
translator Edmund Keeley, both published in 1976. Pinchin explores the real and imagined affinities of three men strongly linked to the home city of "*We the Alexandrians . . . / with our far-flung supremacy, our flexible policy of judicious integration, / and our Common Greek Language / which we carried as far as Bactria, / as far as the Indians.*" ("Come, O King of the Lacedaimonians," 1929, Cavafy, *Collected Poems 1924-1955*.)

Science & Technology

THE FIRST THREE MINUTES: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe

by Steven Weinberg
Basic Books, 1977
188 pp. \$8.95
L of C 76-7682
ISBN 0-465-02435-1

There is a tradition of good writing about astrophysics and cosmology by men who have themselves been in the forefront of these fields. This brief, lucid book by Harvard Professor Steven Weinberg, a leading theoretician in the field of elementary particle physics, is perhaps the most important and readable such exposition since Fred Hoyle's *The Nature of the Universe* (1951) and George Gamow's *The Creation of the Universe* (1952). But Weinberg's discussion begins where the speculations of earlier generations of cosmologists left off; he leads us into the study of elementary particles, from which stems much of the concrete understanding of the universe's course after those first three minutes to today. He describes the "big bang" theory ("In the beginning there was an explosion") as the now generally accepted "standard model"—displacing previous formulations based on the assumption that the universe has always been just about the same as it is now. He reviews the many linking discoveries in astrophysics that have quietly revolutionized the scientific view of the nature of the universe during the last decade. Among these are microwave radiation measurements that show a relatively uniform temperature in space of about 3.5 degrees above absolute zero; this "blackbody" radiation is apparently left over from a time when the universe was approximately 1,000 times smaller and hotter than at present. Weinberg's presentation of the new theories is non-mathematical

but non-trivial ("I picture the reader as a smart old attorney," he says, "who expects . . . some convincing arguments before he makes up his mind").

THE DRAGONS OF EDEN:
Speculations on the
Evolution of Human
Intelligence
 by Carl Sagan
 Random, 1977, 264 pp. \$8.95
 L of C 76-53472
 ISBN 0-394-41045-9

Having explored the possibility of extra-terrestrial intelligence in *The Cosmic Connection*, Sagan, a witty and elegant astronomer, examines the infinite mysteries of the human brain. Natural selection, he assures us, has served as a kind of "intellectual sieve," producing intelligence increasingly competent to deal with the laws of nature. It has been a slow process. In this captivating history of cerebral development, Sagan reminds us that it was only a few hundred million years ago that an organism with more information in its brain than in its genes appeared. We still share with our less well-endowed fellow primates three inborn fears—of falling, of snakes, of the dark. But thanks to the neocortex, which grew up around our more primitive brain structures some 30 million years ago, we have a culture that includes language, logic, intuition, and myths. The human brain, Sagan predicts, will continue to evolve—with the help of its talented competitor, the computer.

SNAKES—A NATURAL
HISTORY
 by H. W. Parker, revised
 by A. G. C. Grandison
 Cornell & British Museum
 (Natural History), 1977,
 124 pp.
 \$8.95 cloth, \$3.95 paper
 L of C 76-54625
 ISBN 0-8014-1095-9
 ISBN 0-8014-9164-9 pbk

The 11 families of snakes in a blend of scientific data and sympathy. This short book, newly revised from the 1965 edition, with enlarged full-color plates, is authoritative enough for professional herpetologists but will not overwhelm well-read modern youngsters who make pets of garter snakes. Necessarily sprinkled with such technical terms as "keratin"—one of the three layers of a snake's skin—the text's sometimes pedantic authenticity is relieved by striking images ("a livery of warning colours") and British matter-of-factness (Typhlopidae, or "blind" snakes, "essentially subterranean creatures," feed on "small invertebrates, especially ants").