

Eccentrics, Truth-Seekers or Holy Fools? The Search for a Moral Universe by Marion Browne, (Marion Browne, 2010; 978-0-9566854-0-7), pp.418; £17.99.

Reviewed by the Revd Neil Broadbent, a council member of the CFPSS, who runs the Sozein Trust.

The author writes "This is a book about dogma - religious, philosophical and scientific. It explores amongst others, such wide-ranging topics as Mesmerism, the New Physics, Christianity, Buddhism, Houdini, the Sufi Mystics, Jung versus Freud, Life after Death, the Steiner system of education and the sphinx-like philosophy of Heidegger. In tackling worldviews such as atheism and humanism it questions their assumptions, particularly as to whether they can be considered rational.

In every branch of knowledge the book stresses the need for empirical, wide-ranging evidence as the only valid foundation for theory. And empirical evidence means the evidence we derive from human testimony of all kinds.

But the sub-heading of 'Eccentrics, Truth-seekers or Holy Fools?' is 'The Search for a Moral Universe'. For it is essentially an exploration of spirituality and ethics. What is our ultimate moral reference, and why should we be moral? Does crime often arise from causes beyond the control of the perpetrator, and if so, how should it be dealt with? In what respect does orthodox religion disappoint in trying to convince us that God is just? Above all, it poses the ultimate question 'What is our true purpose in being here?' and provides some surprising answers."

The author, a retired teacher, tells us that this book was born out of disgust and anger over the way a friend had abused her trust. It began as a form of therapy. At times I felt as if I was reading a private diary of pain. Added to which the small print size may make it hard for some to read.

There is very wide ranging discussion of philosophical concerns and a chapter on psychical topics. Unfortunately, the many quotations are not properly referenced making it difficult to follow up any that take one's interest. Throughout the work judgements and opinions are expressed with vehemence.

There are many well made points herein but the scope of topics tackled is so wide ranging that I failed to find a focus to the work. Wise words on psychical and spiritual healing are found on pp. 355-6 and I smiled when the author's final comment was in agreement with Richard Dawkins.

As I closed the book I was reminded of the Christian mystical writing *The Cloud of Unknowing* in which is written, 'By love God may be gotten hold of, but by thought never.'