

The Return of the Perennial Philosophy: The Supreme Vision of Western Esotericism

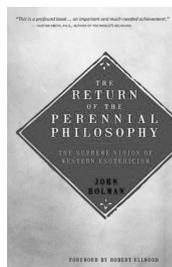
By John Holman, Foreword by Robert Ellwood
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Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

“There is only one mythology, one iconography, and one truth, that of an uncreated wisdom that has been handed down from time immemorial.”

– A.K. Coomaraswamy

In theory nothing could be better than the recovery of the unanimous tradition that lies at the heart of each of the world’s great religions, for widespread skepticism in their regard has brought about the mass disequilibrium that defines the present age. The author states his intention in writing this work: “The principle aim of this book is to paint a picture of the Western esoteric worldview—a picture that might discursively function as the perennial philosophy according to esotericism.” (p. xiii) Although the title of this book is beguiling and even thought-provoking in light of the immense spiritual hunger and the consequent misdirection to which this often leads, it is nonetheless very deceptive, as it could more accurately be called the “The Return of Pseudo-Esoterism” or “The Return of Pseudo-Religion”. We recall an essay presented under the dubious title “The Neo-Perennial Philosophy”¹ that is reminiscent of the general trend of the book at hand. For those unclear as to why we would make efforts to take up this matter can see for themselves where such unbridled theorizing



¹ Ken Wilber, “The Neo-Perennial Philosophy”, *The American Theosophist*, Vol. 71, 1983, pp. 349-355.

has led to the total subversion of the *philosophia perennis*, cunningly titled “Integral Post-Metaphysics”.²

Truth is one and universal and it can be likened to a prism from which emanate all the colors of the rainbow, all of which are refractions of the uncolored light illuminating the primordial unity that is ever-present beyond the manifold differences. However, this does not imply that every doctrine is *de facto* authentic because it is alleged to be “spiritual”. According to the perennialist orientation, tradition corresponds to the continuity of transmission (*silsilah*) which originates in what is supra-human, and can only exist within a revealed tradition including the Shamanic traditions of the First Peoples. An integral tradition can always trace its beginnings to what is non-human (i.e. supra-human) and non-temporal. The perennial philosophy also acknowledges that without exoterism there is no esoterism, these being two complementary facets of one and the same tradition. Contrary to popular notions, mysticism and esoterism are not a revolt from orthodoxy, for the numerous men and women gifted with this divine insight (*gnosis*) never divorced themselves from their particular traditions, rather they practised the formal traditions both outwardly and inwardly, as representatives of them *par excellence*. As an example, we can cite three axial sages who were perceived as orthodox representatives of their respective traditions and also mystics or *jñānins*: Shankara (788-820), Ibn ‘Arabī (1165-1240) and Meister Eckhart (1260-1328).³

This book under review attempts to fashion a *synthesis* of the underlying religion but in fact ends in *syncretism*⁴—an integrative bypass—which is neither true to the necessary dissimilarities between the traditions nor does it do justice to the uncolored truth of the “transcendent unity of religions”. The greater part of this book is about everything that the perennial philosophy is not—on the contrary, it pertains wholly to the “New Age”—as only one chapter, consisting of a scant twelve pages *in toto*, is dedicated to the traditionalist or perennialist school of thought. While there are various quotes by the perennialist authors, tactically situated to give the appearance that there is unanimity between all of these

² Ken Wilber, “Integral Post-Metaphysics” in *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2007), pp. 231-274.

³ Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence: According to Shankara, Ibn Arabi, and Meister Eckhart* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006)

⁴ René Guénon, “Synthesis & Syncretism” in *Perspectives on Initiation*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 37-42. See also the debate on “syncretism” in *Sacred Web, Volume 9* (Sacred Web Publishing, Vancouver, July 2002), pp. 147-156.

distinct doctrines, yet this is quite the contrary and unequivocally false. Although the author provides the newcomer with the general intellectual antecedents of the *philosophia perennis*, clarifying that Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) did not coin the term, but was the compiler of the popular anthology titled *The Perennial Philosophy* (1944) and that he borrowed the term from Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) who in turn borrowed it from Agostino Steuco (1947-1548), all-too-little space is allocated to the traditionalist or perennialist authors such as René Guénon (1886-1951), Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) and Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) to name the three major revivifiers of the timeless wisdom of the *sophia perennis* in its full transparency.

The author distinguishes premodern expressions of the Western esoteric traditions and those of the modern and postmodern periods in order to authenticate that behind all of the different expressions is one truth articulated in the *philosophia perennis* which cleverly leaves modern “Theosophy” as the reconciliatory element behind these diverse temporal developments. The author also attempts to establish the idea that there are different depictions of the perennial philosophy, which is also questionable as this is to say that there are many perennial philosophies just as if there are multiple varieties of Truth. Because there are numerous spiritual traditions that reflect the Truth does not mean there are multiple varieties of Truth but simply a plurality of Its expression. A useful metaphor for this is the adage, “different paths lead to the same summit”. Due to the excessive mixing of traditional spiritual sources with New Age errors this book dilutes, if not extinguishes, an integral presentation of the *philosophia perennis*. Although we are not interested in *ad hominem* attacks, we are very concerned in clarifying the subject matter of the perennial philosophy and, given that no single individual or group can monopolize this universal metaphysic, we need to reiterate that it is the orthodoxy of Truth—and “putting things in their right place”—that we are first and foremost concerned with—“Ye shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32) or “Lead me from the unreal to the Real; Lead me from darkness to Light; Lead me from death to Immortality.” (Brihadāranyaka Upanishad, I, 3, 27)

This book is divided into three parts: *Part One: The Perennial Philosophy*, which contains brief introductions to the Western esoteric traditions of Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, Christian Theosophy, Kabbalah and Alchemy including the traditional or perennialist school and modern

“Theosophy”. All this is contained in a mere forty-two pages, which does not permit it to be much more than a rudimentary outline. *Part Two: The Spiritual Path* contains the greater part of the book, covering forty-six pages whose contents are described by the author in the following words: “In this part we will consider the spiritual or initiatory path as expressed chiefly in the modern theosophical language (that is, in the language of Blavatsky, Purucker, Bailey, etc.—and we will welcome Rudolf Steiner in this part too).” (p. 46) *Part Three: Changing Worldviews*, consisting of thirty-nine pages, discusses postmodernism and the “new” paradigm beyond the Newtonian-Cartesian worldview and also focuses on three central figures of the “fourth” force in modern psychology or transpersonal psychology: C.G. Jung,⁵ Roberto Assagioli and Ken Wilber.⁶ How the author makes a logical transition from the Western esoteric traditions to modern psychology or what he terms “spiritual psychology” is uncertain

⁵ “Jung, unlike Freud, is often considered to be friendly to religion! This is a classic example of a wolf in sheep’s clothing!” [William Stoddart, *Remembering in a World of Forgetting: Thoughts on Tradition and Postmodernism*, ed. Mateus Soares de Azevedo and Alberto Vasconcellos Queiroz (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), p. 47]; For more sources documenting the anti-spiritual trend underscoring C.G. Jung’s analytic psychology or depth psychology see, Titus Burckhardt, *Mirror of the Intellect: Essays on Traditional Science & Sacred Art*, trans. William Stoddart (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987), pp. 66-67; Philip Sherrard, “Christianity and the Religious Thought of C.G. Jung” in *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), pp. 134-157; Wolfgang Smith, “The Deification of the Unconscious” in *Cosmos & Transcendence: Breaking Through the Barrier of Scientific Belief* (Peru, IL: Sherwood Sugden & Company, 1990), pp. 110-133; René Guénon, “Tradition and the ‘Unconscious’” in *Symbols of Sacred Science*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), pp. 38-42; *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier and Lucian W. Stone, Jr. (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2001), p. 50; Hans Jacobs, *Western Psychotherapy and Hindu-Sādhana: A Contribution to Comparative Studies in Psychology and Metaphysics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961); Richard Noll, *The Aryan Christ: The Secret Life of Carl Jung* (New York: Random House, 1997); Richard Noll, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Marco Pallis, “Considerations on the Tantric Alchemy” and “Archetypes, as Seen Through Buddhist Eyes” in *A Buddhist Spectrum: Contributions to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2003), pp. 89-102, 179-202; F.X. Charet, *Spiritualism and the Foundations of C.G. Jung’s Psychology* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993)

⁶ We would like to remind readers that although Wilber has since distanced himself from the perennial philosophy, he began his work with the following quote taken from Frithjof Schuon, “There is no science of the soul without a metaphysical basis to it and without spiritual remedies at its disposal.” Wilber then continues, “One might say that the entire aim of this volume is simply to support and document this statement of Frithjof Schuon, a statement that the siddhas, sages and masters of everywhere and everywhen have eloquently embodied.” [Ken Wilber, *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1977), p. 11]

due to the significant obstacles in making a clear correlation between the integral spiritual psychology of the perennial philosophy with the theories of Jung or Wilber. Assagioli, while highly influenced by both Jung⁷ and modern Theosophy, interestingly appeared to have more discernment⁸ as to not fall into the error of the psychologism of Jung⁹ or the syncretism of Wilber¹⁰ and yet this is not to imply that there are no concerns regard-

⁷ “Of all modern psychotherapists, Jung is the closest in theory and practice to psychosynthesis.” [Sam Keen, “The Synthetic Vision: A Conversation with Roberto Assagioli” in *Voices and Visions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 204]; See also Roberto Assagioli, *Jung and Psychosynthesis* (New York: Psychosynthesis Research Foundation, 1976)

⁸ We recall the informative words of Assagioli acknowledging “the decisive boundary” that distinguishes the psychic domain from that of the Spirit: “Psychosynthesis does not aim nor attempt to give a metaphysical nor a theological explanation of the great Mystery—it leads to the door, but stops there.” [Roberto Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 6-7]

⁹ Jung clearly undermines the consummate role of the Intellect, the transcendent organ in man that can perceive Reality directly, which consequently reduces the tripartite structure of the human microcosm to the psyche: “One cannot grasp anything metaphysically, but it can be done psychologically. Therefore I strip things of their metaphysical wrapping in order to make them objects of psychology.” [C.G. Jung “Commentary” in *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, trans. Richard Wilhelm (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), p. 129]; “All comprehension and all that is comprehended is in itself psychic, and to that extent we are hopelessly cooped up in an exclusively psychic world.” [C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 352]

¹⁰ The synchronistic admixture lacking true synthesis caters directly to the “New Age” and this is evident throughout Wilber’s work: “A truly integral psychology would embrace the enduring insights of premodern, modern, and postmodern sources.” [Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2000), p. 5]; “An Integral Framework [according to Wilber] at least attempts to begin to give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, to Einstein what is Einstein’s, to Picasso what is Picasso’s, to Kant what is Kant’s, and to Christ what is Christ’s.” [Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2007), p. 194]; “Integral: the word means to integrate, to bring together, to join, to link, to embrace. Not in the sense of uniformity, and not in the sense of ironing out all the wonderful differences, colors, zigs and sags of a rainbow-hued humanity, but in the sense of unity-in-diversity, shared commonalities along with our wonderful differences: replacing rancor with mutual recognition, hostility with respect, inviting everybody into the tent of mutual understanding...” [Ken Wilber, *Boomeritis: A Novel That Will Set You Free* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2002), p. 15]; “If we were now to point to the most obvious flaw in Wilber’s proposed integration of science and religion, we would have to say that it lies in the contradiction inherent in his method: the mixing of traditional and secular knowledge.... We can only wonder what might be the advantage of having obtained by this integration a ‘spiritual science’ and a ‘spiritual religion’ when in fact both of them have always been united by Tradition [the perennial philosophy] from the very beginning, a union which has caused no internal theoretical problem.... The problem that Wilber seeks to resolve is the very one he creates as a result of misunderstanding the traditional material he employs in his misguided attempt to marry modern science to traditional religion, two mismatched elements which belong to totally different spheres and are therefore wholly incompatible, absent a proper metaphysical matrix.” [José Segura, “On Ken Wilber’s Integration of Science and Religion”, *Sacred Web* 5, pp. 82-83]

ing Assagioli. With this said, there are notable similarities between Jung and Wilber, even though Wilber clearly disagrees with Jung's views on the status of the archetypes. Such an outlook, claims Wilber, leads to a regressive treatment of the Spirit that essentially confuses the ego with that of the Self—the prepersonal, the personal and the transpersonal components—that Wilber terms the “pre/trans fallacy”.¹¹ However it cannot be overlooked that both Jung and Wilber have purported to be friends of the world's spiritual traditions while simultaneously attempting to reinterpret them via their own self-styled psychologies. In this light, Wilber thus appears to be a continuator of Jung—situated on his shoulders while benefiting from the advantage of hindsight—as he wages his assault on the perennial philosophy in an up-to-date fashion that appeals to the naïveté of the present spiritual decline, incorporating not only the postmodern, but the premodern and modern eras as well. As there is no room for further digressions in this review, it must suffice to illustrate this point alone so that readers may carry out further discernment for themselves. The author makes the following statement which does not do justice to the point of view of the *philosophia perennis* regarding postmodernism: “Traditionalists see in postmodernism, with its rejection of fixed principles and core values, the height of anti-Traditionalism.” (p. 101) It is also significant that there are twenty-two pages dedicated to notes regarding the body of the text, which could have been used to give more breadth and depth to the general content of the book itself.

In the second part of the book, *The Spiritual Path* is outlined in the following manner: “A secondary aim is the illumination of modern theosophical teachings particularly concerning initiatology—a subject which, to date, has been little understood or at least explored in depth.” (p. xiii) With this said we can strongly recommend readers to read the

¹¹ Ken Wilber, *The Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1998), pp. 264-267. Wilber underscores the apex of his reticence regarding Jung: “the Jungian light is one we must use with much caution”. (p. 267) See also Ken Wilber, “Psychotherapy and Spirituality” in *Grace and Grit: Spirituality and Healing in the Life and Death of Treya Killam Wilber* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1993), pp. 179-182; Ken Wilber, “Jung and the Archetypes” in *A Brief History of Everything* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1996), pp. 212-218; On a closing note we must illustrate how far-reaching the ideas of Jung are upon what has been termed the “fourth force” in modern psychology: “Jung had made some profound errors, and these errors were now the single greatest obstacle within the field of transpersonal psychology, made all the worse by the fact that they were so widespread and so apparently unchallenged.” [Ken Wilber, “Psychotherapy and Spirituality” in *Grace and Grit: Spirituality and Healing in the Life and Death of Treya Killam Wilber* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1993), p. 179]

detailed critique of Theosophy provided by Guénon in his work *Le Théosophisme: Histoire d'une Pseudo-Religion* (1921).¹² One may be surprised to learn how pervasive and influential modern Theosophy has been—and still is—as many of its ideas have paved inroads into the so-called spiritual marketplace of the New Age.¹³ William Quinn in his book *The Only Tradition* (1997) erroneously states that, because Guénon dismissed modern Theosophy entirely, this was his “blind spot”; Quinn also alleges, based on a fundamental misreading of Tradition, that there is similarity between the principles of traditional metaphysics and modern theosophism.¹⁴

His [Guénon's] repugnance toward modern Theosophy is a blind spot in Guénon's worldview...the promulgators of modern Theosophy were neither intentionally nor wholly corrupt as he [Guénon] seems to think, and there are innumerable more points of agreement between Tradition and modern Theosophy...than he [Guénon] was ever willing to admit.¹⁵

What are these innumerable “points of agreement” between Blavatsky and Guénon—modern Theosophy and the *philosophia perennis*—that the above passage refers to? The following responds to this misinformation:

It is true that Blavatsky on the one hand, and Guénon and Schuon on the other, spoke of a Primordial Tradition (in Hindu terms the *sanatana dharma*), but this, in Blavatsky's rendition, is something that is destined to replace the revealed religions in the near future, while Guénon and Schuon maintained that it is manifest in the revealed religions, and is *only spiritually effective within the bounds of one of them*. This is the great divide between Blavatsky and Guénon [and Schuon]... You can legitimately disagree with Guénon's [or Schuon's or even the traditionalist school's] position, but no well-informed person can confuse his teaching with Blavatsky's, except in accidentals.¹⁶

The only similarities between the metaphysics of the perennial philosophy and Theosophy, are superficial and there are no ultimate

¹² René Guénon, *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion*, trans. Alvin Moore, Jr., Cecil Bethell, Hubert and Rohini Schiff (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001)

¹³ Jocelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994)

¹⁴ For those interested in understanding how theosophy (or rather theosophism) and New Age spirituality axiomatically differ from the perennial philosophy should see Charles Upton, “Vigilance at the Eleventh Hour: A Refutation of *The Only Tradition*”, in *The System of Antichrist: Truth and Falsehood in Postmodernism and the New Age* (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 387-423.

¹⁵ William W. Quinn, Jr. *The Only Tradition* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997), p. 113.

¹⁶ Charles Upton, *Knowings: In the Arts of Metaphysics, Cosmology, and the Spiritual Path* (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2008), pp. 33-34.

parallels, in terms of fundamental metaphysics, between such authors as Blavatsky, Leadbeater, Purucker, Bailey, Manly P. Hall or Rudolf Steiner and the traditionalists.¹⁷

We can easily perceive the rationale as to why the author has chosen to describe the *philosophia perennis* in such a syncretistic manner and why he has chosen to do away with a genuine unifying center: “We do not assert a perennialist view, but we do affirm the perennial injunction ‘man, know thyself.’” (p. xxi) The author continues via his extensive footnote underscoring where he clearly differs from the traditionalist authors:

[A] first necessary step towards establishing the study of esotericism as a serious academic pursuit would be to demarcate it clearly from the perennialist perspective’ ([Wouter J. Hanegraaff] ‘On the Construction of “Esoteric Traditions” in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, 27). This is where that perennialist perspective is the one that rejects esotericism *outside* of the major (revealed) religions, and therefore sees the teachings of ‘occult schools’ as pseudo-esotericism (or *-esotericism*). The author is strongly sympathetic to the perennialist/Traditionalist view, as will be evident from the tenor of this book; however, there is a strong doctrinaire tendency in Traditionalism—a tendency to substitute philosophical principles for *that which they merely point towards and which are discovered through gnostic practice*. ‘A finger is required to point at the moon, but when the moon is recognized, the finger is no longer required’, says a Zen proverb. The ‘finger’ that is the principle of the ‘transcendent unity of religions’ merely points towards the esoteric being found in the religious—which is an *orientation* manifested in literature and elsewhere. It is *not* the case that the esoteric is to be found only in the major religions—it is on this erroneous basis that Whitall N. Perry, for instance, dismisses H.P. Blavatsky and G.I. Gurdjieff (pp. 35-36)

The following quotation by the distinguished scholar of religion Mircea Eliade, goes straight to the kernel of the matter, and underscores the critical role of the traditionalist or perennialist teachings—of deciphering Truth from error and the Real from the unreal—in exposing the errors of occultism within Theosophy:

The most erudite and devastating critique of all these so-called occult groups [i.e. the Theosophical Society and the Anthroposophical Society] was presented, not by a rationalist “outside” observer, but by an author from the inner circle, duly initiated into some of the secret orders and well acquainted with their occult doctrines; furthermore, that

¹⁷ Interested readers are referred to the exchange between Alvin Moore, and William Quinn, published in *Sacred Web, Volumes 3, 4, and 5* (Sacred Web Publishing, Vancouver): “Slouching Towards Bethlehem: Notes on the First Days after the Kali Yuga” by Quinn (*Sacred Web, Volume 3*, Summer 1999); “Who or What is Slouching Toward Bethlehem” by Moore (*Sacred Web, Volume 4*, Winter 1999); “The Polemics of Parousia: Further Notes on the First Days after the End of the Kali Yuga” by Quinn, and Letter in Response by Moore (*Sacred Web, Volume 5*, Summer 2000).

critique was directed, not from a skeptical or positivistic perspective, but from what he called “traditional esotericism.” This learned and intransigent critic was René Guénon.¹⁸

Guénon, a chief exponent of traditional esotericism in the twentieth century, cautions serious seekers of today about the dangers of counterfeit religion in the following words:

[T]he ‘pseudo-traditional’ counterfeits, to which belong all the denaturings of the idea of tradition...take their most dangerous form in ‘pseudo-initiation’, first because in it they are translated into effective action instead of remaining in the form of more or less vague conceptions, and secondly because they make their attack on tradition from the inside, on what is its very spirit, namely, the esoteric and initiatic domain.¹⁹

A crucial matter that also needs to be seriously considered is that no amount of reading or studying of the world’s religions or their esoteric counterparts will bring about realization. In essence, according to the *philosophia perennis*, what is sought is not abstract theories or concepts about truth, but “theoria” as the “envisioning of Truth as Presence” by the “realization of the Real”.

A description of China is not China. A map of China distilled from a thousand descriptions of China, is still not China. To know China one has to go there, and to know the perennial philosophy as Divine Reality, one has to ‘go there’ too. In the writings of many contemporary thinkers, the perennial philosophy is essentially the premodern worldview—a philosophical consensus of sorts, featuring a multileveled universe from matter, through living systems, mind and soul, to spirit/God. This gives us a perennial philosophy ‘map’ of sorts but, reminds esotericism, we are to remember that the map is not the terrain.²⁰

That discerning minds have written welcoming endorsements for this book is a decisive indication of the present intellectual erosion and how susceptible individuals are to deviating from and diluting the core principles of the perennial philosophy—and of the fact that this compromising trend is not accidental but part and parcel of the greater downward trajectory of the *Kali-Yuga*. Such dilutions cannot avoid ending in error as their compatibility with Truth is itself illusory. The book’s highly dubious “reinterpretation” does not differentiate amid the various representations

¹⁸ Mircea Eliade, “The Occult and the Modern World”, *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religions* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 51.

¹⁹ René Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity & the Signs of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), p. 243.

²⁰ John Holman, *The Return of the Perennial Philosophy: The Supreme Vision of Western Esotericism* (London: Watkins Publishing, 2008), p. 127.

of the *philosophia perennis*—the vital difference between authentic and inauthentic esoterism—and so regrettably places this book in the New Age *cul-de-sac*. Although the book provides some useful information regarding influential currents that have shaped modern Western spirituality, it is likely to leave beginners confused and those well versed yearning for something more authentic. If one were looking for a comprehensive presentation of the perennial philosophy, one would do far better to go straight to the traditionalist canon itself (for example, the writings of René Guénon, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy and Frithjof Schuon) or directly to the faith tradition in question and its spiritual authorities. We cannot therefore recommend this book without caution, as it adds to the ongoing deregulation of the present-day spiritual economy, doing more harm than good by muddling the *philosophia perennis* than resurrecting its timeless wisdom for contemporary seekers.