

David Hay
**Something There -
*The Biology of the Human Spirit***

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It is widely understood that, whilst commitment to any faith system is relatively small, the phenomenon of spirituality is widespread. William James pioneered the study of such phenomena in the Gifford Lectures of 1901-2, and in his subsequent book "The Varieties of Religious Experience".

Professor David Hay here picks up from further research by Sir Alister Hardy who, in 1969 founded the Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College, Oxford. An empirical scientist, Hay looks to demonstrate, with data collated from research with a large number of people of no church allegiance, that there can be a biology of the human spirit.

He relates the stories and elucidates opinions to discover individual or shared factors which may be categorised for statistics. He then discusses conflict among past and present psychologists and others as different lines of research have been considered, finally noting factors, beginning with the Enlightenment, which have influenced society's ideas on matters of religion.

Hay points up particularly the individualising of religion, born of embarrassment and fear, and also the ideas behind the growth of the Market Economy from the legitimising of selfishness. He quotes the economic historian Albert Hirschman on what he (Hay) calls 'the remarkable metamorphosis of the medieval sin of avarice into a necessary economic virtue'; and further, on the semantic drift of the term 'interests'. During the seventeenth century this came to be regarded as a social virtue and the necessary basis for a stable market economy.

Religion then appeared as a private matter for those concerned with a relationship with God; and with that, 'relational consciousness' towards others came to be repudiated or forgotten, along with its concomitant virtues. Further, the sense of personal relationship with God gave way to intellectual conviction and philosophical argument.

But Hay avers that 'relational consciousness' is a fundamental aspect of our biological make-up; and the last part of the book is given over to a diagnosis of how metaphor shapes experience and how change and reversal of these movements might come about.

This fascinating and readable book supports the view that spirituality is part of our human make-up and has survival value in the evolutionary process. As his clients told Hay, there is Something There.

Elizabeth CSF

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