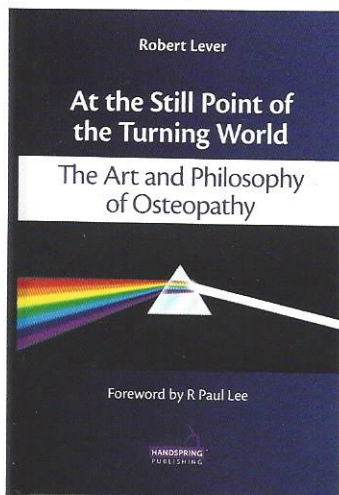


At the Still Point of the Turning World

The Art and Philosophy of Osteopathy By Robert Lever

Hardcover: 204 pages. £29.95

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Imagine somehow you have made the money and time to go on one of those upmarket-guided trips to some favoured land, with a highly respected expert. As you board your ship wondering who your fellow passengers will be, you sneak a quick look at the passenger list and are excited to see the long list of fellow seekers after truth, who will accompany and befriend you on your journey.

Armstrong, Becker, Dummer, Eckhart, Feynman, Ho, Jealous, Kant, Littlejohn, Oschman,

Pischinger, Still, Sutherland, Wernham, Zukav...the juicy list goes on. You are starting to get excited; the company is going to be stimulating!

And so, indeed, it turns out, in this brave and brilliant book as it draws on all of these thinkers and more. Like a profound, and renewing sabbatical, we are carried away from the distracting land of pressing, but dull, professional issues, allowing us the time and space to swim in the limpid pools of osteopathic art and philosophy with a master. Like all skillful guides Robert Lever takes you into the numinous, almost lost, caves of clinical subjectivity and renews our sense of wonder and awe at the world that we inhabit, but, with the daily pressures, may have half forgotten.

I suspect this is a book that will be loved by the many who are drawn to read it, and ignored or even possibly, rubbished by those philosophically disinclined to read a book that, in a way, is as far from a how-to-book, so beloved of the neophyte clinician struggling with her/his own clinical limitations, as one can get.

And yet, and yet, for those just starting on the taxing life journey of the clinician, or those with a lifetime in it, this book has much to give, and will repay slow reading and savouring. If there were such a thing as an osteopathic book club it would guarantee a lively night.

The book is dedicated both to Robert's father Derrick and to Tom Dummer. As a reviewer I should declare an interest, in that although a contemporary of Robert's, as a late entry to the profession, I was both able to enjoy his first explorations, of his now, much expanded and enriched ideas in his early lectures in the '70s at The European School of Osteopathy, and shortly afterwards, to share Tom Dummer as a mentor when, as young practitioners, we both worked for him in central London. As the decades have rolled past, it is rewarding to see the ideas developed, refined, and contextualized both philosophically and through the new science that is starting to give objective

credence to the vital subjective experiences of the thinking clinician.

Osteopathy is, as always, at a crossroads. Great effort is being exerted to 'place us' in the swirling mass of the ever changing quicksands of the publicly funded health care hierarchy. Issues of public recognition, regulation and acceptance, understandably vital, preoccupy those concerned with the regulation of the profession, their busy days caught by the pressing and pertinent. But, for a profession based on a philosophy, often obscured rather than elucidated, by the half-truths and superficial generalisations of our traditions of gurus and 'history as propaganda', it is incumbent upon us to regularly pull back from the urgent and address the timeless and important. This is such a book.

Divided into three parts, we start in part one, with *Principles*. Here we journey through five chapters focusing on the nature of osteopathy, the vital quality of motion, holism and the osteopathic 'lens', exploring our models and schools of thought and some of the growing science that is starting to support them, as well as touching on our historical debt through Still to the likes of Swedenborg and others.

I would have liked the exploration of the models and 'schools' that have fed into osteopathic thinking, to have been expanded sufficiently to include both a bit more on the contributions of 'visceral' osteopathy and, even the revolutionary diagnostic input of professional applied kinesiology which has, to some extent, helped both objectify the subjective and melt, the now rather outdated dichotomy, between 'structural' and 'cranial' schools of thought. But, that said, it is Lever's book and not mine and he rightly stays in the fields he knows best, the twin traditions of specific adjusting technique, (S.A.T.) and cranial osteopathy. Also by his timely labours he has justly bagged the use of Eliot's famous Burt Norton, 'Still Point' quote, surely the title most likely chosen by many osteopaths for all those, as yet, unwritten books!

I suspect we are just entering a golden age starting to cast much greater light on our own, much obscured roots and history, of which the likes of O'Brien¹, Lewis² and Collins³, are, hopefully, only the heroic vanguard. This will, in the future, make the task of books like this easier to align with our heterogeneous and confusing past.

However, this is not a history, but a discourse on the vital and irreducible importance of that elephant in the room, the Subjective.

In part two, *The Art of It*, we explore the dance we clinicians do. Here, with the thoughtful brilliance of a well honed, introverted mind, calling on a lifetime of refined and careful teaching and practice, we venture into the osteopathic undergrowth adeptly, elegantly side-stepping the 'dogmatic traps' laid for us by the crude, flat-landers of analytical reductionism, whose dogma is "often expressing insecurity, self doubt and self-

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