

A painting of a large, leafy tree in a forest. The tree is the central focus, with its branches spreading out. The leaves are green and dense. In the background, there are other trees and a glimpse of a blue sky with clouds. In the foreground, a path leads through the forest, and a small figure is sitting on the path, looking towards the tree. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

A Quest for Wisdom

Inspiring Purpose on the Path of Life

DAVID LORIMER

PRAISE FOR A QUEST FOR WISDOM

“For years I have had a personal rule: read anything that David Lorimer writes. I have benefited from David’s insights for decades. *A Quest for Wisdom* is his latest and most profound contribution, a summing up of accumulated wisdom. Lorimer is a rare cultural treasure. I hope your quest for wisdom includes this great book.”

—Larry Dossey, MD

Author: *One Mind: How Our Individual Mind Is Part of Greater Consciousness and Why It Matters*

“What a blessing David Lorimer’s work has been for many fellow seekers over these past several decades. Reading, assimilating, and reviewing countless works at the frontiers of science, philosophy, and spirituality, he has provided his readers year after year with a unique gift, opening up to them horizons that without his intercession might have remained unexplored. Especially important, he combines a wide-ranging, agile intellect with a spiritual foundation that has long grounded his inquiries and deepened his insights. David has made an

enduring contribution to our intellectual and spiritual life that I hope will ripple out into the broader culture.”

—**Richard Tarnas**, Professor of Philosophy and Psychology,
California Institute of Integral Studies, author of *The Passion
of the Western Mind* and *Cosmos and Psyche*

“What a wonderful read this collection of essays is from David Lorimer, who has been a curator of seminal thinkers for nearly four decades. Well organised, broad ranging, and filled with penetrating insights, this book is a tour of great minds by a great mind. Highly recommended.”

—**Christopher Bache, PhD**, author of
LSD and the Mind of the Universe

“The range of David Lorimer’s writing is extraordinary. Yet every one of these scholarly essays has a freshness and vigour that inspires the reader from the first sentence to the last. Lorimer’s contribution to the understanding of the spiritual side of our existence is increasingly widely appreciated. He is a wise and humane guide.”

—**Alexander McCall Smith, CBE**, best-selling author and
Emeritus Professor of Medical Law, University of Edinburgh

“Events of the last few decades have revealed an alarming decline of wisdom from the mainstream discussion, calling into question any claims of human progress. Enter David Lorimer with his voluminous knowledge of modern science and spirituality, and his heartfelt reflections on an optimistic reverence for life. This book is a gift to humanity, perfectly attuned to the apparent challenges that will energise our awakening into lives rich with purpose and meaning!”

—**Eben Alexander, MD**, neurosurgeon and author of *Living in
a Mindful Universe*, *Proof of Heaven*, and *The Map of Heaven*

“David Lorimer’s far-ranging enquiries have taken him through many realms of science, spirituality and philosophy. He has read more books on these subjects than anyone I know, and knows most of the

leading thinkers in these fields. This book brings together some of his reflections, previously scattered in various publications—it is an invaluable resource and a perfect bedside book.”

—**Rupert Sheldrake, PhD**, biologist and
author of *The Science Delusion*

“David Lorimer is just the sort of thinker that is today all too rare: hugely well read, unstuffy, and interested in philosophy in the best sense. In the course of these essays, spanning forty years, he asks most of the big questions about the nature and meaning of life, with an accent on a spiritual understanding, and drawing on a wide range of sources. They are a delight to read; and on this ‘quest for wisdom’, there is many a nugget already there to reward the seeker along the way.”

—**Dr Iain McGilchrist**, neuroscientist and philosopher,
author of *The Master and his Emissary*

“For the last 40 years, David Lorimer has made an immense contribution to the emerging spiritual worldview of our culture. This book is a marvellously rich and varied collection of his writings, pervaded with a rare combination of acute intellectual insight, spiritual depth and encyclopaedic knowledge. It’s a joy to read, showing how a spiritual perspective can illuminate every aspect of our lives and our culture.”

—**Steve Taylor, PhD**, author of
Spiritual Science and *The Leap*

“Seated within the Scots “generalist” intellectual tradition of rounded knowledge, David Lorimer braids a guiding thread of philosophy, psychology and politics. Like Jung, he understands the ways in which the outer life of the times draws its drive and meaning from inner spiritual currents. Neither does he flinch from searching out empirical evidence of that psychospiritual reality. These are grounding essays of the past half century that transcend the hustling bustle of a frenzied world.”

—**Professor Alastair McIntosh**, author of
Soil and Soul and *Poacher’s Pilgrimage*

“The quest is of paramount importance, the substance of it as presented in this book is fascinating and meaningful—and the book as a whole is great and even essential reading in our critical times.”

—**Ervin Laszlo, PhD**, Founder, Club of Budapest,
Author, *The Wisdom Principles: A Handbook for our Time*

“There is too much information and a lot of knowledge in our contemporary world, but sadly very little wisdom. David Lorimer’s book helps to fill that void. *A Quest for Wisdom* distils the profound thoughts and insights of many philosophers and prophets of our time. It is a handy guide to navigate through the confusions and illusions of the modern materialistic paradigm and shows us the way leading to a more holistic culture. *A Quest for Wisdom* is a most accessible and deeply inspiring book. If you are searching for meaning in your life then this book will certainly prove to be a wonderful companion in that search.”

—**Satish Kumar**, Editor Emeritus, Resurgence & Ecologist

“I am delighted to follow David Lorimer’s search over decades for Truth, Love and Beauty—usual epithets of the One which remains a Mystery beyond description—without restrictions of the West or the East, or of science and religion, modern and ancient, or of this and that. It is amazing to learn about the number of books he has read, reviewed and assimilated. Each essay in the book is worth staying with and pondering, questioning and learning from. Every searcher will find this book stimulating, encouraging, delightful and full of insights in their journey towards eternal wisdom which of necessity includes taking care of our world with compassion and kindness. I highly recommend David’s book *A Quest for Wisdom* but with a caution: find a quiet place and enough time because if you pick up this book you won’t be able to put it down.”

—**Ravi Ravindra, PhD**, Emeritus Professor of Physics
and Comparative Religion, Dalhousie University

“These wise and wonderful essays offer a penetrating survey of human thought from Heraclitus, Anaxagoras and Plato to Albert Schweitzer, Carl Jung and Peter Deunov. Reading them is a revelatory experience

in itself. The brilliance, intelligence and lucidity with which complex ideas are explored and evaluated for their contribution to the enlightenment of humanity is extraordinary; the commitment to this task from the age of 21 prodigious. The critique of materialist science that has cut us off from the universe and dispensed with both God and the soul is both timely and necessary. But most of all, these essays reflect the ideas and values which have informed the author's lifelong quest for wisdom: ideas and values that he has imbibed and assimilated from great teachers and which are totally missing in today's world. They can be summed up by the words Reverence for Life. A truly outstanding gift to us from a man who lives the role of philosopher-king in an era sorely in need of one."

—**Anne Baring**, author of *The Dream of the Cosmos: A Quest for the Soul*

"When I was taking my first steps in philosophy at Winchester College, David Lorimer stressed to me the importance of taking into account lived human experience alongside abstract argumentation; if readers of this book benefit from his humaneness as much as I did, they will be lucky indeed."

—**Benjamin Morison, DPhil**, Chair of Classical Philosophy, Princeton University, former scholar, Winchester College

"A gifted, original and inspirational teacher, David Lorimer is also a writer who compels the attention—and whose passionate quest for wisdom comes through on every page."

—**Harry Bingham**, best-selling author, and Chairman, Jericho Writers, former scholar, Winchester College

"Deep Dave—that's what they called David Lorimer at school. But when I met him, it wasn't so much his *deepness* that struck me, though, certainly, as soon as we did finally start talking, our conversation went down to the deepest profundities of life, as if we were two swimmers. What struck me was how *easy* the swimming felt. He was such a wonderfully kind and clear-eyed guide. His interest in ideas, his affection for the thinkers, his lucidity—they light the way. And reading these

marvellous essays brought back how influential he has been. I read first his fascinating pieces on Swedenborg and Beinsa Douno, but then I wanted to read about *everyone* that David has enjoyed. I shall! This is a book that I shall swim in often!"

—**Andrew Clover**, writer, teacher, actor, director, comedian and former scholar, Winchester College

"Written in eloquent prose that makes reading a pleasure, this volume of essays by David Lorimer is exceptional in breadth and depth as the author explores some of the deepest and most troubling concerns for the world today. The three sections, Philosophy, Spirituality and Meaning, Consciousness, Death and Transformation, Taking Responsibility—Ethics and Society, between them cover the most pressing existential questions that face humanity: why are we here, what lies beyond birth and death, and how can our lives individually and together fulfil the spiritual potential of humankind. Modernity is challenged by a global crisis largely of our own making and the author, with both compassion and scholarship, shows how the solution lies in our hands. Starting with Swedenborg, Lorimer draws with wonderful clarity on some of the great spiritual exemplars in recent history, to which he adds his own sensitive and thoughtful reflections. Notwithstanding the worst excesses of the human species, this book offers a profound message of hope for the future—never more needed than at the present time."

—**Dr Andrew Powell**, Founding Chair, Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group, Royal College of Psychiatrists, UK, author of *The Ways of the Soul*, *Conversations with the Soul*

"I very much like the idea of someone publishing a collection of the thoughts and explorations of their lifetime, and this one is rich in its coverage and depth. The references, the topics and the arguments show David Lorimer's passage through time, shifting and deepening, with love, Divine Love appearing everywhere. Fascinating, full of wonderful quotes, and worth taking slowly."

—**Prof David Cadman**, Harmony Adviser to The Prince's Foundation and author of *Love and the Divine Feminine*

“In his Foreword to this book, so full of philosophical and spiritual treasures, Charles Maclean writes that the British have a certain ambivalence about intellectuals. Maybe so, but what they do appreciate and admire are explorers, and this is what David Lorimer has done so diligently over the past fifty years. The story of his journey and his quest, and the insights and signposts along the way, give an extraordinarily helpful perspective into what I sometimes call ‘a bigger picture’—a window into what really matters, as humanity continues to evolve.”

—**Jonathan Stedall**, documentary film-maker
and author of *‘Where on Earth is Heaven?’*

“What would a lifelong quest for wisdom look like? These essays by David Lorimer are highly literate evidence of the author’s breadth of reference and intellectual energy: they seem to me to fulfil the dictum, “the idealists and dreamers have important work to do in every human culture”. I strongly recommend this collection to anyone engaged in, or beginning, a quest for wisdom in our troubled times.”

—**John Maxwell Kerr, SOSC.**, Former Warden,
The Society of Ordained Scientists

A QUEST FOR WISDOM

A QUEST FOR WISDOM
Inspiring Purpose on
the Path of Life

David Lorimer

AEON

First published in 2021 by
Aeon Books
PO Box 76401
London W5 9RG

Copyright © 2021 by David Lorimer

The right of David Lorimer to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with §§ 77 and 78 of the Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 978-1-91350-476-2

Typeset by Medlar Publishing Solutions Pvt Ltd, India
Printed in Great Britain

www.aeonbooks.co.uk

*For my daughter Charlotte,
the next writer in the family.
And my son George, a tower of
strength to his many friends.*

CONTENTS

<i>FOREWORD</i>	xvii
<i>PREFACE</i> <i>Dr Peter Fenwick</i>	xxi
<i>FORMATIVE BACKGROUND</i>	xxiii
PHILOSOPHY, SPIRITUALITY AND MEANING	
Victor Frankl and the Human Search for Meaning	3
The Absurd and the Mysterious	13
John Moriarty Memorial Lecture— <i>Rhythmica Mythica</i> : Separation and Union, Exile and Homecoming	29
The Principles of Love and Wisdom in Swedenborg and Beinsa Douno (Peter Deunov)	45
Beinsa Douno (Peter Deunov, 1864–1944)—a Prophet for our Times	55
Tao and the Path towards Integration	63
Cultivating a Sense of Beauty	75

The Encounter of Eastern and Western Cosmologies— Speculations on Radhakrishnan and the “Implicate Order”	85
Consciousness and Spirituality: Widening the Scientific Perspective	101
CONSCIOUSNESS, DEATH AND TRANSFORMATION	
The Challenge of Death	115
Religious and Scientific Implications of the Near-death and Related Experiences	119
Aspects of the Near-death Experience in the Light of the Tibetan Book of the Dead and the Experiences of Swedenborg	127
Swedenborg and Survival	135
Swedenborg, the Soul and Modern Consciousness Studies	151
The Near-death Experience and the Perennial Wisdom	159
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY—ETHICS AND SOCIETY	
A Life as an Argument: The Plight of the Individual in Modern Society	173
The Ethic of “Reverence for Life” and the Problem of Peace	183
The Ethical Mysticism of Dag Hammarskjöld	195
Religion, Society and Spiritual Renewal in Radhakrishnan	209
Ethics and the Nature of the Human	217
Beyond Fanaticism—the “Pneumatocratic” Perspective	227
Voltaire and Russell—the Crusade against Dogma and Fanaticism	235
The Spiritual Perspective and Political Responsibility	247
Fear of Freedom	257
Some Aspects of the German Democratic Republic	263
Towards a Culture of Love—an Ethic of Interconnectedness	269
<i>AFTERWORD</i>	279
<i>BIBLIOGRAPHY</i>	285
<i>INDEX</i>	305

FOREWORD

I first met David Lorimer at the University of St Andrews in October 1970. He was studying economics, French, and German; I was studying theology, and we both took the compulsory philosophy course in our second year. We were nineteen years old; bright-eyed, questioning, uncertain about our futures and the future of the world, naively seeking answers to perennial questions. We had long—sometimes night-long—conversations, rambling and earnest but also entertaining—about books, ideas, potential girlfriends, gossip, wine, snippets of information we had picked up in lectures. He was a considerable athlete; I played rugby. We were Children of the Sixties.

I had taken what is now called a “gap year” between school and university, had spent some months in Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was then), travelled a bit in Europe, and mainly lived alone in my family’s cottage by the sea on the south coast of the Isle of Arran. Reading, walking, talking with friends—with the vast sky and glimmering sea always present.

By the time I went up to St Andrews I was already interested in parapsychology, spiritualism, and, broadly, the Western mystical tradition. I had had an out-of-body experience in 1969 which made me profoundly conscious of the possibility of universal “one-ness”, which David writes about in this book. In retrospect, it may be that such topics

were an initial shared interest; what is certain is that David has devoted his life to pursuing them, which is why this book is appropriately titled *A Quest for Wisdom*.

After St Andrews, I studied law in Dundee and Edinburgh, arriving in the latter university in 1976 and being elected to the “exclusive” Speculative Society the same year. As David mentions in his Introduction, the “Spec” is a literary and debating society, founded in 1764 and little changed in its order of business and its candle-lit, fire-lit debating chamber since then.

David arrived in Edinburgh in 1978 and I proposed him for membership. Admission is by ballot, and on the night on which our petition was being voted the members were unusually boisterous and obstreperous, questioning the validity of the application on spurious grounds and requiring the president of the night, Duncan Menzies, to exercise all his considerable skills of advocacy to order an unprecedented recount. It is not surprising that Mr Menzies is now a Senator of the College of Justice and Privy Councillor, as the Right Hon. Lord Menzies.

What a loss it would have been to the Spec had David not been elected. The three essays he delivered in the Society’s Hall—*The Absurd and the Mysterious*, *Tao and the Path Towards Integration*, and *Voltaire and Russell: the Crusade Against Dogma and Fanaticism*, all included in this book—amply display his erudition, breadth of reading, and intellectual depth. At least to those who managed to stay awake, given the lateness of the hour and the effects of quantities of claret.

David introduced me, and in many cases gave me, many books which have brought me joy and influenced my thought—Gerard Manley Hopkins, Arnold Toynbee, John Moriarty, Sir James Frazer (I managed the 800-page abridged edition of *The Golden Bough*; typically, David has the entire twelve volume canon). My contributions were meagre by comparison, although I did introduce him to Colin Wilson’s sixth-form synthesis of existential thought, *The Outsider*, and to the poetry of Ted Hughes. I gave him a membership of the Poetry Book Society for his twenty-first birthday.

Our further careers led David briefly to banking, then teaching, then to devoting himself to philosophical research and spiritual development. I qualified as a solicitor but immediately knew I was not sufficiently committed to the job and set up my plate as a literary agent—I had always aspired to be a writer. In the early 1980s I found my calling

writing about Scotch whisky, and in this I am happy to say, I am now pre-eminent.

David Lorimer is a true intellectual in the respected European sense—the British are ambivalent about intellectuals. Over the past forty years he has devoted himself full-time to his search for meaning with intellectual honesty and rigour—not only does he read the books, he understands and reviews them. He has the ability to synthesise and clarify complex ideas from this vast array of sources, and then to draw his own conclusions in the essays which comprise this book.

David now lives in France, but we have kept up over the years—me limping along behind, like Jack Kerouac following Alan Ginsberg and Dean Moriarty, who “... burn, burn, burn like fabulous Roman candles exploding across the skies”. David is, and deserves to be, a star.

I have to admit that some of the essays are beyond me, where they require a greater familiarity with authors, concepts, and ideas than I possess to follow David’s tightly constructed arguments. But others are glorious revelations—eureka moments, epiphanies—connecting and explaining previously dimly conceived hunches and beliefs.

As I say, the book is truly one person’s quest for wisdom over nearly half a century. A highly intelligent, open-minded, extraordinarily well-read person. His is a fascinating quest, from which we can all benefit.

I certainly have.

Charles MacLean
Edinburgh

Charles MacLean has been researching and writing about Scotch whisky for forty years and has published seventeen books on the subject. He was the founding editor of *Whisky Magazine*, sits on a number of judging panels and advises whisky companies on a variety of matters, travelling extensively on their behalf. He was elected Master of the Quaich (the industry’s highest accolade) in 2012 and was inducted into the Whisky Hall of Fame in 2016. *The Times* describes him as “Scotland’s leading whisky expert”.

www.whiskymax.co.uk

PREFACE

Dr Peter Fenwick

David and I first met back in the early 1980s. I had been asked to be Chair of the Scientific and Medical Network and David was its new Director. I asked him why he wanted to take on the Network and he told me that although his father had wanted him to remain a merchant banker and then a conventional public school teacher, David wanted to do something much more spiritual. When it looked as if he was putting his spiritual development ahead of family interests, he was warned that they would disinherit him. David told me this without any rancour or criticism, just accepting that this was the way things were. I could see straight away that I was in the presence of a very unusual person and this became more and more apparent as I got to know him.

Throughout the last 30 years he has produced outstanding programmes for the Network and helped develop Network membership as a web of mutual support and friendship. But his interests extend far beyond the Network. The Inspiring Purpose character and values programme he created for children in Scotland is remarkable. Up to 20,000 children take the course every year and the programme has now expanded beyond the UK into the Commonwealth. David is the modern example of a renaissance man, highly intelligent and pushing forward each area that he touches. His capacity for hard work is

phenomenal and his amazing memory even more so. *The Quest for Wisdom* contains 20 pages of references and I can guarantee that David will not only have read them all, but would probably be able to quote accurately from any one of them. He has reviewed up to 200 books a year since 1986 as editor of the Network journal *Paradigm Explorer*. His knowledge of music is vast and he has a deep understanding of the underlying spiritual meaning of many of Bach's preludes and fugues.

The Bulgarian sage Peter Deunov has always been central in David's philosophy. The three words love, wisdom and truth, which are central to the teachings of Deunov, play an equally large role in David's life. This book of essays begins with Victor Frankl and his search for meaning, something which David's own life clearly demonstrates. His deep spirituality is expressed in everything he does—and in every page of his book. But even more importantly he is also a communicator, able not only to convey the essence of a particular philosophical teaching, but also to spark the interest he feels himself in his readers. This book will naturally have a ready-made readership in anyone with an interest in this field. But perhaps more surprisingly, it has the power to interest and even to captivate those for whom the areas of spirituality and philosophy have never held much fascination.

Dr Peter Fenwick is a neuropsychiatrist who is Emeritus President of the Scientific and Medical Network and a world authority on death and dying, about which he has written many books with his wife Elizabeth.

FORMATIVE BACKGROUND

By his labours he has given to our nation many a poem in wood and stone which will continue to impress on the minds of men the sense of another and greater world which surrounds us, and which will lift the thoughts of generations yet unborn to that house of God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. The workmen die, the dreamers pass away, but the dreams, the idealism, the vision, and the work remain. The dust must return to the earth, but the spirit shall return to God who gave it.

—Tribute to Sir Robert Lorimer KBE at
St Giles Cathedral, September 1929

When I discovered this tribute to my architect grandfather only recently in some family papers at Gibliston in Fife (where I was brought up and which Sir Robert bought in 1916), I was impressed by the phrase referring to “the sense of another and greater world which surrounds us” as this has been a central theme of my own work, though not in stone, but rather in terms of sculpting words. I had read the penultimate sentence during a visit to the Scottish National Archives on the occasion of a conference we organised in 2014 for the 150th anniversary of Sir Robert’s birth, and was intensely moved by “The workmen die,

the dreamers pass away, but the dreams, the idealism, the vision and the work remain." I wrote it down in my diary at the time, as the dreamers and idealists have important work to do in every human culture. Dr Albert Schweitzer, who features prominently in this volume, wrote that just as a fruit tree produces fruit every year that is the same and yet different, so the perennial truths of human wisdom need to be reborn and expressed anew in every generation. As I wrote of Aldous Huxley when re-reviewing his final book *The Human Situation*, he was a realistic idealist or an idealistic realist—a position which I also espouse.

The earliest of these essays was written forty years ago, and the reader will find in some instances reflections of the time which have to some extent been overtaken by events. There is also, inevitably, a certain amount of repetition, but often in different contexts, although I have carried out some editing in this respect. The essays are divided into three sections: philosophy, spirituality, and meaning; consciousness and death; and ethics and society. They range widely over existential, philosophical, and ethical issues, also with respect to our different levels of identity.

I read very little outside the syllabus during my time at Eton College, although in my last half I did read a book called *They Saw the Future: The Story of Fulfilled Prophecy*, by Justin Glass, which also began to make sense of a number of impressive psychic experiences that my mother had related. My time was principally devoted to athletics, squash, and fives, and as a result, I represented the school in all three sports. When I went on to St Andrews University, I represented the university in athletics, cross-country, and squash, and also ran 3,000 m steeplechase for Scotland in 1972, the same year I won the British Universities Championship at Meadowbank in Edinburgh—one of my first exhilarating experiences of the tartan track that had hosted the Commonwealth Games two years previously.

At St Andrews, I mainly read French and economics, although I also read German, and, crucially, philosophy in my second year. At that time, it was compulsory for arts undergraduates to spend a year studying philosophy, about which I knew next to nothing. There were compulsory courses on logic and metaphysics, including Plato, Aristotle, and the British empiricists of the eighteenth century. At the same time, I was reading Voltaire and Rousseau, and had a brilliant teacher of French poetry in Ian Higgins. It was while studying Baudelaire's poem *Correspondances* with him that I discovered Swedenborg. In twentieth-century literature, we read Camus and Sartre, which gave me an entry into

existentialism. The two philosophy courses I found most engaging were Leslie Stevenson on *Seven Theories of Human Nature* and Penny Palmer on the history of existentialism. Stevenson covered Plato, Christianity, Marx, Freud, Sartre, Skinner, and Lorenz (looking this up on the internet reveals that the book has since sold over 250,000 copies). Each thinker or system was covered in terms of basic ideas about human nature, what is wrong with it, and how to put this right—hence it was a consideration of metaphysics and ethics. It was my first proper introduction to Karl Marx’s materialist political theory, B. F. Skinner’s behaviourism, and Konrad Lorenz’s work on aggression, both animal and human.

Penny Palmer opened up new avenues beyond Camus and Sartre to include Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Marcel, Husserl, Heidegger, and others. I remember one exam question asking us to explain the meaning of Kierkegaard’s “teleological suspension of the ethical” in relation to the sacrifice by Abraham of his son Isaac. You really had to have read the text in order even to understand the question. My friend the whisky writer Charlie Maclean and I had a couple of personal sessions with Penny, and of course these were prolonged far into the night on many occasions—I’m sure you know the feeling of the conversation being so interesting that you don’t want it to end despite the fact that it is already 2 am. There is a deep sense of shared quest to plumb the depths of the human condition.

For me, as for many others of my generation, a pivotal and intensely engaging intellectual experience was reading Colin Wilson’s book *The Outsider*, which had become a runaway bestseller on its publication in 1956 when the author was only twenty-five. The book was the same title as the English edition of Albert Camus’s *L’Etranger*, but was a *tour de force* of scope and erudition, especially for one so young. It introduced me to a galaxy of new thinkers beyond Camus and Sartre, and in particular T. S. Eliot, T. E. Hulme, T. E. Lawrence, William Blake, W. B. Yeats, William James, Hermann Hesse, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and George Fox. I followed this up with his second volume *Religion and the Rebel*, where I encountered A. N. Whitehead, Edmund Husserl, Jakob Boehme (I already knew about Swedenborg, Pascal, and Goethe), Nicholas Ferrar, William Law, John Henry Newman, Rainer Maria Rilke, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ramakrishna, George Gurdjieff, P. D. Ouspensky, Oswald Spengler, C. G. Jung, Arnold Toynbee, and Bernard Shaw.

This was all heady stuff, and I set out to read as much as I could of the original work of these authors. They seemed to me to be addressing

the really important philosophical questions relating to the nature of freedom and the importance of intentionality, our true identity and the way to seek it out. When I had completed my first book, *Survival*, in late 1982, I sent it off to Eileen Campbell at Routledge, whom I had met at the 1981 Mystics and Scientists conference and who had invited me to send her the manuscript. She sent this on to Colin Wilson as the publisher's reader, and he came back with an incredibly enthusiastic recommendation. I have unfortunately lost the original, but it kindly contained the phrase "destined to become a classic in its field". After the book was published and on one of my regular visits to Cornwall, I was invited to spend the night at Colin's house, and I remember enjoying the bottle of Mercurey Rouge 1977 in the course of our fascinating conversation. At the time, he had over 25,000 books spread all around the house and in his garage, and offered me £10 if I could locate a space where he could put another bookshelf! He also tested me on whether I had read all his books, and gave me a couple that I had not read, including his biography of Wilhelm Reich.

I graduated in 1974, and, on the strength of my French and economics, was employed in the international loans department of City merchant bankers Morgan Grenfell. It soon became apparent that this was not to be my career path, although I did work there until the summer of 1976. During that time, I continued to read widely while commuting on the train and I remember one occasion when my colleague Quentin Davies—now Lord Davies of Stamford—saw a volume of Bertrand Russell on my desk, having tracked my other books over the previous few weeks, and remarked, "I agree, life's too short for trash!" One key book I read at the time and discussed with my very supportive honorary grandmother Barbara Hayward (almost all my grandparents had died before I was born) was *Testimony of Light* by Helen Greaves. This was ostensibly a post-mortem account of the experiences of Helen's nun friend Frances Banks and contained the essential idea of a life blueprint agreed to by the soul before incarnation, similar to the process of choosing lives described by Plato in the 10th book of the *Republic*. It is our task and challenge not to forget this blueprint (in Plotinus, the fall is one into ignorance, forgetfulness, and density) and to try to live our lives in alignment with it. It is my experience that, at certain critical moments, there is a strong sense of this blueprint in the way that our lives unfold.

In 1975, I met an important mentor in the Rev Dr Norman Cockburn. He was born in Edinburgh in 1907 and became a canon at Saint Mary's

Cathedral while studying for his PhD at the University on the Platonic Church Father Origen. Norman had an immense library, also extending into his garage, ranging over the huge variety of disciplines. He most generously gave me his sets of C. G. Jung's Collected Works (20 volumes), *The Golden Bough* (12 volumes) and other works by Sir J. G. Frazer, *A Study of History* (12 volumes) by Arnold Toynbee, James Hastings's 12 volume *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, the complete works of Emanuel Swedenborg and Rudolf Steiner, *The Sacred Books of the East* (50 volumes) an almost complete set of the journals and proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research along with other works by Oswald Spengler (*The Decline of the West*), Nicholas Berdyaev, Vladimir Solovyev, and John Macmurray.

At the time, I was considering becoming ordained, either in the Swedenborg Church or the Church of England (I remember my mother saying, rather to my indignation, when we first visited Canterbury in 1966 that I might make a good bishop!). Norman advised me to stay within the mainstream, so I arranged to spend a weekend at St Stephen's House in Oxford. There I had an interview with the admissions tutor, John Cobb, who told me to my astonishment that if I studied theology for three years, I would probably lose my faith in the process! Suffice to say, by the end of the weekend I had decided against this path. During one of my visits to Norman in New Malden, I asked him what he thought were the most important principles in life. Almost without hesitation, he replied Love and Freedom. I have found this to be very good advice on the path of life.

In the meantime, I visited my old university friend Robert Bogdan, who was teaching at Charterhouse. This seemed to me an intrinsically worthwhile and congenial way of life, which had the advantage of long holidays that would give me an opportunity for study and writing. So I got in touch with Cambridge and secured a place more than a year in advance for the Postgraduate Certificate in Education in the academic year 1977-78. It was now the very hot summer of 1976, with temperatures over 90° and no air conditioning in the offices. While I was a student, in the summer of 1971, I was lucky enough to have a job at Moët & Chandon in Epernay showing visitors around their champagne cellars, and drinking champagne with them either in a salon or in the garden. I learned a lot about champagne in particular, and wine in general. So I decided to write to Patrick Forbes, the managing director in London, on the off chance that there might be an opening for

September. He replied synchronistically that someone had just withdrawn and that they would be delighted if I could come out and work during September and October. This sign was all I needed, so I resigned from the bank the following day.

I spent August in Scotland putting a part of my music collection onto cassette tapes and choosing what amounted to four boxes of books that I had resolved to read over the following year. These included many of the authors mentioned above, including Radhakrishnan, Jung, Spengler, Toynbee's abridged *Study of History* (still over 1,000 pages), Frazer's *Golden Bough* (almost as long) and a large number of books on philosophy, psychology, theology, spirituality, consciousness, and comparative religion. I arrived in Epernay at the end of August, just in time for the vintage beginning on September 1, the earliest since 1893. It was a glorious autumn, and I was also able to read during the day when I was not giving a tour, as well as in the evening.

At the end of October, I drove through eastern France to Heidelberg, where I was initially hosted by Fritz and Gordon, two friends of my old school friend Martin Powell, who had studied at the university there. I had saved up enough money not to have to work until after Christmas, so I spent the time reading in the library and attending lectures on a number of topics. In the evening, the bells from all the churches in the city chimed at once, a magical feeling. I read late into the night in my lodgings in nearby Schwetzingen, which also had a castle, but nothing like as romantic and beautiful as Heidelberg. I had wanted to go there ever since the city was featured in my first German textbook, *Deutsches Leben*. I spent Christmas in Scotland, and on my return managed to find a job delivering furniture to US military bases with my flatmate Harald from Poland. The most amusing incident occurred when, having received an enormous consignment of china eggs, we had to take part of the stock over to Nuremberg and were stopped by the police as they reckoned that we might be overweight. I suggested to Harald that we should jump out, but the police told us to get in again as we were part of the weight. In the event, we were fined for being overweight on the back axle and warned that we were liable to be fined again if stopped by another police patrol before reaching our destination. Luckily, we weren't.

I returned to Epernay at the beginning of April 1977 and worked there until the end of May, moving down to Cognac to work for Hennessy during June. At the end of my stay, my university friend

Alex Field, who was working for Martell, paid a visit and we were allowed to enter the “*Paradise*” area and lower test tubes into three barrels of ancient cognac—we chose 1815 as the oldest, 1864 as the year of my grandfather’s birth, and 1920, the year of Alex’s father’s birth. It has to be said that the 1920 brandy was the best, although it is always fascinating to taste old wines and spirits. I also had this opportunity at Moët, where I tasted 1911, 1914, 1928, and, during the visit of a representative from Andre Simon, 1878. They had hoped to dig out some 1876, but there was none to be found, so they went for 1878, and apparently had to open forty bottles in order to find two that were remotely drinkable.

I spent a very stimulating year in Cambridge, and carried out my teaching practice at Tonbridge. There I took transcendental meditation after listening to a lecture by Peter Russell, and also had my intellectual and artistic horizons broadened by my friend Henry Dyson, who introduced me to the work of Martin Buber and the artist Thetis Blacker. During the Lent term, I had an interview at Fettes College in Edinburgh with my old head, Tony Chenevix-Trench, who appointed me for the autumn of 1978. I lived in School House on the top floor of the building, where the rooms were 127 steps up and only accessible through the boys’ washroom. However, there was a magnificent view over the skyline of Edinburgh, and east down towards north Berwick. It was during this period that I was elected a member of the Speculative Society, founded in 1764 and about which I write in relation to three of the essays in this collection.

During the Easter holidays of 1980, I went to have lunch with Ian and Esther Higgins, and I bought a copy of the *Times Educational Supplement*, something I never did. I leafed through the advertisements for modern languages, and fell upon an appointment at Winchester College for French and German. It was one of those blueprint moments and I knew immediately that I would get the job, despite some intermittent uncertainty during the appointment process. Auspiciously, on my way to the interview with the headmaster, John Thorn, I passed through the cathedral where Bach’s fugue in D major, BWV 533 was being played on the cathedral organ—I thought this a very good omen, which indeed it turned out to be. Years later, when visiting my former colleague David Conner, now Dean of Windsor, I heard this same piece again being played in St George’s Chapel as he was escorting me to the gate—I had not heard it before or since.

By the summer of 1981, I had decided to write two books, the first of which was *Survival—Body, Mind and Death in the Light of Psychic Experience*, which I more or less completed in St Andrews during the eight-week summer holiday of 1982. I typed it directly on a manual typewriter, then retyped it onto a clean copy at two pages a day until I had a manuscript of 240 pages—I made hardly any changes between the first and second versions. It was very exciting when the published copy dropped through my letterbox in June 1984. As you can appreciate, writing a book is hugely easier with our current technology, which also allows a cut-and-paste process as well as the simple correction of mistakes before anything is printed out. In addition, I am dictating this piece, as with all my writing.

Winchester was a hugely stimulating environment, both in terms of pupils and dons. I was enormously aware of the history and pedigree of a school founded in 1382, and regularly walked around the cloister where many distinguished Wykehamists were commemorated. I also used to meditate in the Chantry in the centre of the cloister and would often work peacefully in School, a magnificent building designed by Sir Christopher Wren where hardly any other colleagues were to be found. During my time there, I got to know many of the cleverest scholars in the school and held regular discussion groups by candlelight on Friday evening in my dining room at 6 Kingsgate Street. Three of them stand out: the first was Christopher Gray, who collected almost one language O Level from scratch per term, and whom I was deputed to teach German (he later learned Polish, Romanian, Czech, Slovak, and Lithuanian). I lent him many books, including Jung's *Psychological Types*, which he read at the age of sixteen. He took the top First in Greats in his year at Oxford, and another First in theology before becoming ordained and working in a poor area of Liverpool, where he was tragically murdered by one of his parishioners in 1996, at the age of only thirty-two. Obituaries appeared in all the major broadsheets.

The second was the author Harry Bingham, son of the distinguished judge Lord Bingham of Cornhill, KG, who held the posts of both Lord Chief Justice and Master of the Rolls. Harry arrived in Winchester as a scholar at the same time and I initially taught him German. Then in his third year he was in my Div (general studies class) where boys had to write fortnightly essays on the books we were reading. Harry's essays were uniformly brilliant and incredibly well written. I remember

writing at the bottom on one of these essays that he wrote as well as Aldous Huxley, and that I hoped he would become a writer. He read PPE at Oxford and achieved a Congratulatory First, moving on to become a merchant banker. However, he took a sabbatical to look after his wife in his late twenties, and took the opportunity of writing his first novel, *Money Matters*, receiving, as I understand it, a six-figure advance for this and his next two books—so he became a writer after all. Indeed, he now coaches people on how to write.

The third person was Ben Morison. My friend and colleague Simon Eliot told me that Ben had written a six-page essay at the age of fourteen entitled *Does God Exist?* Could he come round and discuss the essay? I read it in advance and remember Ben turning up in his gown on my doorstep for tea on a rainy afternoon. He had considered the various philosophical proofs of the existence of God, and had concluded that God did not exist. I put the point that God is not just a concept, but that the divine can be directly experienced in mystical states—so I lent him my copy of William James’s famous Gifford Lectures, *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Ben became a regular at my discussion groups until I left Winchester in 1986. I saw him again in Paris in 1988, when he was studying piano with the widow of Olivier Messiaen. We lost touch, until I looked him up in the Old Wykehamist Roll, only to find that his address was Exeter College, Oxford. I immediately rang him up and found that he was a philosophy don and senior tutor, having chosen this path over that of a concert pianist. As it happened, I was planning to come to Oxford only a fortnight later, so he kindly invited me to stay as his guest in college, and it turned out that he was also the wine steward, a further congenial link. Ben now teaches at Princeton, but I believe he is still an atheist ...

In 1985 I discovered via Omraam Mikhael Aivanhov the work of Beinsa Douno (Peter Deunov), as I describe in one of my prefaces below. Even now, and notwithstanding my own modest publications (see bibliography), he is very little known when one considers that he is arguably among the greatest spiritual teachers who have ever lived. He left an extraordinary spiritual and musical legacy, as I explain in *Prophet for Our Times*. I was attracted by the way in which he combined the Greek and Christian heritage of the West, as well as his focus on five key principles—Love, Wisdom, Truth, Justice, and Virtue—rather than on a series of creedal propositions to which one is obliged to assent.

The incorporation of physically based spiritual exercises and the Paneurhythmy sacred dance was also attractive by contrast with the neglect and even denigration of the body within the Western Christian tradition.

It was around this time that I began to think of moving on from Winchester, and had the opportunity of becoming either Director of Wrekin Trust—an adult spiritual education charity founded by one of my mentors and friends Sir George Trevelyan, or Director of the Scientific and Medical Network. I chose the Network and left Winchester, moving to Gloucestershire to live in a house belonging to my friend Serge Beddington-Behrens. Another Winchester scholar, Andrew Clover, helped with the move involving a huge number of books onto shelves with bricks in between. Just out of curiosity, as I was writing this, I looked him up on the internet and found that he had become a famous writer, actor, and comedian ...

I have been working with the Network ever since, and have just completed my 100th issue as editor of what began as a plain newsletter and has become a fully-fledged review called *Paradigm Explorer*. One of the aspects I have strongly developed over the years is the book review section. I write long reviews of between forty and fifty books a year and shorter accounts of a further 150, all of which adds up over the years. More than 5,000 books were entered into the Network database between 1996 and 2014. These cover science and philosophy of science, medicine and health, philosophy and spirituality, psychology and consciousness studies, ecology and futures studies, and a general section for other areas including politics. It has been an immense privilege to be in a position where I am learning all the time across a considerable range of disciplines, distilling many essential insights in the process—which I aim to pass on to readers, but which also form part of my own intellectual and spiritual development, along with our programme of conferences—especially *Mystics and Scientists* and *Beyond the Brain*. As such, I regard myself as a curator who has been creatively exhibiting and communicating a selection of important works for my readers.

The structure and content of this volume is self-explanatory, and I have written short introductions to each piece to put them in context. Many of the people I have written about have been inspiring beacons on my own path and I hope that you can likewise draw some inspiration for your own journey through life.

Many of the essays were written without the extensive academic apparatus of footnotes, and where there were such notes I have removed

them. However, readers will find a comprehensive bibliography at the end of the book, including details of my other publications.

I am dedicating this book with immense love to my daughter Charlotte, who is just embarking on her own career as a writer, podcaster, and curator, which I expect to surpass my own by a considerable margin; also to my son George, whose life will not be a literary one but rather one dedicated to acting and the performing arts, cooking, and, in his spare time, to our common passion for golf.

I'd also like to thank my wife Marianne for kindly typing up so many of the essays—our life together with our dogs and horses is such a blessing!

St Colombe sur l'Hers, France, January 2020.