

John Haldane
Seeking Meaning and Making Sense
ISBN 9781 8454 0122 1

Imprint Academic, Exeter UK & Charlottesville USA, 2008, 144pp, £8.95

At first glance, a book of philosophical essays might seem rather specialist; but after the first couple of necessarily factual episodes, I was hooked. A university lecturer and philosophical journalist, now Professor at St Andrew's, this author stands in the tradition of the Scottish intellectual and cultural field; and in his second essay reviews some of the historical links between Scotland and America, with reference to renowned figures in the literary world from both countries.

Professor Haldane does what his title tells us: he seeks meaning in a number of ever-debatable topics, and unfailingly makes sense, for this reader at least. His writings here are modifications of articles previously appearing in journals of all flavours, from *The Herald*, through culture magazines, to *The Tablet*; and his subject matter ranges over a wide field - common sense, history, science and the arts, ethics and morality, religion.

He writes seriously and with care for detail, providing interest and thoughtful enjoiner rather than spurious argument; and sometimes gleams with a delightful sense of humour.

Haldane refutes the postmodern criterion of uncertainty, with its reliance only upon material and scientifically observable facts. He maintains that while modern society appears to have lost its belief in any system of values or meaning, we still seek 'unifying and ennobling visions'; and he points out that artists and writers still pose questions of ethical concern, of 'who we are and where we might be heading'.

I found the whole absorbing and very worthwhile, though not to be 'run through' and with an occasional paragraph requiring a second reading. Some of the essays could well form a basis for group study.

Elizabeth CSF