

COMMENTARY

I enjoyed Willis's review¹ of Iain McGilchrist's fascinating book; he agrees with its thesis, which means that he is less hesitant than I am about the degree to which contemporary neurology explains the history of Western civilisation, and since this is the fulcrum point for the case McGilchrist set out to make, it is unsurprising that it should prompt debate in this way. It is true that McGilchrist speaks of promoting the idea that there should be balance between right and left hemispherical (what shall we call them?) *Weltanschauung*, but the tenour of his book is that the right offers more and better than the left, and that the left has been too much in control, and that we need more of the more intuitive, religious, mystical, emotional, cloudy, perfumed right hemisphere. I, casting a shuddering look over history, think we do not.

Anthony C Grayling

REFERENCE

1. Willis J. A tale of two hemispheres. *Br J Gen Pract* 2010; **60**: 226–227. DOI: 10.3399/bjgp10X483779.

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp10X483788

complains that this picture is not matched in the book by a description of what a right hemisphere world would look like — with its equally troubling superstition, arbitrary authority, religiosity, and so on. But the point Grayling misses is that everything McGilchrist says is about balance, and about the relationship between the worlds created by the two hemispheres. Indeed, it is precisely Grayling's assumption that this is a matter of one-or-the-other, either/or, which marks him so clearly as fixed, like so much of the official mindset today, in the left hemisphere trap. Here is McGilchrist's final paragraph:

'The divided nature of our reality has been a consistent observation since humanity has been sufficiently self-conscious to reflect on it. [...] He names a few key examples [...] What all these point to is the fundamentally divided nature of mental experience. When one puts that together with the fact that the brain is divided into two relatively independent chunks which just happen to mirror the very dichotomies that are being pointed to — alienation versus engagement, abstraction versus incarnation, the categorical versus the unique, the

general versus the particular, the part versus the whole, and so on — it seems like a metaphor that might have some literal truth. But if it turns out to be 'just' a metaphor, I will be content. I have a high regard for metaphor. It is how we come to understand the world.'

I think it is more than a metaphor. Time and again the insights it yields coincide with instincts that many of us share, but have difficulty expressing in words — the required currency of contemporary thought: above all the need to balance, in general practice perhaps more than in any other field, the rigidity of logic with the warmth of humanity. I know too well there will be many sceptics. I challenge them to read this book before dismissing what their left brain thinks it says.

James Willis

REFERENCES

1. Midgley M. The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World by Iain McGilchrist. *Guardian* 2010; **2 Jan**: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/jan/02/1> (accessed 1 Feb 2010).
2. Grayling AC. In two minds. *Literary Review*. http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/grayling_12_09.html (accessed 1 Feb 2010).

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Melt-down: how pass e, darling!

Sweden vies with the US in raunchy thriller writing at present. Lately lamented Stieg Larsson's first film in his Millenium Trilogy now ready for cinema — *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*. Clever, numerate, pacey, techy, Swedish. Filmed version ideally will be restrained and European. Trailer doesn't inspire confidence ...

<http://www.thegirl.co.uk/>

From the UK, *The Rapture*, by Liz Jensen. Another perceptive study of adolescent psychosis. Credible and very readable. *Rapture* includes the wittiest contemporary orchidectomy in the literature, and fashionable, plausibly researched eco-catastrophe:

<http://www.lizjensen.com/default.aspx?id=1>

Not so good the film realisation of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (<http://www.theroad-movie.com/>) which looked good in a grey sort of way, boasted two fine performances, but was unforgivably SLOW — the original novel is read in a oner because it has to be.

Two great films however, to be watched by everyone — *A Prophet*, directed by Jacques Audiard, prison drama, consummate French cinema, best in class: http://www.metacafe.com/watch/3860639/a_prophet_trailer_2010/

And *Sex and Drugs and Rock and Roll*, surely a roll call for academic GPs everywhere. Ian Dury not a model parent and no mention of QOF:

<http://www.imdb.com/video/imdb/vi1506083865/>

And a reminder that Americans write great thrillers, especially interns at Columbia — *Beat the Reaper*, by Josh Bazell:

http://www.amazon.com/Beat-Reaper-Novel-Josh-Bazell/dp/0316032212/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1266317489&sr=8-1

Alec Logan

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