

person with the condition tells Greenberg, “It meant I’m not an asshole. I’m just wired differently.”

The person who said this will probably face a dilemma on 22 May, when the *DSM-5* is published. By all reports, it will expunge Asperger’s, folding it into a tightened autism spectrum disorder diagnosis. Will that person still be wired differently? Studies suggest that anywhere from one-third to three-quarters of people with Asperger’s will fail to secure one of these new autism diagnoses and the accompanying health-insurance coverage and other benefits. And of those who do secure one, few are likely to find in the autism diagnosis the same satisfying fit between workable description and recognizable self-identity.

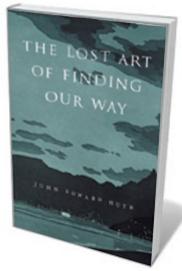
The annihilation of Asperger’s suggests what may be a key part of psychiatry’s tension. As Greenberg writes, the *DSM*, and psychiatry with it, increasingly “casts its subjects into dry, data-driven stories, freed from the vagaries of hope and desire, of prejudice and ignorance and fear, and anchored instead in the laws of nature”. Yet when psychiatry works, it often works less at a biological than at a humanistic, narrative level, by helping the sufferer to reframe the story of his life and of his place in the world into one that includes a sense of agency, strength and social connection. This is doubtless why a combination of drugs and talk therapy generally works better than just drugs. It also helps to explain why schizophrenia, as described in Ethan Watters’ *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the American Psyche* (Free Press, 2010) and in work by Tanya Luhrmann, is much less disabling in cultures — or even treatment regimes — that cast its eccentricities more as variations in human nature than as biological dysfunction.

For more than 100 years, psychiatry has been getting by on pseudo-scientific explanations and confident nods while it waited for the day, always just around the corner, in which it could be a strictly biological undertaking. Part of the *DSM-5*’s long delay occurred because, a decade ago, APA leaders actually thought that advances in neuroscience would allow them write a brain-based *DSM*. Yet, as former APA front liner Michael First, a psychiatrist at Columbia University in New York, confirms on Greenberg’s last page, the discipline remains in its infancy.

Greenberg shows us vividly that psychiatry’s biggest problem may be a stubborn reluctance to admit its immaturity. And we all know how things go when you won’t admit your problems. ■

David Dobbs writes for publications including *The New York Times* and *National Geographic*. His forthcoming book, *The Orchid and the Dandelion*, focuses on the genetic and cultural roots of temperament. He blogs at *Neuron Culture*. e-mail: david.a.dobbs@gmail.com

Books in brief



The Lost Art of Finding Our Way

John Edward Huth BELKNAP 544 pp. \$35 (2013)

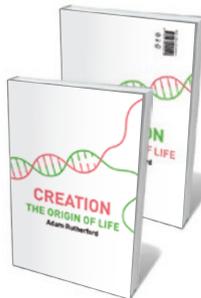
Humanity’s lust for exploring terra incognita shaped and tested our prodigious capacity for mental mapping. Now, with the advent of the Global Positioning System, wayfaring skills are on the wane. Physicist John Edward Huth turns explorer in this rich, wide-ranging and lucidly illustrated primer on how to find yourself in the middle of somewhere. Huth’s prescription for navigating fog, darkness, open ocean, thick forests or unknown terrain rests first on harnessing compass, Sun and stars; then on the subtleties of weather forecasting and decoding markers such as the wind, waves and tides.



The Burning Question: We Can’t Burn Half the World’s Oil, Coal and Gas. So How Do We Quit?

Mike Berners-Lee and Duncan Clark PROFILE 256 pp. £9.99 (2013)

Flabby political will and corridors of disempowerment have not dented the determination of energy writer Duncan Clark and carbon consultant Mike Berners-Lee. Arguing for a moratorium on fossil-fuel extraction, they explain why, citing the evidence on warming, the lack of an international climate-change deal, false energy ‘efficiency’ and the plethora of good techno-fixes. They probe the economic, social and psychological blocks to progress, and lay out a six-step solution — from pushing sustainables to capping carbon. Compelling.



Creation: The Origin of Life/The Future of Life

Adam Rutherford VIKING 272 pp. £20 (2013)

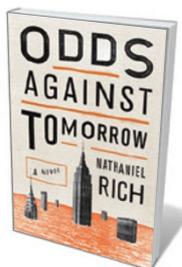
Geneticist and *Nature* editor Adam Rutherford’s two-in-one study cleverly twins the quest to understand how life emerged some 4 billion years ago with today’s race to bio-engineer new life forms. In *The Origin of Life*, he marshals science history and groundbreaking recent research to build up a scenario of proto-cells spontaneously generating in the deep ocean, with a little help from RNA, lipids and mineral deposits. *The Future of Life* focuses on the potential of synthetic biology to create novel, much-needed treatments, fuels and more. Thought-provoking, and double the fun.



My Backyard Jungle: The Adventures of an Urban Wildlife Lover Who Turned His Yard into Habitat and Learned to Live with It

James Barilla YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS 376 pp. \$28 (2013)

The much-probed nexus between humans and the wild gets yet another twist in this engaging chronicle. Environmental writer James Barilla certified his garden in South Carolina as a habitat with the US National Wildlife Federation. When the experiment turned into a feral free-for-all, he sallied forth to study urban wildlife, from the garbage-scoffing macaques of New Delhi to Brazil’s urban marmosets. The findings were unsettling. Ultimately, he argues, creating a “culture of coexistence” is as tough as it is necessary.



Odds Against Tomorrow: A Novel

Nathaniel Rich FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX 320 pp. \$26 (2013)

From Fukushima to Hurricane Sandy, catastrophes come at a hideously high price. Victims and governments feel it one way; insurers another. Nathaniel Rich lights the shadier corners of that number-crunching realm in this incisive novel. Quant Mitchell Zukor has mastered the maths of cataclysms, but his assessments are used to corrupt ends — and immersion in paper disasters fails to prepare him for the real thing. Amusing and petrifying by turns, this is near-future fiction with an edge of the real. [Barbara Kiser](#)