

Book Review

The Great Adventure: Toward a Fully Human Theory of Evolution.
Edited by David Loye. Albany, NY: State University of New York
Press, 2004. ISBN 0-7914-5924-1.

What sets an adventure apart from a mere trip is the element of discovery: new vistas, unprecedented and engaging dialogues, and perhaps most importantly, a heightened awareness and an appreciation of ourselves before, and after, the journey. These revelations come at some price – the bed and board may not always comfort or sustain us, and it takes an effort more like work than exercise to ‘take it all in’ when the stopover is short and the environment new and strange. So it is with the thirteen essays and several appendices comprising *The Great Adventure*, which in less than 350 pages reincarnates Natural Philosophy, with all its grandeur and wide-eyed self-assurance, as a dynamic, transpersonal, and humanistic theory of psychosocial and moral evolution.

Fortunately, the guides for this multidisciplinary tour de force are a sympathetic lot. In his introductory and final chapters, David Loye provides concise and accessible commentary on the contributions by Ervin Laszlo, Stanley Salthe, Raymond Bradley, Riane Eisler, Sally Goerner, Ken Bausch, Alexander Christakis, Alfonso Montuori, Allan Combs, and Ruth Richards. In the interim, these authors provide many summaries and restatements for those who are not equally at home with classical and quantum holography, metahistory, creative theory, biology, anthropology, chaos and complexity, developmental psychology, and entanglement. And lay readers whose spirits might falter under the intricacy of the evolutionary theory that emerges from the pages and the sheer volume of information those pages contain will be rallied by the authors’ enthusiastic commitment to and deep conviction in their scientific vision.

Two themes are woven together in this book. On the one hand, the material presented by Lazlo, Salthe, Bradley, Montouri, Combs, and Richards is focused primarily on integral evolutionary science – investigating and interpreting life, consciousness, culture, and evolution itself as a hierarchical interplay of dynamic and complex structures,

whose endogenous patterns of organization are self-motivating, non-local, and dialectical. On the other hand, Loye, Eisler, and Goerner stress the moral aspects of the new evolutionary science, rejecting the materialist and domineering credo of 'survival of the fittest' for a second Darwinian revolution, one in fact more in keeping with Darwin's actual intent, in which humans are agents and stewards of evolution rather than its byproducts. These themes are complementary and produce a reasonably coherent defense for a new evolutionary theory that is both explanatory and normative.

Laszlo argues that only a holistic perspective can provide lasting insight into matter, mind, or society. Organisms are integrated multidimensional systems in which nonlocal communication is the real connective tissue. Bradley explores the triadic relationship between affective energy, social control, and emergent organization in our individual and communal experience. Bridging the gap between the structural and the moral vistas, Montuori, Combs, and Richards use a study of individual creativity to identify the psychological and social characteristics of individuals who are best able to turn stress and disequilibrium into healthy, productive action. Such individuals are tolerant of ambiguity, think dialogically, create symmetry from the asymmetrical and find cohesion at the edge of chaos, and view the world from within an androgynous rather than polarized perspective. This makes them a microcosm of a healthy, durable culture.

We need more such exemplars, Loye and Eisler and Goerner would say. The clockwork world is ticking down to our extinction, for science, politics, religion, and culture in general have been unable to resist the allure of the domination-oriented and exploitive periodic attractor. Eisler contrasts this attractor with another, a partnership-oriented model of human behavior sustained by actualization hierarchies and linking of individuals. She outlines their interaction in human history and suggests that technology has brought us to a critical juncture where we face actualization or extinction. Goerner unites the themes of energy flow, partnership, communication, and structural complexity to sketch a vision of an integral society where collaborative learning and creativity provide the diversity and disequilibrium that organic and cultural energy systems need, not just to survive, but to prosper.

Loye's final chapters are both summary and prolegomena. He distills the previous essays into seventeen key concepts that are fundamental to the new theory. He then presents ten requirements for

completing the new evolutionary model, from breaking free of the Neo-Darwinist paradigm of evolution to unifying discourses on science, spirituality, and the moral imperative. In keeping with the action-oriented emphasis of the evolutionary model, Loye completes the cycle by outlining the financial, academic, and research resources needed to complete the research into his “full-spectrum, action-oriented model” of evolution. Two of the appendices are devoted to a course outline with *The Great Adventure* as the cornerstone and a bibliography for further study.

Like the theory it outlines, *The Great Adventure* operates at many levels. It is a declaration of independence, a call to action, an introduction to a very promising and provocative movement in modern thought, and it is a curriculum tool. As the authors point out, to be fully humanistic and complete, this Natural Philosophy must draw insight from disciplines not included in the current volume. Although Loye presents a ten-tiered evolutionary hierarchy that begins in cosmic evolution and ends with moral and spiritual evolution, little is said in this book about these topmost links in the new Great Chain of Being, where aesthetics, hermeneutics, and theology need to be given substantial consideration.

Still, it is understandable that the current effort limits its scope and vision to physics, biology, sociology and psychology. At the beginning of any paradigm shift, the breakaway faction cannot make converts without using the rhetoric of their opponents and locating their efforts in the topography of the conceptual map they ultimately intend to redraw. As the flagship volume in a new curriculum intended to usher in a new world order, this collection of essays is both ambitious and successful. If the vessel is not as fully stocked as it might be, that is the risk one takes on all great adventures. It is only on the second outing, when the adventure becomes a trip, that one remembers to bring along all the gear one needed or longed for during the first venture.

--Robert Bruce Kelsey,
Siemens ILG

South Amana, IA 52334

Email: robertbrucekelsey@hotmail.com