.

An autobiographical account of the therapeutic journey of a chiropractor into a healing practice. The book begins with an account of one such healing where the result was so rapid as to be nothing short of miraculous. The reconnection in question is remembering our identity with the Source and allowing what he calls the transfer of information in terms of energy to the healee thereby restoring the person to spiritual wholeness. In this perspective, healing is a decision arrived at between the patient and the Universe - the healer is an intermediary. This is a book for those in therapeutic practice and those who would like a new angle on the meaning of healing.

### **My Path**

by **Carolien van Leusden (SMN)**

Carolien van Leusden, 144 pp., p/b.

A personal and inspiring account of how the author survived secondary breast cancer by combining conventional and complementary treatments, changing her diet and following spiritual guidance. As a nurse herself from a medical family, the story is well informed and is written as a diary so that the reader can appreciate the events as they unfold, sharing both the anguish and the breakthroughs at all levels, psychological, emotional, physical and spiritual. The lessons from the book are the perennial ones that we need to live in the present with courage and love, and also to be able to reach out for the support we need and which we can in turn give out.

### **Movement Medicine**

by **Susannah & Ya' Acov Darling Khan**

Hay House Publishers 2009, 285 pp., £10.99, p/b.

Subtitled 'bring the life of the dance into the dance of your life', this book is the result of many years of research and teaching across a number of traditions. It is a meditation practice rooted in traditions of ecstatic dance, and is promoted as 'suitable for anybody in a body.' It is certainly true that movement and dance can reach new parts of our being. The structure of the book includes the dance of creation, the journey of empowerment, the journey of responsibility and living the dream. Within this are the four elements and what they call the nine gateways as a journey to the soul and a means of embodying your essential self. There are many practical exercises which form part of the workshops put on by the authors. The intent of the book can be summed up with the words of a Colombian Shaman: 'the only really important thing is that you can look yourself straight in the eye and know that you have lived from your truth and integrity. Have faith in your truth. Follow it with love.'

**The Function of the Orgasms**

by Michael Odent (SMN)

*21st Century Information 2009, 149 pp., £7.99, p/b.*

Following on from his work on what he calls the scientification of love, this book, with its subtitle 'the highways to transcendence' will radically revise your understanding of orgasms. Note the plural, for a start: here he focuses on the fetus ejection reflex, male and female orgasms in genital sexuality, and the milk ejection reflex, drawing various parallels along the way. Interestingly, the word climax in Greek originally meant a ladder; but there are other etymological associations too, with shame and guilt and fear. Pubic hair in German is Schamhaare. These associations go deep, as Michel's historical analysis of the political repression of sexuality shows.

A key theme running through the book is a central role of oxytocin in all orgasmic and ecstatic states. This is released in normal childbirth, but not in Caesareans, during sexual arousal and during breastfeeding; so the decline in natural births and breastfeeding also implies a decline in bonding between mothers and children, with all which that implies. The link between transcendence and ecstatic states involves intense activity of the archaic primitive brain, while the neocortex is put to rest; and the term peak experience carries its own connotations. After an interesting chapter on parallels between humans, dolphins and bonobos, Michel discusses orgasmophobia and its relation to shame, already mentioned above. Here the thesis touches on that of Riane Eisler's Sacred Pleasure. He finishes with pessimistic and optimistic scenarios about the future of love, putting forward suggestions for reversing current cultural conditioning, based on his long first-hand experience. It is no exaggeration when he argues that the future of civilisation is at stake.

**PHILOSOPHY/RELIGION****Introducing American Religion**

by Charles H Lippy

*Routledge - Taylor & Francis Group 2009, 268 pp., £16.99.*

An exemplary and highly readable textbook on this topic covering every conceivable aspect of American religion. It begins with native American understandings as well as key elements in African tribal religions and varieties within Christianity. The approach is then historical, tracing the evolution of religious forms and practices from colonisation through the revolution, the civil war and into the late 20th century picture of pluralism. Each chapter is introduced with a summary of the main topics covered then there are summary boxes throughout the text. Chapters end with key points you need to know, discussion questions and further reading. Although Network readers will not need all this information, it does make the contents of the book easy to absorb.

**Faith in the Fool:****Risk and Delight in the Christian Adventure**

by Angela Ashwin

*Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. 2009, 187 pp., p/b.*

I found this a refreshing and indeed disarming book as it is relatively rare to find a book on the fool written from a Christian perspective. Some readers will remember that St Paul defined Christianity as a form of folly to the wise, but the fool is always a subversive figure who draws on a deeper wisdom and puts us in touch with the spontaneous child. Various themes emerge, including the value of uselessness (that delight of the fool), the mirage of perfection, the uncluttered fool who is not attached to possessions, and the vulnerable fool who grows through suffering and may be foolish in generosity and forgiveness. She also draws on her own everyday experiences as well as the work of other writers, providing points to ponder at the end of each chapter. Within a structure of somewhat rigid expectations, this is a liberating book which many spiritually inclined people will celebrate.

**Peace in the Post-Christian Era**

by Thomas Merton

*Orbis Books 2004, 165 pp., £16.00, p/b.*

It is fitting and a trifle ironic that I am writing this short review on the day when Barack Obama will receive the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, having recently committed a further 30,000 troops to Afghanistan. Merton would surely have objected to this in the strongest possible terms, for the same reasons that he voiced his opposition to the war in Vietnam. Indeed, his extraordinary death in a shower in Bangkok in December 1968 may well have been an 'accident' engineered by the intelligence services in order to rid themselves of a thorn in their side. Merton's writings on peace are extraordinarily powerful - he saw them as an expression of his prophetic mission and his conviction that 'the vitality of the Church depends precisely on spiritual renewal, uninterrupted, continuous, and deep.' In this context, he did not believe that monks should be in the rear with the baggage, but rather part of the advance guard. Needless to say, the nuclear issue is at the forefront of these essays, but there is much discussion of the

parameters of a just war in the Christian tradition, along with a penetrating essay on the legacy of Machiavelli. The situation in Afghanistan owes a good deal to realpolitik as practised from Machiavelli to Clausewitz to Kissinger. Merton characterises the state of mind of his time, and indeed of ours, as 'one of truculence and suspicion, based on fear. In such a mood, it becomes difficult to see any other solution than violence.' On another page he remarks that military logic frequently demands a new and more ruthless policy, arguing that this will save lives and enable a swifter end to the war. This sounds chillingly familiar, and I'm sure that Obama will have heard this repeatedly. For Merton, the winner is war, with the same ruthless inhumanity on both sides. In Copenhagen, we are trying to formulate the interests of our common humanity - a logic that should be extended to all fields as we recognise our oneness and interdependence.

**Where is Heaven?**

by Alexander Gorbenko

*RG Publishing 2009, 150 pp., p/b.*

The author of this book is a Russian Quaker who is also a Swedenborgian scholar interested in mysticism and the scientific work of Constantine Korotkov who has done some Kirlian photography with recently deceased people. The book begins with some comparative definitions of heaven, moving on to a discussion of the terms universe, life and self. The author asks what actually survives bodily death in terms of soul, mind, aura or spiritual body, drawing on the work of a number of scholars will be known to readers such as Chris Clarke, Max Velmans, David Chalmers and John Polkinghorne. He concludes that what we call mental in the physical world becomes environmental beyond death, in other words that we continue to exist in a mind-dependent or imaginal world, which is hinted at it through the sciences of quantum theory, information theory and the study of complexity. A stimulating and unusual discussion.

**When Philosophers Rule:****Ficino on Plato's Republic, Laws, & Epinomis**

by Arthur Farndell

*Shepherd-Walwyn (Publishers) Ltd 2009, 180 pp.,**£18.95, h/b.*

Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) was a key figure in the Renaissance era as a philosopher, scholar, a priest, physician and musician. He made available to the West the Corpus Hermeticum as well as the works of Plato, which he quoted in his sermons in Florence Cathedral. It is quite surprising that this is the first English translation of Ficino's commentaries on Plato's Republic and the Laws, as well as a lesser-known work. The translator has been associated with the School of Economic Science for nearly 50 years, and its principal, Ian Mason, contributes the Foreword. He sees the importance of this work to our time in terms of self-government, taking control of one's inner life (these two dialogues are fundamentally about government, the latter written by Plato in his old age). As one would expect, the commentaries are erudite and well-informed, referring to neo-Platonic literature as well as to Plato himself. Of particular interest are his remarks on the allegory of the cave if, where he refers to light being threefold - divine, intellectual and visible. He also provides a commentary on the Myth of Er, giving his view on why this is conveyed as a story rather than a philosophical analysis. The structure follows the original books, and the whole work is dedicated to Lorenzo de Medici, his patron. This is a rich new seam for students of the perennial philosophy.

**Creative Wisdom Ancient and Modern, Self Enlightenment and Liberation**

by Tahasa Falconar (SMN)

*Non-Aristotelian Publishing 2009, 143 pp., p/b.*

This print on demand book revises and updates some of the author's previous work on non-Aristotelian thinking based on the work of Count Alfred Korzybski who argued that creativity is essentially what we would now call the right hemisphere function, whether one is referring to Einstein or Rumi. The book ranges widely over themes including ancient and modern wisdom - there is a good discussion of Seneca, Epictetus and Thoreau - and enlightenment with Ramana Maharishi and Maharaj. The author also points out that much of our schooling is based on words and memory, which bypasses real and immediate insight and experience. The font and layout of the print on demand format does not make the book easy to read, but there is plenty to engage the reader interested in the full spectrum of ways of knowing.

**Swedenborg's Secret - A Biography**

by Lars Berquist

*Swedenborg Society 2005, 516 pp., h/b.*

Lars Bergquist is a former Swedish diplomat who has translated Chinese, Italian and French poetry and prose into Swedish. This is the English translation of a highly acclaimed biography of Emanuel Swedenborg, which came out in 1999 and is the first definitive, full-length biography for 50 years. For those readers unacquainted with this enlightenment genius, this beautifully produced book provides the ideal introduction to the man

and his influence. The book helps rescue Swedenborg from the margins of European thought by demonstrating his role as a founding father of modern esoteric spirituality. His stand-off with Kant (or rather Kant's with Swedenborg) represented a clash in ways of knowing with which we are now much more familiar. Swedenborg's unique distinction was to combine his intuitive visionary capacity with his analytical and empirical gifts as a scientist.

### **Religion Politics Evangelism**

by P C Jena

*Imprint Academic 2009, 138 pp., £8.99, p/b.*

Edited by Member Dick Vane-Wright, this radical book by an Indian Christian challenges churches to participate in political action as an integral expression of evangelism; interestingly, the same point of view was put by one of the candidates to become rector of our local church. The key contention in this book is that religion has historically been controlled by political ideologies, which in turn shape the nature of evangelism: right-wing fundamentalism in the USA is a conspicuous contemporary example. The author is clear that people cannot call themselves spiritual if their actions reflect unjust practices - this calls for searching self-examination. The word best characterising his approach is the Greek 'diakonia', which I must confess was new to me. It means ministry to the poor and is the manifestation of divine love, as explained by Jesus himself. It implies a prophetic stance critical of existing social structures which all too often co-opt religion for other ends - as Constantine did in the fourth century. The author is equally critical of the role of modern media and political propaganda associated with the war on terror. This distracts attention from the situation of city dwellers in slums, a reality only too apparent in India. In this context, the author reminds us that Christianity is now predominantly a non-Western religion and that Pentecostalism is a dynamic force in the impoverished cities. Jena highlights the theological rediscovery of politics and outlines his own view of hope and witness in political action, reflected in his own work with the Urban Rural Mission. This is a powerful and passionate book.

### **Soul Survivor**

by Bruce and Andrea Leininger with Ken Gross

*Hay House Publishers 2009, 256 pp., £9.99, p/b.*

A very interesting account of the ostensible reincarnation of a World War II fighter pilot. As with many such stories, James Leininger began to have memories and nightmares about dying in a fighter plane which was on fire, and which he could not get out of. Over the course of time, many verifiable details came to light, which the young boy could not possibly have known. This enabled the parents to identify the pilot as James Huston. The book is written as a narrative, carrying the reader along with some extraordinary details and the profound effect this experience had on the belief system of his parents, especially the father as a Christian searching for a rational explanation not involving reincarnation. It contains some original drawings and photos of other officers identified by James and who were also killed. There are some poignant reunions, when James recognises and names one of his old comrades from the sound of his voice. It is an extraordinary story and one of the most evidential cases on record.

### **Rivers of Time**

by Cy Grant (SMN)

*Naked Light 2008, 95 pp., £7.00, p/b.*

These poems span a period of over 60 years, and are ably introduced by Ian Dieffenthaler. Some describe his experiences in the air force during the war, while others reflect wider philosophical concerns, his interests in the Tao Te Ching and his role as a champion of the dreaming black soul in a white materialistic culture. Cy makes very creative use of language and rhythm. Here is the first part of his poem Silence

To say that which is unsaid  
is like throwing a pebble  
breaking the pool of silence  
words alone are as inadequate  
as a lack of words;  
silence is not a lack of words.  
tears dissolve the eyes  
as love the senses.

The poems are powerful and evocative, showing how words and their combination can reach beyond normal explicit meanings.

### **Lighting a Candle**

by Kathleen Raine and Temenos

*Temenos Academy Review 2008, 223 pp., p/b.*

Many readers will be familiar with the work of Kathleen Raine and Temenos, whose Review I review every year. This book consists of a series of over 40 tributes to her, along with her own inaugural address at the Temenos Academy in 1991. Pride of place goes to the eulogy by the Prince of Wales at the service of Thanksgiving for her life, when he identifies with her own ambition to reverse the premises of materialism in our culture, which

she referred to as the Great Battle. Among the best-known names in this collection are Wendell Berry, Thetis Blacker (who writes about her prowess at cooking and even provides some of her recipes), Keith Critchlow, Satish Kumar, John Lane, the Bishop of London and Sir Stephen Lampport. As private secretary to the Prince of Wales it was one of his jobs to arrange a fortnightly delivery of organic vegetables from Highgrove. The contribution from Sir John Tavener is a musical score for which a magnifying glass is required in order to decipher even the dedication. This is a book which anyone who knew Kathleen will treasure and want to read.

### **The Future of the Ancient World**

by Jeremy Naydler (SMN)

*Inner Traditions International 2009, 311 pp., \$19.95, p/b.*

Following his last book on Egypt, The Temple of the Cosmos, this new book by Jeremy Naydler is a series of essays based on talks given over the last 15 years. The themes are wide ranging, including ancient Egypt and the soul of the West, sacred art, modern esotericism, epistemology, the importance of the ear in relation to the eye, early Christianity and divination. Central to Jeremy's concerns is the way in which our modern culture has lost touch with nature and the spiritual world. He urges us to reconnect with invisible realms and develop a new participatory awareness: 'I believe it is one of the great tasks of our time, and the future, to rediscover and live in conscious connection with the nonphysical, invisible worlds. Otherwise we simply live in one half of reality rather than the whole of reality.' For him, the cosmos that surrounds us is full of soul, which we can learn to feel again through rather than in contrast with modern cosmology. Likewise, we already live within the interior world beyond death without necessarily being aware of it. The book is full of rich insights into history and culture that enable us to understand our own story and decide which elements need to be carried forward into the future.

### **Perception, Hallucination, and Illusion**

by William Fish

*Oxford University Press Inc 2009, 198 pp., £28.99, h/b.*

A technical book defending a naive realist theory of perception by incorporating analyses of three kinds of visual experience in terms of perceptions, hallucinations and illusions. I find it ironic that the author begins his book with a quote from the Cambridge philosopher CD Broad, who was president of the Society for Psychical Research, but nowhere mentions the kind of experiences which Broad himself took an interest in such as apparitions and out of body experiences.

### **From Cells to Souls and Beyond - Changing Portraits of Human**

by Malcolm Jeeves, Editor

*William Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2004, 266 pp., £19.99, p/b.*

A sophisticated set of essays bringing scientists and theologians together to consider a range of interpretations of human nature and representing, biological and medical sciences, psychiatry, psychology, genetics, philosophy, theology and biblical scholarship. Central to the concerns raised are developments in genetics and neuroscience, which raise ethical and religious questions such as: would a cloned individual have their own distinct identity? When do we become and when do we cease to be persons? Can there ever be a real freedom of choice? What is the relationship between spiritual experience and brain processes? Do genes play a role in religion and values? How do we evaluate Christian visions? What can Christianity offer in terms of an interpretation of personhood? The editor then brings the strands together in the last piece, noting the centrality of personal agency, the importance of relatedness, and the emphasis on embodied spirituality. An important volume for anyone considering the deeper questions of human identity posed by science and philosophy.

### **Open Spaces, Sacred Places**

by Tom Stoner and Carolyn Rapp

*TKF Foundation 2008, 191 pp., £24.95, p/b.*

The Spirit of this beautiful book can be captured in a quotation from John Muir: 'climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop away from you like the leaves of autumn.' The healing power of nature and gardens is underestimated in modern medicine, an insight that underlies the projects described in this remarkable and wonderfully illustrated book. The chapters describe how people have created green public spaces for contemplation and refreshment and which will help heal the community. Tom and Kitty Stoner founded the TKF Foundation in 1996 after experiencing the healing power of nature in their lives. Since then, more than 100 open sacred spaces have been created. One of the most striking was a meditation garden at the Western Correctional Institution, where one of the inmates said that making this garden was a chance on him to do something positive. Buy this book, and be inspired yourself!



**G.K. Chesterton, Theologian**

by Aidan Nichols OP

*Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. 2009, 209 pp., p/b.*

GK Chesterton was one of the leading and most versatile Catholic minds of the 20th century, one of whose books helped convert CS Lewis to Christianity. The author is a lecturer at Cambridge University and this book is based on lectures given at Oxford in memory of John Paul II. As such, its most immediate appeal will be to Catholic readers but it introduces Chesterton to the general reader in a wider context with discussions on the nature of spirituality and secularism. I particularly enjoyed the quotation from Father Brown that 'I can believe the impossible, but not the improbable', which, incidentally he also relates to the incredible.

**Studies in the Gospels Volume 1**

by Emil Bock

*Floris Books 2009, 336 pp., £20.00, p/b.*

Emil Bock was a leading light in the early days of the Christian Community, which is rooted in the teachings of Rudolf Steiner. These studies originally appeared in a series of newsletters at a time when the author was also making a new translation of the Gospels from Greek. Rudolf Steiner's perspective those beyond the normal limits of biblical criticism and materialistic understandings, reinstating the importance of what he called the supersensible, in the light of which the miracles of Christ can be understood afresh. Bock examines differences between the consciousness of the various evangelists, and he uses Steiner's scheme of three stages in spiritual perception, namely imagination, inspiration and intuition as means of deepening his own understanding. The topics covered are very broad, including parables, miracles, the Sermon on the Mount, John the Baptist, Judas and Peter. I found his comments on the Beatitudes especially interesting in shedding new light on their layers of meaning.

**Home Tonight:****Further Reflections on the Parable of the Prodigal**

by Henri J M Nouwen

*Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. 2009, 137 pp., p/b.*

Henri Nouwen's original book on the Prodigal Son is one of his best-known works, and this is a sequel based on workshops he gave when he returned to his community at L'Arche in Toronto after a period of breakdown and soul-searching. He describes the enormous impression made on him by Rembrandt's painting, which hangs in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. He contemplated its many layers of meaning, especially the depiction of the magnanimous father and the repentant son, which evokes enormous tenderness and compassion. Nouwen notes that Rembrandt himself had suffered enormously in the period before he painted the picture. The book is beautifully crafted, elaborating the themes of the story and creating spiritual exercises around them, including the practices of listening, journaling and communing. Besides the main text, there are some wonderful apposite quotations, including some from Jean Vanier, which add to the richness of texture and provide ample material for spiritual reflection.

**2159 AD - A History of Christianity**

by Craig Borlase

*Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. 2009, 255 pp., £9.99, p/b.*

This unusual book outlines the history of Christianity from the perspective of 150 years hence. The first 12 chapters are in the past and the last four in the future. The text is highly readable and the originality of the book consists in its forecast of the future with an accompanying timeline including such events as a global flu epidemic, droughts and water wars (not until the 2090s); on the theological side there are schisms firstly in the Anglican Communion, then in the Catholic Church where the Vatican loses its independent status. The details of these discussions make stimulating reading, but perhaps the most surprising forecast is the dramatic conversion of Richard Dawkins to the Jacobite Syrian Christian Church, described as an obscure branch of Orthodox Christianity. Needless to say, his last book charts this religious conversion and is entitled, appropriately, *The Learning Gene*.

**Envisioning Nature, Science, and Religion**

by James D Proctor

*Templeton Foundation Press 2009, 371 pp., h/b.*

A stimulating set of essays examining possible relationships between the three terms in the title - nature, science and religion. The point of departure is that many claims about the nature of nature have negative social consequences expressed in terms of, for instance, racial prejudice. Interestingly, the word nature as meaning the physical world as a whole did not come into usage until the 17th century. Then there is the use of the term to refer to human nature with inner and outer dimensions. More specifically, five visions of nature are presented: evolutionary nature, emergent nature, malleable nature, nature as sacred and nature as culture. The editor points out how each of these five visions challenges a different metaphysical dichotomy, for instance malleable nature expressed in biotechnology challenges the dichotomy between the natural and the artificial, while

nature as sacred challenges the distinction between matter and spirit, secular and sacred. The 14 essays range widely across this terrain, and the authors are mapped in relation to each other at the end of the book. The reader comes away with an enhanced and more subtle understanding of the way in which philosophers and scientists understand nature, which will form the cultural backdrop to any new relationship with nature.

**Sun of g0d**

by Gregory Sams

*Weiser Publications 2009, 232 pp., \$17.95, p/b.*

More than 10 years ago, Rupert Sheldrake arranged a meeting in Devon to ask the question, is the sun conscious? And in 1999, the Sun was the theme of the Mystics and Scientists conference. This book raises all these questions again, and its premise is that 'Sun is a large complex system with some form of self governing intelligence. It is a living being, aware of itself and its place in the universe...its power of consciousness is so far beyond what we enjoy that it should be accorded deity status of a high order'. For millennia, human beings had an animistic outlook on the world, and many worshipped the sun as the source of light and life. Blake still understood this, but the modern mechanistic outlook regards the sun as little more than a molten mass, and would certainly balk at attributing any intelligence to it. Sams suggests that we need to recover this more ancient understanding, but in the light of the self-organising consciousness that underlies everything. And if the sun is in any way conscious, then it is possible to communicate with it. At the very least, we can be filled with a sense of gratitude for the life and warmth and sustenance that we gain from the sun. This is a wide ranging and thought-provoking book.

**Patterns of Eternity:****Sacred Geometry and the Starcut Diagram**

by Malcolm Stewart

*Floris Books 2009, 279 pp., £20.00, p/b.*

The front cover of this beautiful and profound book depicts the starcut diagram, which is a way of demonstrating an internal geometry of the square by creating triangles from each corner to the opposite apex. The thesis, which I find persuasive, is that this diagram underlies many developments of sacred geometry in different parts of the world. The author takes the reader on a cultural adventure from Pythagoras to the Pyramids, from the Vedic fire altar to Chinese shamanism, from Sufism to Raphael. All of this is beautifully illustrated with both diagrams and photographs, so that the reader is able to understand the subtleties of the geometric patterns as well and the way in which they have been put into practice. The underlying harmonic of this shape could contribute a healing presence to our jangled and fragmented consciousness; the book is an outstanding achievement and deserves a wide readership.

**Angels in my Hair**

by Lorna Byrne

*Arrow Books 2008, 325 pp., £6.99, p/b.*

Lorna Byrne is a contemporary Irish mystic, and this book is her fascinating autobiography starting from her early childhood where she was already seeing angels and spirits. At one level, her life is very normal, but her perceptions make it exceptional. As a girl, she explains the nature of God to her friend Marian, asking her if she sees the beautiful finch with all its golden colours, remarking that the bird is like God, encouraging her to look at it closely and see its beauty and perfection. She recounts an accident where two boys are killed by a truck, but she sees this from inside, the boys becoming luminous at the moment of death. She explains that death for most humans is a continuous flow from one life to another, in perfect harmony. She receives a beautiful prayer from the Archangel Michael, whom she perceives as a radiant force beyond our comprehension. At the end of the book, she entreats Mother Mary to appear more widely in the world. The message of this book, and many others reviewed in this publication, is that there are hidden and subtle dimensions to our existence, which enables us to understand the context of life more deeply and realise that we are not trapped within a purely physical system.

**PSYCHOLOGY/PARAPSYCHOLOGY****Cosmic Ordering: the Next Step**

by Barbel Mohr

*Hay House Publishers 2009, 183 pp., £7.99, p/b.*

In spite of the marketing hype, there is some underlying wisdom in this book drawing on the ancient Hawaiian technique of ho'oponopono and involving both self-healing and empathy, as well as more generally the relationship between what we call inner and outer. The path involves love, forgiveness and responsibility in maintaining a personal connection to the universe through gratitude and acceptance. It encourages the formation of new patterns of behaviour, which in turn will bring about

alterations in outer circumstances. The key insight is the way in which other people mirror processes going on in ourselves so that if we feel the resonance within ourselves, then the relationship may well change: we ask ourselves what our own motivation for the behaviour of the other person might be, healing this motive within ourselves, so that the other person can take care of themselves. Anecdotally, there are some very interesting results where healer working on themselves resulted in the healing of patients on which he was focusing in on distant hospital.

### **Virtuous Living - Fulfilling your Individual Purpose in Life**

by Belinda Joubert

*O Books 2009, 178 pp., £9.99, p/b.*

This book is written on the basis that we are spiritual beings and that our purpose is to live life fully devoted to God in a spirit of love and service. The sentence that particularly struck me was that we should always strive to be kinder than necessary because everyone we meet is fighting some kind of battle. The people who will get most out of the book are those who share the author's perspective on God; it is refreshing to see the word virtue used so explicitly and to reflect on the explanation of 12 natural laws. Interestingly, the book as a whole is something to the channelled wisdom of *Silver Birch*, which I have not read for many years.

### **The Radiant Warrior**

by Jason Chan, with Jane Rogers

*Hay House Publishers 2009, 234 pp., £9.99, p/b.*

Jason Chan is a Tai Chi and Chi Kung master and a lifelong Taoist. His co-author, Jane Rogers is a former lecturer in social policy, who now works with him. Her contributions, often at the end of chapters, relate her own unfolding development as she enters more deeply into Jason's practice. The book has an authentic ring of genuine experience and progression, moving through awakening, healing and empowerment to dynamic surrender. Themes covered include meditation, transcending emotions, understanding relationships, forgiveness, abundance, trust and service. The goal is formulated as the return to pure consciousness and the realisation that we are all one with everything. The rest is the human journey with its process of awakening and the evolving understanding of the nature and commitment of a radiant warrior.

### **Seeds of Transformation - a 52 step journey towards enlightenment**

by Maggie Erotokritou

*Findhorn Press 2007, 121 pp., £7.99, p/b.*

A powerful practical book for self growth and the transformation of consciousness, where each seed is likened to a mantra planted in consciousness which then grows into new thought forms. The format describes the quality on the left-hand page and provides further reflections on the right. Then there are intermittent reviews which formulate the seeds in terms of affirmations. The seeds or qualities include harmony, peace, vision, understanding, the process of refinement, intention, flow, creativity, abundance, and gratitude and many others. The aim is to live with vision, entering into the flow of life. Interested readers can also consult [www.livingwithvision.com](http://www.livingwithvision.com).

### **Vision: Awakening your Potential to Create a Better World**

by Peter L Benson

*Templeton Foundation Press 2009, 120 pp., £8.99, p/b.*

A book that evokes the life and work of Sir John Templeton himself as a visionary embodying a higher purpose. It addresses both the personal and social, giving guidance on creating one's own personal vision as a pull towards the future. The book is interspersed with inspiring quotations, for instance from Gabriel Garcia Marquez who says that 'it is not true that people stop pursuing dreams because they grow old. They grow old because they stop pursuing dreams.' He explains how spirit animates and connects us all, and that love is the unifying force in the universe, on which we ourselves can draw and express in our lives. An inspiring little book.

### **Psychosynthesis New Perspectives and Creative Research**

by Will Parfitt (ed)

*PS Avalon 2009, 275 pp., £13.00, p/b.*

This is an edited selection from the *Synthesist Journal* covering a broad range of topics. The editor provides an introduction to psychosynthesis and the topics covered reflect both a professional and cultural approach and are therefore suitable for a wider readership. Among the contributions is poetic exploration of the hidden mythical depths of Harry Potter, the correspondence between existentialism and alchemy, the comparison between psychosynthesis models and Biblical literature,

and an essay on the influence of Gnosticism and Christian mysticism on Roberto Assagioli, which has an interesting section on the Cathars. Anyone interested in the human psychospiritual journey will find much food for thought.

### **Love and its Disappointment**

by David Brazier (SMN)

*O Books, 2009, 199 pp., £11.99, p/b.*

An explanation of the meaning of life, therapy and art by an author who has already written on Carl Rogers and Zen. He takes the position that love is the primary drive in human life, that psychotherapy is an art, that art is therapeutic; hence both therapy and art are forms of love, which is essentially expressed as esteem. However, as we know, love encounters obstacles, giving rise to frustration, which is then expressed in art. Brazier proposes what he calls 'other centred therapy' in order to emphasise that the therapist is client-centred and the client is dealing with others in her own life, reaching beyond herself. The book goes on to explain the context of this new theory, the nature of esteem, the troubles of the artist, dimensions of love and issues of transference and technique. He concludes that the effectiveness of Rogers' approach is in fact due to the functioning of love and esteem. The book mainly aimed at practitioners, but contains much of interest for the general reader.

### **Love in a Time of Broken Heart**

Benig Mauger (SMN)

*Soul Connections, 208, 331 pp., no price given*

See [www.soul-connections.com](http://www.soul-connections.com)

By her own account, this is the most personal of the author's three books. It arose in the aftermath of the break-up of a relationship which she had expected to last, plunging her into the depths for a new and more profound exploration of love, including Divine Love. As she writes, it is at times of profound vulnerability that a deeper intelligence emerges and life renews itself. So the book as a whole is a spiritual journey which can help others understand patterns in their emotional relationships as they relate to their parents, to stories or myths and to the process of reconciling the masculine and feminine within.

Like David Brazier's book reviewed above, love is seen as a primary drive in overcoming our sense of separation and achieving wholeness. Interestingly, she drew her inspiration not so much from psychology books as from mystics and poets like Rilke, who is quoted often. One notable feature of the book is the way in which it is interspersed with stories, real and imaginary, to highlight the issues. One of her clients was able to initiate a dialogue with her unborn baby, in the course of which she understood what gift the child would have brought her and that she was not ready to become a mother herself before resolving some further issues with her own mother. In the chapter on healing broken hearts, there is some particularly good advice on soul work that can be done in the metaphorical desert as one patiently waits for the seeds to germinate in the new cycle. The book is full of spiritual and emotional wisdom of the kind which can only be gained through experience and reflective understanding.

### **Happiness Around the World**

by Carol Graham

*Oxford University Press 2009, 240 pp., £14.99, p/b.*

Taking as its point of departure the paradox of happy peasants and miserable millionaires, this book represents a considerable advance on earlier popular studies with its wider cross-cultural scope. Many studies have stemmed from the so-called Easterlin paradox revealing that while within countries wealthier people are on average happier than the poor, there is little relationship across countries between increases in per capita incomes and average happiness levels. This field is at the intersection between psychology, sociology and economics and has become a major focus of attention in the UK since the publication of Richard Layard's book in 2005.

The author discusses the economics of happiness, and reports that the determinants of happiness around the world are very similar. She then considers various aspects of happiness in relation to health, inequality and poverty and ways in which friends, freedom, crime and corruption affect happiness. She is cautious in drawing practical implications from her study, although she does stress the importance of non-income variables in the overall formulation of policy. If one combines the three recognised components of contentment, welfare and dignity, then they can form a basis for policy proposals and the development of more adequate indicators of well-being; finally, one should not neglect resilience, since the author highlights the remarkable human capacity to adapt to the most extreme of circumstances.

## FUTURE STUDIES/ECONOMICS/ ECOLOGY

### **Eco-logical!**

by Joanna Yarrow

*Duncan Baird Publishers 2009, 128 pp., £7.99, p/b.*

A colourful and lively book aiming to present the key ecological issues in an accessible fashion, with arguments on both sides of controversial questions: so-called eco-dilemmas. The various sections deal with resources, population, climate, waste, cities, energy, travel, organic food and farming and ethical consumption. Statistics show the development of various trends, and the choices we face are clearly articulated. Pitched at an introductory level, this is a book we can use to help inform our choices.

### **Tescopoly**

by Andrew Simms

*Constable & Company Limited 2007, 372 pp., £7.99, p/b.*

Andrew Simms is the Director of the New Economics Foundation, and is ideally placed to have written this eye-opening book. I imagine that nearly every reader of this review shops, at least occasionally, at Tesco. Readers are probably not aware that the Tesco capital in Scotland is Inverness, with three stores already and a further one applied for. Perhaps the central economic dynamic in the book is the relationship between scale or size and economic clout. The larger you are, the more power and influence you have, both economically and politically. In addition, the book documents the evisceration of local communities and shops all over the world by the installation of supermarkets. The dynamic of capitalism also encourages further concentration in market shares, reflecting the global supply chain. This process is associated with globalisation and the encouragement of international trade at the expense of local economies.

For developing countries, this means making hard choices between growing food for their own citizens and for export. If we return to the power issue already mentioned, then supermarkets are in a position to put pressure on producers and those who work for them, with the result that many commodity prices have actually fallen in the last 30 years. This means that the developed countries' cheap food is effectively paid for by poverty in developing countries. Moreover, this food needs to be transported around the world – it takes up a large proportion of air freight and creates corresponding carbon emissions. The good news is that something can be done about this and indeed is being done in certain localities, on which the author reports. There is a great deal more that could be done by way of regulation, which he spells out, and which many other countries have implemented. At a local level, campaigns have been organised to oppose planning permission for new supermarkets. In the long run, we ourselves as consumers make choices; this is a difficult one, since, for reasons already outlined, supermarkets can offer the lowest prices – 'every little bit helps.' This book is a real wake-up call to encourage us to support local shops where we can rather than the supermarket juggernauts, which Tesco is the largest in Britain, and rapidly expanding abroad.

### **Sakhnin**

by Jan Martin Bang

*Floris Books 2009, 120 pp., £12.99, p/b.*

This portrait of an environmental project in northern Israel is an inspiring beacon of hope. It is run by a dedicated group of Arabs and Jews, and teaches environmental awareness to local students. Its centrepiece is a waste water management system where the water is used to irrigate local farmland. Lavishly illustrated, this book brings the whole operation alive with vivid portraits of those people central to the enterprise as well as photographs of the work that has been going on. More broadly, the book is dedicated to a wider quest for peace based on Rudolf Steiner's idea of social threefolding in terms of liberty, fraternity and equality or the three aspects of peace - cultural, economic and political.

### **The Long Road to IRENA**

by Eurosolar and WCRE

*Ponte Press 2009, 136 pp., p/b.*

IRENA is the International Renewable Energy Agency, which was finally incorporated this year after a campaign of nearly 20 years initiated by Hermann Scheer, MEP, who spoke at our Mystics and Scientists conference on the Sun in 1999. Appropriately, he is president of Eurosolar and one of the leading proponents of renewable energy who has been a driving force behind the microgeneration measures introduced by the German Federal government to encourage small-scale investment in renewables. The political point behind IRENA is to provide a prestigious international body as a counterweight to the International Atomic Agency and the lobbying power of fossil fuels. The documents provide a route map and endocrinology or major speeches given along the way, culminating in the founding conference in January of this year and an interview with Hermann Scheer explaining the arduous process

involved in the funding of this agency. See [www.eurosolar.org](http://www.eurosolar.org)

### **In Resonance with Nature**

by Hans Andeweg

*Floris Books 2009, 291 pp., £16.99, p/b.*

Subtitled 'holistic healing for plants and land', this book summarises the work of a Dutch biologist in restoring the vitality of habitats through what he calls eco-therapy. The two parts deal with diagnosis and therapy, analysing life force energy in number of places and exploring theoretical ideas from Sheldrake to Reich and the Huna. Each chapter contains practical exercises for the reader, including using a pendulum for energy diagnosis and perceiving at a distance. In the therapeutic section, green fingers are explained in terms of giving energy to plants, and the use of music, colours and symbols is elaborated. There is also a separate chapter on crop circles and one on radionics. This is a difficult book for the general reader with a great deal of technical detail, and I had the impression that this kind of material would be easier to absorb through personal contact. Nevertheless, those interested in healing the landscape will find much practical advice.

### **Climate Change and Energy Insecurity**

by Felix Dodds et al (eds)

*Earthscan Ltd 2009, 282 pp., £19.99, p/b.*

In the spring of 2005, the International Futures Forum conducted some research on the relationship between climate change and energy security, projecting 50 years into the past and 50 into the future. In the event, few people were able to see much beyond 2020, but the longer term perspective is vital in order to inform present decisions and actions. The relationship between climate change and energy security is much more widely recognised four years on, especially if one just extrapolates current trends without any revolution in energy provision, since the burning of fossil fuels is a major driver of climate change. Revising security to include environmental dimensions is essential. This volume provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges, beginning with future energy stability and moving on to an analysis of climate insecurity, including an essay by Lord Stern and papers on the future of food and water. The third and most extensive section explores avenues for preventative diplomacy from a number of different perspectives, including that of the so-called green new deal. All this represents a very thorough briefing on the issues.

### **The Sustainability Mirage**

by John Foster

*Earthscan Ltd 2008, 170 pp., £19.99, p/b.*

A radical and challenging work with an all too plausible thesis, considering the current negotiations going on in Copenhagen. The author points out the remarkable speed with which the concept of sustainable development has become mainstream, but argues that it is structurally unsound and may be undermining the possibility of taking serious action on climate change and other environmental issues. The problem, as he points out, is that the trade-off between present and future will always tend to collapse in favour of the present under the pressure of current economic and political concerns. This in turn means that our actions will always fall short and targets will be moved into the future. Instead of a long sustainability, the author proposes a deep sustainability starting in the present and using the levers of government frameworks and capitalist incentives. Only then do we have a chance of moving beyond the constantly receding mirage.

### **Climate Change - the Science, Impacts and Solutions**

by A. Barrie Pittock

*Earthscan Ltd 2009, 350 pp., £19.99, p/b.*

This is the most comprehensive book on climate change I have yet come across, and must count as the single volume to buy if you want an overview of every aspect of the topic. The author, an Australian, has been working in the field for 40 years, publishing his first paper on climate change as far back as 1972. Readers will be familiar with the overall ecological, economic and political issues and scenarios, especially in view of recent debates. While giving both sides of the arguments on key issues, he also provides the necessary facts on which interpretations are based. This process circumvents the cherry picking approach where the whole balance of evidence is not considered that people do not apply the same scepticism to their own favourite set of facts, or else create a false dichotomy between combating climate change and other global problems. The book begins with a discussion of why climate change matters, meaning onto lessons from the past and the nature of future scenarios and projections. The author observes that uncertainty is inevitable, but that risk is certain, and that delaying our responses will certainly increase our risks. He surveys what specific climate changes are likely and the impacts that these will have. He then considers measures of adaptation and mitigation and the larger context of climate change in terms of air, land, water and population growth. Finally, he moves on to the politics of greenhouse emissions



and the ways in which the international community has addressed these in relation to national interests. His own favoured approach is activism rather than nihilism or market fundamentalism. Forecasts and prophecies are calls to action and only become self-fulfilling if ignored. Although the environmental crisis is the largest collective challenge we have faced, humans are extraordinarily resourceful and ingenious - but we will need a new worldview and understanding of our relationship to nature and that between ecology and economics in order to forge long-term sustainability.

### **State of the World 2009 - Confronting Climate Change by Worldwatch Institute**

*Earthscan Ltd 2009, 262 pp., £14.99, p/b.*

Published every year in 28 languages, this book always represents essential reading, in this case focusing on the topical issue of climate change and within an overall context of progress towards a sustainable future. The tone, while always realistic in its diagnosis, is nevertheless oriented towards positive measures and the capacity of politicians to carry things through. Various essays examine the options, covering farming and land use, energy, adaptation and resilience, and political dimensions of securing a viable deal. In the middle, there are 22 short pieces on factors related to climate change such as security, biodiversity, health, trade, carbon capture, geo-engineering and shifting values. Aside from scientific and technical considerations, the most pressing issue is our ability to undertake the necessary transformational changes, which will have to be driven from below - see the review of *Blessed Unrest* below.

### **Climate Change and Aviation by Stefan Gossling and Paul Upham**

*Earthscan Ltd 2009, 386 pp., £24.95, p/b.*

A comprehensive and timely book on a vital topic at the interface between the environment and our economic system dedicated to continuous growth. As people increasingly realise, the political difficulty is that of reconciling the immense popularity of aviation with its growing environmental damage and significant contribution to global warming. Although many of the contributions are relatively technical, the issues are easy to understand. The four parts are devoted to aviation and atmosphere, drivers and trends, socio-economics and politics, and mitigation. The opening chapter sets the scene and argues the case for an integrated perspective which the book provides. The science is described in detail, as are the drivers, in particular the emergence of low-cost airlines, which have done so much to change aviation and travel patterns with their familiar business model, which is increasingly being adopted by other airlines. The last chapter provides an overview of policy options in terms of regulation, market incentives, environmental taxes, emissions charges, subsidies and tradable permits. The authors provide an evaluation of these various policy options, but they warn that the growth in demand for travel could easily consume all the emissions savings from other sectors of the economy. The real dilemma for governments is that absolute reductions in greenhouse gas emissions will only be possible if growth in aviation is reduced. This in turn will require co-ordinated international action, but national governments will be tempted to evade regulations in order to take advantage in their own interest.

### **The Atlas of Climate Change - Mapping the World's Greatest by Kirstin Dow and Thomas E Downing**

*Earthscan Ltd 2007, 112 pp., £12.99, p/b.*

Endorsed by none other than the Foreign & Commonwealth Office as an essential overview, this richly illustrated book enables the general reader to get to grips with the issues. It is divided into six parts: signs of change, forcing change, driving climate change, expected consequences, responding to change and committing to solutions. Then at the end there are extensive climate change data. The maps and charts bring the issues to life, for instance in terms of food security, threats to health and cultural losses. It is striking that so much of the threat to food security is concentrated in Africa. The drivers of climate change are considered in detail, as are the possible responses to change and issues such as the relationship between carbon dioxide and economic growth. Measures for adapting and mitigating change will both be required, as will personal as well as public action. The format of the book makes it a suitable textbook for schools.

### **Chill: a Reassessment of Global Warming Theory by Peter Taylor**

*Clairview Books 2009, 404 pp., £14.99, p/b.*

There has been much discussion in the press recently about leaked e-mails from the climate research centre in East Anglia, which has raised the question about the degree of consensus among climate scientists about global warming, and the extent to which this has been manipulated. This book takes a dissenting view from the majority, arguing that the key computer simulations are flawed and that researchers have fed into the political process in return for further funding. Taylor's own argument is that the main driver of recent global warming has been an unprecedented combination of natural events, and that we may be facing a greater threat of

cooling than warming. Sceptics have always argued that natural causes can account for the data, a contention strongly contested by the majority. Taylor adduces satellite data as evidence to contradict global warming theory, and contends that changing patterns in cloud cover can explain the warming, an argument which he also applies to the Arctic. The second part deals with the politics, and sheds light on the collective psychology of scientists, which tends to overrule dissent and brand opponents as heretics. Few non-specialists have the time to study a 400 page book; indeed one would need to study several such books in order to be sure of one's ground. For me, however, whatever the rights and wrongs of the arguments, the main point is that the human footprint on nature has been excessive, and that measures need to be taken to restore the earth rather than continue business as usual. Interested readers can consult [www.ethos-uk.com](http://www.ethos-uk.com).

### **Before it is too Late by Aurelio Peccei and Daisaku Ikeda**

*I B Tauris & Co Ltd 2009, 155 pp., h/b.*

A book which had a huge influence on me 30 years ago was a dialogue between Arnold Toynbee and Daisaku Ikeda called *Choose Life*, representing Toynbee's mature reflections on the human condition and its relation to the planet. Toynbee was then in his 80s, while Ikeda was still in his 40s. This dialogue is not dissimilar in scope, and engages Aurelio Peccei, the founder of the Club of Rome. First published 25 years ago, it is still chillingly relevant and a reflection of how little underlying progress has been made in addressing the world problematique - the interconnected set of challenges we face, or, as Peccei puts it 'causes, problems and solutions are all interlinked in one great continuum'.

As with Toynbee, the authors call for an individual renewal of vision and values from within at the same time as deeply reflecting on our relationship with nature - Peccei himself asserts that our oneness with Nature is the primary element of our being. However, as he observes, we are paradoxically in our most dangerous situation at the peak of our power, so that we are inclined to 'do what we can do, not what we ought to do', prioritising technology over the biosphere and neglecting the mismatch between our technological sophistication and our behavioural obsolescence. Nothing, he insists, can be lasting 'until and unless we succeed in re-establishing peace and harmony with Nature.' This, he maintains, along with Thomas Berry, is the Great Work or the basic imperative of our age, which ought to be a primary consideration at Copenhagen. The dialogues explore this possibility.

### **Blessed Unrest by Paul Hawken**

*Penguin/Viking Books, 342 pp., \$16, p/b.*

Readers may recall the commencement address by Paul Hawken printed in the last issue. When asked if he is pessimistic or optimistic about the future, he always says that if you look at the science and aren't pessimistic, you don't have the correct data. However, if you meet the people in this unnamed movement and aren't optimistic, you haven't got a heart. This movement he refers to consists of millions of people dedicated to change in an organic, self organising manner, and together they constitute the largest social movement in history, which aims to restore grace, justice and beauty to the world. They represent the World Social Forum rather than the World Economic Forum: glocalisation rather than the current form of globalisation. Our greatest resource is our capacity to adapt, leading the author to conclude that 'evolution is optimism in action.' The first part of the book describes our overall situation and the areas in which people are working, while the second, in the form of an appendix, describes in more detail the activities of NGOs and the number involved. All this makes very encouraging reading and can be followed up on [www.blessedunrest.com](http://www.blessedunrest.com)

### **Blackout by Richard Heinberg**

*Clairview Books 2009, 208 pp., £12.99, p/b.*

This is the latest of a number of books by Richard Heinberg on aspects of the energy crisis. He concentrates on coal, which fuels more than 30% of UK electricity production and 50% in the US. Recently, many people have been turning to coal as a possible solution to our energy problems. Indeed, the growth of China and India has been largely fuelled by it. Heinberg focuses on three issues: potential scarcity, cost and quality (including transport costs), and climate effects. This brings into play the relationship between the environment and the economy, between pollution and growth. The book is a thorough examination of the use of coal around the world, and addresses the role of new coal technologies. He finishes by looking at three potential scenarios, the maximum burn rate (this is the default), the clean solution involving storage of carbon emissions, and a post-carbon transition leading to widespread adoption of renewable energies. His take-home message is that we need not have further energy price fluctuations once we rely on resources that are continually replenished and have adopted a no-growth economic paradigm. This last option does not look likely in the short-term so it is more probable that we will go down one of the first two routes.

**Viktor Schauberger: A Life of Learning from Nature**  
by Jane Cobbald

*Floris Books 2009, 170 pp., £9.99, p/b.*

A new edition of a book I reviewed in 2005. Readers unfamiliar with Schauberger will find this an excellent place to start. The author integrates biographical insights and explains the context in which his work arose. The text is also interspersed with some stimulating quotations and hand drawings: 'a bird does not fly - it is flown. A fish does not swim - it is swum.' She brings out the influence of Goethe in a way that clarifies the parallels with contemporary Goethean science. Schauberger's basic vision and philosophy was to understand the processes of nature from within, and then to devise technologies that imitated these processes. He contended that modern civilisation is based on destructive forms of energy use and technological exploitation, which can only take us down a correspondingly destructive path. As one who is convinced that our attitude to nature must undergo a complete revolution, I regard the work of Schauberger as essential reading.

**The Biodynamic Sowing and Planting Calendar 2010**  
by Maria & Matthias Thun

*Floris Books 2009, 64 pp., £6.99, p/b.*

This annual publication is the practical guide for who want to farm and garden biodynamically. There are useful notes for new readers and a number of special features, including this time the care of bees, Anthroposophical insights into honey, water management in crop production and water storage and soil fertility. There is also a recipe for rye bread. The book is illustrated with a number of small photos as well as charts and is based on nearly 50 years of search and experience. This year, for the first time, there is an equivalent for North America.

**The World of Organic Agriculture**

by Helga Willer, Minouyussefi-Menzler & Neil Sorensen (eds)  
*Earthscan Ltd 2008, 267 pp., £40.00, h/b.*

This annual publication documents statistics and trends around the world in organic agriculture, and is chock full of fascinating data. Australia has more organic land - over five times as much - as the next country, China. The leading European country is Italy with 1.1 million hectares, of which a quarter is olives. There are graphs indicating the growth in the global market for organic food and drink as well as of land under organic cultivation. In Europe, the two leading consumers of organic food are Germany and the UK, but Switzerland has the highest per capita consumption. In Europe as a whole there are nearly 204,000 organic farms, which represents about a quarter of the world's total. To put this in perspective, European organic farms occupy 1.6% of the European agricultural area and 4% in the EU. Similar detailed statistics and charts are provided for other parts of the world. This is not a book for the general reader, but an extremely useful point of reference which should be available in your local library.

**The Biofuel Delusion**

by Mario Giampietro and Kozo Mayumi  
*Earthscan Ltd 2009, 318 pp., £49.95, h/b.*

Subtitled 'the fallacy of large-scale agro-biofuel production', this comprehensive volume is surely the textbook for the field. They did not take long for people to catch on to be disadvantages of biofuel production, especially that it uses land that could otherwise produce food, which then has the effect of raising food prices. However, as my review of Robert Allbritton's book in the last issue showed, the key driver of capitalism is short-term profit rather than long-term sustainability. In this case, it would have been good if knowledge had preceded policy, but it is equally clear that the policies, notably in the EU, have been captured by corporate interests with their strong lobbying activity on the part of car manufacturers, oil companies and biotechnology interests. A good book to order for your local library.

**Nature Spirits of the Trees**

by Wolfgang Weirauch and Verena Stael von Holstein  
*Floris Books 2009, 228 pp., £12.99, p/b.*

A very unusual book, the fruit of Verena's ability to communicate with nature spirits and to translate their elemental language into human terms. The format is one of dialogue with the spirits of different kinds of tree. If this sounds outlandish, the results are coherent and timely, adding a different voice to concerns over environmental degradation. Trees are highly rhythmic, and the book makes clear that we have disturbed many of their rhythms and therefore compromised their immune systems, rendering them more susceptible to disease. Chestnut trees communicate exactly this point, claiming that they can no longer defend themselves against the chestnut leaf miner - this is apparent in some of our own horse chestnut trees, two of which have died in the last two years. The text indicates that it is good for these trees if there are people who feel responsible for them, as this 'helps them to stay rhythmic.' Sweet cherry trees state that they are unable to ripen sufficiently with wet springs and excessively dry summers 'so we cannot form fruits properly any more and creatures don't enjoy

eating us so much.' A curious but rather disturbing thought as one thinks of the lusciousness of the cherry. One of my high points (literally) was a memorable, even timeless afternoon I spent in France in July 1970 picking and eating cherries right up in a tree.

**Insider Voices: Human Dimensions of Low Carbon Technology**

by Peter Reason (ed) SMN

*Earthscan Publications Ltd, 129 pp., p/b.*

A report on a piece of action research carried out at Bath University. The format is novel in using colour coding for the reader to identify who is speaking and what links to make between different elements in the report. The research assumptions are set out at the beginning, as is the nature of action research, which may be unfamiliar to many people. There follows an account of six action research engagements across a number of sectors including food, biogas, engineering, heating technology, energy and clothing. The reader gets a multi dimensional impression of the processes and outcomes and is then led into the theoretical section which discusses the social shaping of technology, a sociotechnical transition framework, various forms of power and resistance to change, and even different narratives, which clearly determine what people can see and which connections they make. The final section uses the four quadrant model of Ken Wilber. The report suggests ten ingredients for low carbon change which include building networks and relationships, systemic thinking and amplifying feedback so as to drive the change process. This leads in turn to the formulation of key issues for policymakers and research funders. The really interesting thing about this piece of work is the methodology and the subtle insights which emerge from it. My guess is that many of the recommendations could be applied to other issues and in other circumstances.

**Local Food How to Make it Happen in Your Community**  
by Tamzin Pinkerton & Rob Hopkins

*Green Books Ltd 2009, 216 pp., £12.95, p/b.*

This is the third in a series of Transition Books authored or co-authored by Rob Hopkins. The keyword in the Transition Movement is localisation, as opposed to globalisation (some say glocalisation), and here the emphasis is on creating local food initiatives, which are springing up all over the country. Only this weekend, my wife has been involved in a cooking demonstration at a local food fair, and we have our own local farm shops and local farmers markets. The strength of this book is that it provides a guide about how to make local food happen in your community, with chapters and examples on every conceivable aspect including allotment provision, community gardens and orchards, food co-operatives, local food guides, school projects on local food and local food events. The background to the transition movement is explained, as is the centrality of food, with plenty of inspiring real-life stories. There is no doubt that the movement has momentum, and this book will provide an invaluable resource for those interested in replicating existing successful initiatives.

**EDUCATION**

**Dyslexia: Learning Disorder or Creative Gift?**

by Cornelia Jantzen

*Floris Books 2009, 203 pp., £14.99, p/b.*

The book's subtitle issues its rhetorical challenge, and invites readers to revise their understanding of dyslexia. The American Ronald Davis has been working as a pioneer in the field for over 30 years and articulates eight abilities shared by dyslexics such as enhanced awareness of the environment, thinking in pictures, highly developed intuition and vivid imagination. Interestingly, this correlates with right hemisphere thinking and is arguably only stigmatised in a left hemisphere dominated society. It appears that Rudolf Steiner was himself dyslexic and his lectures and way of thinking shed an interesting light on the field and informed his own teaching methods, which have been carried forward in the Waldorf education programmes. No one reading this book will think about dyslexia in the same way again.

**Navigating the Terrain of Childhood**

by Jack Petrash

*Floris Books 2009, 119 pp., £8.99, p/b.*

Subtitled 'a guidebook for meaningful parenting and heartfelt discipline', this is a book which every parent will want to read and reflect on. All parents know that the path of development contains both precious moments and difficult situations, challenges that test us to the limit, so that, as one of the chapters puts it, parenting can be seen as a path of inner development. The author uses the metaphor of a journey across America to describe the various phases and stages of child development. Parents will naturally look at the chapters applying particularly to the ages of their own children, even adult. But reading the book through enables one to gain a better understanding of the journey as a whole and to be wary of overcompensating



for the methods of our parents; hence the emphasis on heartfelt discipline. An intriguing section is headed 'the complaint department' when children begin to complain about various family obligations, partly as a way of beginning to assert their independence. If there is bonding, there is also letting go, which is the other half of love. I was struck by the author's advice that two key ingredients of raising healthy teenagers are purposeful, challenging activities and meaningful contact with adults in situations of responsibility. This makes it more likely that teenagers will feel good about themselves, and we will feel good about them.

### **The Spirit of Adventure - Towards a Better World . . .**

by Colin Mortlock

*Outdoor Integrity Publishing Limited 2009, 290 pp., £14.95, p/b.*

Colin Mortlock has been involved in outdoor adventure all his life, and is now in his 70s. For him, outdoor adventure is also an inner adventure as we discover more about ourselves and others. The book is partly autobiographical, and contains many episodes that help make his points. The big questions of who we are, where we are going and how we get there are at the forefront of his consideration, as are values, virtues and the corresponding vices. It was with a sense of déjà vu that I looked down his list of values and virtues, which corresponds almost exactly to those found on the Learning for Life website. His explanation of qualities associated with each virtue and vice is extremely helpful, as are the stories from his own experience that illustrate them. There is an extended section on wisdom and specific wisdom that one can derive from nature. In the wider context, life is seen as a quest for beauty, love and friendship, and the author stresses the importance of transcendent experiences. There are great many inspiring quotations in the text, many from writers who have also inspired me. There is even an index of authors quoted. I can think of no better volume giving insight into the relationship between inner and outer aspects of life. It is a book to which I shall return often.

### **Learning for Tomorrow**

by Bryce Taylor (SMN)

*Oasis Press 2007, 256 pp., p/b.*

This book is essential reading for everyone concerned with the deeper issues of learning in terms of structure, context, process, group dynamics and outcomes. Based on a subtle understanding and a vast range of experience and building on the work of such people as John Heron, Carl Rogers and John Rowan, the reader travels through some new landscapes on a journey that involves all the faculties. Individuals are no mere spectators, but rather they are involved in what they are going to learn, how they learn it, and how the process of reflection and peer assessment will be carried out. There is a focus on interpersonal needs such as inclusion, control, collaboration and openness, all of which will invariably emerge in the course of a two or three day process. This makes participants much more sensitive to others and their reactions, along similar lines to Bohm dialogues.

The peer principle, an educational expression of equality, is a key element in this approach and is explained in detail in the expectation that 'tough, open, honest confrontation is the norm to be aimed at', which many people will initially find uncomfortable. The situation is essentially co-operative, participative, emergent, open-ended, experiential and co-creative. Much of the rest of the book is taken up with explanations of learning in groups, facilitating groups, assessing the process and formulating accreditation. By the end of the book, the reader is in no doubt that whole person learning is a radical new paradigm which has extensive implications for all kinds of education. This is a not only a comprehensive overview but also a landmark in this new field.

## GENERAL

### **A Rosslyn Treasury**

by P L Snow

*Floris Books 2009, 185 pp., £9.99, p/b.*

A book about stories and legends depicted in the sculptures of Rosslyn Chapel near Edinburgh; the place has always been one of pilgrimage, but more intensively in the last 20 years. The building dates back to the 15th century, with some pieces as early as 1446. The pilgrim will find much to reflect on within the building. This book gives a brief history before recounting twenty stories connected with the sculptures. There are chapters with black-and-white illustrations on the Green Man, Melchizedek, Elijah, the Three Kings, the Templars, Mani's dualism and the legend of the Holy Grail. The author suggests that this building needs to be understood at three levels: physical, spiritual and divine; this is the meaning of sacred art as a way of raising consciousness to the divine by means of physical manifestation.

### **The Oxford Guide to Etymology**

by Philip Durkin

*Oxford University Press 2009, 347 pp., h/b.*

Essential reading for anyone who, like me, is fascinated with the history of words and their meanings. The author is eminently qualified as principal etymologist of the Oxford English Dictionary. The chapters cover such topics as word formation, lexical borrowing, change in word form and semantic change. The book begins with a couple of examples, one of which is the English word friar, related to the French frere and the Latin frater then the English brother, both in form and meaning. Another example further into the book is the change of meaning in English word quaint. The current meaning dates from the mid-18th century, but in earlier periods it meant cunning or crafty; also pretty or dainty. Meanings overlap and gradually fall into disuse as new meanings emerge. There are also sections on etymologies of names of people and places. A fascinating and authoritative work.

### **Gods, Genes and Consciousness**

by Paul Von Ward (SMN)

*Hampton Roads Publishing Company 2004, 410 pp., p/b.*

Subtitled 'the 21st-century challenge: redefining the human response to advanced beings', this is an ambitious and wide-ranging work making the case for non-human intervention in human history. These advanced beings (ABs) have taken many forms and still do, such as divine beings, guardian angels, ETs and other forms of intelligence. Interestingly, scientists, religious leaders and governments have all tended to take the view that the existence of such beings should be ignored or denied. This is partly to do with the suppression of subtler ways of knowing and the insistence that the physical world is a closed system.

Scientists still find it hard to come to terms with parapsychology, while the US government has not yet come clean on the existence of UFOs and extra terrestrial intelligence, all of which is amply documented in this book. Admitting officially that these other forms of intelligence do indeed exist would be a massive paradigm shift, and I can't help thinking that something of this magnitude becomes increasingly necessary, all the more so when combined with the admonitions from ABs that we should live peacefully, take care of the earth and love one another. Beware, however, of future propagandist manipulations of this kind of information in order to keep humanity in a state of fear. Liberation from fear is true liberation.

### **Turning Points**

by Julia Ogilvy

*Lion Hudson PLC 2009, 192 pp., £8.99, p/b.*

At the beginning of this book is a quotation from Epictetus: 'we cannot choose our circumstances, but we can always choose how we respond to them.' It is a fitting commentary on the eleven life stories and turning points presented in this searching book. Julia begins with our own story of transformation from successful businesswoman to social entrepreneur, in part triggered by the death of a friend's child and being opened up to the tough realities endured by many young people in Scotland and elsewhere. Turning inwards, she found her faith, as did a number of the other people featured in the book, the best-known of whom are the Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Bob Geldof. After reading Gordon Brown's story about the short life and death of his daughter Jennifer, one understands how pain can be transformative and galvanise new forms of action. The interview with Geldof is very different, as he is the only subject to come across as a pretty militant atheist but driven to do what he could about famine in Africa.

Two of the subjects are young people connected with Julia's work with the volunteering charity Project Scotland, and show how young people can turn themselves around from grim conditions. Perhaps the most charismatic story is that of Chris Moon, whose work in various parts of the world – including clearing landmines and losing his leg – has brought him close to death on a number of occasions. Summarising his two key turning points and what they have taught him, he comments that we need to take responsibility for who we are, where we are and work out where we want to be and how to get there. Secondly, remember that life is all about people, about loving and being loved and making the best of life and connecting with like-minded people. Finally, persistence is key as one needs to keep on getting up when one has fallen over. Reading this book will cause you to reflect on your own priorities and sense of direction, and whether there is more you could do in terms of service, without forgetting the quality of your relationships with those closest to you.

**The Elixir of Immortality**

by Robert E Cox

*Inner Traditions International 2009, 193 pp., p/b.*

Alchemy is perhaps the most ancient spiritual science, which has been practised for centuries in different cultures. The author's quest began with an American called David Hudson, who in 1989 claimed to have discovered a new form of matter that initially defied scientific assays but which was eventually found to consist of gold and platinum. He took this white powder along to the local vet, who injected it into some terminally ill dogs; they subsequently recovered and were tumour free within a few weeks. The book explores various traditions of alchemy, bringing the story right up to date with recent experiments conducted with Hudson's chemist. He has not yet arrived at the elixir of life, but gives some substantial clues about the procedure. Traditionally, alchemists never revealed any of their secrets, partly because putting such power in the hands of humanity as a whole would be a leap of faith, as, like all other advances, these techniques could fall into the wrong hands. However, it may not be long before we hear more about this hidden science, which could provide an antidote to many of the diseases of civilisation. And with the right intentions, the capacity to create gold and platinum could give us the opportunity and resources to help create a new culture.

**The Wild Places**

by Robert Macfarlane

*Granta Publications Ltd 2007, 340 pp., £8.99, p/b.*

Some readers will have read Robert Macfarlane's first book, *Mountains of the Mind*, and they will certainly be enthralled by its sequel. The author set out to ask if there are any genuinely wild places left in Britain and Ireland. The answer is emphatically positive, as he evokes in a series of exquisitely delineated journeys into different landscapes, memories and histories. He sleeps out and swims in some rugged landscapes, bringing his experiences intensely alive to the reader. Beginning not far from his home in Cambridge with a wonderful description of sitting up a beech tree, he travels to some of the farthest points in our islands, following in the footsteps of other famous travel writers, to whose ranks he himself now belongs. This is a book to savour, relishing the rhythm and beauty of the author's prose and the breadth of his literary reference.

**Many Miles to Go**

by Brian Tracy

*Entrepreneur Press 2007, 292 pp., \$19.95, p/b.*

Brian Tracy is well known for his personal and professional development programmes. In the book he tells the epic story the journey he made with two other friends across the Sahara desert in the mid-1960s when he was in his early 20s. The book is billed as a modern parable from business and is accompanied by commentary drawing out the lessons from the various situations in which the young men find themselves. It is a gripping tale in its own right, of challenges met and difficulties overcome. One also comes to appreciate the extraordinary hostility of the desert in the heat of the sun and the absolute necessity of drinking large quantities of water. The core themes are the development of character and a sense of responsibility. At the end of the book are seven principles for lifelong success, which can apply to any situation. Then there are a series of inspiring quotations, among which are Aristotle: 'Wisdom is a combination of experience plus reflection.' And Goethe: 'to have more, we must first be more.' An inspiring read at a number of different levels.

**The Ape of Sorrows - From Stranger to Destroyer: The Inside Story of Humans**

by Maurice Rowdon

*iUniverse Inc 2008, 320 pp., \$23.95, p/b.*

A book of extraordinary originality by a writer who was both a historian and philosopher, and who died earlier this year. It examines human behaviour through the lens of animal intelligence, making the point that the measure of any animal's intelligence is whether it leaves its habitat enhanced or depleted. By this criterion, humans are singularly unintelligent, even if in a subtle way. The author argues that the very nature of civilisation has been defined by separating out the human mind from animal minds, and pretending that we are not animals at all. Combined with apocalyptic and enlightenment ideas that a better future can be attained implicitly through withdrawing from the habitat in order to create this new world, 'civilised' humans have cut themselves off and gone about destroying their habitat along with other living things. We now face the dark side of the brain or the shadow and along with it the greatest challenge to civilisation, what Thomas Berry called The Great Work of formulating a constructive human presence on the earth.

**When Wine Tastes Best 2010**

by Maria &amp; Matthias Thun

*Floris Books 2009, 48 pp., £3.99, p/b.*

Readers will recall that the authors produce an annual biodynamic sowing and planting calendar, reviewed elsewhere in this issue. In this small pocket guide and biodynamic calendar, they advise which days are optimum for drinking wine, and which days to avoid. We are told that both Tesco and Marks & Spencer now only hold tastings for wine critics on the best days according to this calendar. These are called fruit and flower days, corresponding in the guide to yellow or red. As it happens, Christmas day is one to avoid, so you will be able to judge yourself how good you thought your wine tasted.

**Oxford Dictionary of Humorous Quotations**

by Ned Sherrin

*Oxford University Press, 536 pp., £12.99, p/b.*

Fourth edition of what is becoming a classic work in the field the first to appear since the death of the editor, who compiled the first edition in 1994. The entries are organised by themes - 200 of them - with over 5,000 quotations in all. These appear in front, with an index of subjects at the back, thus enabling the reader to navigate around the book. The book can be opened at any page, for instance telegrams, where one reads: on arriving in Venice - streets flooded, please advise. Or Chesterton's appeal to his wife: am I in Market Harborough, where ought I to be? Or Dorothy Parker to Mrs Sherwood on the arrival of her baby: good work, Mary, we all knew you had it in you. Under Science we find Arthur C Clarke: if an elderly but distinguished scientist says that something is possible he is almost certainly right, but if he says that it is impossible he is very probably wrong. A great collection to dip in and out of.

**The Ends of Life -****Roads to Fulfilment in Early Modern England**

by Sir Keith Thomas, FBA

*Oxford University Press 2009, 393 pp., £20.00, h/b.*

Sir Keith Thomas is the author of the seminal *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, which he published nearly 40 years ago. His period has always been early modern England, and here he examines ideas about how we should live, dating from the early 16th to the late 18th centuries. He begins with an 1818 advertisement by Coleridge for a course of lectures on the history of philosophy, to be held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand: 'what, and for what am I made? What can I, and what ought I to do, to make myself? And in what relations do I stand to the world and to my fellow men?' Although this is the stuff of philosophy, most people are too engaged in everyday living to ask themselves such questions. Thomas chooses six concerns which people of that epoch regarded as central to a life well lived: military prowess, work, wealth, reputation, personal relationships, and the afterlife. With the help of an amazing array of primary sources, he paints a picture of the ways in which these values shaped lives, with a particular emphasis on how the views and practices of ordinary people relate to the writings of contemporary philosophers and theologians. Reading the book from the vantage point of the early 21st century enables the reader to reflect on continuities and differences in outlook.

**DEATH AND DYING****The Case against Reincarnation**

by James Webster (SMN)

*Grosvenor House Publishing Ltd 2009, 249 pp., p/b.*

This book brings together a compendium of arguments against reincarnation as a hypothesis or doctrine. The author takes a spiritualist view that we survive physical death, but contends that this form of immortality is logically incompatible with reincarnation. He quotes a variety of interesting sources and correspondence with various friends and colleagues, including Arthur Oram, whom some members may remember. I have been familiar for some time that Swedenborg explained apparent cases of reincarnation in his day as a form of possession, an argument also considered by Ian Stevenson in his research. The main question at issue is that of identity, and perhaps one has to take a both/and approach rather than an either-or. Is it possible for Jenny Cockell to be fully herself and to have been the Irishwoman she remembers in her book? The author does not think so. He also has to explain Stevenson's cases as a form of temporary possession, a hypothesis which Stevenson does consider, but does not for him have the same explanatory value as reincarnation, given the further correspondence between memories and birthmarks. There is a good piece by Stephen Clarke summarising the arguments against reincarnation, but they bring the reader right back to the identity question. We may never know the answer for sure.