

book reviews

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science-philosophy of science

Questioning New Physics

Paul Kieniewicz

Fashion, Faith and Fantasy – in the New Physics of the Universe

Sir Roger Penrose (Hon SMN)

Princeton University Press, 2016,
501 pp., £19.95, p/b -
ISBN 978-0691119793

Roger Penrose is not only a great physicist, but a great communicator of complicated scientific issues that embrace mathematics, physics, artificial intelligence and cosmology. At age 85, he has published a remarkable tour de force that depicts the state of modern physics.

The title of his book suggests that he proposes to question whether many of the fashionable ideas in physics, generally accepted as true, are all they are cracked up to be. Chief among those are string theory, superstring theory, cosmic inflation, and quantum field theory. After examining them in some detail he finds them wanting. He is convinced that today's version of quantum mechanics is provisional, waiting for a new formulation that will resolve some of its problems, in particular the difficult problem integrating the effects of gravitation into quantum effects.

This is a very technical book, written primarily for physicists, cosmologists and others who have at least an undergraduate grounding in those fields. The lay reader may find the technical level challenging. However, a simplified version of the book would not have worked because the arguments that Penrose raises are subtle, requiring a detailed knowledge of the field.

Of many fashionable theories, Penrose first takes aim at string and superstring theory. String theory became popular because of its inherent elegance. Its original version purported to show that all elementary particles can be explained as different modalities of vibration of elementary strings. A wonderful unifying theory! Unfortunately,

by the early 1970s, it became clear that in order for the theory to explain observable quantum rules, it required a world of 25 dimensions. In the 1990s, a later development called M-Theory pared down the number of dimensions to eleven. Penrose examines in some detail the problems that arise as a result of the extra dimensions. Chief among them is "functional freedom" of the strings that rapidly becomes infinite. Regarding supersymmetry, a development of string theory, Penrose takes the position that the theory is not falsifiable. There are so many types and versions of string theory, that if one version is disproved, there remain an infinite number of others. There is no experiment, performed or to be performed, that could put the nail in the coffin of string theory.

When writing on modern cosmology Penrose raises significant issues that many cosmologists still tend to sweep under the carpet. Chief among those is the low entropy of the Big Bang. The present day cosmic microwave background is at thermal equilibrium, but at the time of the Big Bang, the entropy was vanishingly small. More, it had highly restricted degrees of gravitational freedom. How did such an unlikely event arise? Cyclical models of the universe offer no answers as a universe that implodes on itself, creates a high entropy black hole, not the low entropy situation of the Big Bang. The most popular theory to explain the evenness of the cosmic microwave background is inflation – the notion that the early universe underwent a rapid expansion as a result of a (as yet unidentified) "inflation field". Penrose doubts whether this took place. Given that the initial singularity was extremely uniform, with restricted degrees of freedom, its expansion would have resulted in a uniform cosmic microwave background, without the need for inflation.

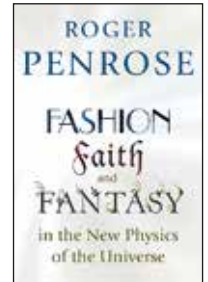
Penrose looks also at the Anthropic Principle. He takes seriously the fine tuning of many physical constants, that we live in a special universe that appears designed for the development of stars, galaxies and eventually life. However, he feels that the Anthropic Principle does little to explain the low entropy of the Big Bang – unless the latter arose purely by chance. An explanation via multiple universes, some of which contain life but most of which are dead, he regards

as a cop-out. As with superstring theory, he regards the multiverse hypothesis as non-falsifiable.

The fine tuning of physical constants, and the low entropy of the Big Bang, could all be explained, according to Penrose, by his Conformal Cyclical Cosmology. While he proposed the idea over ten years ago, its mathematical details are yet to be worked out, so the theory is mostly conceptual. In this model, we live in a series of universes. The present universe is only one of many Aeons. It will continue to expand at an accelerating rate. Galaxies will eventually collapse to form supermassive black holes that will themselves evaporate via Hawking Radiation. Even the Higgs Bosons will decay. All matter will dissolve to form a sea of energy. This sea of energy will be the seed for the next Aeon, the next Big Bang. However, information from one Aeon can be transferred to the next via evaporating black holes. Thus, physical constants can be passed on down the generations of universes. He points to observed anomalies in the cosmic microwave background that could have resulted from collisions between black holes in the previous Aeon. However, for most cosmologists those observations remain controversial.

In summary, this book offers exciting insights into the boundaries of modern physics and cosmology – a look at some of the greatest controversies, what is unknown, and also what may remain unknowable. The writer also makes a compelling case for why many popular ideas in physics today will eventually have to be abandoned; why quantum mechanics will most likely be superseded by a new, more embracing theory. He offers a few suggestions for ways out of many contradictions in physics, but he also admits that he does not know how or where the next developments will occur.

Paul Kieniewicz (SMN) is a geologist, astronomer and writer. He is the author of *Gaia's Children*, co-author with Andrew Glazewski of *Harmony of the Universe*.



Belief Perseverance

David Lorimer

QUANTUM LEAPS IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

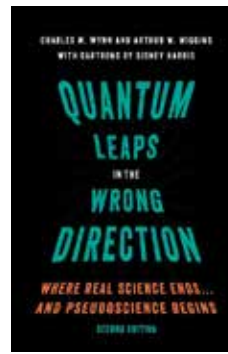
Charles M. Wynn and Arthur Wiggins, cartoons by Sidney Harris

Oxford, 2017 (2nd edition), 187 pp., \$35, h/b – ISBN 978-0-19-062029-5

Belief perseverance is described by the authors (respectively a chemist and a physicist) as 'unreasonable resistance to change one's beliefs', a state they lament as irrational and based on what they regard as wrong evidence. Part of their update consists of what they call information about reliable websites and educational modules. If one consults these, one finds that they consist entirely of sceptical websites and educational modules all from the James Randi Educational Foundation. In addition, the bibliography consists almost exclusively of sceptical references. In other words, reliable equals sceptical, which itself entails a belief perseverance in the adequacy of naturalism and physicalism. The authors envisage three groups of readers: one unfamiliar with the phenomena where they hope useful insights will be gained, secondly those acquainted with the phenomena and already in agreement with their conclusions, and thirdly, including the present reviewer, 'already acquainted with the phenomena and already in disagreement with our conclusions.' This is the group they feel tend to adhere to their beliefs, even in the face of contradictory evidence and even when explanations are shown to be irrational or based on 'wrong evidence'. Such people, they say, 'disregard evidence inconsistent with or contradictory to their belief' and are subject to potential flaws in their reasoning or observation process.

The assumption or equation here is scientific = naturalistic = rational, hence pseudoscientific = supernatural = irrational where rationality is associated exclusively with a sceptical view. By this logic, a rational scientific explanation has to be naturalistic, as TH Huxley insisted when arguing with Alfred Russel Wallace. Writers like the present authors are very rarely explicit about their own assumptions, while criticising those of others. The first two chapters give a good account of the scientific method and scientific reasoning in action, stating that scientists should not become too attached to their assumptions. The issue here is how to balance openness with rigour, a balance that the Network seeks to maintain. Scientific materialism holds a naturalistic presumption as a point of departure for explanations of phenomena, while also holding to what Sir John Eccles called promissory materialism: if it has not yet been explained naturalistically, it soon will be - including consciousness. The book goes on to consider what the authors call the five biggest ideas of

pseudoscience: UFOs and alien abductions; paranormal out of body experiences such as astral projection, near death experience and entities such as spirits and ghosts; astrology; creationism and paranormal powers such as ESP and psychokinesis. In this review I will address their comments on the areas with which I am most familiar, namely the second and fifth.



Before doing so, I would also like to comment on the oft-cited remark of Carl Sagan that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. This statement itself embodies a cultural position about what is or is not extraordinary in terms of what CD Broad called antecedent probability. The antecedent probability of the existence of the phenomenon depends on your assumptions about it: if you regard ESP *a priori* impossible, then any ostensible instance must be due to fraud or poor experimental design. For the person for whom ESP is an everyday reality, it is no longer extraordinary. The discussion on NDEs is selective, incomplete and in some cases misleading in bringing in the phantom limb example. While the oxygen deprivation hypothesis is correctly set aside, the authors support a neurochemical explanation. No mention is made of the work of Bruce Greyson, Peter Fenwick, Pim van Lommel and many others - especially the work on cardiac arrest and the collections of veridical OBEs. Although these are anecdotal, they still require to be explained and raise intriguing questions about the nature of perception. The authors remark that veridical reports could have been obtained by ordinary means - 'through the senses both before and during the procedure.' This is a typical off-the-shelf sceptical argument dealing only with generalities and completely failing to address the specifics of particular cases. The authors are equally cavalier in their treatment of apparitions and simply state that naturalistic explanations abound for such phenomena. The section on reincarnation and past life memories is equally inadequate, citing only one case and failing even to mention the extensive research of Ian Stevenson and his colleagues. Even Carl Sagan was impressed by this research and regarded it as a question mark for the completeness of scientific naturalism.

Moving on to the chapter on normal sensory perception, ESP and psychokinesis, there is a good description of the mechanics of perception and the authors mention the 20 year CIA research programme on ESP without analysing the evidence it produced. Claims for psychic experiences are regarded as 'merely odd

coincidences that command our attention.' Here again we have a general off-the-shelf argument claiming that we often think of people and they don't phone. This totally disregards the uniqueness of, say, deathbed apparitions, where the subject has no idea until after the event that the person concerned has died. This is a one-off rather than everyday occurrence, perhaps only once-in-a-lifetime, so the coincidence theory cuts very little ice.

The rest of the chapter continues in a similar vein with 'alleged observations of extrasensory perception', failing to mention, for instance, the studies and meta-analyses reported by Dean Radin covering decades of scientific research. They conclude that if nothing really happened in the first place, there is nothing to explain - and the uninformed reader is supposed to take this on board as if the authors' investigation had been complete and unbiased.

The chapter on alternatives to medicine takes a similar approach, lumping together a very wide range of phenomena but adopting a generalised approach - some areas they deal with are much less established than others, but no mention is made of the multi-million-dollar funding given by the National Institutes of Health is to support research in this area, even if this is a tiny percentage compared with the orthodox field. In their conclusion, this lumping together continues, creating the impression that better researched areas are all equally wacky. The prejudice of the authors shows through in their dismissive and insinuating conclusions about the areas we have treated: 'out of body experiences and entities are observed by people whose imaginations have gotten the best of them, by people in an altered state of consciousness, by people who report the phenomena for ulterior motives, and by people who have been deliberately deceived by con artists.' (p. 142-3) To think these phenomena are real is mere wishful thinking. Then, on ESP and PK, observation of these phenomena 'is tenuous at best' and the 'hypotheses difficult to evaluate because of the questionable nature of the phenomena they purport to explain.' Then part of the rest of the chapter is devoted to hoaxes, including the 'crop circle hoax' where the authors swallow the long discredited 'Doug and Dave did it all' hypothesis as if this all stopped in 1991.

They conclude that their interpretation of these phenomena is the road to reality, contrasting with the road to illusion - giving an accurate view of reality instead of a deluded one. They then give a series of standard sceptical recommendations for further reading, quack busting and debunking. The uninformed reader might be impressed and taken in by the superficial rationality of the arguments

presented, but the informed reader without a prior commitment to scepticism and scientific materialism will realise that the treatment of the phenomena is both incomplete and inadequate, demonstrating the confirmation bias of the authors and their own belief perseverance in ignoring evidence that might challenge their own assumptions. I would certainly not disagree with their strictures on some of the more outlandish phenomena they discuss, but their treatment of serious areas of research is nothing short of misleading and intellectually disreputable.

Macroshift

David Lorimer

WHAT IS REALITY?

Ervin Laszlo (Hon SMN) and others

Select Books, 2016, 335 pp., \$22.95, h/b – ISBN 978-1-59079-391-6

THE LASZLO CHRONICLE

Gyorgyi Szabo

Select Books, 2017, 320 pp., \$22.95, h/b – ISBN 978-1-59079-396-1

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO LASZLO

Gyorgyi Szabo

Ariane Books, 2016, 206 pp., \$13.95, h/b – ISBN 978-2-89626-308-0

Ervin Laszlo is celebrating his 85th birthday this year. Quite a few of his books, including his autobiography, have been reviewed on these pages, but for those who are unfamiliar with his life, he began as a concert pianist and then moved into evolution and systems theory in his 30s. He has been developing a series of important ideas over the last 50 years. The first book here is his latest publication describing the new map of cosmos and consciousness, the second a major analysis of the development of his ideas, and the third, by the same author, a more informal portrait and introduction to a universal man.

Taking the third book first, it falls into three parts: initially, Ervin on himself, then the author's own view and that of his wife, Carita, and younger son Alexander. It is clear that Ervin is a very private person who is hugely creative, productive and driven. This comes out in an amusing way when Carita used to ask Alexander to call Ervin to the

table, which he did with some trepidation as he knew he was by definition disturbing his train of thought. Connecting with Nature and the world is very important for him while he reports that his greatest joys are intellectual

pleasure, listening to music, tasting great food and driving elegant cars. He sees this as moving and developing, and his life as a whole as a form of being and becoming that has not been wasted. Gyorgyi re-visits many places that have meant a great deal to Ervin at different times of his life and participates in quite a number of recent significant events.

In addition, there is a comprehensive interview on the Akasha paradigm, which appears in both books. The last part conveys some vignettes of his everyday life, in which Carita is always a beautiful and supportive presence. Ervin keeps himself in good shape with morning exercises and stretches. He himself provides the inside story of the previous eight years in the final chapter, commenting on a fundamental change within himself from world-transformation to self-transformation, as one cannot change the world without changing oneself. His work has been a search for logos in terms of meaning and intelligence, but he has now come to the realisation that the fundamental answer is love: 'the deep, ineffable, numinous and undefinable feeling of *being one*.' Moreover, he has concluded that we are and remain part of the world through an evolutionary cycle of birth and rebirth – hence our responsibility to play a creative and constructive role in this process.

The Laszlo Chronicle gives readers a very clear insight into the development of Ervin's thought across a range of topics. It begins with the discovery and development of his systems philosophy and the influence of Whitehead, Von Bertalanffy, Bohm and Prigogine. This leads on to the application of the systems concept to world order and general evolution theory, not only as an idea but also in terms of realisation in the life of society. His work on a unified information field theory has gone through a number of phases, starting with the idea of the psi-field, moving through the fifth field to its more mature expression in the Akashic field and paradigm. The use of the word Macroshift arises within the context of bifurcations, tipping points (breakdown and breakthrough) and the evolution of worldviews from what he calls *logos* to *holos*, from separation to wholeness. Ervin's participation in the Club of Rome and his founding of the Club of Budapest have enabled him to become an expert on world transformation. The conclusion lays out the principal results of his philosophical work from systems theory to the study of consciousness and the theory of universal information field. This is the best introduction to Ervin's work for the general reader.

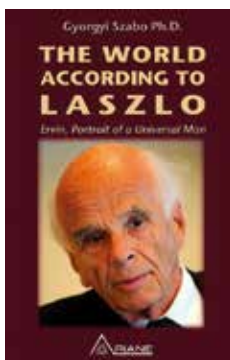
What is Reality? follows on from *What is Consciousness?* The direction of Ervin's thinking has been towards ever more integral models of reality and wholeness, conceptualised as the 'deep dimension' where everything is connected in a seamless, irreducible whole. The Akashic

Holofield is the primordial ground of the universe, a concept very similar to the Universal Mind of Walter Russell, out of which everything unfolds and into which it re-folds - also parallel to the implicate and explicate orders of David Bohm. The basic reality is 'the intelligence that co-ordinates the clusters of vibrations that appear as object-like and mind-like phenomena. Ervin proposes an in-formed vibrational universe in which object-like clusters of waves vibrate at a high frequency in the spectrum and mind-like clusters at a lower frequency. Critically, the manifest entities of the universe are 'phenomenologically distinct but not ontologically separate.' (p. 14) We are one in the deep dimension. The world is not a giant mechanism but 'a unitary realm of in-formed clusters of vibration.' (p. 46)

The three parts of Ervin's contribution address cosmos, consciousness and existence. In discussing consciousness, Ervin takes full account of anomalies that cannot be explained by scientific materialism, proposing that 'the enduring essence of consciousness extends beyond the brain, transcending it and capable of existing independently of it.' (p. 39) This means that birth and death are both phase transitions in an out of different levels of existence. Moreover, '*the universe is entangled in all of its relationships and acts as ONE.*' (p. 101) A manifestation of this oneness is the emphasis on increasing coherence. For Ervin, the logic of life is towards coherence and wholeness, through interconnection and interaction.

The book also contains further explorations of the new map, with a foreword by Deepak Chopra and an introduction by Stanislav Grof – the latter with his notion of holotropic, moving towards wholeness. Well-known authors contribute their reflections on the new map in physics, consciousness, the nature of existence, then wider horizons. Nitamo Montecucco gives a striking illustration of coherence in the brain, Jean Houston gives her take on the mystical path, Stephan Schwartz elaborates his own map in terms of a scientifically grounded consciousness-based reality, Chris Bache shares his insights from psychedelic communion, Alexander Laszlo reflects on syntony as evolutionary consonance, and, on the practical side, Kingsley Dennis gives guidance on conscious agency for planetary wholeness.

The final part returns to Ervin's own thinking on meaning. He explores purpose in Nature with respect to the coherence of physics and the evolution of complex coherent systems. The ultimate meaning cannot lie in the evolution of these systems as they will ultimately disappear. However, Ervin makes a good case for the meaning and purpose of the universe lying in the evolution of consciousness: 'we are here to evolve the consciousness of the cosmos by



evolving our own consciousness. We can pursue this task throughout the cycle of our existence.' (p. 263) While on Earth we can tune into this deep oneness and express it in unconditional love. Ultimately, we can reach a state of resonance with the intelligence inherent in the ground state of the cosmos. In other words, we vibrate and manifest love and wisdom.

There is no doubt that Ervin is one of the great visionaries of our time. He has plumbed the depths of cosmology, physics, biology, systems theory, evolution and consciousness and come up with a coherent vision of reality and the purpose of existence to which we can all subscribe. His latest book does indeed provide a more than adequate map of reality that is consistent with our emerging planetary consciousness and ethic. Having understood this, it is critical to apply its implications to our current challenges and forge a holistic vision of our planetary future beyond existing polarities and power politics. The signs of breakdown are all too apparent, but green shoots are breaking through. We are in a massive phase transition as a species and it is critical that we hold this vision of wholeness through this transitional process. Ervin's life and work has been dedicated to this noble task.

Cosmos and Consciousness

Ervin Laszlo

YOU ARE THE UNIVERSE Deepak Chopra & Menas Kafatos

Harmony Books, New York 2017, 276 pp., €26, p/b - ISBN 978-0-88916-4

It is a rare pleasure to write a review of Chopra's and Kafatos' new book, *YOU ARE THE UNIVERSE*. It is also somewhat vexing in that I agree with nearly every word in it; after all, a reviewer is expected to say at least one thing that he/she knows better than the author or authors. In this case, however, I can say with Oscar Wilde, "I wish I'd have said that." And I can also appreciate the expectation of his friends who remarked "You will, Oscar, you will."

I will indeed myself say what this book says, with due credit of course to its authors. I will affirm and re-affirm these ideas, concepts and principles, because I have already said them in my own formulation in various books and articles. We have been thinking along similar lines and, even more, our thinking has been evolving along similar lines. We are now asking the same questions and giving the basically same answer. We are formulating it in different ways; but that is not a problem—agreement does not require repetition.

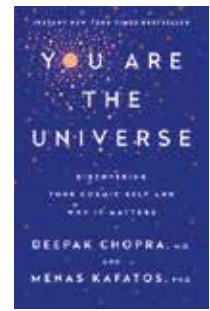
The crucial issue behind accepting the proposition of this book—namely, that "you are the universe"—regards the

fundamental nature of the universe. Before we could say whether the universe is you or I, or everyone or no one, we have to know if it is the result of a random concatenation of things and events, or if it is determined in some way. Scientists abhor determinism because in the classical Newtonian framework it suggests determination by a mechanism—a sublime mechanism but a mechanism just the same, where the past determines the present and the present determines the future. This hypothesis is outdated and is rightfully relegated to the dustheaps of history. But the alternative to it is not randomness and serendipity. A thing or event in the universe need not be either purely aleatory or fully determined or, even worse, pre-determined by all that went on beforehand. There is another alternative, and that is difficult to accept for a classical-physics trained mind (although not for a quantum-physics oriented one), because that alternative is that the given thing or event is just more likely to happen than some other thing or event. This can be expressed in the formula, when condition A obtains, the probability that B will follow is greater than that C will follow. This expresses a form of preference—the preference for B under condition A, relative to C.

The idea of preference in nature is hard to accept in natural science, because it smacks of something that classical science excluded from nature, namely "choice." If the thing or event we observe is more likely to occur than another thing or event, nature demonstrates a preference for it. But does nature have preferences?

Scientists get around this problem by claiming that the laws of nature are simply such that under condition A, B happens statistically more often than C. No further explanation or interpretation is needed: all we need to do is to record this observed fact. This, however, does not do away with the problem, because the question why this happens is not answered. If not mere chance, then what is responsible for the higher probability of the observation of B? Randomness does not explain this and analogous phenomena. A random mixing of the elements that make up the universe would not create a significant probability that the genome of a fruit fly would result in the timeframe available for evolution in the universe, namely that which has elapsed since the birth of the universe in the singularity known as the Big Bang. In regard to anything more complex and interesting than the presence of inert gases in space, an additional factor must be involved. The student asking "if not by the determination of the past (of the rest of the universe) on the present, why then?" is usually told to keep quiet and just work on the equations. This fails in regard to the ultimate task of science, which is to illuminate and make understandable what is taking place in

the world. To be satisfied that B merely happens, is a cop-out. Why is it that it happens? Why is the world such that the laws that govern existence and evolution in space and time produce the universe we observe?



If the laws of nature make the universe what it is, and if what it is, is improbable under the assumption of randomness, some factor of selection must be at work. The search space of possible universes is enormous—why is it that this particular universe has come about rather than any of the myriad other universes that would be possible? Answering that we live in this universe, because otherwise we would not be here to ask about it, is the answer given by adherents of the anthropic principle, but it is not satisfactory: it is still the answer of serendipity, bolstered by the consideration that it worked for us, this time. But why did it work? We are back to square one. We cannot avoid acknowledging that some selection has been at work in the build-up of the phenomena observed in the universe.

Given that randomness cannot be the answer, our universe and all things in it must have been "selected" in the welter of alternative possibilities. Selection implies choice, and choice implies intention. The conclusion that appears is that the universe did not just happen to be as it is, it was brought about—perhaps, intentionally. This comes dangerously close to the notion of a Creator. It is the Creator who intended the universe the way it is. With this supposition we are beyond science, we are in the domain of theology.

The "creation implies creator" thesis is a leap in reasoning, and it is not necessary. The meaningful alternative is that creation and creator are one. The universe creates itself, because the universe is not random, it is not the product of chance: it is that what it intends to be. The universe selects and chooses to be the way it is, not by obeying an external agency, but by being that agency itself.

The thesis put forward by Deepak and Menas is that the universe is the way it is because it is how the cosmic consciousness that creates the laws of nature—and therewith the phenomena we observe in nature—behaves, comes up with essentially the same answer. I agree, with the proviso that "cosmic consciousness" is not something that acts on the universe, but is the universe itself. It is not a case of a creator acting on its creation, but of the creator creating itself. The universe

itself is the cosmic consciousness. It is a conscious, intending, selecting universe. I prefer to call this creative factor the “intelligence of the cosmos,” to highlight that this factor is the cosmos itself—it is its own intelligence—and that our consciousness is the way this intelligence is manifesting for us. The universe we inhabit, and we embody, is the cosmic intelligence that chooses and intends itself. Our consciousness is a reflection, a projection, a manifestation of the intelligence of the universe: of the intelligence that *is* the universe.

Here “hologram” is the applicable principle, because a hologram can be fragmented without losing its wholeness: all the information that constitutes it is present in all its parts. If the cosmic consciousness is a hologram (meaning that the universe itself is a hologram) your consciousness and mine is a fractal of the universe. And then we truly *are* the universe.

To remark on the last term in the subtitle of this book “why it matters” is obvious. If the universe is a hologram, then we are fractal elements of it: we are the universe. And being the universe is very different from being a separate or separable part of it. We are not the part; we are the whole. This is the new paradigm in science, and in all areas of inquiry into who we are, whether in religion or in spirituality, in business or in economics, or in politics. Discovering who we are matters more than anything other than our instinctive yearning for belonging and for giving and receiving love. Our inherent disposition for belonging and for loving, and our re-discovered insight into who we are, can together bring us back to the path we had nearly lost in the rudderless chaos of change and transformation. It is the path of the oneness of the world, and of our oneness with (and not in) the world.

philosophy-religion

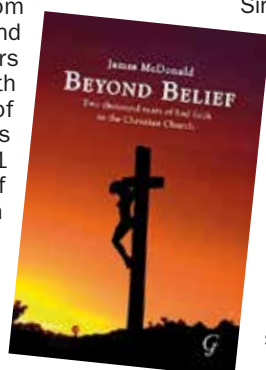
Authoritative yet Mischievous

David Lorimer

BEYOND BELIEF James McDonald

Garnet Publishing, 2011, 496 pp., £49.99, h/b – ISBN 978-0-863723-46-9

The title above comes from back cover of this critical and encyclopaedic book – 20 years in the making – dealing with the origins and history of Christianity. The scholarship is demonstrated in a total of 631 footnotes from a wide variety of sources. The author builds on the work of biblical criticism over the last two centuries, sharing the humanistic perspective of Voltaire, Gibbon, Thomas Paine, J.M



Robertson, author of *Pagan Christs*, and Grant Allen, author of *The Evolution of the Idea of God*. The first two chapters deal with the reliability of Christian authorities in both the Old and New Testaments. The author points out that there are no original texts for any of the books in the Bible, that they have been subject to tampering, and that there are many internal contradictions as well as factual errors. He explains the history of the creation of the Canon of the New Testament, again full of contradictions and inconsistencies as well as additions and amendments to the original text along with errors in translation. All this is well known to biblical scholars, yet fundamentalists still insist that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls revealed the existence of other gospels, some with a Gnostic perspective. A common feature of amendments, such as those in St Jerome, is correcting existing texts so as to confirm the orthodoxy of their own views. In addition, the earliest texts of the Gospels date from the fourth century. The author gives many examples of difficulties raised in relation to the apostolic tradition, individual church fathers, church councils and popes contradicting each other.

The chapter on the development of Christianity asks whom Jesus believed himself to be, who actually founded Christianity, the origins of Christian doctrines, ideas and practices, the question of what is and is not orthodox, and the origins of the priesthood. There are sections on Jesus the rabbi, the miracle worker, the prophet, the Messiah, the Royal pretender, the Son of Man, the lunatic, the Lord, the Son of God, the Christian and the God. The notion of a Christ as an anointed one mutates into Jesus Christ as a title. In the early days, there were Nazarenes under Jesus's brother James, Pauline Christians and Gnostic Christians as well as other schismatic sects who all disagreed with each other. Eventually, the Pauline line triumphs. A key and long-running dispute concerned the relationship between Jesus's humanity and divinity, which was also an important topic at successive Councils, where issues were decided on a majority vote. The Trinity has its origins in Egypt, while other religions like Hinduism have their own trinities. There is considerable discussion over Mary, the Virgin Birth, the Atonement, Original Sin and the Resurrection.

The author shows how many Christian ideas and practices had their origins in other traditions, for instance the correlation between vegetation gods and the resurrection; then many originally pagan sacred sites were taken over by Christianity, which also adopted the festivals, such as Christmas. There

is an impressive table on page 195 showing the development of Christian sects in the context of related religions. This means that all present day denominations are in fact branches. The early church had no ecclesiastical power structure, which was a later development leading to a chain of succession as an argument for authority and obedience. In the history of the papacy, there is no biblical reference to Peter as the first Bishop of Rome which, according to Irenaeus, seems to have been Linus (p. 211). Some claims to power were reinforced by forged documents such as *The Donation of Constantine*, actually dating from 754, but post-dated from 315. This ‘purported to confer on the reigning Pope, and his successors, primacy over the patriarchs as well as temporal dominion over the West, along with the Imperial insignia.’ (p. 215) There follows a colourful summary of the history of the papacy with some really shocking details and plenty of nepotism and corruption. For example, Pius II created a nephew, the future Pius III an archbishop and cardinal at the age of 21. Sixtus IV appointed numerous relatives including three sons and six others, as cardinals, one of them the future Julius II (p. 228)

The forensic analysis continues with eight methods of manipulating facts, with numerous examples: suppressing inconvenient evidence, selecting sources and arguments, fabricating records, creating retrospective prophecies, attributing ambiguous authority to the Old Testament, ignoring or distorting New Testament injunctions and examples, inventing, amending and discarding teachings and practices, and manipulating language. This is followed by case studies about the rebranding of a sky God, the virginity of the Virgin Mary (the Hebrew word *almah* used in the Old Testament does not mean ‘virgin’ but ‘nubile young woman’) and the creation of the Nativity story along with a further discussion of textual problems.

Many writings regarded as heretical were destroyed, and their authors persecuted when the Church achieved political power. Prophecies are quoted out of context, and the status of the Old Testament is called into question as it is used selectively by believers, depending on their affiliation. The interpretation of many doctrines, such as hell, has evolved as attitudes have changed and positions become untenable or ‘unteachable because of widespread disbelief.’ (p. 306) Women are now able to play a much more active part in the Anglican Communion, but there is still resistance on grounds of tradition to any change in the Roman Catholic Church. These fundamental changes of direction undermine the claim of perfection and infallibility. A real difficulty arises from the fact that educated theologians and priests ‘generally have beliefs far in advance of their flocks’ (p. 339), who

have a much more simplified and a generally literalistic understanding.

The last two shorter chapters look at the history of science and Christianity, and the prospects for religion in the 21st-century. The author discusses issues arising from cosmology, mathematics and physics, biology, earth science, theology and philosophy, then more recent controversies on evolution and genetics, creation science and the origins of life. The huge historical and cultural power of the Church until the 17th century enabled them to control learning and suppress inconvenient knowledge. Even now, churches enjoy considerable advantages and influence on education. There is still a danger of subordinating rationality to religious dogma, an attitude that led to 'book burning, scientist burning, obscurantism, suppression of evidence, rewriting history, linguistic deceptions, and hostility to scientific advances.' (p. 455)

For those unfamiliar with the field, the devastating detail of the book will be an eye-opener, but I am more optimistic than the author in terms of a sea change in opinion. He rightly says that the early church taught brotherhood, tolerance, peace, love, justice and mercy. However, when it achieved political power, it caused division, persecution, war, hatred and injustice, not to mention child abuse – a side-effect of narrow views on sexuality and the celibacy of priests, only introduced in the 11th century. I think there is a return to the early essence of Christianity and a much more universal outlook, although this is balanced by the prevalence of fundamentalism, both in Christianity and Islam, where, as Voltaire observed in the 18th century, those who believe absurdities will commit atrocities. There is also a considerable trend towards non-sectarian spirituality, many of whom would be sympathetic to the disturbing analysis in this book. It can be recommended to any reader wanting to find out more about the history of Christianity, even though there is a danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater with the relentless focus on the negative side of religious dogma.

The Journey from Gawd to God and why it matters

John Maxwell Kerr

GOD EXISTS BUT GAWD DOES NOT: FROM EVIL TO NEW ATHEISM TO FINE-TUNING

David Ray Griffin

Process Century Press, Anoka, MN, 331 pp., \$24.00 (US), p/b - ISBN 978-1-940447-15-5

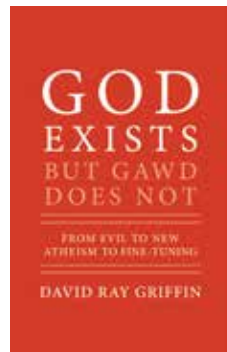
With this most engaging title, David Ray Griffin, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy of Religion and Theology at Claremont, will draw many a reader into his engagement with arguments

for theism and antitheism variously understood. Over all fourteen chapters and the postscript, the tutelary genius of A.N. Whitehead hovers, with Charles Hartshorne, Thomas Nagel, and John Cobb as attendant muses. The well-read reader will not be disappointed by either the extremely wide range of topics covered nor by the quality of their brief treatment by this able scholar. "God Exists but Gawd Does Not" feels like the fruit of a life-time of faith seeking understanding within process theology.

The first six chapters present arguments for the non-existence of "Gawd." The strongly-convincing anti-theistic case rests on the existence of evil, the case for scientific naturalism, evolution, consciousness, miracles, and immoral effects. The arguments are critically presented with a pleasing breadth of reference to Griffin's sources in the 'End-notes' section of each chapter. But who or what is this "Gawd"? For Griffin "Gawd" is the omnipotent deity who, having created the world out of nothing, can unilaterally bring about any state of state of affairs, as long as it is not self-contradictory. Another of Gawd's attributes is: "non-existent." Is the alternative to "Gawd," atheism?

Eight chapters are then devoted to making a cumulative case for the existence of "God," as understood in panentheism. These chapters begin with mathematics' evincing a reality other than that met in sensate empiricism. Frequent reference is here made to both the Platonist and Bencerraf problems' challenge to the naturalistic rejection of any relationship between mathematical forms (as actual entities), and the physical world, and their interaction with mind. Those challenges form much of the case against "Gawd." Kurt Gödel suggested the solution lay in the validity of non-sensory perception (also as in Middle Platonism), saying that he did not know of any reason why we should have "less confidence in this kind of perception, i.e. in mathematical intuition, than in sense perception." The late modern world-view, which argues forcefully against "Gawd," insists that non-sensory perception is impossible *naturally* because the material world we apprehend with our senses is all there is. Griffin points out that this is not a sufficient argument against "God."

Confidence in non-sense-derived experience is carried through Griffin's treatments of the reality of moral perception, logic, and the truths of rationality (non-contradiction, for example), truth itself, and (surprisingly) religious experience, followed by chapters on metaphysical, cosmological, and teleological order.



The eight chapters present again and again Whitehead's dictum "we must take the whole evidence into account," with Hartshorne's "what we have to be guided by in our decision-making, we should not pretend to reject theoretically." Some pages are almost a commentary on Whitehead citing him eight times.

In his Postscript, Griffin answers the big question, "So what? Why does it matter whether we believe in the non-existence of "Gawd," or that "God" exists"?

His very readable 2015 book, "Unprecedented: Can Civilisation Survive the CO₂ Crisis?" gives a hint: the "over-riding threat of global warming or climate change" could mean that civilisation will be destroyed. Belief in an omnipotent "Gawd", especially among American Christians of an evangelical persuasion, leads to their complacency about the deleterious effects of human activity on climate or outright denial. "God Exists But Gawd Does Not" was written during the debates prior to the 2016 presidential election – many examples from these debates, and since the election, sadly illustrate Griffin's case.

Finally, Griffin tells us that his book supports what Rupert Sheldrake has called *anatheism*. This means "returning to a belief in God after passing through the purifying fires of atheism." The trajectory of the arguments in "God Exists" takes the reader through the weaknesses of "Gawd Exists", shows the intellectual inadequacy of atheism after the rejection of divine reality, and presents a third alternative. God exists, God as construed within panentheism. Belief in God may yet give an incentive to combat climate change and a hope that our efforts may find success.

I strongly recommend close study of Griffin's book. To appreciate his arguments does require a moderately sophisticated background in philosophical theology, preferably from a process theology perspective. Of course some of the material is far too compressed to be persuasive by itself (and persuasion, beyond mere information, is the object of "God Exists But Gawd Does Not.") The treatment of the physics and metaphysics of some forms of anthropic principle derived from the fine-tuning of constants and of the forces in nature is necessarily rather curtailed. And in a book of this length and complexity to be stopped only once by a grammatical error is remarkable these days. On page 282 of "God Exists but Gawd Does Not", a lapse in proof-reading created an enormity.

Rev John Maxwell Kerr is a Member of the Society of Ordained Scientists.

Self-Formation on an Ascetic Planet

David Lorimer

YOU MUST CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Peter Sloterdijk

Polity, 2013, 503 pp., £17.99, p/b – ISBN 978-0-7456-4922-1

I doubt that many readers will have heard of Peter Sloterdijk (b. 1947), who is professor of philosophy and aesthetics at Karlsruhe's School of Design. He was active in the student movement of the 1960s, and in 1983 published his *Critique of Cynical Reason*, where he analyses the dissolution of the student movement as a 'complex metamorphosis of hope into realism, of revolt into a clever melancholy. He continues: 'Because everything has become problematic, everything is also somehow a matter of indifference. The result is cynicism, defined as 'enlightened false consciousness': 'It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. With this reference to practice, we come to a central theme of the current book, which is challenging, complex and dense in its analysis.

The title comes from the last line of a poem by Rilke, Archaic Torso of Apollo. Despite its incompleteness, the perfection of the statue represents the ethical imperative that we must change our life. Christians will recognise this as the fallen state requiring conversion, transformation or a new birth. Broadly speaking, this requires *askesis*, exercise or training, striving to become better. The brooding presence in the book is that of Friedrich Nietzsche with his representation of human life as a rope with *Übermensch* at one end and the beast at the other. Nietzsche helped to define the plight of modernity after the proclaimed death of God, favouring self-mastery over submission even if discipline is required in both instances. For Sloterdijk, the dichotomy between believers and unbelievers is obsolete and has been replaced by the distinction between the practising and the untrained, and those who train differently. (p. 3)

This distinction raises interesting issues since practice, whether athletic, musical or spiritual, requires commitment and discipline, especially to maintain it in the long term. Discipline can also be contrasted with indulgence encouraged by our consumerist culture and built on the kinds of habit and inertia that we all recognise. At a certain point, we may feel compelled to overcome our inner obstacles in the form of passions, habits and unclear ideas, (p. 195), which, for Nietzsche, metaphorically represents a form of acrobatics designed produce strength

and resilience. This also introduces the image of verticality and the de-verticalisation of our culture. Height psychology is maintained in our discourse of ladders and levels, as well as the traditional idea that heaven is above and hell below. One example of de-verticalisation given by the author is the Olympic philosophy of Pierre de Coubertin where the ascetic practice is primarily physical, although the mental component is also important. Interestingly, he does not mention the Olympic motto of *citius, altius, fortius* (faster, higher, stronger) as an example of self-overcoming, or becoming superior to oneself - the breaking of Olympic records testifies to this. This process of self-formation is similar to biological concept of *autopoiesis*, which is not mentioned in this context. We also live in the time of de-contextualisation, where practices like mindfulness are removed from their original cultural context. However, this makes the point that for us contemporary people, the practice and its pragmatic results are what matters. An interesting example (not given by the author) of self-overcoming since the 19th century is the rise of mountaineering - an obvious image of verticality - where courage, perseverance and discipline are required in equal measure, and humans have consistently climbed new faces; then we have it complement in downhill skiing. The horizontal equivalent would be polar expeditions, if anything even more gruelling.

Human life consists both of self-formation, mainly in the first part of life, and self-transcendence in the second. This corresponds to a process of creation and dissolution, anabolic and catabolic processes, the creation and transcendence of the ego. In this respect, the author gives examples from various spiritual traditions, including the ladder of humility by St Benedict and the exercises of St Ignatius. All these forms of training come under the heading of 'anthropotechnics', requiring individual effort and persistence. The result is often overtaxing, and the imitation of Christ (*theomimesis*) may represent a form of 'authoritative perfection'. In every case, however, there is a self-referential or autoplasmic relationship where we are artistically forming ourselves - 'actions return to affect the actor, works the worker, communications the communicator, thoughts the thinker and feelings the feeler.' (p. 110) It is important to note that this represents a conscious striving for self-improvement rather than a technological or engineering enhancement from the outside. Augustine has a different take when, against Arius, he devalues works and by implication practice in favour of the overwhelming power of grace.



He may have a point in the sense that there is both a time to act and a time to surrender.

Although the author uses the phrase 'work on oneself', he does not delve into the long American tradition of self-improvement, going back to Benjamin Franklin in the 18th century and also manifest in Britain the 19th century with Samuel Smiles. This was given a new impulse by Andrew Carnegie in persuading Napoleon Hill to undertake a 20-year project, resulting in his *Laws of Success in Sixteen Lessons*, which forms the starting point of subsequent work on self-improvement and success principles developed by Earl Nightingale, which one also finds transpersonal psychology and the work of Ken Wilber. The spiritual impulse in 19th-century also came from Emerson and the New Thought movement with Ralph Waldo Trine, Thomas Troward, Charles Haanel and Walter Russell. All these men were convinced that we co-create our lives from the inside out and can transform ourselves in the process.

The final chapter analyses the human outlook in relation to Rilke's imperative that you must change your life. It was Nietzsche who suggested that humans can only advance as long as they follow the impossible, challenging the pragmatic consensus that one can only demand of people what they seem capable of achieving. In our current predicament, this is manifestly inadequate and we all fall short of who we might become. It is now the spectre of global catastrophe that urges us to change our lives, but most of us continue to prevaricate with business as usual - threatening pronouncements can be seen as a form of entertainment in the documentary horror genre.

As a signpost, the author quotes Hans Jonas' version of the categorical imperative: 'act in such a way that the effects of your actions can be reconciled with the permanence of true human life on earth.' (p. 448) The trouble is that we are in a long emergency, 'heading for a crash whose time is uncertain, but which cannot be delayed indefinitely' - we can see a parallel uncertainty in the timing of our own deaths. However, our short-term imperatives trump these concerns and we spend our time 'preserving jobs on the Titanic.' This does leave the reader asking for further guidance on the kinds of practice the author thinks are required beyond his generality of 'taking on the good habits of shared survival in daily exercises.' He is stronger on diagnosis than practical applications, even with his overall emphasis on the importance of practice - perhaps this will be the subject of a further volume.

Evolution and Soul Formation

David Lorimer

SOUL STORY

Tim Freke

Watkins, 2017, 322 pp., £12.99, p/b – ISBN 978-1-78028-964-7

While checking the publication details of Tim's hugely significant new book, I find that I am writing this review on its exact publication date - a nice synchronicity. His starting point is what he calls a soul crisis brought about by the demise of outdated religious ideas and the rise of a hard-headed science 'which has left us adrift in a meaningless universe.' Hence his proposal for evolutionary and emergent spirituality that creates a genuinely fresh understanding of life by reconciling scientific knowledge with spiritual wisdom - going beyond both religious and scientific dogmatism. In order to articulate this, he invents a number of new terms, of which more anon, but also sets the book out in an unconventional minimalist format without punctuation and capital letters in the interest of conciseness. He provides a useful glossary defining his new terms at the end.

The overall evolutionary narrative in the 'timestream' can be seen as 'the journey [of self-realisation] from unconscious oneness through conscious individuality to conscious oneness' (p. 142), a similar structure to the thinking of Owen Barfield with his original participation, individuation and final participation - as an overall narrative, this makes a great deal of sense to me. From timestreams emerge lifestreams with individual somastreams and finally soulstreams. Each new level transcends and includes the previous one, but they exist alongside each other. Time is understood not so much as passing as accumulating, building ourselves up as we go. If the future is open, however, the past, like inertia and gravity, exerts a backwards or downwards pull - as we can all experience. He calls this 'pastivity'. At the same time as individuation, we have a corresponding process of what Tim calls 'unindividuation' combining to form a greater timestream on a more emergent level of evolution.

Within this picture, body and soul are seen as emergently related, the former associated with sensation and the latter with imagination. Beyond is the spirit as formless presence witnessing both. We are at the same time individuals and one in spirit, moving towards self-realisation and the expression of love and wisdom. Awakening is spirit becoming conscious of itself as spirit, what Thomas Troward calls the great realisation of the relationship between individual and universal. A key insight is the evolution itself has evolved. Tim sees chance predominating in the early

stages of evolution, and a gradual emergence of choice and consciousness with complexification. These levels of emergence exist alongside each other and we are shaped not only by physical causality and biological necessity, but also by what he calls magical narrativity and divine transivity - these last two terms refer to the way in which conceptual narratives shape the way our lives unfold, and how the power of transcendent spirit shapes our life stories in benign ways.

Tim's understanding of immortality and God is that these have also evolved with our imaginative capacities. He cites earlier pictures of the afterlife and how these have gradually been refined; a corresponding process applies to our understanding of God, as Sir James Frazer and Grant Allen were pointing out at the end of the 19th century, even if the direction of their thought was towards atheism. While the lifestream is necessarily temporary, the soulstream is postulated as permanent - the word itself means lasting through. Hence his picture of reincarnation and the 'imaginos' of the afterlife as a shared collective dream or dreams. If death enables us to remember who we are, then incarnation is postulated as a forgetting or fall/descent, as in Neoplatonism and Gnosticism. As the NDE suggests, death provides us with an opportunity for a deeper review and evaluation of our lives within an evolutionary context. While in incarnation, we have to work with the body and its genetic heritage as well as our cultural situation.

We also know from NDEs and mystical experience more generally that people become what Tim calls love-light and that this is an intensely real experience of communion, which experiencers try to apply when they return, in other words bringing heaven to earth. This picture means that even what we understand as transcendent is in fact emergent, which has made me rethink my previous understanding of the relationship between transcendence and immanence (Whitehead's *Process and Reality* is a key text with this his ideas of the primordial and consequent natures of the Divine). Traditionally, transcendence is primordial, existence is a manifestation and unfolds a gradual process of immanently coming to realise the divine within. This view, however, gives rise to the classic problem of evil or theodicy where an all-powerful and all-knowing God seemingly permits evil and suffering. Like some Gnostics, Tim postulates that the divine is essentially goodness but is not all-powerful, guiding rather than coercing, but doing its best in the circumstances.



An encouraging thought is that our outrage at terrorist barbarities is an indication of evolutionary advance as such things were taken for granted hundreds of years ago. In that sense, such acts represent a regression that will gradually be replaced.

This brings Tim to a consideration of the complementary importance of love and wisdom, which he hyphenates into love-wisdom. This helps us live with paradox and balance individual needs with universal oneness, autonomy with connectedness, as we become more conscious more often. He proposes a new discipline of 'soulology' to assist with the process of social transmutation and spiritual awakening. Summarising the overall process, Tim suggests that 'individually and collectively we are evolving from ignorance to wisdom, from biological need to universal empathy, from egoism and tribalism to compassionate communion.' (p. 170) I find this an inspiring vision in which we can all play our part by expressing our individual genius in fulfilling ourselves and contributing to the good of the whole. He urges us to take the risk of really living our lives, deciding to make the most of being the person we are right now, remembering that 'life is good, death is safe, and what really matters is love.' (p. 108) This is a book of true philosophy - meaning the love of wisdom - and deserves the widest possible readership.

A Tantric Initiation

David Lorimer

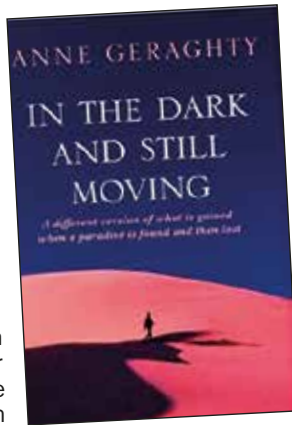
IN THE DARK AND STILL MOVING

Anne Geraghty (SMN) –
www.annegeraghty.org

The Tenth Bull, 2007, 302 pp., £10.95, p/b – ISBN 978-0-9554954-0-3

I reviewed Anne Geraghty's more recent book about the death of her son, Tim – *Death – the last God* – last year, then she spoke at our November conference on conscious ageing and subsequently sent me a copy of her earlier autobiographical book. It is an extraordinary and eloquent account of a passionate life that takes readers of my generation right back to the 60s with the rise of radical spirituality and politics, feminism, drugs and sexual liberation. Anne lives all this with passionate intensity and to a degree that few would dare. She refers to this as an energy release from the prison of rigid bourgeois culture.

The story begins with her Catholic upbringing and the gradually escalating tension between her ambition for sainthood and her quest for freedom. The latter wins out, and provides her first initiation into dark turbulence as she seeks to reconcile these opposites. She even buys a wig as an alter ego, and relates that she would go to confession on Saturday afternoon then a wild party on Saturday evening (she is also sexually approached by the priest, introducing another element of darkness). She relates a fascinating encounter with Donald Winnicott that gives her an insight into vulnerability and the potential healing of suffering through redemptive love, and this theme of vulnerability recurs several times in the narrative as Anne seeks to reconcile her roles as feminist, spiritual seeker, mother, lover and activist.



The second part relates her spiritual adventure in connection with the crazy Tantric wisdom of Osho Rajneesh and is entitled *Playing Snakes and Buddhas*. This is a story of both heaven and hell, freedom and repression, wild abandon and submission. Anne becomes Vismaya and takes on responsibility for the British centre after a trip to India. She has to face her own demons, realising that fear just gives them more power and that one must enter fully into life with its ecstasy and agony in order to distil wisdom from life experience. She writes that she 'saw the genuine love that breaks your own heart because its roots are in the real mud of our human struggle with hate. I saw the fierce honesty of a compassion that emerges from passionate anger, rather than the sugar on the shit of piety.' (p. 122) No holds barred here, or indeed anywhere else in this candid account.

Later, she writes that 'wherever there is life, there is everything - power in service and the abuse of power, sexual love and sexual abuse, the light of awareness and the darkness of ignorance.' (p. 132). This all becomes only too apparent in the psychodynamics of the Osho organisation. Many who occupied senior positions are later viciously stripped down to nothing, shamed and humiliated, their motivation questioned in the name of deconstructing the ego, which of course is meant to be good for them. I was quite taken aback by the unconscious projection of the shadow by those who had taken over - many of whom were later humiliated themselves (hence the implicit reference to snakes and ladders). Anne is told that she has the negativity of lifetimes to deal with, that she is deceitful, manipulative and cowardly; then, with supreme irony,

she is informed that she is 'completely unconscious of the true motivations of your vicious and vindictive mind.' This leads to a punishment in a 'correction facility' in Germany involving 14 hours a day of manual work as a way of crushing the spirit.

On another level, Anne has to deal with loss in terms of intimate relationships and difficult issues in prioritising time as a mother for her son. Tim later writes a book

about his experience, and as a family they undertake an intense process of exploration and healing. Her intimate relationship at the time when she was in the community is subjected to enormous strain, even though it later survives and thrives. One point, she literally loses everything as her house is burgled by people pretending to be furniture removers! Indeed, the third part is entitled 'falling in all directions' as she goes deeper into the realisation of the redemptive role of suffering and enters into further despair. It looks like her long-term relationship is doomed as her lover abandons her for another woman - she alternates between rage and grief as she processes the perverse results of her efforts to create a better world, but her vulnerable heart opens further and her lover returns. The mystery of the human heart is that 'its capacity for love and its capacity for suffering are the same.' (p. 277)

The final chapters bring things together, the brightness of the light corresponding to the darkness of the shadow. Osho dies, and appears to her the next night. She reflects that she did her best to make love not war, but found that all love leads to some kind of war until a different love arrives. She realises that she has to live with her own darkness, or else someone else will have to suffer it for her and she will project it out onto others. This leads to the profound realisation that 'darkness is intrinsic to our dualistic existence where life is divided into 'good' and 'evil' and 'you' are not 'me', 'we' are not 'them'. I learned by falling, repeatedly into my own darkness.' (p. 293) However, 'our human darkness, in all its anguish and despair, is the inextricable soul mate of the love, freedom, truth, friendship and beauty I have also found.' (p. 294). As readers of her other book will know, the loss of her son Tim gave her a further intense initiation even beyond all the joy and suffering expressed in this book. At a time when the shadow is cast worldwide for us all to see, this book can help us realise that light can come out of our own darkness if we embrace it rather than project it onto others.

A Cosmic Messenger

David Lorimer

A WORTHY MESSENGER

Charles W. Hardy

Cosmic Books, 2013, 361 pp., no price given, p/b - ISBN 978-0-615-88732-6

THE MESSAGE OF THE DIVINE ILIAD

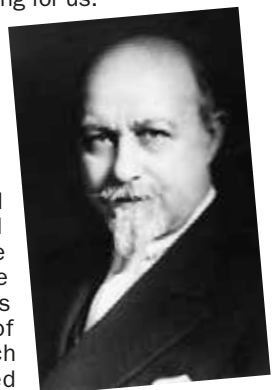
Walter Russell

University of Science and Philosophy, 1999, 130 pp., \$25, h/b - ISBN 1-879605-59-9

I have referred to the work of Walter Russell (1871-1963) quite a few times recently in various conference presentations, and I usually find that the only people who have heard of him are those who have attended a previous presentation! I also reviewed the short biography by Glenn Clark (*The Man Who Tapped the Secrets of the Universe*) and Russell's own *The Secret of Light* in a previous issue. I would still recommend those unfamiliar with his work to begin with the Clark biography which is only some 60 pages - the pdf can be sourced on the Internet. The New York Herald Tribune called Russell the modern Leonardo for the variety of his accomplishments, which are described in this readable biography by Charles Hardy, who knew Russell as a young man.

Starting as a musician, Russell became one of the foremost portrait painters of children, including those of President Theodore Roosevelt, as well as a prolific illustrator. At the age of 56, he moved on to sculpture, which he had never done before, and his first subject was none other than Thomas Edison. He is perhaps most famous for his Mark Twain Memorial and the Four Freedoms, which include President Franklin Roosevelt's freedom from fear: 'there is nothing to fear but fear itself.' In the meantime, he was also an architect, town planner and the originator of the cooperative housing concept. Then he was a leading horse breeder and champion figure skater, even into his 60s. He famously said that genius is self-bestowed, and mediocrity self-inflicted. His life is an extraordinary demonstration of human capacity and possibilities when connected to the Source. This means working with God, rather than God working for us.

The central incident of Russell's life was a three-week mystical illumination in 1921 where he became aligned with the Light and Love of the Universal Mind and was able to download some extraordinary insights into the nature of the universe, which he first expressed



in the mystical Divine Iliad and more scientifically and philosophically in *The Universal One*. Here he is able to articulate some of the basic dynamic principles of the universe, including the complementary principles of unfolding and refolding, radiation and gravitation, birth and death, all in what he called a rhythmic balanced interchange. I am still in the middle of this masterwork, which he subsequently updated in other publications, but which was the source of his doctorate conferred by the New York Academy of Sciences in the 1941. It should be noted that Russell left school at 10, and never received any formal scientific education. Nevertheless, he was able to conduct high-level debates with scientists on these topics.

In the 1890s, he became involved with Andrew Carnegie and others in the Twilight Club and the Poet's Code of Ethics, which sets out a number of basic ethical principles as the foundation of what we would now call a global ethic. In its original form, the Twilight Club was instrumental in bringing into existence movements such as the Boy Scouts, Rotary Clubs, and Better Business Bureaus, which was a joint venture with Thomas J Watson Sr of IBM. Russell gave many motivational talks at IBM, which were very well received. He also continued the work of the Twilight club through the Society of Arts and Sciences. Carnegie also sponsored the Authors Club, which brought together many leading literary individuals and was an important element in Carnegie's own education.

The Message of the Divine Iliad gives the mystical essence of Russell's vision as a scribe for the Universal Mind. It is written in verses and with old-fashioned use of thee and thy and directly inspired from the I Am presence. There are nine sections, including a salutation to the day and invocation for the night as well as chapters on desire, rest, love, beauty and healing. Desires are seen as patterned seeds that repeat themselves and give rise to corresponding situations and conditions. The divine is the centring presence within all manifestation and thinks or creates within us. The key shift is the realisation that 'the Self of man is Me' (p. 67). The Divine is the universal I, and humans are 'One in Me when they know Me in them.' Knowledge and power are not only in the Light, but also in Love as well as in Beauty. This is a form of knowing beyond sensing and the separation of bodily awareness. We cannot think beyond our knowing, and the ultimate knowing is cosmic knowing in which all is unified. We are therefore encouraged to know that we are wholly Mind and that our minds and the divine one Mind.

It is interesting to reflect that Walter Russell (1871-1963) and Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) were almost exact contemporaries with very

different viewpoints. Walter would have considered Bertrand as sense bound in his knowing, while Bertrand would have regarded Walter as going beyond the bounds of reason. However, they both lived in the same world while operating at very different levels but sharing a concern for the welfare of the world as a whole, as their common preoccupation with nuclear weapons in the 1950s shows.

Seeking the Essence of "Spiritual but not Religious"

Oliver Robinson

BELIEF WITHOUT BORDERS: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious

Linda A. Mercadante

Oxford University Press USA, 352 pp., £19.99, ISBN 978-0199931002

There is a demographic revolution going on in the Western world. Several decades back, the label of 'spiritual but not religious' (SBNR) did not exist. Now surveys suggest that up to a quarter of the population endorse that option. Linda Mercadante, a professor of theology, has done a major study in the US to find out more about this group and what they believe. This research is presented and summarised in accessible form in *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious*.

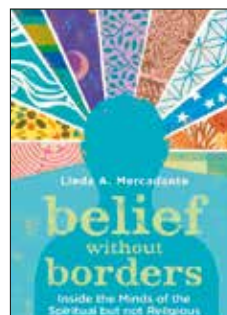
The book is set up in a subtle way that makes the distinction between spirituality and religion both relevant and problematic. It is problematic in that it is often over-simplified as "religion = dogma and convention" and "spirituality = experience and individualism", and this problem is compounded by the fact that SBNR individuals tend to over-simplify in this way. In fact, the distinction is far messier than that. Religion contains liberal, critical and highly individualised forms of belief and worship as well as more exclusivist and dogmatic forms, while spirituality contains varied formulations, some of which have a form of dogmatism and exclusivism of their own in being cocksure of their superiority. I appreciated Mercadante's approach to this breaking this distinction down – it was considerably more nuanced than I have found in most other books on the subject.

Mercadante categorises her SBNR interviewees into five types. *Dissenters* intentionally stay away from institutional religion and are critical of it. They tend to reject particular theological positions, and select a personal worldview that is intentionally contrary to the religion that they grew

up with. *Casuals* are not so bothered. Spirituality is neither something that captures their attention nor organises their life. They dip in 'as needed'. Spiritual practices are for them primarily a way toward better health, stress relief and emotional support. *Explorers* show a fascination with all things spiritual. They tend to try one thing out and then another, seeking novelty and new experiences. They have no plans to settle anywhere, enjoying the journey without any hope of a destination. *Seekers* are much like explorers, but the difference is that they are looking for a spiritual home. *Immigrants* are those who have moved to a new spiritual land and trying to adjust to new identity and community, while still identifying as SBNR. Mercadante found this group struggling with the constancies of religious life, and suggests that something about the independence and freedom of the SBNR designation may make the commitment and group loyalty of a religious community difficult.

In the context of a very hazy division between spirituality and religion, what *does* define being SBNR? Despite the prize attached to being individual and unconventional in the SBNR world, the interviewees in the study showed a clear and common heritage in their beliefs. They were, however, often unaware of this heritage, thinking that their own ideas were new and even unique. In fact, they were drawing on ideas and language from Swedenborgianism, Transcendentalism, Romanticism, spiritualism, esotericism, Theosophy, New Thought and Asian religions. They also were drawing on the Protestant lineage of individual interpretation and allowance of criticism to be part of faith.

In her analysis of the key themes in belief, she picks out as particularly common in the SBNR ethos. Firstly, spirituality is based on a hero myth structure of overcoming the ego through a quest of self-improvement, which requires undertaking a host of therapeutic, artistic and spiritual practices. Secondly, exclusivism – the idea that one idea has the truth – is rejected in favour of a "perennialist" approach that sees all spiritual concepts as relative, but the mystical experience as absolute and truth-giving. Experience in this belief set is the ultimate touchstone, so interpretations and concepts should follow it. Thirdly, the choice to be SBNR is based on perceived ethical shortcomings in religious groups, including prejudice, homophobia and fear of the other. Finally, there is the belief in the validity of syncretism – the bringing together of diverse ideas and practices and integrating them in an individual and improvised personal system. The postmodern values of uncertainty, fluidity, subjectivity



and relativism are all richly espoused in SBNR, but typically within a worldview that places spirituality as a higher expression of the sacred than religion. It seems that Mercadante is, as a Christian, slightly irritated by the superiority that she sees hiding behind SNBR's espoused pluralism, and one can understand why.

Overall, the book has a strong balance of description, evaluation and criticism and is, as yet, one of only a few major empirical studies on the SBNR revolution.

Mercadante does a good job of arguing for and against the worth of the SBNR label. On one side, it could be as a narcissistic descent into spiritual navel-gazing, while on the other, it could be a healthy flood of spiritual passion out of religious institutions into the world at large. In Linda Mercadante's view (and mine too) it's probably both.

Olly Robinson is Senior Lecturer at the University of Greenwich and author of **Paths Between Head and Heart: The Seven Harmonies of Science and Spirituality**, to be published in 2017 by O Books.

psychology- consciousness studies

Law and Freedom

Peter Fenwick

LIVING ZEN REMINDFULLY – Retraining Subconscious Awareness

James Austin (SMN)

MIT Press, 2016, 308 pp., £24.95, p/b
- ISBN 9780262035088

Living Zen Remindfully begins with this quotation, by Jonathan Livingstone Seagull:

"The only true law is that which leads to freedom. There is no other."

This book is remarkable because every word in it is directed towards an understanding of Zen freedom. As you read, you become aware that James Austin is no longer a neurologist struggling with the problems of neurology, but has become a true Zen Master, showing a depth of understanding which only comes through the freedom of Zen.

He begins by asking whether meditation can enhance creative problem solving skills. Not surprisingly, meditation greatly enhances creativity, and the data show that divergent styles of creative performance draw on certain parts of both hemispheres, with the highly creative group showing greater connectivity. James goes on to discuss the two games practised widely in Japan, GO and Shogi. A paper from the Riken

Brain Sciences Institute (where I worked for a number of years) shows that the caudate nucleus, the major motor nucleus, was involved in intuition and planning.

So is it possible that the completely thought-free intervals that arise in long-term meditation practitioners could be a major factor in increasing the potential for creativity? James reviews the data, but concludes that more research is needed. We shall just have to wait and see.

He goes on to ask another fundamental question. What does it mean to be enlightened? He initially answers this with a quotation from Koun Yamada-Roshi, "*Enlightenment means to directly see the essential world through one's experience. To bring the enlightened eye to complete clarity requires a long period of continued practice.*" James goes on to look at the factors which may facilitate awakening, including the fact that it is frequently precipitated by an auditory stimulus. To achieve enlightenment the path of Zen must be followed, and this Yamada-Roshi defines as "the perfection of character." The guidelines for this practice come from the living Buddhist philosophy, generosity of spirit in all matters, disciplined restraint of the passions, patience and tolerance, resolutely applied energy, meditative practices that dissolve the intrusive site, the ripening of authentic insight wisdom. But as James points out, awakening is not a final destination. Enlightenment is a work in progress.

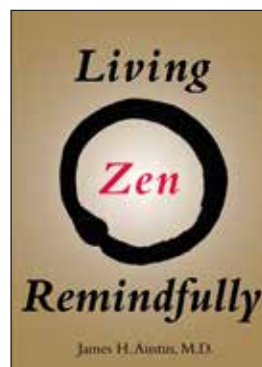
After reminding us about the Self/Other concept, he brings us up to date with a study on long-term Vipassana meditators, showing that a diminution in the self is accompanied by reductions in beta and gamma frequencies. Thus less self means less gamma in the left hemisphere, those networks which underpin self-verbalisation, i.e. talking to oneself. He points out that disturbances of ventral (temporal) information processing – concerning detailed object representation – lead to allocentric (other) impairment, while disorders of the fronto-parietal processing stream, dealing with spatial information, cause egocentric deficit. These concepts are now well advanced and evidence suggests that millisecond decisions are made on spatial allocation within the brain.

Remindfulness, the title of the book, lies at its core. James defines it as the quality of recollecting the most appropriate thing at the right time, starting with the simple example of following the breath. Soon, the mind wanders and defines it as the quality of recollecting the most appropriate thing at the right moment and then,

from short-term memory, into the mind unbidden comes the fact that you should be following the breath, and you return to this. He also mentions the important example of Prince Siddhartha who, while a child, experienced blissful states of consciousness while meditating under a tree. He left the palace and wandered for many years on his spiritual quest. One day, when he felt he could not go on, this distant memory came into his mind. Note – it retrieved itself. For this crucial recollection led him to seek out a tree under which he could meditate. This tree, as we know, was the Bodhi tree, and after struggling for some time, conquering his demons, just before dawn he gained selfless insight to the full glory of the universe.

This quality of mindfulness, James reminds us, is extremely important, particularly when intuitive thinking is required. Intuitive thinking has been termed 'the unconscious thought effect' (UTE) and, is correlated with an enhanced memory, and more importantly, with the *gist* (the overall flavour) of the relevant attributes of a decision making process. He describes the neuroanatomy underpinning this effect and goes on to look at mindfulness in action. He notes its more frequent occurrence with intensive Zen meditation practice and describes one such episode from his own experience. A single soft note, one ring of the familiar doorbell which came unbidden into his consciousness, so persuasive that he got up to answer the door and found no one there. These single note rings were all recurrent auditory hallucinations, lateralised in physical space, off to his left. One morning in May, 2015, after he had been increasing his meditation and while still in a phase of light sleep, he heard a soft single resonant note, which turned into a phrase of syncopated music. He goes on to say that this when this phrase changed he asked himself why? No extra zen sitting had been carried out. He then remembered that the day before he had been walking for an hour in a wood of tall trees, and this was clearly what had triggered the inspiration. He quotes Master Yongmige then quote He then quotes Yanshou who said "*Mountains and rivers, earth and grasses, trees and forests are always emanating their subtle and precious sound....It is right in front of our faces. Every one has this inconceivable capacity for great liberation.*"

Realising the significance of an ordinary stimulus such as sound led James to understand what happened that day when, standing on the London Transport Platform, the state of kensho descended on him. He describes the case of a 52-year-old man who, when he was 28, whilst in



meditation, heard the sound of a jet plane moving overhead, and this was followed by a dramatic experience of seeing light. It was his attention to this auditory stimulus which triggered his experience of the light; an auditory cue activating his 'what and where' allocentric pathway.

Regarding his own experience of the dawning of his kensho, James notes that he was standing there on that unfamiliar platform watching the train move away and become smaller and smaller till it disappeared. He heard the diminuendo of its clattering along the track which faded into the distance. Then, turning casually 45° to the right, he looked up to see way up there a bit of open blue sky. This was sufficient to lead to the onset of kensho. Interestingly, Zen masters have long recognised that when you stand, there is an absence of 'self' thoughts. Turning to the right preferentially activates the right hemisphere and particularly the right hippocampus. There is thus a clear relationship between body movement and the sense of self, and in his case Kensho.

He analyses the signals that would have passed through his brain, the stimulus of the hippocampus leading to the alteration in his allocentric processing brain module realising that it was a very specific set of actions that triggered this dawning of expanded consciousness changing him forever. Thus James the Zen master who experienced Kensho merges with James the neurologist whose understanding and description of the neurological processes suggests a mechanism that released kensho.

The last part of the book is related to Basho, the Haiku poet. Here is James the Zen master, the intuitive poet, who now walks the stage of wider consciousness. He starts this section with a quote by Blyth "What makes Basho one of the greatest poets of the world is that he lived in the poetry he wrote and wrote the poetry he lived." This is a marker of James' own progress. James continues the idea illustrated by Basho's poetry and the significance of the auditory stimulus in triggering Zen states.

*"An old pond,
A frog jumps in,
The sound of the water"*

Did a sound stimulus, James asks, trigger, the state of awakening in Basho? He goes on to quote a number of sources.

*The old pond, Ah!
A frog jumps in:
The waters sound!*

In another translation:
*Old pond,
A frog jumps in,
The sound of water.*

In this wonderful chapter full of insight into the writing of Japanese poetry James, with his extensive understanding of Zen, brings the practice of Zen and the art of poetry together, illustrating the relationship between the development of Zen consciousness and the outflowing of rich and illuminating poetry. The Zen poet Ryokan in his final poem reminded us of the importance of the natural world. He says, "My legacy, what will it be? And he answers "The flowers of spring time, the cuckoo in the summer, the scarlet leaves of fall."

James in closing reminds us that: *"Living Zen also enters subliminally through open eyes and ears into an open-hearted processing of whatever arises in this present moment. We bow in gratitude, mindful of the countless gifts that all other beings contribute to our living."*

Will James write another book? He is 91, goes for a cardiac work-out three times a week, plays tennis, and keeps himself alive and alert. For someone like James, anything is possible. Has he said all that there is to be said regarding a scientific explanation of the practice of Zen and the brain's functional changes which go with silent Zen sitting and which may trigger and lead to wider states of consciousness? I have thought this before, and I have been wrong. Perhaps I will be right this time when I say that I expect James' next book will be just the flourish of the calligraphy pen as he rests in the immediacy of Zen.

Dr Peter Fenwick is President of the Network.

Dealing with the Dark Side

Serge Beddington-Behrens

ILLUMINATING THE SHADOW

David Furlong (SMN)

Atlanta Press, 2016, 324 pp., £14.98, p/b - ISBN 978-0-955979-569

Our world is becoming increasingly transparent, as the emergence of a higher consciousness is ever conspiring to light up our dark sides with the result that our personal, family, social, political, economic, national and human collective shadows continue to arise ever more forcefully around us, so David Furlong's book could not be more timely. It could also not be more revealing, as too many of us talk far too blithely about the Shadow or the 'dark side' without being fully aware of what it really is and how important it is at this time that we understand it and know how to work with it so we can stop projecting it outside of ourselves all the time.



Jung, who coined the term the 'Shadow', stressed that the way to become enlightened was not to sit on the mountain top in the sun but to have the courage to go down and confront our shadow sides, would be rising from his grave in joy at this book. Why? Because not only is it extremely well-written and does much to deepen our understanding of the term - placing as much emphasis on our repressed positive, light or 'spiritual' shadow and on the cosmic shadow - but it takes what Jung said to the next level. For me, it is everything about the shadow that one wants to know about but didn't know how to ask. While being very scholarly and dealing with dark and difficult issues, it is in no way ponderous, which is quite an achievement.

'We see things,' David tells us, 'not as they are but as we are' and we need both to stop demonising others (projecting our own shadow upon them) as well as rejecting polarities, as our shadow is as much carried by those who inspire us as by those we detest. (No doubt if he were writing today, he might have a lot to say about the significance of Donald Trump and what his presence tells us about the state of America, and who today, has overtaken Jimmy Saville and Tony Blair as the one we most love to hate!)

We learn a great deal about the shadow, David tells us, from the movies. Darth Vader is the 'dark side' of the Force and the films are centred around themes of working through hatred, greed, deception and fear. In 'Return of the Jedi', Luke confronts his father and the Dark Lord who tempts him to give in to his hatred and anger. David shows us how similar shadow issues are present in the films on Superman and Spiderman and in particular in Pirates of the Caribbean. In ET, we glimpse the spiritual shadow where Elliot loves the unattractive-looking ET who is the magical ingredient allowing him to recover, showing us that 'when we love the ugly parts of ourselves, they release their powers to us.' The gift of the positive shadow is that, if owned, it asks us to be much more than the little self that we think we are. In Avatar, we see how shadow issues around greed and fear on the part of the mining company who want to exploit the beautiful planet for its precious minerals, create their own comeuppance. In Schindler's List, we see how Schindler, the rescuer of so many Jews, transformed his life through his relationship with his 'other half' - the evil Amon Goeth!

We learn that literature is also full of shadow themes. Harry Potter is challenged all the time by his shadow side, Voldemort, and is able to overcome him by learning to grow in his humanity and courage. Of course

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is the archetypal 'shadow book' and we are shown that when we reject our dark side, it ends up destroying us. The point is that we all have our dark sides, or as David reminds us, quoting from the Rime of the Ancient Mariner, we all have albatrosses around our necks. Shadow themes also show up in mythology with Seth in Ancient Egypt, Lucifer the 'fallen angel' in Christianity and Loki in Teutonic mythology. Mara, like Satan with Christ, does everything in his power to deflect the Buddha from his mission on Earth because he knows that the Buddha's teachings can potentially remove evil from the world. As such, he is the Buddha's shadow.

David is very good when he helps us identify our own shadow sides and gives us many useful exercises to work with it, reminding us that all criticisms of others and all self-criticisms are shadow issues. I found it a bit alarming when he reminded us that people who say they are hopeless at something, say maths, always have a disowned mathematician inside them, as I like to say this about myself with regard to learning foreign languages. It made me realise that if I am to be honest, I need to shift gears and simply own a side of me that is plain lazy in this arena, yet in doing so, not be hard on myself! I think David is so 'right on' when he tells us that 'whatever politicians say, we know they'll do the opposite', as this happened when, a few months ago, Gove said "I unequivocally support my friend Boris Johnson to be the next prime minister", only, a couple of days later, utterly to denounce him as being completely unfit for the job! In this context, I think of Trump's assertion about 'America being in a terrible state' which only he can fix!

There is so much that is absolutely fascinating about this book. We learn how to identify our archetypes and sub-personalities and recognise our traumatised parts and how to work with them. He is very good talking about the shadow around families and in fairy tales (an excellent analysis of Beauty and the Beast) and draws on the Tarot and the I Ching to reinforce his arguments. I learned to see the various conflicts in the Ukraine, Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia and the continuous struggle between Israel and Palestine through entirely new eyes. David, you have great political insight and I think you'd make an excellent diplomat. Why not give it a go? Don't 'deny' those impulses for a potential career change!

If I have any small criticism, it is that sometimes he describes things in too much detail, which, while always fascinating, can take one away from the actual theme of the Shadow. For example, while I found what he said about Richard Dawkins and whether God exists or not, very interesting just as I did his discussions about life after death, I was also wondering what their connection was to the main theme of

the book. I also have one or two small disagreements. For example, to me not all dark material is necessarily shadow material and not all evil is necessarily shadow. Some evil is very conscious, that is, it exists very much 'in the light of a person's knowing'. Thus, there is nothing 'shadowy' and everything intentional about Russia dropping bunk busting and flame hurling bombs to assist Assad to kill all off all resistance in Aleppo, just as there was nothing unconscious about Hitler's determination to kill off all the Jews in gas ovens. I would also have been interested in what David would have had to say about the Dark Web, the hidden side of the Internet.

But these points are small in comparison to the overall excellence of a multi-levelled book that needs to be read by politicians, peace activists and economists as well as by psychotherapists and spiritual educators. Its 'self help' dimension constituting various exercises we can do with ourselves to help us integrate our dark sides, I repeat once more, is very well thought out. I finished reading this book full of awe at its magnitude and with a whole new understanding of how deeply shadow issues permeate themselves into all areas of our lives. This is a must for all our bookshelves.

Towards Spiritual Simplicity

David Lorimer

SURVIVAL OF DEATH

Paul Beard (ex-SMN)

White Crow Books, 2015 (1966), 177 pp., £10.99, p/b - ISBN 978-1-910121-94-8

LIVING ON

Paul Beard (ex-SMN)

White Crow Books, 2015 (1980), 202 pp., £10.99, p/b - ISBN 978-1-910121-80-1

HIDDEN MAN

Paul Beard (ex-SMN)

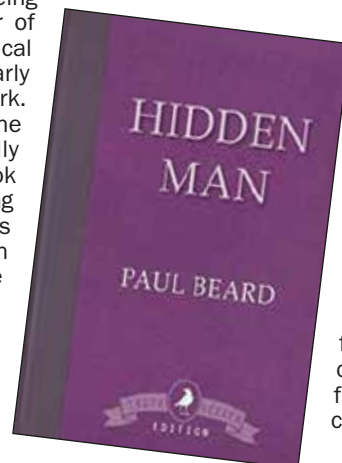
White Crow Books, 2015 (1986), 139 pp., £9.99, p/b - ISBN 978-1-910121-76-4

Paul Beard (1907-2002) was President of the College of Psychic Studies for 16 years, as well as being a prominent member of the Society of Psychical Research and an early member of the Network. I met him during the 1980s, and carefully studied his first book while I was researching my own. There was a close connection between the College with SMN Founders George Blaker and Peter Leggett, and I believe the latter was also a College council

member at one point. The College itself was founded by the Anglican priest and medium Rev William Stainton Moses in 1884, and still maintains its interest at the intersection between the psychical and the spiritual, and the way that interest in the first often leads to the pursuit of the second. These three books are effectively a trilogy, the first looking at the arguments for and against survival, the second an interpretation of how consciousness continues in different phases after death, and the third a book of practical spiritual advice based on guidance received by Paul and on his own insights. The tone reminded me strongly of Peter Leggett, whose books I re-reviewed two issues ago - Peter was an ardent spiritual seeker who also tried to understand and apply the guidance he received. All three books exhibit scrupulous fair-mindedness and I found it rewarding to reread them after many years - they have certainly stood the test of time.

Paul's book on survival was reviewed by the Telegraph, which commented that it was 'an unusually fair and thorough examination of the complexity of psychic phenomena', and it was also endorsed by Ian Stevenson as a valuable contribution. It looks evidence from psychical research and from afterlife communications, while not shirking any of the difficulties and challenges that these approaches raise (see, for instance, p. 43). For instance, highly intelligent and qualified people reach different conclusions on the basis of the same evidence, although many more come down on the side of survival than not. So the evidence is not totally conclusive, and always open to different interpretations, although again these largely depend on the presuppositions of the investigator. For instance, Sir Oliver Lodge became convinced of survival, but the equally distinguished Professor Charles Richet could not bring himself to accept it, largely because of his detailed understanding of physiology, for which he had been awarded a Nobel Prize. Paul quotes Eleanor Sidgwick, the husband of Professor Henry Sidgwick, the first President of the SPR, as saying that conclusive proof of survival is notoriously difficult to obtain, 'but the evidence may be such as to produce belief, even though it falls short of conclusive proof.'

I think this a very fair assessment. The personal search via mediumistic communications is a different approach, but yields a good deal of data, and in this respect Paul was as well-informed as anyone in the history of the field. The difficulties of communication itself are fascinatingly illustrated in a communication ostensibly from Sir William Barrett. He comments that he cannot



come with his whole self and brings only a small portion of his consciousness. Apparently, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had a similar experience and gave wise guidance to people who would like to communicate with their loved ones. Towards the end of this volume, Paul refers to the work of guides and opening up to inner knowing.

This brings me to the second book as seekers begin to realise that part of them is indestructible – this conviction supervenes on previous reading. *Living On* is concerned with how consciousness continues and evolves after death. Again, the book is based on very wide reading of classic sources including Oliver Lodge, Mrs Willett and FWH Myers, all in pre- and post-mortem states. The evidence from Myers through Geraldine Cummins is perhaps the most extensive in the books *The Road to Immortality* and *Beyond Human Personality*. While certainty is not attainable, a high degree of probability is. Paul discusses problems of assessment and acceptance, as well as the various sources he uses, and it becomes clear that he has moved to a more committed but no less circumspect stance since writing his first book. Similar to the books of ex-SMN member Dr Robert Crookall, Paul uses a progressive scheme in describing early experiences, the illusion of the summerland, the judgement, the first heaven, the second death, the second heaven, the group soul and the third heaven. This may sound over-systematic to the uninitiated, but it makes a lot of sense. The process is one of extending self-knowledge and transcending the ego, work that can also be accomplished during physical lifetime. Conan Doyle (p. 127) describes this process of relinquishment of the personality, then comes the transfer of consciousness to what is called the individuality. Paul summarises this as the process of giving oneself up: first, the physical body, then the personality while preserving only the essence of its experience.

In *Hidden Man*, Paul takes the themes of reincarnation and the group soul a stage further, distilling practical spiritual wisdom from the many sources of guidance and reading to which he has had access. He also describes his own sequence of lives and their principal themes of loner, the love of beauty and rebellion. Amusingly, my own review is copied on the back cover, where I say 'readers will find themselves illuminated by this lucid account of his spiritual journey, and will see much to be applied to their own conditions.' I would endorse this assessment on a second reading, and indeed the book becomes more valuable in relation to one's own accumulating life experience. The overall purpose is to awaken the inner man or woman to the reality and centrality of the spiritual life - a life oriented beyond exclusively material concerns. This involves accepting

guidance along the way, a process of continuous learning and a realisation of the many levels of the human being. The purpose of human lives is the return to God in partnership with guidance, along with the refinement of character and embodiment of values. This also represents a process of regeneration on an individual and collective level. It is a practical mysticism that involves putting your inner house in order and realising that the self is not in fact closed but open-ended and an expression of a larger group soul. Meditation is a key practice for opening up.

Paul is clear on the basis of guidance and his own experience that this spiritual evolution cannot be completed in a single human lifetime, hence the need for reincarnation, which may also be an expression of the group soul. It seems that there is a greater sense of union and unity corresponding to mystical experience as one advances spiritually, all of which is underpinned by love and the growth towards oneness of life. I am sure Paul is right when he says that the essential spiritual vision is very simple (p. 125) – this is where love and wisdom flow together. The analytical human mind would like something more complicated, but this is not necessary. At the end of the book, Paul quotes a guide as saying that 'the wise ones do not put their words and long ways, they put them in simple ways but they have to be worked at' in a process of growth. For me, it is also a simple as understanding and applying the principles of love and wisdom. All three books are well worth reading, and especially the last as a source of wise guidance for life.

ecology-futures studies

Sacred Journeys

David Lorimer

IN SEARCH OF GRACE – an Ecological Pilgrimage

Peter Reason (SMN)

Earth Books (John Hunt), 2017, 239 pp., £10.99, p/b – ISBN 978-1-78279-486-8

POACHER'S PILGRIMAGE – an Island Journey

Alastair McIntosh (SMN)

Birlinn, 2016, 329 pp., £20, h/b – ISBN 978-1-78027-361-7

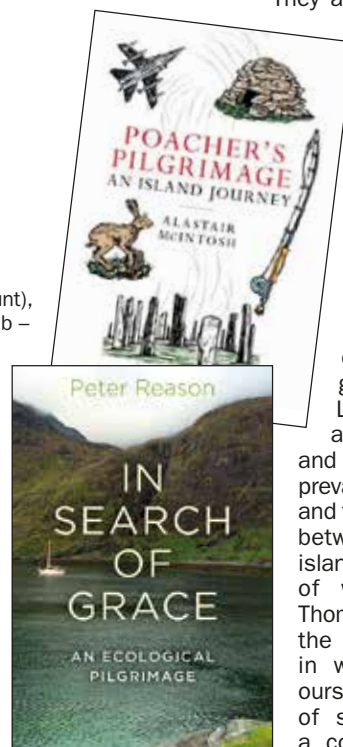
Some years ago at Falkland in Fife, Ian Bradley came to talk about his new book on pilgrimage. I was struck at

the time by his finding that pilgrimage had become enormously popular over the previous 30 years, and that all kinds of people could resonate with the metaphor of life as a journey. Oddly enough, Alastair McIntosh came to speak at the same venue in 2009 just before embarking on his pilgrimage, so the event is mentioned in his book. As Peter explains, the word originally comes from the Latin *peregrinus*, etymologically derived from *per* (through) and *ager* (field, country, land) and it meant a foreigner, stranger, someone on a journey, or a temporary resident. We are certainly all temporary residents on the journey of life. Peter defines pilgrimage as a 'journey of moral or spiritual significance, undertaken in response to deep questions and a yearning for answers from a realm beyond the everyday.' (p. ix) So an ecological pilgrimage is a 'search for an experience of deep participation with the Earth and her creatures.' This is true for both books featuring the West Coast of Ireland and the West Coast of Scotland - in Peter's case mostly on the water, while Alastair walks across his home territory of Harris and Lewis, where his father had been a GP.

The three phases of the pilgrimage are preparation, the journey itself and the return home, plus, in these cases, writing up the experience for one's own benefit and that of others. The habits of everyday life are disrupted and we subject ourselves to considerable physical discomfort and hardship. This intensifies the ups and downs of life, but such experiences are required in order to gain resilience, however challenging they are time. Both writers record their changing moods, sometimes corresponding to the weather, a source of constant concern to pilgrims, especially on the sea.

They also write about being up against their physical limits, about tiredness and exhaustion compensated by exquisite landscapes and a deeper sense of belonging.

Both writers seek and experience the sacred, what Peter calls moments of grace. Harris and Lewis are full of ancient sacred sites and wells. Overlaid on the prevalence of second sight and the thinness of the veil between realities on the island is a bleak Calvinism, of which more below. Thomas Berry wrote about the need for a new story in which we experience ourselves as a communion of subjects rather than a collection of separate



objects. Peter asks what it would take to experience ourselves fully as part of the whole, shifting our way of thinking from a world of separate objects to an interconnected whole, which is also a moral shift towards 'seeing humans as part of the community of life on Earth [the moral gaze].' (p. 10, also p. 138) Alastair's previous work in human ecology and on soil and soul resonates with this concern. This new vision is vital to generate the necessary energy for real transformation, as Thomas Berry insisted.

Part of our sense of alienation is the uprooting from more traditional cosmologies where we were contained within something larger and consequently knew our place and purpose. Peter and Alastair both refer to the work of Gregory Bateson, Alastair quoting his sentence 'Mind is immanent in the larger system - man plus environment.' (p. 17) – he could have added culture. Peter quotes Bateson to the effect that the human mind is driven by conscious purpose, which means the pursuit of short-term goals rather than long-term stability. Similarly, Bateson said that our major problems arise from the differences between the way Nature operates and the workings of the human mind - contrasting cyclical with linear. As pilgrims, the authors become aware of the rhythms and gestures of Nature - light and dark, hot and cold, sunrise and sunset, calm and storm corresponding to inner peace and turmoil. Beyond these polarities are the moments of grace and oneness where we can experience being part of a greater or wider whole. Here the boundaries of our everyday distinction between inner and outer blend, and we glimpse a greater depth as a more conscious traveller.

I reviewed Peter's earlier sea pilgrimage recounted in his book *Spindrift*. In the new book, he describes his pilgrimage in two parts over two years, spanning his 70th birthday at sea and completing the phase of his identity as a sailor by selling his boat and coming back to the fruit trees in his garden. He has a companion or companions for parts of his journey, but much of it is solo, bringing him into an encounter with himself, the boat, the sea, the weather and the landscape. Although the narrative is sequential, the chapters raise larger themes as reading and reflection intersect with episodes on the journey. Pilgrimage as homage or honouring, the relationship between tourist and pilgrim, finding the way - a lot of mapping and consulting charts is essential - dangers and difficulties, meandering and storytelling, silence and solitude, transience, fragility, Earth time, eternal now, deep time and pilgrimage at home. All this is beautifully written as the reader shares a range and intensity of experience. Just as the writer listens, so too does the reader.

Peter draws three lessons from his challenging experiences (p. 121): that the world beyond and beneath human constructions is irrefutably real and its indisputable presence will be revealed; secondly, the pilgrim is alert for signs, trying to remain awake. When we translate this into our ecological situation, we realise that many of us are 'sleepwalking into calamity.' The third lesson is about response - do we have the skill, resources and presence of mind to respond appropriately, both individually and collectively? Meandering and storytelling allows us to enter into the flow of life without imposing our own goals, it corresponds to silence, stillness and deep listening, an emptiness that is also fullness and healing.

In some ways, Alastair's pilgrimage across the land of his childhood is 'knowing place for the first time', seeing with new eyes. The bus ride at the start telescopes the island into a few hours, which extends to 12 days in reverse, a pilgrimage shorter than that of Peter, but no less intense. The land has its own history, including the 18th and 19th century croft clearances intersecting with Alastair's own work on land reform and confrontation with international business interests. Many of the colourful characters of the island are brought to life over the course of a few days, sometimes over a glass of cask-conditioned whisky. The landscape is both sacred and imaginal, the 'otherworld' ever present. The ancient Celtic spiritual heritage, as I referred to above, was overlaid by the strict and severe theological system of John Calvin, with his insistence on human depravity and double predestination - to heaven or hell. As Alastair remarks, this constitutes a theology of fear and control. However, an underlying sense of veneration still breaks through. Beside the gate of an ancient 'temple' site, he came across a plaque commemorating the burial of 400 tattered old family Bibles in 2006. Calvin might have fretted. Was this some idolatrous treatment of the paper, as distinct from its Word? The islanders had the last word in the inscription: 'the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever.'

The dualism of heaven and hell, light and dark, good and evil also informs Alastair's work over many years with the Defence Academy and other military think tanks. American defence thinking, as explained in my review of Paul Johnstone's book *From MAD to Madness in Books in Brief* below, is based on a naïve dichotomy of good and evil and the demonising of the enemy without awareness of projecting one's own shadow. Alastair explains his brief as exploring 'the moral implications of conflict that exceeds military capacity to deter or contain it; and the application of nonviolence, including its

religious basis, to achieve security in a complex world where the net results of conflict are not easy to predict.' (p. xvii). He describes various encounters with high-ranking military and the typical arguments they might deploy as Alastair insists on the courage of nonviolence and deconstructs just war theory. He confronts a number of people with the question - have you killed, lamenting the brutalisation inherent in many conflict situations. He admits his own complicity in being part of the system that destroys life more generally. Thoughtful military comment that he reminds them of their limits, encouraging them to move along the spectrum from violence to nonviolence, towards a spirituality of transformation. Here his thinking intersects with earlier reflections on Calvinism, since he sees the cross as nonviolence personified, while updating the literalistic insistence on ransom and atonement - freeing ourselves from ourselves, and reconnecting with our divine source (p. 262).

These reflections intersperse with the other side of the pilgrimage - the moor, the rocks, the sea, the wind, encounters with sacred wells and sites and with the blue mountain hare and deer, as well as the practicalities of food and shelter, with his trusty rucksack Osprey. People give him eggs and sandwiches for his journey and one can viscerally appreciate the warmth of hot drinks – also a prominent feature for Peter. The pilgrimage is an immersion not only in the landscape, but also in the otherworld of faeries and his concerns for God and war. The metaphor of the poacher comes up in a number of contexts, including the thought that we are all poachers in the flow of life: 'None of us', Alastair remarks, 'or very few at any rate, complete the cycles of gratitude and right relationships that open up to greater depths of being.' (p. 250) This includes a transformative encounter with the shadow, of which many people are still unaware, both generally and in themselves. In that sense, we are all work in progress, and pilgrimage helps us to become more conscious of this journey.

Both of these inspiring books can also turn into vicarious pilgrimages for the reader. I read many of the chapters by the fire in the evening, occasionally with a glass of good whisky to hand. The writers wrestle with central human challenges and the need for transformation, as well as personal and collective resistance to this process. If you are not planning a pilgrimage yourself, then I suggest you set aside time to read both of these books in the pilgrim state of mind as a way of opening up a deeper sense of connectedness with life and Nature and enhancing your own contribution to the current evolutionary transformation.

Reinventing the Human

David Lorimer

WHOLE EARTH THINKING AND PLANETARY COEXISTENCE

Sam Mickey

Earthscan, 2016, 153 pp., £29.59, p/b
– ISBN 978-1-138-74355-7

This timely interdisciplinary study presents 'whole Earth thinking' as a way of ecological wisdom and a response to the challenges of planetary coexistence, apparent not only with species extinction and multiple environmental crises, but also in political and economic flux. The word crisis derives from the Greek *'krinein'*, meaning to separate, and implying a fork in the road. This is well represented by a good distinction between what the author calls globalists and planetarians. The first approach stresses control, manipulation and consumption, while the second represents people who view themselves from within the biosphere and who therefore cultivate biological and cultural diversity and seek life-affirming responses to our situation. One could also speak contrast between globalisation and 'glocalisation', the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum, between trans-humanism and posthumanism. Both these processes are going on simultaneously, but only the second is truly sustainable since the first affirms the primacy of power and the second the primacy of love.

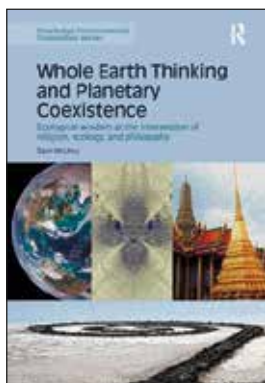
After an introductory chapter on the history of ecology, a word dating back to Ernest Haeckel in 1866, the author provides an overview of different disciplines engaged - the spiritual and religious, including indigenous perspectives, scientific approaches based on complexity and systems theory, then more specifically environmental and social views - all this implies opening up to multiple ways of knowing. The next chapter compares and contrasts the approaches of the 'geologist' Thomas Berry and the French geophilosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who will be less well-known to most readers. I regard Berry's work as essential reading, since it goes to the heart of our human agenda of creating what he called an ecozoic era where humans become a mutually beneficial presence on the earth - moving beyond a mechanistic collection of objects to a communion of subjects. This is what he described as the Great Work. The French philosophers are much more sceptical about the value of religion, and it is interesting to reflect on the contrasts between the American and French revolutions. However, both

agree on the destructive capacity of individualism and the need for different ways of knowing. The book also draws considerably on the work of Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim at the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Harvard.

One of the strengths of the book is its connection across disciplines, as already mentioned, and this includes the political and economic as well as biology and other sciences. Mickey also calls for the reclaiming of subjectivity in a world obsessed with mechanisms and objects. There are many roots of ecological wisdom intertwining in our times: indigenous traditions, classical and philosophical traditions, ways of knowing embedded in feminist perspectives and the experiences of women, and contemporary sciences. Each has a slightly different take on planetary interconnectedness, and the overall process is seen as a creative unfolding, moving beyond anthropocentrism to what the author calls an anthropocosmic view where the self is seen as relational and connected. It is here that he could have referred to the pioneering work of Henryk Skolimowski, whose books are not mentioned but who credit provided a valuable extra series of insights.

There is an important emphasis on community and self-organisation in creating potential networks of care as a counterbalance to the globally dominant extractive economy that turns everything into an object of consumption. Given that we exist in what the author calls a 'chaosmos', this process requires our active participation, I liked his comparison and use of Chinese terms with *yi* as change, *tao* as the way a structure or pattern (*li*) unfolds in a self-organising fashion, and the overarching concept of *shen* as 'the relationality and affective mutuality whereby things fold into a communion of subjects' (p. 117) - we are all enfolded or implicated.

As Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme and others have argued, we need a new narrative and story to make sense of where we need to go. This is a dream of peace, justice and mutuality rather than the New World Order vision of fear, control, domination and manipulation. This latter is the default position unless a sufficient number of people decide otherwise. The pressure is certainly rising, as is the opportunity to take a stand for a culture of love and compassion - how many of us will gather together the energy to participate in this necessary process? This is what the work of Avaaz, Care2Causes, Thrive and others is about, and we have unprecedented capacity to self-organise through the Internet.



The integrative vision of this book provides a good philosophical starting point for a vision of a mutually enhancing planetary coexistence.

Responsible Geoengineering?

David Lorimer

EXPERIMENT EARTH

Jack Stilgoe

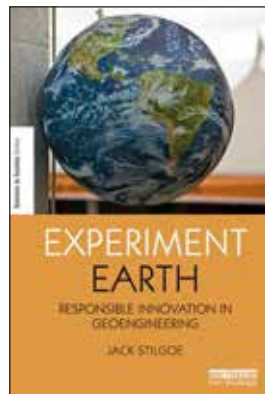
Earthscan, 2015, 222 pp., £29.95, p/b
– ISBN 978-1-13869-194-0

In their 2009 report entitled *Geo-engineering the climate: science, governance and uncertainty*, the Royal Society defines geo-engineering as the 'deliberate and large-scale intervention in the Earth's climatic system with the aim of reducing global warming', principally through solar radiation management (SRM). This area has become the focus of a controversial debate on responsible science and innovation with the underlying idea of taking responsibility for the climate. This has become more publicly thinkable since the publication in 2006 of the paper by Paul Crutzen - the inventor of the term Anthropocene - entitled *Albedo enhancement by stratospheric sulphur injections: a contribution to resolve a policy dilemma?* This is encapsulated in the Royal Society press release for the above report with an apparent ultimatum: *Stop emitting CO2 or geo-engineering could be our only hope.* In the foreword to the report, the then president, Lord Martin Rees refers to geo-engineering as a plan B for climate change.

This book draws on three years of sociological research with scientists, particularly from the SPICE project, an acronym for stratospheric particle injection for climate engineering. Human development is already interwoven with the evolution of climate, and the possibility of geo-engineering takes things a stage further through deliberate reflection of solar radiation through spraying particles into the upper atmosphere. The Royal Society press release is somewhat chilling in its implications as CO2 emissions continue to grow and with this fact the pressure will grow for a technical fix without any fundamental alteration in our ways of life, especially as some proponents insist that the technology is cheap and relatively safe- remember nuclear power?

The Royal Society report does not take this view and many participants were reluctant to have the field opened up - their conclusions are summarised in two tables (pp. 116, 118) charting the affordability and safety of various possible interventions. Stratospheric aerosols are thought to be potentially highly effective and highly affordable, while questions exist about their safety. A major issue is that once the process of SRM is initiated, it has to continue indefinitely, otherwise

there would be a sharp temperature increase - and experiments would have to be large-scale in order to yield significant results. Moreover, the skies would turn from blue to white. The science and politics of geo-engineering are inextricably entwined, and the topic was also broached in a 2013 IPCC report, building on an earlier one in 2007. They warn that both carbon dioxide removal (CDR) and SRM carry side effects and long term consequences on a global scale. Interestingly, research models are based on the effects of volcanic eruption, especially that of Mount Pinatubo in 1991.



attention in the context of the security threat posed by catastrophic climate change. He sees this as a possible way of giving the world economy additional time to transition from fossil fuels, and quotes an estimate by the National Research Council that the cost of deployment would only be \$10 billion a year. He envisages other measures as also being necessary in view of, for instance, ocean acidification.

Ethically, geo-engineering involves both responsibility and uncertainty with a mixture of knowns and unknowns, but also, inevitably, unknown unknowns. In addition, there is a danger of tackling a wicked non-linear challenge with a linear way of thinking. Then there are the challenges of governance and what the author calls a radical new architecture of responsibility in terms of the gradual technocratic ownership of the climate. He says that we should not be scared of geo-engineering, at least not yet, as it is neither as exciting nor as terrifying as we have been led to believe, 'for the simple reason that it doesn't exist. The technologies of geo-engineering... remain imaginary. (p. 199) But is this actually true?

The documentary *Look Up* and the website www.geoengineeringwatch.com provide evidence that geo-engineering is already going on. It is a curious phenomenon of being both overt and covert at the same time - overt in the sense that the evidence is there to see in the sky, but covert because governments insist that nothing is actually going on. What is undoubtedly true, however, is that emissions from aircraft can, under certain atmospheric conditions, spread out into thin cloud; sometimes these clouds join together to form the kind of white haze described in a Scientific American feature. I have observed these trails and subsequent clouds in various parts of the world. A further issue is that many of these sprays are toxic, and what goes up must eventually come down. This is a form of pollution, in any event, and is associated overall with global dimming.

Speaking to the Council for Foreign Relations at the end of June 2016, CIA director John Brennan refers to geo-engineering technologies, and specifically SRM as potentially helping to reverse the warming effects of global climate change - now denied by the Trump administration. Stratospheric aerosol injection has gained Brennan's

A paper published in the *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2015**, *12*(8), 9375-9390 by J Marvin Hendon and entitled *Evidence of Coal-Fly-Ash Toxic Chemical Geoengineering in the Troposphere: Consequences for Public Health* (<http://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/12/8/9375/htm>) argues that this process is already happening. The author uses two methods: '(1) Comparison of 8 elements analysed in rainwater, leached from aerosolised particulates, with corresponding elements leached into water from coal fly ash in published laboratory experiments, and (2) Comparison of 14 elements analysed in dust collected outdoors on a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter with corresponding elements analysed in un-leached coal fly ash material. The results show: (1) the assemblage of elements in rainwater and in the corresponding experimental leachate are essentially identical.' The author noticed the phenomenon I described above occurring in the skies above San Diego from the spring of 2014: 'In a matter of minutes, the aerosol trails exiting the tanker-jets would start to diffuse, eventually forming cirrus-like clouds that further diffuse to form a white haze that scattered sunlight, often occluding or dimming the sun.' He found aluminium and barium in post-spraying rainwater, elements that are not normally present. The author also found that there had been a systematic campaign of disinformation, with claims that these trails were nothing more than a condensation of ice particles. In addition, there has been 'no public disclosure, no informed consent, and no public health warnings.' So we have an interesting situation of theoretical discussion, good evidence that spraying is going on and may be toxic and therefore harmful, while governments deny that any such geo-engineering experiments are already taking place. So it looks to me as if this book is excellent as far as it goes, but does not go far enough in addressing what is actually happening. This is another controversial area where readers will have to conduct their own research and reach their own conclusions. There is undoubtedly something that requires further explanation.

The Possible Human

David Lorimer

THE FUTURE

Jennifer M. Gidley

Oxford, 2017, 164 pp., £7.99, p/b - ISBN 978-0-19-873528-1

Jennifer Gidley is President of the World Futures Studies Federation, and is also an educator and psychologist. In this brilliant and concise overview - part of the OUP Very Short Introduction series - she gives readers multiple insights into the field and ways of thinking about the future. She defines futures studies as 'the art and science of taking responsibility for the long-term consequences of our decisions and our actions today.' She is careful to emphasise that the future is not just something that happens, nor is it inevitable, but we co-create it through our thoughts and actions within both a cultural and global or planetary context.

The notion of the future is closely tied to the way we think about time. The French word means what is to come (*a-venir*) while the English word first appears in the 14th century. Gidley traces the origins of linear time to the emergence of philosophy in Greece, while prior societies lived in a more embedded, cyclical sense of time. Taming time is equated with measurement and control and is represented by the emergence of calendars and clocks as well as predictions. Early predictions were prophetic or oracular as we sought to grapple with uncertainty with a measure of both hope and fear. Coming up to date, we find that the US Department of Defence coined a new term in the 1990s: VUCA, which stands for volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous - terms we can certainly recognise today, and which are also reflected in scientific developments. The author looks at the thinking of Roger and Francis Bacon and the emergence of a mechanistic and engineering metaphor, which still dominates science today and which is associated with control and precision. However, both Newton and Francis Bacon embodied the tension between modern and hermetic science, and the author correctly notes that Bacon was both the father of empiricism and leader of the Rosicrucian movement in England.

More scientific predictions emerged with HG Wells and JBS Haldane about a hundred years ago, then with Aldous Huxley's dystopic *A Brave New World*. Forecasting becomes more scientific, but there is a danger of simply extrapolating current trends and discounting the unexpected. The German physicist, economist and sociologist Rolf Kreibich warns us about a singular future approach based on 'the scientific-technological-industrial expansion of all aspects of life', which he sees as a tunnel vision and which Gidley contrasts with a more participatory and integral

approach. She considers the implications of the development of robotics, which is partly being driven by the military and aims to bridge the human-machine divide.

This brings her onto transhumanism, which is 'inextricably linked with technological advancement or extension of human capacities through technology.' (p. 92) It is a systematic attempt to overcome some of our biological limits, but it is important to realise that it is based on an ideology of technological determinism and a mechanistic view of consciousness and the human being. These people envisage a new, hybrid species and the creation of a technotopia through techno-fixes. However, as Lewis Mumford was already writing in the 1940s, there is a danger of dehumanisation in this post-human vision that many of its proponents regard as an inevitable development. Cleverness has to be balanced by emotional intelligence and the expression of moral and aesthetic values.

Chapter 5 is in my view the key of the book, focusing as it does on technotopian or human-centred futures as diverging streams already identified by the futurist Willis Harman in the 1980s. He saw two broad possibilities: evolutionary transformational or technological extrapolationist - the latter, as I already mentioned, is based on a mechanistic, behaviourist model of the human being, while the ethos within the Network favours a more human-centred model also promoted by holistic medicine, organic agriculture and publications like *Resurgence*. Gidley explains the varieties of transhumanism, including Teilhard de Chardin, Sir Julian Huxley, Nietzsche, Bergson and Steiner, all with different visions. She then looks at conscious human-centred futures as a counterpoint and based on the evolution of consciousness in a transpersonal direction. Here again, she is exceptionally well informed and points out that we have a choice of either continuing to invest heavily in 'technotopian dreams of creating machines that can operate better than humans. Or we can invest more of our consciousness and resources on educating and consciously evolving human futures with all the wisdom that would entail.' (p. 115)

The final chapter reflects on grand global futures challenges, especially urbanisation, education and climate. Her tables on pp. 119-20 summarise both the challenges and alternative possible responses under various headings such as governance, economic, health, energy, leadership, technology and conflict. As Al Gore notes, many of these challenges are the consequences of



short-term economic thinking and the reckless use of our planet's resources. However, we can contribute to co-creating an ecological and regenerative future rather than continuing extraction and exploitation. The French philosopher Edgar Morin, like Gregory Bateson, put his finger on the educational

challenge: 'one of the greatest problems we face today is how to adjust our way of thinking to meet the challenge of an increasingly complex, rapidly changing, unpredictable world. We must rethink our way of organising knowledge.' (p. 131) In this sense, it becomes very clear that our 'old fragmented, mechanistic, and materialistic ways of thinking are not capable of dealing with the growing complexity of global environmental, economic and societal change.' The situation is not helped by the dominance of linear analysis in our universities, so that young people are coming into the world with inadequate ways of thinking. However, as the author points out in her conclusion, 'we all have the capacity to create our desired features, for more than most of us realise' and we can work collaboratively for positive change and towards the future we prefer.

It seems to me that there needs to be much more public discussion and reflection about the nature of the future that we are creating together in a technological, economic, ecological, cultural and personal sense - and especially of the tensions between the technotopic and human-centred visions. This book not only raises the issues in a highly readable manner, but also raises awareness, and as such I can recommend it unreservedly.

general

The Race for a Less-troubled Civilisation

Martin Lockley

A TROUBLESOME INHERITANCE: Genes, Race and Human History

Nicholas Wade

Penguin, 2014/2015, 288 pp., \$17, p/b - ISBN 978-0-14-312716-1

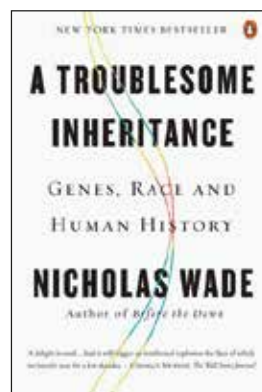
When I first heard of *Guns, Germs and Steel* (GGS), by Jared Diamond, I was disinclined to read it, and still have not done so conscientiously. In reading *A Troublesome Inheritance* by Nicholas Wade I have a better inkling of why my intuition made me avoid the former of these two best-selling titles. Apart

from the 'harsh' title GGS is far too deterministic, accounting for culture in terms of metal weapons, disease, geography and other external rather than human factors. Diamond, like the famous anthropologists Franz Boas and his student Ashley Montagu, deny the existence of race regarding it as a "social construct" with no basis in biology - a "fallacy," a "dangerous myth," "America's original sin." Montagu even labeled it "witchcraft." They evidently believe race (and the diversity it implies) is somehow unrelated to biological and evolutionary reality, having arisen as the result of humanity's conceptual misunderstanding of itself.

The message of *Troublesome* is fairly simple: "race" and its biological, genetic, ethnic and social manifestations is a real phenomenon that can and should be studied without implying that its students are "racists" who believe in the superiority of one race over another. To deny the existence of race because some people are racist is an ideological and unscientific approach popular in some academic circles, mostly because it is a touchy and potentially inflammatory subject like politics or religion. But these too are deeply influential cultural realities.

Eugenics is also a taboo subject. While its extremely objectionable manifestations (sterilisation of perceived inferiors *etcetera*) is despicable, not only is breeding (artificial selection) a deliberate application of eugenics in the plant and animal world, it is also exercised through our free, human choice when it comes to "selecting" partners, often within our own race or ethnicity. Like seems to attract like, with evolutionary implications for biology and our cultural institutions. So race is a biological reality. Wade holds that there is substantial consensus about the traditional threefold distinction of Asian, Indo-European and African (Mongoloid, Caucasian and Negroid), with Australian and Native American as two less populous but distinctive groups. Here Wade reminds us of the famous Dmitry Belyaev experiment with foxes, our mammalian brethren. By selecting foxes simply for their degree of tameness, within a few generations

he bred in many juvenile anatomical features that had not been selected for. If it works for foxes, why not for we human mammals? If no one denies the physical variation in stature, skin, hair and eye color between ethnic groups (races) should we be surprised that there are different manifestations in the sphere of social behaviour and culture, which also correlate with genetic variation?



Here Wade makes the compelling argument, backed up by diverse studies in the broad field of cultural anthropology, that the shift from tribal to city state, nation state and global polities has brought about inevitable change, which in a word has helped “tame” human nature, not least by forcing most individuals, in any given culture, to live and let live with a widening and more civilised community of neighbours beyond the narrow confines of family and tribe. Thus, the murder rate has gone down steadily in the transition from tribal to more regional and nationally-structured polities that have instituted religion, the rule of law and other collectively civilising influences. [For skeptics who doubt such progress, mere rumination on the subject of improving human nature implies a higher aspiration and reluctance to regress]. Skeptics should also note the well-established biological evidence for the ongoing evolutionary juvenilisation of the human species (known as paedomorphosis) leading to a physical gracilisation, or decrease in robustness, and increasing “domestication” or tameness. We are no longer robust Neanderthals, at least in 96% of our genetic makeup (Network 116). Thus, biology and culture remain inextricable interwoven.

There is, it appears, no single gene to ensure “tameness” or civilisation in individuals or cultures as a whole, but “gene frequencies” play an important, collective role. The MAO-A gene is “associated with aggression” and occurs in different frequencies, in different individuals, resulting in different levels of aggression and delinquency in different ethnic groups. So genes influence human behavior and cause it to “vary from one race to another.” *Vive la difference*: but use it not for racist generalisations! Single Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP) sites on the genome where at least 1% of the population has a non-standard DNA unit have helped define distinctive ethnic groups (races) that are generally consistent with the aforementioned threefold (plus 2) race distinctions. However, races are not sharply defined but rather are “clusters of individuals with genetic variation.” Such individuals give the overall cultural group (cluster) certain propensities [rather as an individual might influence a group culturally]. To date the chicken and egg riddle of whether cultural propensities drive genetic variation or vice versa is unresolved, but almost certainly it is a complex two-way evolutionary dynamic. This exposition is appealing, at least to this reader, because it integrates the complex race debate holistically with biological and cultural evolution, and thus with history, including changing views on race and racism. Put another way, given that race and ethnicity is widely recognised, except by a few ideologically motivated, if well-meaning, naysayers, and is, moreover, responsible for much of what we call history, how

could these cultural, biological (genetic) factors not be interwoven in a complex evolutionary dynamic with everything else in the biosphere, including tamed and untamed foxes, human delinquents and saints!?

Arguably we do not need to use the term “race” as a rigid label, if we recognise, as Wade does, that “human evolution has been recent, copious and regional” affecting all individuals and cultures differently, and complexly, but not randomly. Using the overarching paradigm of cultural evolution (tribal though global polities), we see shifts in the propensity for a domestication, taming and juvenilisation of human nature, though not without reversals and regressions. Perhaps, therefore, we could use the dreaded “r” word in a different context and speak of the “race for a less troubled civilisation.”

I’m Liked therefore I am

David Lorimer

THE HAPPINESS EFFECT

Donna Freitas

Oxford, 2017, 339 pp., \$29.95, h/b – ISBN 978-0-19-023985-5

In this highly informative and readable book, Donna Freitas interviews 184 students from 13 different US universities, with a follow-up 14 survey taken by 884 volunteers, of whom, interestingly, 75% were women. The subtitle indicates the thesis of the book, that social media is driving a generation to appear perfect at any cost, with the huge social pressure that this represents. Young people invariably compare themselves with others, but the comparison on social media can be skewed by the fact that Facebook pages show people’s best on the upside of life without any consideration for the inevitable downsides. This creates a split between real and online personalities with the concomitant criticism that the online personality is not in fact authentic. Indeed, young people craft, curate, construct and cultivate what amounts to a brand image online, with eventual employment in mind - sometimes this may necessitate a Facebook cleanup.

We are all susceptible to the opinions of others and seek approval in various ways. In this sense, our self-esteem is vulnerable and on social media is influenced by the number of likes - hence my title above. The tendency is for people to be driven by external rather than internal motivation. The author points out that we used to

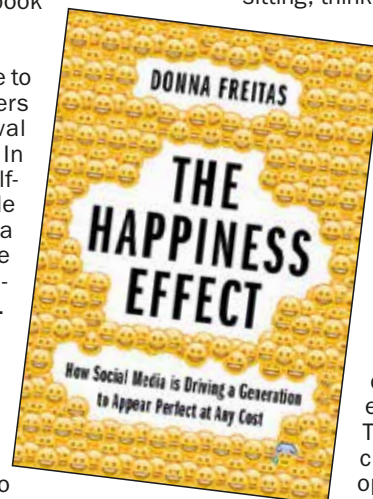
select photos for albums, but these albums remained private. Social media amplifies and publicises these selection effects. The perceived pressure is to be online all the time, which means that the smartphone is regarded as both a blessing and a curse. It was interesting to read how relieved many respondents felt when they were able to take a break from their phone (also because of FOMO – fear of missing out). This itself reflects our society of constant distraction, which also takes us away from the deeper sides of ourselves, and makes us unfamiliar with inner life. Paradoxically, an inner life is all the more necessary in the light of these external distractions.

It turns out that the anonymity of sites like Yik Yak gives students the opportunity to express not only their real opinions, but also hurtful views. In this sense, these kind of sites represent the shadow side as well as a liberation. This is also a common venue for bullying, which brings up the whole question of vulnerability. The findings show that students are wary of online dating apps, and do favour face-to-face meetings. However, relationships can become official on Facebook, as can break-ups. Some students deliberately quit social media, taking time out from online pressure.

The penultimate chapter proposes eight virtues based on Aristotle’s idea of the mean. Some of these like authenticity and tolerance are fairly standard, but I wondered if others were in fact virtues. For instance, vulnerability is put forward when one might have used sensitivity or consideration. It seems to me that vulnerability is a state of mind rather than a virtue. Nor am I sure that forgetting is a virtue – what about forgiving? ‘Living in the moment’ is an interesting case as it relates to not doing so because one has one’s eye on recording that same moment – there is an amusing account of students having a bad time taking the very photos designed to show what a good time they were having. The virtue of unplugging could be re-expressed as reflection - sitting, thinking and being alone, which

leads into mindfulness practices as a way of coping with this online pressure. This is related to the eighth virtue of quitting, which may require courage in deciding to withdraw. Courage is much more recognisable as a virtue, especially moral courage in this instance.

The final chapter gives advice on how to take control of smartphones, especially on campus. The authorities need to create Wi-Fi oases and opportunities for students



to slow down and just be. The author also raises the question of whether it is in fact ethical for employers to check Facebook pages. It has to be said that young people live in an incredibly competitive world where it is hard to stand out. By the end of this hugely instructive book, I was wondering whether there might be an opportunity to sponsor young people to unplug - say £5 per 24 hours - as a way of raising money for charity. The book not only gives high-level analysis, but plenty of live illustrations of exactly how social media is impacting the lives of young people from different backgrounds - what the author calls the test generation.

A Universalist Vision

David Lorimer

MY DOUBLE LIFE 2 – A RAINBOW OVER THE HILLS

Nicholas Hagger (SMN)

O Books, 2016, 1,061 pp., £34.99, p/b – ISBN 978-1-78099-714-8

Nicholas Hagger is one of the most prolific and prodigious writers of our time, who has produced 40 books over the last 25 years. His output includes 1,500 poems, more than 300 classical odes after Horace and Ronsard, five verse plays, two national epic poems after Homer, and over 1,000 short stories. He is variously a poet, man of letters, journalist, cultural historian, mystic, philosopher, political scientist, intelligence officer, university lecturer and educationalist. His is a multiple life rather than just a double life of the title. He reflects (p. 564) that 'the only way for an artist in an unhealthy culture to recover contact with his culture's roots is to go back to the past and reflect its vitality in images. As Sir Laurens van der Post observed to Nicholas, this was his path as it had been for TS Eliot, CG Jung and Arnold Toynbee.

Sir Laurens sees Nicholas' work in the same bracket as these other cultural pioneers, especially his work on the creative role of the metaphysical fire or light in his monumental work on the evolution of cultures, *The Fire and the Stones*. Nicholas himself is very aware of his own affinity with writers from previous eras, for instance the metaphysical poets of the 17th century and Ficino during the Florentine Renaissance. His journey belongs both to the hero archetype and to the illuminated thinking of the mystic way. His Universalism is one outlook within different disciplines (pp. 870 and 918):

- Mystical Universalism in terms of personal growth and transformation leading to a perception of the unity of the universe
- Literary Universalism, combining sense and spirit, Classicism and Romanticism in content and method so world literature as a unity
- Philosophical Universalism bringing together East and West, Plato and Aristotle in investigating order and unity
- Historical Universalism, perceiving world history as a unity through the patterns and roots of 25 world civilisations
- Political Universalism focusing on the world unity of the coming benevolent World State that would control what he calls the Syndicate – the New World Order of military dominance and technical control
- Religious Universalism, identifying the common essence of world religions and finally
- Cultural Universalism, identifying a unified world culture

The poles of Nicholas' double life are his practical working and writing lives, the social and metaphysical worlds – he owned three schools with nearly 250 staff. There is an underlying polarity of yin and yang, the +A of the soul and the –A of the social ego harmonised in the One. This volume continues the pattern of paired episodes with a further fifteen structuring and distilling the narrative as well as representing the tension of the transforming soul and the regressive social ego which we all experience to some degree. Nicholas then lists the nodal points or critical experiences within these episodes. He sees the archetypal pattern of human lives as a progress towards a unitive vision through the reconciliation of opposites. Free will, chance and providence all seem to play a role in the unfolding blueprint where our inner compass points home towards the One.

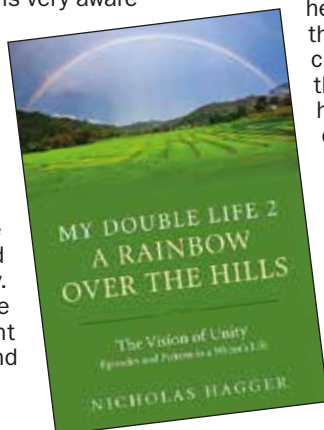
Space prevents me addressing the many themes of this book, so I will confine my attention to two: first, what Nicholas calls the Metaphysical Revolution. In this respect he was an early attender of the Mystics and Scientists conferences, including the first one in 1978. He himself spoke at our 1992 conference on light and explains the background and genesis of his lecture while also recalling conversations with the other speakers including Fr Bede Griffiths and John Barrow. Through John Barrow he also attended a memorable 1992 conference on

reductionism (I was there as well) at Jesus College, Cambridge organised by John Cornwell. Here he recalls exchanges with Peter Atkins, Mary Midgley, Freeman Dyson and especially with Sir Roger Penrose. He is always probing in his enquiries, pushing the boundaries of his interlocutors.

Nicholas played an active role during the 1990s in the Network Metaphysical Research Group that subsequently became the Universalist Philosophy Group then the Science and Esoteric Knowledge Group. He brings many of these meetings to life and cites the contributions of Chris Macann, Peter Hewitt, Max Payne, Alison Watson and Geoffrey Read, among others. He also recalls the day I arranged on Universalist Philosophy at Regent's College and the various initiatives for publications. It has to be said that this metaphysical revolution has yet to happen, and most universities are still very much in the grip of scientism, rationalism, materialism, reductionism and scepticism, i.e. an exclusively left hemisphere approach. Nicholas also records conversations and differences of opinion with Dr Kathleen Raine of Temenos and his good friend Colin Wilson, who could never quite grasp his vision. He has a huge network of contacts.

Nicholas' earlier work in intelligence as well as his own extensive research made him aware of the ambitions of the elite New World Order Syndicate operating behind the scenes and through the Trilateral Commission and the Bilderberg Group. He repudiates their self-interested, covert and explicit agenda of military full spectrum dominance and technological control. Instead, his vision is of a benevolent and democratic world state, which Churchill also thought necessary. The problem remains one of power and how its balance can be shifted, especially as the current world system is arranged to suit the richest and most powerful people and corporations. So the transformative impulse will have to come from below and probably through the galvanising capacity of the Internet.

The fact that this autobiography is based on extensive diaries has both a positive and negative side. The positive is the vividness of the account, including the genesis of his books, family matters, travel, political intrigue and conversations with leading thinkers. The downside is the overwhelming detail – the index alone runs to 80 pages out of over 1,000 and the two volumes make 1,700 pages of reading! Having said this, the book is well organised into shortish sections and gives an intimate view of a multiple, wide-ranging and remarkable life, which should be better known than it is.



Don't forget to Love Yourself

Martin Lockley

THE SELFISHNESS OF OTHERS: AN ESSAY ON THE FEAR OF NARCISSISM

Kristin Dombek,

Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2016, 150 pp., \$13.00, p/b - ISBN 978-0-86547-823-7

When G. K. Chesterton was asked what was wrong with the world, he answered "I am." How many of us would answer this way? Are we, as discussed in *The Righteous Mind* (Network 114), willing to admit the extent to which our emotional, often subconscious, biases underlie our preferred ideologies, which we will defend and rationalise with righteous indignation? In doing so we may toss around labels that suggest others, with different ideologies are ill-informed, unenlightened, narcissistic or worse. It is because of the need for honest self- and other-evaluation that Kristin Dombek's little book on selfishness and narcissism is of considerable interest. Dombek, a cultural journalist, begins her book with the story of Allison, a millennial, "Generation Me" teenager who was ostensibly so spoiled that she demanded that Peachtree Boulevard, Atlanta, Georgia's busiest thoroughfare be closed down so she could celebrate her sweet 16 birthday. This was regardless of warnings that it would snarl traffic and obstruct emergency access to a hospital. Is narcissism the correct label for such selfish behaviour, and is it a rampant new pathology as countless blogs in the "narcisphere" suggest? Or are we just labelling others inappropriately? What does it mean that "selfie" was declared word of the year, or that the pronoun I is used more than ever before? [How many "I"s can literary critics get to dance on the head of a pin?]

Has the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) given us a correct definition of narcissism when equating it with exaggerated self-importance, fantasies of success and entitlement, specialness, exploitative behaviour, need for admiration, lack of empathy, arrogance *etcetera.*, Since the term Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) was introduced in 1980 the term has been applied to Donald Trump, Bill Clinton (sexually exploitative males) and even to Oprah Winfrey, or anyone ambitious, self-assured or successful who might be a "phallic narcissist." Self-esteem and talking about yourself therefore could be a pathology, causing superficiality, (cultural and /or conversational narcissism), profit motives (corporate narcissism), a sanctimonious sense of piety (spiritual narcissism). Is everyone a narcissist? Are psychologists doing

what other medical professionals and drug companies are doing: inventing pathologies everywhere? There are apps to help you avoid narcissists! [I don't have the app and do run across some people I'm tempted to label! But wonder if there is also an app to do away with labels!]

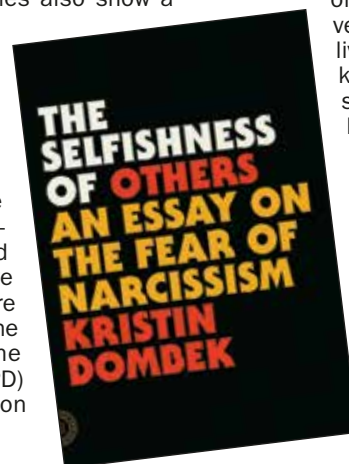
Dombek tells us that the Internet is riddled with pop psychology expositions on narcissism, some fuzzy and nonsensical, and too many allowing us to self-evaluate as victims of "others" who won't commit or love us enough. Since Freud and Havelock Ellis there has been too much erotic emphasis on "self-love." Such thinking has made "self-contentment" appear self-centered, and a self-contained "blissful state of mind" an unwillingness to engage with or be helped by others. [Don't help me while I'm meditating - Please!] In short such Freudian perspectives may have unfairly branded healthy self-esteem as a pathological form of arrested development, and, some critics argue, Freud was "taken in" by his own mythology and certain of his own failed relationships. If you read the Internet and analyse too much you'll find reasons to run away from every relationship: just consider who (Ms. Disgruntlement) might be writing about their own "bad boyfriend" experiences! It's enough, Dombek says, to send a guy into the macho "manosphere" to Google "why is my girlfriend suddenly cold." [He'll likely receive his share of dubious advice and explanations, possibly as just desserts for his own sins]. Philosopher René Girard reminds us that the deceivers are not sharply separated from the deceived, and that we likely diagnose in others our own fears and desires. [Mirror, Mirror!] Let us remember that Donald Winnicott (excommunicated from Freud's circle) held that narcissism was "a rich source of healthy ego and love."

The plot thickens as the 'Bad Boyfriend' chapter ends with a number of highly successful, but rather nasty, self-confessed narcissist bad boys beginning to grow up a bit and realise they had narcissist mothers. [Blaming the mother / other, facing reality, or perhaps a bit of both?] Studies also show a positive correlation between narcissism and self-esteem survey scores, even though traditionally the relationship should be inverse, as narcissism is supposed to be caused by low self-esteem! Since it could be that narcissists have high self-esteem and are not empty vessels, some suggest removing the supposed disorder (NPD) from the new edition of APA.

Here's another fascinating plot thickener. Allison's sweet 16 party was planned, well in advance, by her party-loving father. At first she objected, but went along later, when MTV got involved, and it was their influence that shut down one lane of the busy thoroughfare, for just five minutes. Her ostensibly selfish quotes were in response to silly questions encouraging a perceived narcissism, and she was rather embarrassed afterwards. We learn that Allison, (B.A. in psychology), and her boyfriend independently started a foundation to give impoverished kids "the tools they need to succeed." They see class, money and privilege as more divisive than race (she is from a well-to-do black family). When Dombek asked Allison about "Me Generation" narcissism her reply was that while all the blogging and selfies may 'appear' narcissistic, she feels part of a "caring generation" genuinely interested in other people, others she's never met, people whose experience she can learn from. "It's really hard to find someone who no one knows."

Alice Miller wrote that "loss or absence of love ... happened in the past." You can't change that. Dombek says "you can rage against your dependency, the absolute need for the other that can never be satiated." The others, however, are the centres of their universes, places always empty of you. You can study it and theorise it, but if self-other differences were not so "love would never go on very long." In a clever twist Dombek ends with a parody of the APA's definition of NPD by proposing a new entry entitled "Narciphobia." The nine symptoms include: preoccupation with fear that others are self-serving, manipulative or unreal, belief that one is especially unselfish and can only be understood by others who are equally unselfish, exaggerated sense of ability to read other people's motives, quick to judge others, and fear that world will end due to selfishness of others.

Dombek has done her homework, both online and in the traditional academic literature. She reminds us of the original Narcissus story. A prophet told Liriope, a rape victim, and the mother of Narcissus, that her son, a very pretty child, would only live long if he never came to know himself. This original story has been distorted by latter-day interpretations of narcissism. When seeing his reflection in a pool Narcissus does not fall in love with himself: he sees, or thinks he sees another person who is a potentially perfect companion, with many of his desirable, mirror-mirror attributes. But when he reaches for the other the image



ripples, distorts and disappears leaving him distraught and alone. The tragedy Ovid gives us is that the lack of affection and companionship is not to be blamed on others. It reflects our own emptiness. Narcissus is not vain. He is a victim, of not knowing himself. He might have benefited from Kierkegaard's advice "don't forget to love yourself." It seems he was that lonely person that "no one knows." Had he been "on" Facebook, he might have had more friends from the caring generation.

Time to Reflect

David Lorimer

STEP BACK

Norman Drummond – foreword by HRH The Princess Royal

Hodder, 2016, 179 pp., £9.99, p/b – ISBN 978-1-473-61480-2

Norman Drummond's third book is a further distillation of practical wisdom based on his wide range of experiences. Norman is the founder of Columba 1400, an award-winning charity that seeks to change the life outcomes of young people from harsh realities, a former BBC governor, head teacher and Chair of BBC Children in Need as well as the current Chair of the Scottish World War I Commemoration Panel. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, a Chaplain to the Queen in Scotland and visiting Professor of Education at the University of Edinburgh. In addition, he is an internationally known coach and speaker on life and business (www.drummondinternational.com). I mention all this as it informs the content and direct style of the book.

I imagine the message of the title will resonate with every reader as our frantic busyness means that we rush from one task to the next without making time to reflect on our values and on what really matters. This reminds me of the aphorism of Archbishop Fenelon, who urged people to meditate for at least one hour a day and, if very busy, then two hours. The book consists of two parts, covering the rich rewards of stepping back and the many ways of doing so. Themes include the importance of attitude, the need to

find your path as well as care for yourself, growing wisdom and letting go of negativity, escaping limitations and stepping up to opportunities, focusing on what matters and overcoming failure, taking stock and keeping going, having faith and making a difference. This last point is crucial as Norman's own life is devoted to service.

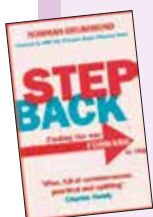
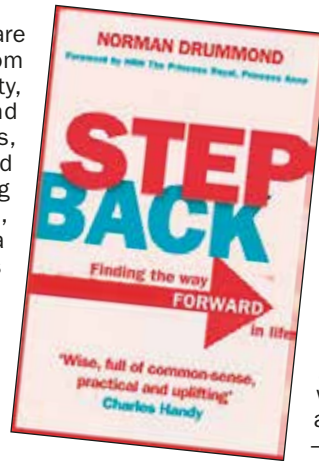
Stepping back can help us develop the key qualities of integrity, courage and open heartedness while restoring balance and rhythm to our lives. One of the features of the book are many pertinent quotations, such as this from Eleanor Roosevelt – 'do what you feel in your heart to be right - for you will be criticised anyway.' Here we need to have clear values and our own sense of integrity as well as courage. In his coaching sessions, where he probably speaks only 15 to 20% of the time, Norman listens deeply and finds that many of his clients suffer from the NQGE syndrome (not quite good enough) when in fact they are MTGE - more than good enough. Sometimes, by doing less we can achieve more, and the book's many panels of questions for reflection will help us in this regard. The core Columba 1400 values are also worth pondering on – awareness, focus, creativity, integrity, perseverance and service, and it helps to have our own space or place where we can go to reflect more deeply on a regular basis.

There are many instructive and amusing anecdotes in the book, including his son Christian getting him to promise that he would watch the whole of a DVD with him on Boxing Day, without realising that the series lasted 11 hours! Another story about Charles Swindoll struck a chord – in his zeal to fit too much into his life, he was caught up in a hurry-up style and became unbearable at home. One evening, his daughter Colleen wanted to tell him something important and began, "Daddy, I want to tell you something and I'll tell you really fast", whereupon he realised what a pass things had come to and said she could say it slowly - to which her response was: "Then

listen slowly!" On another occasion, a self-important businessman came to see Mother Teresa and told her about all his achievements, to which she replied "And what do you do that matters?" The story that made me laugh out loud was a simple parable about a group of forest animals who were discussing a new animal – a bear – who had a list of animals who will die.

The lion and the fox stepped forward first, but they pined away and died when they found they were on the list. Many other animals followed, with the same outcome. Finally, the tortoise makes it to the bear and finds that he too is on the list. Okay, says the tortoise, you can take me off the list - he walks away and lives happily for a long time. We can all choose to get off the list and find our own path.

The second part advises on how to put stepping back into practice. The first thing is to plan to make a start. Without planning this will never happen, and it is best to start small. One easy way is to have a quiet period of prayer or reflection in the morning, as Norman himself does and indeed I do myself. Retreat periods can help us to reboot, also silence or even solitude. Norman suggests a number of searching questions that we can put ourselves (p. 145). As it happens, I was asked to take a walking day myself today with Marianne and some friends, but I have too many book reviews to write, so I will have to plan this for next month! This is truly a book for our times, with its simple message of slowing down, focusing on what matters and keeping things simple, and it finishes with the challenge of daring to look for the best in others and in ourselves - if we want to find a way forward, then it's time to step back. I am glad that Norman took the time to step back to write this book, and I urge you to read and apply its advice yourselves.



When a highly regarded international businessman went to visit Mother Teresa in the Missionaries of Charity hostel where she, with other nuns, nursed the sick and the poor, he was keen to explain to her all he had achieved. Mother Teresa listened patiently. When he had finished she said to him, "And what do you do that matters?"