**FULL SPECTRUM KNOWING**

*David Lorimer*

**RE-ENCHANTING THE ACADEMY**

**Edited by Angels Voss (SMN) and Simon Wilson**

Rubedo Press, 2017, 366 pp., £xx, p/b – ISBN 978-1-943710-13-3

Max Weber first popularised the idea of disenchantment over 100 years ago, a process that has intensified since that time. This book emerged from a conference at the University of Kent in Canterbury in 2015. It is based on the premise that education has to nourish and inspire both heart and mind ‘if it is to lead future generations of students out of the cave of policy-led bureaucratisation and financially-led consumerism into the creative freedom of their own souls.’ The authors represent a reclamation movement towards rebalancing the emphasis of education in terms of what Iain McGilchrist refers to as left and right hemisphere thinking, analysis and imagination. This requires ‘going against the grain of our contemporary scientisms, our functional instrumentalist imperatives, and even our enlightened liberal agendas of secular humanism, which will have no truck with a magical reality as, well, *true*.’ (p. 15) Crucial to this process is metaphorical thinking and a corresponding revival of the arts. The four parts are devoted to re-enchanting the institution, the curriculum, the mind, and nature and body.

The first essay is a wide-ranging discussion of the enchantment of learning by Patrick Curry. He reminds readers of Newman’s thesis that the University should be a place where ‘scholars seek truth, pursue and transmit knowledge for knowledge’s sake – irrespective of the consequences, implications and utility of the endeavour.’ This is precisely the ethos that has been undermined in the last 40 years, with a corresponding impoverishment of the imagination and a grim focus on results and outcomes. We have also lost the metaphysical understanding of the nature of the human being where wisdom is the ultimate rather than factual knowledge - this involves a cultivation of being as well as knowing. Eduard Heyning contributes a piece on panpsychism and the academy, tracing this back to Renaissance philosophers and linking it with the work of William James, RM Bucke, Aldous Huxley, CG Jung and most recently Freya Mathews who, like Seyyed Hossein Nasr in his 1967 book *Man and Nature*, realised that the environmental crisis is a symptom of deeper issues.

Angela Voss explores the power of symbol and the mediaeval exegesis enabling readers to move from ‘literal, to allegorical, to tropological or moral, to anagogic for mystical readings of Scripture’ (p. 116). This is an important point because scientism and fundamentalism are two sides of the same literalistic coin corresponding to a loss of depth and the sacred. Traditionally, we have three eyes: the eye of flesh or sense, the eye of reason and the eye of the spirit or heart. Modern universities cultivate only the first two, *episteme* and not *gnosis*. Angela quotes Bernardo Kastrup’s observation that there is a critical difference between emotionally taking the Christian myth of literal truth and intellectually doing so, which leads to intolerance and persecution. Julia Moore’s daring contribution addresses the contrast between the experimental séance and the academy. She analyses the methods used by a number of investigators where distinctions between fiction or fantasy and objective reality are blurred and result in fierce opposition or outright dismissal. Her conclusion is that there is in fact no clear-cut ontological distinction between the subjective and objective, as we also find in participatory methodologies and the experimenter effect. It is easier to ignore rather than engage with these realms that subvert an exclusively rational approach.

The imagination can be a vehicle towards wholeness, as argued by Anita Klujber quoting Northrop Frye that literary teaching involves the transfer of imaginative energy from literature to student, and involving both emotion and intellect. This is exemplified in both Yeats and the work of Kathleen Raine who founded the Temenos Academy and who was the leading scholar of Blake in her generation. In the last part, we encounter directly nature and the body, reading about ‘active care’ opening up awareness of interrelationships, then the power of rewilding and immersion in nature. There is an intriguing participatory chapter on breathing making space for ‘empathetic perception.’ Another chapter describes right brain consciousness in the learning process in Balkan dance and the consequences of exclusion from the academic and learning process of ‘women, nature and the body, joy, celebration and play, colour, creativity, beauty, a sense of the sacred, communion with the divine, laughter and love of life’ - this is quite a list! The author explains how traditionally women in Greece and the Balkans have been in charge of dance and ceremonial matters involving the great transitions of life and death – much of this is embedded in line and chain dances ‘taught without teaching, and learnt without learning’, hence fully and literally embodied in a common heritage and identity. We have recently experienced this in south-west France where we regularly attend such traditional dance evenings that elicit a palpable feeling of connectedness and community. Needless to say, these have been suspended during the lockdown, but such contact is vital while also connecting the past with the present. Taken as a whole, the volume explores the many dimensions of re-enchantment, providing a crucial source of Renaissance for our time.