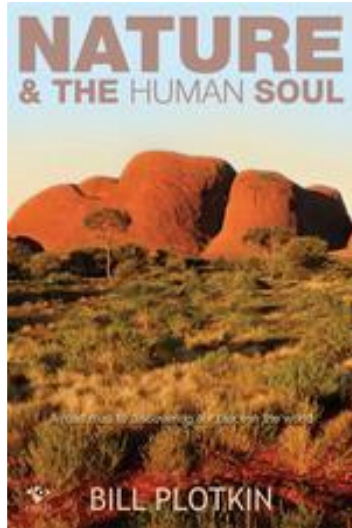


BOOK REVIEW

Plotkin, Bill. *Nature and the Human Soul: A Road Map to Discovering Our Place in the World.* Sydney: Finch Publishing, 2008.



This book sat on my desk for weeks; I was really looking forward to reading it. The title and the cover illustration of Kata Juta - in rich outback Australian red - had led me to expect, at best, a work by an Australian writer set in Australia or, at the very least, some connection to the Australian landscape. Alas, I was sorely disappointed, for not only does the book have no Australian content, but its author assumes a northern hemisphere frame of reference, describing his Soulcentric Developmental Wheel as "Beginning in the east and proceeding clockwise (which is sunwise)".

However, once I decided to ignore this bias, I discovered a book that offers a positive framework for human development. According to wilderness guide and former psychology professor Bill Plotkin, the damage to the world's ecosystems, and the pollution created by humans, are consequences of our self-centred and irresponsible cultures, and significant change is urgently required.

He suggests that the changes we need will only flow once we progress from egocentric, competitive consumer societies to ecocentric, soul-based ones that are sustainable, cooperative and compassionate. Plotkin suggests that "nature (including our own deeper nature, soul) has always provided and still provides the best template for human maturation". He profiles eight stages in the human life cycle: "a portrayal not of typical or 'average' human development but of exemplary development as it occurs in the healthiest contemporary people - and as it could occur for everyone", and then sets out to depict the qualities and challenges of each stage.

From early childhood (the Innocent in the Nest), middle childhood (the Explorer in the Garden), early adolescence (the Thespian at the Oasis), late adolescence (the Wanderer in the Cocoon), early adulthood (the Soul Apprentice at the Wellspring), late adulthood (the Artisan on the Wild Orchard), early elderhood (the Master in the Grove of Elders) to late elderhood (the Sage in the Mountain Cave), Plotkin offers a practical integration of personal and spiritual understandings (from nature and the journey of the human soul) that will allow us to transform our culture.

According to David Tacey "This is an important book ... showing why our repair of damage done to the environment must be based on a new vision of spiritual interconnectedness and ecological imagination."