

David Hay *Something There: the Biology of the Human Spirit*
London, Darton Longman and Todd, 2006. (xiv) 316 pp. ISBN 0 232 52537 0.
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This book begins in a lively way with the challenge that Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* sets as a reflection of where we are, or might be. David Hay has been investigating spiritual and religious experiences over many decades and explains (p.xii) that he is attempting to place the evidence 'in the context of our western cultural history'. He was the third Director of the Religious Experience Research Unit, which became the Religious Experience Research Centre (RERC) in 1989. In many ways Hay sees himself as heir to the work of Sir Alister Hardy to whom (with Alan Bullock) this volume is dedicated.

In chapters 1 and 2, *Mountains of The Mind* and *Unfuzzifying The Fuzzy*, Hay summarises some of Hardy's ideas. Hay also notes much of his own previous research, for example with Gordon Heald and Kate Hunt in chapter 3 *The Individuality of the Spirit*, and that with Rebecca Nye in chapter 6 *Primordial Spirituality*. My first points of criticism can be placed at this juncture. Many parts of the text are engaging because of the quotations both from classical authors and from accounts drawn from the archives of RERC and Hay's own research. However, although the accounts of experiences in the Hardy Archive are identified by number to protect confidentiality, and are electronically searchable to access individual themes, Hay gives no reference numbers, so examples cannot be contextualised.

The Archive is now lodged with the University of Wales, Lampeter, a fact only briefly acknowledged on page 258, and there is no acknowledgment of the extensive use of the archive in the research of people such as Mark Fox, nor of work of a more interdisciplinary and cross-cultural nature that has been done under the auspices of the Centre since Hay's own involvement. This work has included reprinting Hardy's *Spiritual Nature of Man* (Hay has only the original publisher's details for this and other early work, all of which RERC has kept in print and for sale). Nor is there discussion of the fifty Occasional Papers published by the RERC. These contain a wide range of original research material on approaches to spirituality and religious experience in a variety of faiths, and on many themes which are entirely relevant to our European context. Despite highlighting awareness of evil as a key area (p. 11), Hay does not mention Merete Jakobsen's pioneering work on the accounts of experiences of evil held in the RERC Archive. When dealing with happiness and the benefits of spiritual experience (p. 46), he does not mention the work of Michael Argyle, and Caroline Franks Davis' *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience* is not even listed in the bibliography. These omissions are notable for anyone concerned for research in this field and with a knowledge of the continuing vitality of RERC.

Early on, the extensive nature of spirituality and the juxtaposition of spirituality and institutional religion, an emphasis which has become almost normative for those working in this area, is made. "Spiritual awareness is commonly the context out of which religion grows. But spirituality is not religion. Like Hardy I believe it is prior to religion and is a built-in, biologically structured dimension of the lives of all members of the human species. Therefore there are secular as well as religious expressions of spirituality" (pp. 48-49). The 'talking to ordinary people' examples which are discussed in the next chapter are based on the research with Kate Hunt in Nottingham in 2000 where the focus was on the spirituality of people who do not go to church. In this book religion tends to

equal Christianity and examines its relationship to spirituality and secularity.

Hay's agenda and emphasis is spelt out particularly in Chapter 11, *Treating The Sickness of the Spirit* which identifies individualism and self-interest as blocking the development of spirituality. When he asks whether anything can be done to retrieve our lost humanity, he asserts that 'the religious institutions are potentially in a very strong position with regard to social experiments in community building. More than any other body the Church has vast experience ... (p.239). Later Hay writes "The more we believe that God the Holy Spirit speaks to everyone", echoing the John 3:8 quotation which heads chapter 3. There are one or two apt Jewish quotations and examples in the book, but the orientation is clearly that of European as Christian. The assumed 'we' is clearly a problem, as is the confessional stance in relation to scientific probability and religious orientation. As a survey of work done and an example of a position held in relation to certain views of what counts as 'scientific' and 'spiritual' and 'religious' this is a useful book, even though the case is not clearly proven. The book also needs to be contextualised academically in a broader arena of methods of research such as the ethnography of the 'Warwick team', the critique of Carrette and King, and the further interdisciplinary and intercultural work of RERC in recent years. It has been timely that in 1997 in Oxford and again in the September 2007 Edinburgh conference that BASR has facilitated breadth of discussion in the academic community of this interesting and often controversial area.

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