
According to the editors, the *Handbook of New Age* is both a “testament to the discipline of New Age scholarship” and an example of the breadth of the discipline. Divided into five main sections, each comprising four or five articles, the twenty-two chapters of the book do indeed represent a broad range of methodologies and analytical foci.

The introductory section is one of the more interesting parts of the book. George D. Chryssides’ article opens the volume by reviewing the important discussion about defining the term *New Age*. While the author acknowledges the critique of the term by scholars such as Steven Sutcliffe, he nevertheless suggests that the term should be retained. Chryssides puts forth the argument that the expression *New Age* can be compared to the term *Hinduism*, in that both are somewhat problematic etic constructs. Since the latter term has “become so embedded in western thinking that it would be difficult to change it,” the former also has a place in the vocabulary of our discipline. The term *New Age*, however, is hardly as embedded in western thinking as the term *Hinduism*, nor is the fact that a term is familiar in itself a particularly good reason to continue using it. There is, as Chryssides notes, an advantage in having a term that draws together a set of religious worldviews with family resemblances, but the concomitant disadvantage may be that the common label makes ultimately different worldviews seem too uniform.

The three following chapters in the introductory section all treat the historical roots and developments of New Age in different ways. Wouter J. Hanegraaff’s focus is on the esoteric roots of New Age in the Enlightenment and in Romanticism, Steven Sutcliffe discusses the foundation of New Age spirituality in trends that emerged between the two World Wars, and J. Gordon Melton’s focus is on the transformation of the phenomenon from a millennial movement to a ‘post-New Age New Age.’

The second section deals with social-scientific research on the New Age. Liselotte Frisk’s highly interesting chapter on quantitative methods in the study of New Age rightly underscores the fact that qualitative studies can only benefit by being complemented by more statistical approaches. As most research on New Age is of a sociological nature, I would really like to be able to recommend Miguel Farias’ and Pehr Granqvist’s psychological study of the New Age adherents. Unfortunately, the article suffers from some rather serious weaknesses. The authors propose that New Age adherents are biologically characterized by “left temporal dysfunction; overactivation of the right hemisphere,” have personalities typified by “schizotypy,” and cognitive styles marked by “abstract self understanding.” In short, the article seems to suggest that New Age adherents are psychiatrically and psychologically severely challenged, and that New Age spirituality therefore has little in the way of redeeming qualities. The authors themselves
admit that some fault might be found in the analytical tools, and it is not hard to concur with this self-critique. In particular their notion of what constitutes a New Age adherent is quite vague. Basically, the authors have searched for research subjects in ‘places that New Age adherents frequent,’ and have let these individuals represent the field of New Age as a whole. Questions of representativity, or issues that have to do with the extent to which the research subjects identified with any particular doctrinal or philosophical components of ‘New Age’ beliefs are simply not discussed.

Section three contains articles that explore particular cultural and societal ramifications of New Age thought. Several of the authors in the volume point out that New Age should no longer be regarded marginal or ‘alternative,’ and that this is so is very clearly shown in Martin Ramstedt’s article on the influence of New Age ideals in the corporate world. On a different note, James R. Lewis’ article explores the somewhat problematic relation between science and New Age. While science-like discourse is used in order to attain legitimacy for New Age thought, the view on traditional science is often negative.

Adrian Ivakhiv’s article on New Age tourism in Sedona, USA, would have fit well in the section on global perspectives on New Age together with Marion I. Bowman’s, Mikael Rothstein’s, María Julia Carrozzi’s, and Inken Prohl’s contributions. All of these articles deal with the local-global dimensions of the phenomena under scrutiny. Although the section is somewhat unfortunately labeled “Global Aspects of New Age”—implying that the global is that which is beyond the western world—the focus of the chapters points a way for future research. More studies need to be conducted on the relation between the local and the global in the context of New Age (and of other religious traditions as well), and cross-cultural studies are also very welcome. In addition to the aforementioned articles, local contexts are treated in Anna E. Kubiak’s (Poland) and Maria Tighe’s and Jenny Butler’s articles (Britain and Ireland).

The last section of the handbook contains articles that treat the relations between New Age and other, often competing worldviews. Modern skeptics (Olav Hammer), mainstream appropriations of astrology (Michael York), New Age concepts of health (Maria Tighe and Jenny Butler), neo-paganism (Melissa Harrington), and the relationship between Christianity and New Age (Daren Kemp) are discussed. All of these articles represent significant contributions to the study of New Age. Among the most valuable contributions in this section are Kemp’s discussion of “Christaquarians,” and Harrington’s separation of neo-pagan traditions and New Age. In his treatment of the history of skepticism, and the focus of contemporary skepticism on New Age, Olav Hammer displays a sociological awareness that many scholars of contemporary religion would do well to learn from.

Overall, the Handbook of New Age is a very interesting and well-written piece of scholarly work. The minor errors that can be found, such as the occasional missing books in the reference lists, do not diminish the quality of this work. Although the