

*God, Ghosts and Independent Minds*, Newton Ridley, 2011, pp. xiii + 265. Pen Press publications, £8.

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Reviewed by the Revd Neil Broadbent of the Sozein Trust, a CFPSS Council member.

The author is a retired Senior Civil Servant, a member of SPR and an Anglican Lay Minister who enjoys discovering, learning and writing. 'Newton Green's fascinating book probes some of the cloudier frontiers of knowledge, in a clear, no-nonsense light. Reader friendly, but impeccably researched, he examines humanity's place in the universe, covering a wide range of interrelated themes – creation and evolution, the nature of God, the supernatural, notions of self and free will, the workings of the mind. *God, Ghosts and Independent Minds* puts established assumptions under the microscope, and surprising truths plus some astonishing new ideas result.' So says the blurb on the back cover: quite fairly, I found. The text evidences a polymath with a very thinking approach to life's mysteries who enjoys gentlemanly discussion.

The first 90 pages very clearly express the author's views on our place in the universe, the mythology of *Genesis*, evolution, God, philosophy without God and Christianity's roots. He tells of the Christian religion's rôle in forming the social conscience of the nation. We then come into the heart of the book. Chapters on Inside Our Skulls, The Independent Mind, Consciousness – a Product, The Mind at Work and Mind – Synaptic Science show the brain and the mind functioning independently. Mr Newton uses an analogy from WWII to describe the mind as the gallery above the plotting table of the brain in the operations room. This allows mind to be put 'at the centre of anomalous conscious experiences' (p.160). Mind bending ideas on 'electron excited states and Twistor light rays' (p.134) lie alongside Professor Ian Stevenson's work on re-incarnation. He quotes G N M Tyrell, Bishop Hugh Montefiore and Dr Rupert Sheldrake with approval. He has clearly defined chapters on OBE's, NDE's, reincarnation, hypnotism, 'telepathy' (the quotation marks are indicative of the line the author takes), poltergeists, apparitions and spiritualism.

Much helpful material is garnered from his researches in the SPR archives. Discussion of the Scole Report leads to a chapter on the evidence for post-mortem minds. There seems to be some confusion over how to talk of the soul as on p.126 the soul is seen as a species of 'aetheric double' and on p.217 our soul comprises the totality of one's non-physical being.

A phrase that re-occurs is "No testable evidence whatever" regarding non-physical events. This reviewer suggests that Dr Robert Crookall's works amply show how psychical or paranormal events may be tested. It may be argued that, for example, the evidence that a celebration of a requiem Eucharist may bring healing for an haunted individual is on a par with the evidence that TB may be cured by the use of Streptomycin, Isoniazid and Rifampicin. As Matthew 7. 16 & 20 say 'by their fruits shall you know them.'

Topics not covered include poetry, contemplation, the spiritual and the mystical. I especially enjoy the concept of "Scientismists". But, to my mind, the very best is left to the last where we find delightful writing on Cultural Ignorance and "The Curse of Political Correctness".

In conclusion this is a truly educational book: one that may lead one out of any number of intellectual dead-ends and raises one's "boggle threshold" as our president –emeritus, Michael Perry

would say. It is a great read which, personally speaking, I found more enjoyable than Colin Wilson's books covering similar grounds.