



books in brief

David Lorimer

Note: many of these books are now available in downloadable electronic form

SCIENCE/PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

I, Superorganism

Jon Turney

Icon Books 2016, 314 pp., £8.99, p/b.

Many advances in science arise from a newly realised complexity in the functioning of living systems. This applies to this very good popular account of the human microbiome - the huge internal population of microorganisms that contribute to digesting our food, making essential vitamins, breaking down toxins, metabolising drugs and influencing our hormones and immune system. The field is interdisciplinary, involving such experts as molecular geneticists, microbial ecologists, infectious disease specialists and immunologists. The book answers the question of what it means to be a superorganism and tells the story of this emerging field. Advances in DNA sequencing have played an important role and the Human Microbiome Project is a natural successor to the Human Genome Project.

Perhaps the most important activity takes place in the gut where the number of organisms would require a ladle while for the rest of the body combined, a teaspoon would suffice. Scientists are having to go beyond the war metaphor of the innate immune system in discussions of the adaptive immune system, suggesting a co-evolutionary process with shifting populations of microbiota related to our diets. Turney also refers to the network of nervous system connections between the gut and the brain. In terms of general advice, he follows Michael Pollan in recommending 'eat food, not too much, mostly plants', adding that fermented food is useful - it is good to remember that we are a habitat for a large array of other species. It is clear that this field is an important development in systems biology and reinforces the significance of cooperation along with competition.

Restless Creatures

Matt Wilkinson

Icon Books 2016, 298 pp., £20, p/b.

This brilliantly written and engaging book tells the story of evolution through locomotion, opening up a new perspective and relating this to the extraordinary capacities of our bodies, which we take for granted. Getting from place to place is critical for both survival and reproduction and enables the application of selective pressures. The fitness of an organism in relation to its environment depends on both form and behaviour in their mutual adaptation. Propulsion interweaves with natural selection in a long series of steps described in the various chapters of this book. This includes the origin of bipedalism, flight, underwater wriggling in relation to the development of vertebrates, the unlikely exodus from the sea and the development of our mental faculties related to movement. The author also invites the reader to conduct a number of thought experiments that make one more aware of the complexities of movements, adjustments and dynamic decision-making. We realise the influence of our ancestors' wanderings on our own living embodiment - an expression of the dance of life.

Being as Communion

William A. Dembski

Ashgate 2014, 218 pp., £17.99, p/b

Bill Dembski is a mathematician and philosopher who is well known for his contributions to intelligent design theory. In this profound study, he provides a metaphysics of information to replace the metaphysics of matter with a more intelligible model. His treatment is detailed and analytical, covering a wide range of themes and a large context. Information implies the primacy of mind and the importance of communion as it passes between organisms. Information also implies a source of intelligence in the widest sense. As he puts it: 'to exist is to be in communion, and to be in communion is to exchange information' - hence the fundamental science 'is a theory of communication rather than an atomistic, reductionistic and mechanistic science of particles and other mindless entities.' This view also suggests a relational and holistic perspective, and while matter entails a bottom-up approach, information is top-down, emerging from a matrix of possibilities. Within this context, intelligent design is the study of patterns and the uncovering of real teleology, which is anathema to scientific materialism.

Philosophically, Dembski regards matter as an abstraction, and within his own view it becomes a medium for dynamic information. Materialism assumes both causal and informational closure, so that only material causes (and energies) can be admitted. He makes a good case for chance as a probabilistic by-product of intelligence rather than mere contingency. Materialists also have to regard consciousness, intelligence and beauty as epiphenomena of matter, and the author shows how hard it is to square the powers attributed to natural selection with the real evolution of information and complexity. For him, intelligence is a causal and creative power, while there is no creativity in natural selection. He criticises the Dawkins weasel algorithm as inherent in the intelligent programmer as the target is specified. This is consistent with his overall argument that intelligence is the ultimate source of information, and in his case that this corresponds to Christian theism. So we finish up with an informational realism where information is the primary stuff of reality and is relational. This view provides a wider and deeper context than scientific materialism. Intriguingly, the author finishes up with a golf analogy where, if God were playing, (S)he would still be subject to certain constraints in terms of rules, hence limiting supernatural powers. This is an important and satisfying philosophical statement promoting a coherent metaphysics of information rather than matter.

The Age of EM

Robin Hanson

Oxford 2016, 426 pp., £20, h/b.

This book is an interdisciplinary thought experiment by an author trained in physics and philosophy, who is now a professor of economics. He envisages in detail a future when robots rule the world and brain emulation (EM) is widespread - this involves scanning a brain to record its cell features and connections then building a computer model that processes signals in the same way and is embodied on a small scale. Some readers may stop right there, since there is an underlying

assumption that brain equals mind (especially in signalling terms) and that all this can be uploaded and expressed on a computer programme. There is no doubt that robots in various forms will gradually displace more and more human activities, but the interest of this book is, as I mentioned at the beginning, as a thought experiment. In a historical sense, the author believes that we are becoming maladaptive as people in more economically developed cultures fail to reproduce in sufficient numbers. In addition, the author speculates that our social systems will fail to prevent what we might currently consider lamentable outcomes. The six parts deal with basics, physics, economics, organisation, sociology and implications. EMs are psychologically similar to ourselves so they have some of the same challenges - and when they begin to wear out, they are allowed to process at a slower speed (sounds familiar?). The sheer amount of detail in the book really allows readers to engage with these scenarios and reflect back on our current situation.

MEDICINE-HEALTH

The Healing Effects of Energy Medicine

Shannon McRae PhD with Scott E. Miners

Quest Books 2015, 233 pp., \$18.95, p/b.

Subtitled 'memoirs of a medical intuitive' and with a foreword by Bernie Siegel, this book makes fascinating reading, especially for those in the healing professions, with its detailed case histories outlining the modalities of healing in specific instances. Shannon was born in 1938, and her medical intuitive faculties go back to her childhood where her mother and very little faith in her abilities, criticising her, for instance, for colouring outside the body when she was in fact filling in the aura she was seeing. Both Bernie and Scott have first-hand experience of Shannon, who was able to see Bernie's guides as well as heal his leg.

The book is arranged in a series of case histories illustrating more general principles. Shannon explains how healing can happen easily when we let go of resistance, which may involve forgiveness, surrender, acceptance and allowing. She sees stress as the main underlying component of dis-ease, hence the power of changing one's thought patterns and letting go of the past. The cases also show how commitment is required on both sides, leading to a state of coherence and alignment. Our negative thoughts and judgements can block the flow of energy and well-being in our systems, as many case histories show. Some are quite dramatic, for instance the healing of a brain aneurysm from a distance, where Shannon feels herself into the tiny lesion in the brain and gathers the necessary healthy cells to initiate healing. Sometimes, apparent accidents are self-inflicted and require a deep process of forgiving oneself and others. Towards the end of the book, Shannon also describes encounters with deceased relatives and the perception of a man leaving his body at 45° and being greeted by his parents on the other side. Altogether, the book provides yet another coherent narrative of how the physical world is embedded in a much larger reality than currently acknowledged by orthodox medicine.

Sustainable Medicine

Dr Sarah Myhill

Hammersmith Books 2016, 339 pp., £8.99, p/b (special offer)

Drawing on her clinical experience of over 30 years, the author conveys her understanding of both sustainable and unsustainable medicine. Conventional medicine, informed by a pharmaceutical, symptom-suppressing perspective, does not address the real underlying causes of ill-health, but rather treats the symptoms and in doing so can make the condition worse than before - for instance, giving painkillers that may actually hasten the need for an operation as joints are damaged faster. The author regards medical education as a brainwashing process that turns caring teenagers into

unquestioning, narrow-minded, one size fits all doctors. She points out that some terms like high blood pressure are descriptions of symptoms rather than a true diagnosis. The pervasive influence of Western science and global food companies means that increasing numbers of people will become susceptible to degenerative conditions or lifestyle diseases. The author reminds us that in both the US and Europe - see also the review below - healthcare-system induced deaths are the third leading cause after heart disease and cancer.

The book is very clearly structured, starting with symptoms as early warning systems then analysing the mechanisms whereby symptoms and diseases are produced, with a particular emphasis on metabolic syndrome, which is characteristic of so many chronic conditions. Underlying her overall approach is what she calls the basic package that we should be applying all the time and consisting of a paleo diet (low on carbohydrates and sugar, including fruit), supplementary minerals and essential fatty acids, good sleep, exercise, sunshine, reduction of chemical burden, emotional security and avoidance of infections. She then describes extra treatments for specific conditions and gives a number of fascinating case histories. From the point of view of conventional practice, this whistleblowing book is revolutionary, but is in fact applied common sense from a naturopathic point of view. Given the financial crisis of health systems around the world, a more preventative approach will become a necessity. In the meantime, this book can help readers heal themselves and maintain their health by addressing underlying causes.

Evolution to Devolution

Karl Elliot-Gough

Earth Books 2016, 370 pp., \$29.95, p/b.

The author of this book has spent nine years researching the rise of the diseases of civilisation, which he characterises as the seven deadly whites; these are sugar, milk, flour, fats/oils, salt, rice and finally white lies. He sympathetically quotes Rousseau in his last chapter as saying 'the greater part of our ills are of our own making, and we might have avoided them, nearly all, by adhering to that simple manner of life that nature prescribed.' In a nutritional sense, so-called advanced societies have radically departed from a natural way of eating as researched in depth by Weston Price over 80 years ago. Similar research was carried out in India by Sir Robert McCarrison, who demonstrated the adverse effect on rats of refined flour, sugar and rice. As it happens, this research is not mentioned here although it does reinforce the argument.

The underlying thesis is that we need to restore the natural order of *oikonomia* that has been distorted by commercial interests in food and agriculture, who control not only the current system but also governments and institutions with their financial clout. 80% of deaths in the industrialised world are due to heart disease, cancer and iatrogeny, that is medical interventions, while 80% of the modern diet is made up of these six deadly food whites, both in terms of weight and calorie content. The effects of the modern diet can be seen all over the world, but more especially in China and India as the population adopts Western practices. Each chapter gives a history of the white in question, highlighting scientific research that has been largely ignored; one example is the work on sugar of John Yudkin, which has only recently been highlighted although he wrote the book in the early 1970s and became the sugar industry's number one enemy.

The book is written in an informal, if at times laborious style with a few grammatical issues such as 'bare' rather than 'bear' with me. It is clearly well researched, but the fact that it is not properly referenced does somewhat undermine its authority - there are no notes and the bibliography is not alphabetical. However, this does not detract from the main message of the book, with which I entirely agree. Having spent over 300 pages on diagnosis, the conclusions indicate that we

should reconnect with the planet, regenerate our soil, change the distribution of farm produce and adopt a natural diet based on the 50 key nutrients that he lists - avoiding processed foods. Such a revolution would have dramatic medium-term effects on our health service whose costs are spiralling out of control.

Science for Life

Brian Clegg

Icon Books 2016, 400 pp., £9.99, p/b.

Subtitled 'a manual for better living', this handbook consists of a large number of short entries, many cross-referenced, under the overall headings of diet, exercise, brain, psychology, health, environment and fun. It is based on extensive research, using the definition of science as providing the best current agreed position, given the data we have at the moment. The book can therefore be consulted on a huge variety of topics, and contains a lot of good practical advice. The organically-inclined reader, however, will find much to argue with under topics such as GM foods, vaccinations, homeopathy and chiropractic - where the main reference is work by quackbusters Simon Singh and Edzard Ernst. In the last section on 'fun' we are told that crop circles were entirely explained by Doug and Dave in 1991 and that the scientific consensus is that ghosts do not exist - 'there is very little good evidence for them' and they are best explained by a combination of imagination, hallucination and fakery. This not only shows the author's ignorance but also prejudice, which is apparent in a number of such entries. So readers will need to exercise some discrimination in consulting the book, although many entries are quite straightforward and uncontroversial.

What is Sound Healing?

Lyz Cooper

Watkins 2016, 139 pp., £7.99, h/b.

This is another excellent little book in the What Is series, providing a succinct introduction to the topic. Sound has many therapeutic qualities as well as helping us become more self-aware and present in the moment. The book begins by explaining the nature of sound and healing before moving on to discussing how sound healing works as well as providing exercises and case histories. The book is arranged around a 5R model consisting of resonance, resistance, responsibility, reflection and release (p. 65). Resonance and resistance represent positive and negative thoughts. The author also discusses sound and healing in other cultures, ancient and modern. In all cases, sound helps induce state of consciousness enabling us to gain the insight to transform our health and well-being as part of a vibrational universe.

Genomics and Personalised Medicine

Michael Snyder

Oxford 2016, 166 pp., \$16.95, p/b.

The author is a professor of genetics at Stanford, and used his own gene sequence to predict and help diagnose a metabolic disorder in 2012. This book is a thorough primer to the whole area with subheadings consisting of questions. It covers the basics of the genome, cancer biology and treatment, the nature of complex genetic diseases, pharmaco-genomics, genomics for the healthy person and the advisability of prenatal testing, the importance of the microbiota and the immune system, as well as issues of information and ethics. It forecasts a world in which we will be able to use an app to obtain personalised recommendations about food and lifestyle. In this sense, the ultimate responsibility is seen to shift to the individual. However, the undercurrent of reasoning is still somewhat deterministic, for instance in the use of the term environment, and we now know from epigenetic studies that our lifestyle choices actually influence gene expression. In addition, it is not clear from the text that genetically transmitted diseases form a very small proportion of the whole. However, in the future we certainly will have a great deal more information about our predispositions and therefore have a sound basis for medically related decisions, although much lifestyle advice is in fact generalisable rather than personal.

Green Exercise

Edited by Jo Barton, Rachel Bragg, Carly Wood and Jules Pretty

Earthscan 2016, 211 pp., £29.99, p/b.

As the title suggests, this book is about linking nature, health and well-being. Readers will be amazed at the wealth of references backing up what is basically common sense, that being in nature and exercising - such as walking - is good for mental and physical well-being. However, with our evidence-based policy-making, this volume provides a huge amount of valuable background, and is all the more relevant with increased emphasis on well-being suggesting a redefinition of prosperity to include the important factors discussed in this book. A dose of nature can elicit a positive response depending on the length of exposure, as many references show. Mood is discussed in terms of attention restoration theory, while there are many lessons to be learned from nature about the design of health buildings. We not only have green exercise, but also blue exercise associated with water and coastlines. Then there is Japanese forest bathing, which includes the scent from pine trees as well as the soothing sound of river water. In addition, nature can be involved in therapeutic interventions such as care farms and wilderness expeditions for youth at risk. Our increasingly sedentary lifestyle demands facilities for green exercise in the workplace context. The overall picture emerges in the benefits of greener and healthier economies with an emphasis on ecological public health, environmentally sustainable consumption and sustainable behaviours involving green exercise.

Crowdsourced Health

Elad Yom-Tov

MIT Press 2016, 144 pp., £18.95, h/b.

The title tells the story of this book - of how massive online data can be harnessed to improve healthcare through large-scale collection and collation of searches by specific groups of patients. One example is searches by cancer patients where it is possible to achieve a better understanding of their information needs, all the more so with the correspondence between the searches and off-line behaviour. Apparently, we all make between five and eight searches a day, which generates a massive amount of data that can be harvested without necessarily invading privacy - a fine line, as readers will know. It seems that about 40% of people arrive at a correct diagnosis of their condition through Internet searches while other conditions such as anorexia can provide a supportive online community. Another interesting aspect in the chapter about disease and information is the replication of the five stages of grief from Kubler Ross after diagnosis with a serious health issue. There is no doubt that this new avenue of research can support public health objectives.

PHILOSOPHY-SPIRITUALITY

The Penultimate Curiosity

Roger Wagner and Andrew Briggs

Oxford 2016, 468 pp., £25, h/b.

This magisterial and beautifully illustrated book is a cooperation between the religious painter Roger Wagner and the physicist and theologian Andrew Briggs. If the ultimate curiosity refers to the question why beyond the visible universe, then the penultimate curiosity of the title investigates the physical world and the question how, the traditional role of science. The thesis of the book is that science swims in the slipstream of ultimate questions that are spiritual in nature. The prologue sets the scene by explaining how a spiritual as well as scientific quest is implied in sculptures and inscriptions on the Oxford Science Museum and the original Cavendish Laboratory in the centre of Cambridge. In this sense, it is instructive to learn that, for mediaeval thinkers, *religio* referred to interior acts of devotion, while *scientia* was considered a habit of mind or intellectual virtue. As such,

there is no inherent conflict, even though the conflict thesis has been dominant in the relationship between science and religion, especially in an intellectual sense since the 19th century. More recent work has been informed by CSR - the cognitive science of religion drawing on a number of fields.

The authors guide the reader through the whole history of the relationship between science and religion, going right back to cave art. This includes the history of Greek philosophy, the role of Alexandria, the work of Arab scholars including one I did not know called Ibn al-Haytham, who suggests that truths are immersed in uncertainties, and that scholars should test everything, accepting nothing on authority. Then we have the founding of the universities, Roger Bacon, Galileo, Kepler, Francis Bacon, Newton, Leibniz and Pascal. In the 19th century, there is an enormous expansion of intellectual horizons, not only in science, but also in biblical criticism and anthropology. Throughout all this, the concept of a transcendent unity underlying the physical universe remains present, even if scientific materialism has tried to dispense with it. People will continue to put both sides of the argument in relation to the evidence they are considering, for instance the contrast between Stephen Jay Gould and Simon Conway Morris. Yet, the 'ultimate metaphysical curiosity is rooted in the human need to make sense of the world as a whole' (p. 411). This can be seen in role of mathematics, concepts of law and order and the pursuit of truth through investigation and experiment. By the end of the book, the reader has an appreciation of the different and evolving forms of thought that cultures have used as an expression of both ultimate and and penultimate curiosity.

More Than Allegory

Bernardo Kastrup

iff books (John Hunt) 2016, 254 pp., £12.99, p/b.

Previous books by Bernardo Kastrup have provided a scathing critique of scientific materialism and a strong advocacy of a worldview based on the primacy of consciousness. This book addresses the relative status of religious myth, truth and belief in relation to each other in a rigorous way. The overall thrust is that the universe is becoming self-aware through us, but we are misled by our current consensus reality that there is a real world outside consciousness. Myths are in fact a means of embodying transcendent truth and not just to be taken allegorically. Their significance can be apprehended intuitively. The author's experience of the cross in Cologne Cathedral revealed to him the transcendent truth of this Christian symbol so that he experienced it for himself. In a spiritual sense, the quest for truth is also a quest for inner peace. In the process, not only the ego but also the notion of truth itself need to be deconstructed while we come to the realisation that past and future are both constructs and, given the primacy of consciousness, truth is inherently subjective, even though it can be shared in terms of perceptions, explanations and predictions. All this, according to Kastrup's perspective, takes place within Mind at large. The third part on belief takes the form of a story/dialogue exploring the themes in more depth as lenses that define our perceptual possibilities. This leads to an interesting discussion of death as a transition from observing the universe to being the universe, from dreaming to conceiving, reflecting another aspect of Mind at large. All this is within the Divine imagination. We become aware of non-separation and thus achieve liberation. A subtle exploration of reality as we know it.

Moving Toward Global Compassion

Paul Ekman

Paul Ekman Group 2014, 109 pp., no price given, p/b – www.paulekman.com

Paul Ekman is the world's foremost expert on facial expressions and is a psychologist at the University of California in San Francisco. In some ways, this book builds on the concept of the global ethic formulated for the centenary of the World Parliament of Religions in 1993. It also reflects

a profound engagement with Buddhism and dialogues with the Dalai Lama. It begins by asking if global compassion is achievable, making an important distinction between two different types of compassion: proximal in relation to someone in the moment, and distal, which is aimed at avoiding suffering in the future. The expression of global compassion reflects our global interconnectedness and interdependence, but lags a long way behind except in expressions following a global emergency. Ekman analyses the immediate benefits of compassion in terms of impassioned joy based on a resonant emotional recognition similar to my own concept of empathetic resonance. We can gradually expand our compassion from familiars to strangers and even heroic interventions to save the life of another. The development of a calm mind is also important, emphasised in conversation with the Dalai Lama towards the end of the book. He also stresses the importance of detachment and spiritual practice as well as questioning our motivation. An important contribution to the field.

Change your Thoughts, Change your Life

Wayne Dyer

Hay House 2007, 392 pp., £12.99, p/b.

This book of reflections on the *Tao Te Ching* is a must-read for all familiar with the Tao and a wonderful introduction for those from have not yet read it. Wayne Dyer spent a year living with the text and has produced series of 81 essays arising out of each short chapter, the translation of which is a composite from many editions. As advised, I read only one chapter a day over a period of months, allowing the simple and profound message of harmony with Nature to permeate my thoughts and being as well as informing the quality of my actions. The teaching is paradoxical and as applicable now as it was 2,500 years ago. Each chapter opens with the translation, and Wayne highlights some key messages in his reflections as well as advising the reader on how to practise the Tao in the light of the insights. It is about living impartially, creatively, in the flow, without attachment, without striving, calmly, simply, softly and peacefully. The sage allows rather than interferes, knows when to act and when to refrain from action, understands the rhythms of life knows when to let go and surrender. As the text reminds us:

*My teachings are very easy to understand
And very easy to practise;
yet so few in this world understand,
and so few are able to practise.*

Erasmus of Christendom

Roland H. Bainton

Hendrickson 2016 (1969), 355 pp., £12.99, h/b.

This is a welcome republication of a classic biography of Erasmus (1466-1536), who was one of the most sought-after advisers of his age to Kings, Cardinals and Popes. He must have been the most widely read man of letters of his day, and was continuously translating classical and other authors as well as producing a definitive first printed edition of the New Testament in Greek in 1516. The book explains how peripatetic his life was, with periods in London, Basel, Rotterdam, Paris, Rome, Cambridge and many other European cities. He was a close friend of both John Colet and Sir Thomas More, to whom his best known work, *In Praise of Folly*, was dedicated. I learned that he produced a number of editions of his book *Adagia* – a collection of proverbs that grew from 800 to 5,000. His role in relation to Luther is carefully discussed and one can see how he tries to steer a middle way on reform of the Church. It seems that he took a particular dislike to Pope Julius, and there is an excellent and witty dialogue as Julius is refused entry to heaven by Peter. It is also striking how he insists on a practical demonstration of the ethics of Jesus rather than relying on faith alone. We could well follow his advice of listening to both sides with open ears and refusing to serve any faction.

How to Understand your Bible**Manly P. Hall***White Crow Books 2016 (1942), 163 pp., £14.99, p/b.*

As a distinguished scholar of esotericism and the ancient wisdom, Manly Hall sees Scriptures as fragmentary expressions of Eternal Law that have to be understood as a whole and therefore cross-referenced to other philosophies and religions. Here he takes key themes and passages from both the Old and New Testaments and interprets them in a broadly symbolic fashion. Although he is sceptical about the grounds for believing in the historical Jesus, he does analyse elements of the New Testament in considerable detail and shows how the church and Bible as we know them were shaped by history. In any event, he maintains that the life of Christ as set forth is an expression of the mystical path and can give us access to spiritual perception of divine truth. He points out that Tertullian and Augustine both express incredulity about the Gospels but believe because it is absurd and on authority. Perhaps one of the most striking insights (p. 106) is that the very words of the Lord's Prayer can be found in a slightly longer version in the Talmud. This should perhaps not surprise us since Jesus was a Jewish rabbi. In any event, there are plenty of stimulating interpretations for readers who want to enhance their understanding of the Bible.

The Golden Key to Happiness**Masami Saionji***Booksurge, 2005, 158 pp., no price given.*

I met the author of this inspirational book at a conference in Italy. She and her husband run the Goi Peace Foundation in Tokyo. The book is directly addressed to the reader and covers five main themes: that we can use our thought and energy to the fullest, that we can improve all our relationships, that we can overcome life's difficulties, that we can live our lives in love, happiness, forgiveness and harmony, and that we can uncover true self and accomplish our divine mission. The reflections are short and to the point, encouraging readers to maintain positive thoughts and an optimistic attitude and not to allow worry to penetrate the mind. We should take a constructive attitude towards all the people we meet, regardless of their attitude towards us. Our lives unfold according to our wishes and visions, and we are all capable of realising these. It is a wise message of freedom, encouragement and responsibility; and the author clearly implements her own advice.

The Divine Order and the Universe**Compiled by Bedri Ruhselman MD***Divine Order Publishing 2014, £15, p/b.*

This channelled book was received in 1959 by the compiler, who in 1950 founded the Metapsychic Investigations and Scientific Research Society in Turkey - their principal areas of interest are mediumistic studies and spiritual communication. This book is divided into three main sections, but there are no chapter headings within this and very little by way of introduction to the book. It launches into a discussion of the nature of matter and being, expressed in physical duality-units and undergoing a process of evolution from the dense to the subtle and towards a higher comprehension of spiritual truths referred to as essence knowledge. This encourages the being onto the path of service or duty through listening to conscience and choosing appropriately. There is extensive discussion of various states of consciousness as well as an interesting exposition of different types or spirals of time. The last part is concerned with the apocalyptic future of humanity as part of the end of the world cycle. The book postulates that a previous world cycle finished some 70,000 years ago with the degeneration and destruction of Mu and Atlantis. Considering that the book was written over 50 years ago, some of the environmental and refugee forecasts are prescient and anticipated to increase, making the planet progressively less habitable. It is envisaged that there will be a final catastrophe before the end of this century but that many beings will be able to migrate to a semi-subtle world of

love, while the residue will be left with a heightened sense of fear and insecurity. It is to be hoped that sufficient remedial actions will be taken to avert the scenario described here, but this is by no means certain - however, I do believe that evolution will continue in other realms.

Illuminating the Way**Christine Valters Paintner***Sorin Books 2016, 198 pp., £11.99, p/b.*

This book about embracing the wisdom of monks and mystics is arranged in 12 chapters according to archetypes that the author associates with various historical figures. She draws on the work of Jung, not only for archetypes, but also in terms of the shadow and the use of mandalas. Some people selected are better known than others - Francis of Assisi as the fool, King David as the sovereign, Hildegard as the visionary and Thomas Merton as the monk. Then there is also the fourth century Amma Syncletica as the warrior and Brigid of Kildare as the healer. Interestingly, St Benedict is the sage, and there is a beautiful reflection about the search for wisdom and truth. Rilke embodies the quest of the artist, while Dorothy Day stands for the orphan. Perhaps the most important point is the author's encouragement to acknowledge the multiplicity within ourselves represented by these archetypes. Each chapter also has a beautiful icon with an accompanying quotation as well as material for reflection. At the end there are instructions on contemplative reading - *lectio divina*, which the author and her husband practise on a daily basis; he also provides the corresponding biblical passages and reflections. To enter deeply into these archetypes is to make a corresponding inner journey.

Shamanism**Christa Mackinnon***Hay House 2016, 217 pp., £8.99, p/b.*

An excellent addition to the Hay House basics series. The book not only introduces the major aspects of shamanism, but also reflects a growing interest in such fields as a response to the soulless materialism of modern Western societies that has cut us off from our roots in both spirit and nature. The book shows how to develop and alter our perception so that we can enter different worlds on various journeys. It explains four levels of human perception - not only the physical, but also the emotional/mental, the soul and the spirit. The exercises reconnect the reader to life forces and potentially convey the insight that we are much more than just physical bodies. I did, however, wonder about the advisability of undertaking some of these journeys on one's own, and the author does put in a word of caution. At a time when many people want to experience deeper realities for themselves, this book is a significant contribution.

PSYCHOLOGY/CONSCIOUSNESS STUDIES**Synchronicity****David Peat (SMN)***Pari Publishing 2014, 149 pp., £9.99, p/b.*

David Peat has been reflecting on and teaching about synchronicity for many years, and this is the second book on the subject about events that break through into everyday life with a great sense of significance and numinosity, strongly linking the inner and outer. David discusses the nature of mind and consciousness more generally before moving on to the work of Freud and especially of Jung, who coined the term. Jung had a close relationship with the physicist Wolfgang Pauli, who helped him develop some of his ideas but was going through a considerable upheaval in his personal life. Jung helped him work through some powerful dreams and unconscious material. Pauli frequently exerted a powerful effect on objects and equipment. The next chapter explores scientific connections through forces

and fields, including the work of Rupert Sheldrake and David Bohm. A chapter on alchemy leads back to a further discussion of synchronicity in relation to causality. A good deal of work on the subject has been carried out in the last 50 years, elaborating the notion of the collective unconscious both in terms of brain and culture as they feed back on each other. Then there is divination – Jung was very interested in the I Ching. David concludes that synchronicity, with its sensitivity to harmony and the indivisibility of consciousness, has a role to play in addressing our cultural crisis as a point of access to a creative source of infinite potential, with mind and matter arising from a deeper order of reality with which we can relate.

Quantum Creativity

Amit Goswami

Hay House 2014, 241 pp., \$16.95, p/b.

Amit Goswami is well-known for his work on quantum theory and its broader implications. Here he provides an interesting discussion of the relationship between quantum physics and creativity, more particularly between the potential and the actual, the unconscious and the conscious. He situates this within his overall view that consciousness is the foundation of all being, so that manifest matter is preceded by quantum possibilities or potentialities. We also exist within the four worlds of material, vital, mental and supra-mental or spiritual. Conscious choice precipitates the collapse of possibilities into manifest actualities, so creativity discontinuously manifests truly new possibilities from transcendent potentiality. In this context, the mind is defined as giving meaning to the interaction of consciousness and matter. In answering the question of who creates, it is an interface between what he calls the ego self and the quantum self (there is an interesting parallel here with the role of the left and right hemispheres as identified by Iain McGilchrist, but the author does not seem to be aware of this).

Amit distinguishes between outer creativity as we normally understand it, and inner creativity as a transformation of the ego and an expansion of boundaries towards the quantum self. He explains the four stages of creative acts in terms of preparation, incubation, insight and manifestation. There is always an element of discontinuity at the moment of insight, of which he gives a number of examples. Unconscious processing plays a crucial role, as does an alternation between doing and being, will and surrender, work and relaxation. He sees synchronicity as more than chance, and does not rule out creativity from one incarnation to the next. On a metaphysical level, he interprets suffering as a separation from wholeness that is typical of our materialistic and consumerist culture which misleads us about the nature of self-realisation and correspondingly limits our identity and spiritual creativity. The final chapter gives clear guidelines of practices to induce creativity, which include intention setting, slowing down and creative imagination. This is a very satisfying book both on a theoretical and practical level.

Spiritual Telepathy

Colleen Mauro

Quest Books 2015, 209 pp., \$17.95, p/b.

The purpose of this accessible book is to introduce ancient mind-training techniques that allow the reader to access the wisdom and guidance of the soul, connecting it with the lower mind in a form of vertical training. Enabling this to happen is an important evolutionary imperative if we are to move towards a more inclusive and compassionate way of life where we take a universal rather than a purely personal view. The metaphysical background is influenced by Alice Bailey, and includes seven planes of reality as well as the existence of the chakras. The author explains the three minds in terms of the lower or rational, the soul, and the higher or intuitive mind. These correspond broadly to the three types of telepathy – instinctual, gut or animal, mental and spiritual. In the last category, the author gives some very inspiring insights from 19th-century composers who refer to universal currents of divine thought vibrating everywhere (Wagner), tapping a source of infinite and

internal energy (Strauss) and the superconscious mind from which inspiration comes (Brahms) - in this context, she could also have quoted very similar words from Walter Russell with respect to mysticism and science. In order to open oneself to these higher possibilities, one needs to refine one's physical, emotional and mental bodies and be able to build a bridge to the soul through meditation and contemplation of seed thoughts. She gives further examples of soul-aligned humans and a meditation with this in mind. Finally, she invites readers to become World Servers, joining up with others to create a New World based on goodwill. The book provides a good road map in this respect.

Quantum Love

Laura Berman

Hay House 2015, 375 pp., £12.99, p/b.

I confess that I am always a little cautious when a book has 'quantum' in the title as there is so much hype around the use of this term and here we not only have quantum love but also 'quantum sex.' Strictly speaking I think the term 'vibrational' would have been more accurate, but this book is a very good combination of theory and practice that can help a lot of people improve the quality of the emotional and physical relationships. The physical principles of energy, coherence, frequency and entrainment are critical variables, and it is interesting how the author uses the work of David Hawkins with his calibration of emotions in creating her 'Quantum Love map' where we can work things out personally. Her characterisation of three states of consciousness is very useful: 'to me' (the victim/ego), 'by me' (co-creator) and 'through me' when we are in what she calls our home frequency at a higher level of operation. Using the exercises and questionnaires, readers can place themselves on this frequency band, but varying between when they are at their worst and at their best. As we know from experience, each relationship creates its own field or resonance, which Rupert Sheldrake would call morphic.

The author draws not only on her own experience but also on that of many others in her extensive discussion of relationship issues. She also outlines four commitments in terms of taking responsibility for the energy we bring into a relationship, clarifying what we want out of love, taking responsibility for the energy of our body and committing to moving on when we are stuck. Throughout, it is important for us to be in touch with our feelings and intuition, realising that our partners are great teachers and that we can change the dynamics of the relationship by changing ourselves; in this respect, appreciation can be especially important, but we also need to have an accurate knowledge of the needs of our partner. There is plenty of good advice on mental health, nutrition and lifestyle. The final main chapter draws on Tantra and Taoism to provide an overview of practices that will take sexual relationships to another level of intimate communion. Then the appendix provides detailed questionnaires and further exercises. It is a life enhancing and highly informative book.

No Time and Nowhere

Fergus Hinds

iff Books (John Hunt) 2016, 217 pp., £13.99, p/b.

Subtitled 'a nonphysical world behind this one', this book takes the reader on a journey through both psychological and material instances of nonphysical manifestations, the latter involving experiments in quantum physics. The main body of the book is devoted to a consideration of well attested apparitions (which the author terms hallucinations, implying that at that level there is nothing actually there) and precognitions. He gives succinct accounts of many cases and discusses the implications in the course of making a case for a nonphysical world beyond space and time. The first category of apparitions concerns principally space, while the second involves time. Here he could have distinguished between cases that seem like imprints and others suggesting real agency. Those familiar with the literature will realise that these cases have to be taken seriously as an indication of

the underlying nature of reality, while those new to the field will find ample evidence for the author's argument. He goes into the dream state and discusses the nature of imagery and imaging, including some cases of foreknowledge about post-mortem events. It is a thorough and logical treatment justifying his hypothesis 'that there exists an ambience influencing aspects of the physical world that is outside time and space.' By his own admission, there is much more theoretical work to be done the cases discussed demand an explanation along the lines he suggests.

Insides and Outsides

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone

Imprint Academic 2016, 284 pp., no price available, p/b.

This collection of papers from different journals constitutes an interdisciplinary perspective on our experience of inside and outside, self and other, drawing on the work of Husserl, Darwin and many others. The essays invite readers to reflect on their experience of inside and outside, embodiment and being in the world, for example in relation to movement in space and time. The treatment is relatively technical and covers a wide range of themes including the genesis of habit, the relation between emotion and movement, self-ignorance and self-deception, the law of battle between disciplines, parallels between Husserl's phenomenology and Vipassana meditation and the body as a source of fundamental meanings. There are two chapters developing the relationship between the concepts of stranger and enemy and how these can be overcome by trust. The author also devotes a chapter to movement and dance and the notion of globalisation as not only an economic phenomenon, but also one with social, political, psychological and ecological consequences. This provides ample scope for the creation of enemies and invites each of us to become aware of the shadow or enemy within and the danger of projecting this on the outside. All this can considerably enhance reader's reflective self understanding.

AI – Its Nature and Future

Margaret Boden, FBA

Oxford 2016, 198 pp., £12.99, h/b.

As Prof Jack Copeland says on the back cover, this book really provides everything you need to know about artificial intelligence, both in terms of its history, current developments and prospects for the future. The story goes back to the 1950s with Turing and Cybernetics and the emergence of distinctive fields modelling language and logical thinking on the one hand and purposive/adaptive motor behaviour on the other. The holy grail of the field is general intelligence and there has been spectacular progress on a number of fronts. There are chapters on language, creativity and emotion, artificial neural networks, and robots and artificial life. This leads to a careful discussion of the sense in which artificial intelligence is intelligence as we generally understand it. The author is a reliable and balanced guide through discussions of machine and phenomenal consciousness and even the question of whether machines might be moral in any meaningful sense. She takes a sceptical view, along with phenomenologists, of the prospects for a singularity and a machine-controlled world. It was reassuring to learn about the development of 'Friendly AI' that is not underpinned by a left hemisphere logic of manipulation. In any event, the informed discussion to be found in this book gives serious pause for thought.

Other than Mother

Kamalamani

Earth Books (John Hunt) 2015, 270 pp., £14.95, p/b.

The author of this book about choosing childlessness with life in mind is both a therapist and Buddhist nun. The discussion is divided into three parts, first the background of the worldly winds of pleasure and pain, loss and gain, fame and infamy, praise and blame, which play a prominent role in forming our identity and expectations – in the case of women this includes the powerful role model and status of the mother. Increasing

numbers of women are now choosing consciously not to have children in spite of these pressures, many of which come from the family and our ideas about normality. The second part focuses on the decision-making process, drawing on the author's own experience and thinking around the issue. These will reflect the thoughts of any women seriously considering the question, including potential regret. This is addressed more fully in the third part about living with the decision and making sure that any void is filled by giving birth to projects in the time that would otherwise have been devoted to raising children. The decision-making process can ebb and flow, but each possibility represents a new beginning – in her own case the aspiration to participate in the calling of the bodhisattva. A sensitive, enlightening and compassionate book.

Why Can't I Meditate?

Nigel Wellings

Tarcher Penguin 2016, 355 pp., \$16, p/b.

The question in the title will be familiar to anyone who has undertaken a meditation practice and struggled with keeping themselves on track in everyday life after the original weekend seminar. This means incorporating mindfulness practice as an everyday habit and prioritising it over other pressing activities. The author has some experience of this himself and draws on that of other teachers and meditators in a series of interviews. I think this is the first book of its kind, and contains a wealth of practical advice as well as being highly recommended by respected practitioners. Various kinds of resistance are discussed, including the sense of vulnerability and the necessity to meet oneself as one really is, especially on an emotional level and in relation to wounds from the past that have not been resolved. The reader is advised simply to be present in such circumstances and aware of defence mechanisms arising from one's temperament and background. The practice can also challenge core beliefs and bring one more directly to a realisation of impermanence – especially in relation to the ego. The underlying process is one of growth towards greater wisdom, kindness and compassion, including self-compassion, as both Paul Gilbert and Jon Kabat-Zinn suggest. At the end, there is a quick fix chart for the struggling meditator summarising many of the insights of this valuable and helpful book.

ECOLOGY-FUTURES STUDIES

Social Change 2.0

David Gershon

Chelsea Green High Point, 2009, 406 pp., no price available, h/b. (www.socialchange2.com)

This extraordinary book has sat rather too long on my review shelves and should have been reviewed some years ago – however, better late than never. David Gershon is a pioneering social entrepreneur who has been active in transformative change since the late 1960s. The book lives up to its subtitle of a blueprint for reinventing our world and going beyond what the author calls Social Change 1.0 in terms of government command and control, financial incentives and citizen protest. Social Change 2.0 starts from the premise that these previous tools are inadequate to the magnitude of the challenge of transforming and reorganising our societies at a higher level of performance. The author places the primary responsibility on us when we are empowered with a vision and the means to bring it to fruition. In this respect, we need new forms of leadership.

The first part of this book describes four social transformations involving learning journeys illustrating process, context and content. In each case, communities are mobilised around a common vision and plan of action involving strategic partnership and collaboration. The second part lays out the design principles for transformative social change with chapters on empowerment, transformation, social innovation, building a unitive field, and leveraging disproportionate influence.

All the steps are explained, with useful charts of tools and processes that can be applied in different contexts. Aspiration, inspiration and hope need to be generated, as well as a deeper interpersonal understanding on the part of participants. Once a pilot has been achieved, this can then be disseminated and scaled up. The third part deals with leadership capacity, the empowerment of a climate change movement through the idea of a low carbon diet, and the possibility of transforming the paradigm of war through the emergence of unity consciousness. This is literally a question of re-imagining ourselves and our capacities as human beings. The book is a roadmap not only for reinventing our world, but also for the processes by which this can be achieved. The author is convinced that 'people are willing to change if they have a compelling vision and are provided tools to help them bring it into being.' This in turn will transform the nature of our institutions as reflections of the new way of thinking. Compelling and inspirational reading for all would-be social entrepreneurs.

Me to We

Craig and Marc Kielburger

Me to We 2016 (2004), 262 + 144 pp. (workbook), no price given, p/b.

In March, I attended a We Day along with 12,000 young people with teachers and guests at Wembley Arena - it is a mixture of inspirational speaking and pop concert. Each of these young people was there because they had helped in their community and had earned a place with their work in the context of Free the Children, a charity initiated by Craig and Marc Kielburger when Marc was only 12. Over 20 years later, their work is testament to the kind of vision described in David Gershon's book above. The brothers have received many honours and prizes as they continue to galvanise and expand their efforts. The philosophy described here is very simple and accessible - we are wired to reach out to each other and together we can change the world. This is one of the most important messages to convey to young people, where I also play my part with Inspire>Aspire (see www.inspire-aspire.org.uk - this year we reached over 25,000 young people).

The book describes the extraordinary stories not only of Craig and Marc, but also of many others like Desmond Tutu, Oprah Winfrey, Jane Goodall, Richard Gere and Queen Noor, who have supported their work. The authors take a critical look and superficial modern ideas on happiness, pointing out that real fulfilment means serving and helping others. There are chapters on gratitude and empathy, as well as plenty of inspiration in terms of guidance towards living a Me to We life. Above all, it is a demonstration of what can be achieved by starting with a small group of committed people with a clear vision. There are many moving episodes, including the time when Craig was given a T-shirt by a street child, Jose, with whom he had been playing football with a plastic bottle. This was his only T-shirt. Craig tried to refuse, but Jose insisted, and he reciprocated. It was a moving example of real communication and trust. Similarly, Marc found himself in the medical front line at the age of 20, with no experience whatsoever. He was on the point of coming home when a local invited him to a terrific party, so he decided to stay on and worked in these appalling conditions before going on to Harvard then Oxford as a Rhodes scholar. He turned down all sorts of lucrative jobs order to pursue this work. I urge you to read this book, be inspired, join the movement and make your own contribution.

A World to Live In

George M. Woodwell

MIT Press 2016, 227 pp., £19.95, h/b.

This ecologist's vision for a plundered planet draws on 40 years of scientific research and activism to reinforce the prevailing scientific and environmental consensus over and against continuing emphasis on economic growth driven by corporate profits externalising environmental costs. It is somewhat chilling to read the prescient testimony delivered to the Senate in 1988 about climate trends, which have relentlessly continued

to unfold since that date. As the author points out, the critical areas are politics, economics and the environment. The power has shifted so far in the direction of corporate economics, that policies are skewed in their favour and politicians sing from their hymn sheet. Woodwell zooms out to present a picture of the impact of a century of industrial development that has brought about greater changes to the Earth than any period in human history. We now know that the Earth is a living system and that its stability is threatened by human disruption, more especially from the by-products of the energy and agriculture industries. It is one of the special features of this book to highlight the polluting impact of unsustainable industrial agriculture, for instance in the creation of the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico. The overall impact of humans on the biosphere was already identified by George Perkins Marsh, a contemporary of Darwin and author of *The Earth as Modified by Human Action* first published in 1885.

Along with many other informed voices, Woodwell calls for a return to fundamentals so that we can understand the underlying forces driving destructive ecological trends and the economic and political system that allows this situation to continue unfettered. His concern is with the integrity of the entire biosphere, which has been compromised by nuclear explosions, chemicals and carbon. We need to be mindful of the global commons and ensure closed loops to prevent the externalisation of costs. We are beginning to see some of the widespread disruption caused by environmental refugees, which will only get worse. In this scenario, adaptation is absolutely insufficient and mitigation is required, especially in view of feedback loops that will intensify climate chaos. Our impact has been chronic, cumulative and relentless, and now demands the fundamental recognition of the integrity of the biosphere since the future of civilisation hangs in the balance. In Woodwell's view, this calls for regenerative action and a government emphasis on public welfare. However, in their present form, governments are simply not up to the job for the reasons outlined above and the sheer interlinked complexity of multiple issues. There are certainly trends towards localisation and smaller scale activity, but these are countered by vast developments of soya in the Amazon to feed animals eaten by humans. The only answer will be pressure exerted by NGOs and Internet campaigns based on ideas set out in this book and in many others, which themselves reflect a scientific consensus.

Climate Change and Anthropos

Linda H. Connor

Earthscan 2016, 206 pp., £85, h/b.

In this book, anthropologist Linda Connor offers an analysis of planet, people and places in relation to climate change, with a special focus on the Hunter Valley in Australia where she made a study of people's experiences of environmental change. There, coal is a major factor, which is one reason for the author's observations on the relationship between combustion and culture (there are some great cartoons in the text). Increasing numbers of books, especially in these academic series published by Earthscan, are exploring the civilisational implications of climate change as part of the overall human impact on the environment. The anthropological method of participant observation gives important insights into ways of life and thinking in particular localities. It is clear, for example, that the impact of climate change on some communities in the Arctic is already considerable, while in other places the reasons for environmental change are more contested and reflect ideas discussed in the media.

It is striking how many of the views quoted from interviews are not in fact informed by science but are still considered to be equally valid by their proponents. This is reflected in cyclical interpretations of climate change, which do not stack up with the latest assessments. More generally, we see a good deal of 'two-track thinking' where acknowledgement of the dangers of human-induced climate change is maintained within the status quo of business as usual. Others try to do their bit as responsible citizens and/or work with their community

as activists. It is apparent that Australian federal and local government policies on the environment may be inconsistent, and it is also evident that people in general are concerned about the future of their children and grandchildren. Hence, there is widespread support for policies of precaution and adaptation. The final chapter takes a psychological look at our apocalyptic prospect, framing it in terms of mortality and human finitude giving rise to resistance and denial. Some Christians interpret our situation in accordance with the last things in the Bible, while technically-minded men are inclined towards geo-engineering solutions which many people regard as hubristic; a desperate attempt to preserve our consumer culture without making any fundamental changes.

The Water, Food, Energy and Climate Nexus

Edited by Felix Dodds and Jamie Bartram

Earthscan 2016, 265 pp., £31.99, p/b.

Median estimates of world population in 2050 are 9.6 billion people, of whom 70% will be living in cities. This represents an increase of 2.3 billion on current figures with forecasts of an increase in demand of 70% for food, and 40% in energy by 2030, with similar figures for energy. As you can also see in my review of *A Future Beyond Growth*, these projections should be ringing alarm bells in terms of the adequacy of our current approaches to population, food, water and energy. The book contains a foreword by the Prince of Wales, who is well aware of the need to move towards a sustainable and circular economy. The main topics cover the history of the Millennium Development Goals and their transition into Sustainable Development Goals that apply to all economies, urban challenges, natural resource security, the various nexuses between key elements and the potential for corporate stewardship. It is good to see a growing awareness of systemic interconnectedness between critical factors, as illustrated in a couple of charts. Central to these is well-being in terms of society, economy and environment, which means water, food and energy security. Without a more sophisticated understanding of feedback loops, policy responses are likely to remain inadequate. In addition to the Nexus of the title, other key factors include education, gender, health, overall terrestrial ecosystems and infrastructure. Each of these areas has its own specialists, but they frequently lack any cross-disciplinary understanding and remain in their own silos. We badly need the kind of analysis set out in this significant book.

Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism

Edited by Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens

Earthscan 2016, 233 pp., £90, h/b.

Drawing on insights from ecology, feminism and socialism, eco-feminism analyses the ideology that authorises oppressions based on race, class, gender, sexuality as a parallel to the oppression of Nature. Quite a lot of space in this volume is devoted to refuting the charge of essentialism in terms of a distinctive feminine approach, but I do think that there are common attitudes towards the body, women and Nature that have pervaded monotheistic outlooks. The structure of the book corresponds to the equal emphasis on academic analysis and activism, which are both concerned with issues of justice. The introduction quotes from the WWF *Living Planet Report* showing that populations of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish around the globe dropped by 52% between 1970 and 2010. In the same period, human population more than doubled.

The essays in the first part discussed the eco-feminist perspective on the relationship between humans and animals, emotional and physical distancing from the world as a reason for governmental inertia, and the multiple facets of our crisis as ecological, social, political and economic. This last essay makes a critique of domination, based on three central principles: the role of alienation and reification; dualism, separation and identification; and instrumentalism and objectification. The argument owes something to Marx, and has interesting implications as a critique of liberal

individualism along with instrumental reason, adding up to an alienation from Nature. Although these ideas may seem quite abstract, they do have considerable practical relevance and can provide intellectual fuel for NGOs and social movements. The second part looks at a number of situations including funding for women's farming, the role of game ranger's wives in conservation, narratives of climate change and climate justice, post-colonialism in South African townships, gender theory and resource management, and the emergence of spiritual principles in business. One interesting theme is the contrast between the instrumental values of techno-science with the logic of care and relational values of cooperation, dependency and flourishing that we may unthinkingly ascribe more to women, but which, as Carol Gilligan shows, are in fact a human capacity. The book is a timely reminder of important issues that we cannot afford to neglect.

Rivers of Wind

Ben Kessler

ICRL Press 2016, 169 pp., \$12.95, p/b.

In the foreword to this vibrant book connecting Nature with language there is a quote from Goethe: 'life in its wholeness is expressed as a force not attributable to any individual part of an organism'; and it goes without saying that we are both part of this and an expression of the same force. The titles of these essays are evocative, such as Riddles, Lethe, Provinces of the, Last Season's Fruit, Parasitism, and Apoptosis. The author is convinced, with reason, that our passivity in relation to Nature is the death of a world through our very lifestyles and destruction of biodiversity as part of Nature's resilience. In case you're wondering, apoptosis is the transformation of the caterpillar into a butterfly, a metaphor widely used these days, but which the author elaborates in fascinating detail, also asking about the purpose served by death. Some languages evolve in partnership with landscapes and people and are more adequate as a result of this embeddedness, which we also recognise in appreciating living beauty. The author believes that the language of sustainability is insufficient, and should be replaced by the idea is thriving as full of life - I agree. He digs deeper by writing about the importance of stories and the poetry of language as a powerful way of communicating from the heart. In this way we have more chance of being true to ourselves and *treu* - loyal and true to Nature.

The Economics of Chocolate

Edited by Mara P. Squicciarani and Johan Swinnen

Oxford 2016, 478 pp., £31.95, h/b.

Reading this comprehensive volume will tell you more about chocolate than you knew there was to know. It originates in a conference and is divided into five main sections: history, consumption, governance and industrial organisation, markets and prices, and new chocolate markets. As many people know, the history of chocolate in the West only goes back to the 1600s and was originally based on the drink. Only in the 1820s was an industrial process developed resulting in the familiar chocolate bar. Switzerland and Belgium are the best-known producer countries, and it is fascinating to discover how these have evolved over the last 100 years. Like coffee, the health effects of chocolate are controversial, but it seems that the dark version is the best, at around 70% - just how I like it... There is considerable discussion of supply chains and fair trade as well as markets and prices over time. Not surprisingly, the largest new markets are India and China where the demand is such that there could even be a world shortage.

The Pursuit of Development

Ian Goldin

Oxford 2016, 214 pp., £11.99, h/b.

Ian Goldin has had a distinguished career as an economist, including at the World Bank, and is currently director of the Oxford Martin School, which is a premier research institution. This is an authoritative and highly readable account of evolution of economic and social development that goes beyond a focus on economic growth to a broader understanding of well-being. He defines development and its history, including key factors of natural resources, infrastructure, the environment, finance, education, health and gender. A different emphasis on the various aspects accounts for the large disparity and varying developmental trajectories between countries. The most important current framework is expressed in the Sustainable Development Goals that have succeeded the earlier Millennium Development Goals and reflect a more sophisticated and universally applicable approach. The success of much development means that the middle-class will expand from 500 million in the 1980s to 4 billion in the 2020s, with a corresponding increase in environmental impact. Goldin is fully aware of the implications, but feels that some important lessons have been learned although enormous challenges will remain in terms of climate change, conflict, fundamentalism and pandemics requiring increasing cooperation and partnership.

DEATH AND DYING

Dying to Know You

P. M. H. Atwater

Rainbow Ridge Books 2014, 122 pp., \$15.95, p/b.

P.M.H. Atwater it is well-known in the field of near death studies as the author of 15 books, some of which concern her own three NDEs in the 1970s. Here she has distilled her reading and understanding of over 4,000 child and adult experiences where the main theme is that God exists, but a God beyond normal understanding and even description, a Source characterised by an all-encompassing sense of oneness. The chapter headings such as God, soul, life and death, heaven and hell, aftereffects and threshold indicate the profound nature of the insights. She writes that death is a step-up of energy implying a shift to an increased speed of vibration. Sometimes death is expected by the one dying but not at all by the family, and there are some striking instances here. I think she is right in saying that near death experience validates the core teachings of world religions but from a universal perspective. She quotes Steve Jobs to the effect that remembering you are going to die is the best way to stop thinking you have something to lose. I was fascinated to read about the role of near death experiences in the life of Walter Russell, culminating in his illumination at the age of 49 giving him insights into the underlying dynamics of the universe. It is important to remember we can only take the essence of ourselves into the next dimension and the love we have shared with others as we evolve in being, not only individually, but more importantly as an interactive collective. Towards the end of the book, there is a remarkable summary of the author's life philosophy of love, freedom, knowing and service - a timely reminder of essential values.

Dying to be Free

Hannah Robinson

O Books (John Hunt) 2016, 133 pp., £9.99, p/b.

This unusual and moving memoir recounts the transformative journey of the author, whose father was a trainee Catholic priest at the time of her birth. He imposed secretive terms on her mother, which reflected the standard practice at the time and set up a huge tension in her life, especially during adolescence. This culminates in a serious accident leading to a near death experience and a different perspective on

her life journey, as well as an experience of love transcending the rejection she felt. Even when they did meet, she felt no real connection with her father and experienced a sense of toxic shame. Her NDE gave her a deeper sense of identity and had a similar effect to the experience of Anita Moorjani (the title of this book is a variation on her title). Later, she has a vision warning her of the serious health condition of her mother. The message of his book, like so many in this field, is the existence and implications of an all-encompassing, accepting, unconditional love of which we are worthy. I learned of the existence of an organisation called Coping, which represents the interests of children of Catholic priests – it was an enormous relief for Hannah to find others in her situation. She concludes that the structure of the Catholic church needs to transform, because enforced secrecy is unhealthy for children of priests. It is a poignant and thought-provoking account.

Peaceful Passages

Janet Wehr

Quest Books 2014, 211 pp., \$16.95, p/b.

This profoundly humane book tells the story of a dedicated hospice nurse and the good deaths she has witnessed over a 20-year period. The seven chapters address understanding death, ways of saying goodbye, heart warming relationships, mysterious and spiritual experiences, tough customers, comic relief and cultural differences. The value lies in the individual stories with the touching details and overall lessons for compassionate and professional practice. There are of course many perspectives on the dying process from patients and families, but an overall impression of departure and transition on a further journey. Perhaps the most interesting experiences relate to two dreams. In one, Janet experiences the death of a patient, while in the other both mother and son had the same dream premonition of his early death - she when he was two and he when he was 12. Among the lighter moments are where she asks one patient if she has any pain, to which the patient replies, only when it hurts. Another asked for a ticking clock to be buried with her, so that she had something to listen to until she got used to being dead. Janet gives an important message in her closing reflections that working with the dying gives an immediate experience of the fragility and impermanence of the thread of life, reminding us all of the precious opportunity that it represents.

GENERAL

Democracy – A Life

Paul Cartledge

Oxford 2016, 383 pp., £20, h/b.

Democracy is a biography of the concept, going back to 6th century Greece and following it through its various manifestations to a peak in the fourth century and a gradual decline thereafter, also in relation to Rome. It is important to remember that the original Greek democracy was direct, although limited to men as citizens, while the modern meaning entails representation, or what Lord Hailsham used to call elective dictatorship. From late Antiquity until the Renaissance, democracy was eclipsed by other forms of government but eventually re-emerges in the modern form in 17th century England, then 18th-century France and North America, championed by Thomas Paine. Modern forms of democracy can still learn something from ancient practices and I liked the definition from Josiah Ober of democracy as 'collective self-government that is at once stably effective and limited'. Cartledge would like to go further and sees the emergence of tele-democracy by combining new digital and information technology with ancient democratic practice – this may also require an international Bill of Digital Rights. This may represent a clarion call for the West but there are other absolutist forces with completely opposing ideas; and the reality is that we live in a pseudo-democracy underpinned by plutocracy as expressed in funding contributions and honours.

Britain's Secret Wars**T.J. Coles***Clairview Books 2016, 214 pp., £14.99, p/b.*

This meticulous account lays bare in documented detail the extent of Britain's covert foreign policy supporting war, conflict and oppression around the world. These activities are well hidden and would create outrage among public opinion if they were openly admitted, hence the Chatham House formulation that 'a successful foreign policy requires a degree of secrecy and duplicity, and willingness to employ spies, engage in bribery, threaten, even use force, compromise principles, pursue clandestine, sometimes illegal, operations, and support dubious regimes.' This revealing study provides plenty of evidence for this in covert activities around the world, including Syria, Libya, Iraq, Ukraine, Sri Lanka, Somalia and Bangladesh. The analysis shows a brazen pursuit of power and self-interest, for instance in terms of commercial opportunities opened up to companies through the devastations of war; also the contrast between the headline stories than the real agenda, often expressed in terms of defending national security or humanitarian aid.

Proxy wars created Al Qaeda and, indirectly, ISIS. Then we have to manage the continuing fallout of these decisions. The chapter on drones is deeply disturbing, and it is clear that most use is illegal, quite apart from collateral civilian casualties. The use of tactical nuclear weapons in Fallujah was unconscionable, all the more so when it was denied despite birth defects among the local population and chronic illness among veterans. It becomes clear that Ukraine is a proxy battleground and a very dangerous one at that. Underlying much of this covert activity is the US pursuit of Full Spectrum Dominance defined as military superiority over land, sea, air, space and information by 2020. Much CIA activity, classified and unclassified, seems to be directed to this end. As long as we have a political system based on selfish national interest and power politics, covert operations are set to continue, reinforcing the war economy of arms trading and creating mutual distrust. Books like this can help inform readers and encourage them towards grassroots action, which alone holds out the prospect of a different world.

How to Have a Good Day**Caroline Webb***Seven Shift 2016, 360 pp., \$26, h/b.*

Caroline Webb is a management consultant and executive coach who spent 15 years at McKinsey and now runs her own company. In this practical and highly useful book, she draws on findings from behavioural economics, psychology and neuroscience as well as personal interviews and experiences to help readers transform their working lives. From psychology she takes a greater focus on well-being, from economics more realism in theories of behaviour, and from neuroscience more sophisticated measurement of brain activity. Three main themes run through every chapter: the two systems brain - one deliberate and controlled, the other automatic and instinctive; the discover-defend axis where discovery is oriented towards reward and defence against threats; finally, the mind-body loop, which is much more tightly coupled than we previously realised. In these ways, a change of intention leads to a change of filters and therefore interpretation of a particular situation.

The seven chapters cover priorities, productivity, relationships, thinking, influence, resilience and energy. The principles are clearly explained with practical examples of everyday situations, and excellent summaries at the end of each chapter. Among the helpful recommendations are writing things down as soon as they come to mind so as not to waste the brain's precious working memory, identifying the very next thing to do in terms of each project, focusing on one thing at once and batching tasks, realising when one is in a defensive or avoidance mode and knowing how to transform this. It is also useful to know how the brain processes information, not only for oneself, but also for

one's communications. The advice on business relationships is very constructive, as is the section on resolving tensions. Then we all need to learn how to be resilient, move on and conserve our energy and enjoyment. One of the appendices contains an excellent chart on how to reinvigorate your routine, summarising much of the key material. A highly informative users' manual for making the most of the working day in terms of thinking, feeling and doing.

How to be a Productivity NINJA**Graham Alcott***Icon Books 2015, 343 pp., £8.99, p/b.*

If you are like me, you are always looking for ways of becoming more productive - this book offers a new slant on the topic by focusing more on attention rather than time management. It also recommends developing a number of characteristics including Zen-like calm, ruthlessness, mindfulness, agility, preparedness and unorthodoxy. Very few of us have a sense of completion on a daily basis as we feel overwhelmed with information and to-do lists. This sense of completion gives us some clear space, and in one chapter is usefully applied to advice on managing one's inbox. One also needs to set aside time for creative thinking during periods of proactive attention (the other two forms are active intention and inactive intention - we are advised to workout our own rhythm in this respect). The heart of the book is the CORD model - capture and collect, organise, review and do. I have already applied the advice on project, weekly and daily checklists, which one can keep together on a single Excel spreadsheet. There is good advice on meetings where 40% represents preparation, 20% the meeting itself, and another 40% follow-up; also on inertia and resistance, which we are all very good at and that needs overcoming on a daily basis if one is to keep things on track. Highly recommended.

Places of Truth**Jay Ramsay***Awen 2016, 169 pp., £12, p/b.*

Jay Ramsay is one of the prophetic poetic voices of our time, and in this book he expresses his experience of journeys into sacred wilderness in a number of different places including Wales, Scotland and Sinai. On such journeys we are pilgrims conscious of both inner process and its subtle interrelationship with our surroundings. The sharp distinction dissolves in contemplative awareness. We become aware of our own transience in ancient places but also of the essentials of life in terms of love, peace and joy. The mountain in the rain is larger than life, silent and expansive while inviting surrender to prevailing conditions. Finally, the desert, endless sand but also offering a striking vaginal cave (depicted on the cover) and symbolising rebirth where heart and sex are one, resting in Nature. The journey, however, continues with its dual narrative of ego and Self inviting us to a wider and deeper experience of love and freedom - a further initiation and a book that is food for the soul.

Stargazers' Almanac 2017**Bob Mizon***Floris Books 2015, £14.99, large format.*

This is an annual invaluable monthly guide to the stars and planets including a general chart and some basic astronomical information. The structure gives monthly guidance with items of interest and a North and South looking sky on the 15th of the month; also a guide to the phases of the moon. Additional items in 2017 include an article on Charles Messier, the great French astronomer, and the Great American Eclipse of 2017 on August 21. Incidentally, there are 68 total eclipses of the sun scheduled for the 21st century. We can currently see both Mars and Saturn in the Southern sky, as I confirmed from this year's edition. This is a great guide for anyone interested in the night sky.