treated as a scientific hypothesis, advocating instead both a positive cataclysmic and negative apophatic approach based on knowing and relationship rather than ideas. Andrew Steane describes the process of reading Dawkins as a form of intellectual mugging employing the tactics of propaganda and overstating his case, while also failing to distinguish between facts and his presuppositions. The authors acknowledge their own assumptions in their quest to make sense of the world, making the observation that what we consider real corresponds to this sense-making process and flows from more basic presuppositions. They present a very helpful chart/glossary (p. 36) where they clarify a number of words, distinguishing between their commonly understood meaning and their meaning as used by them. These are critical, and need to be borne in mind - for instance religion as ‘a set of practices in relation to beliefs about God’ as compared with their view that it is ‘a way of living in relation to God’, which in turn relates to what they regard as the essential message of Jesus, which is how life is to be lived in the light of his understanding of God. Then again, faith in the commonly understood parlance means ‘forming beliefs without evidence’ (c.f. Dawkins) while for them it means ‘willingness to respond to suggestive evidence’. In this respect, philosophy, theology and science all have unresolved questions to be lived with and processed. (p. 82)

The authors address in a series of chapters and dialogues some of the principal features and ideas of modern science, including machine learning, issues arising from quantum physics, general relativity, biological evolution and the argument from design; from philosophy and theology, they look at naturalism, the nature of human identity, readings of Scripture, free will and attitudes to miracles. From the transition to quantum physics, they take the limit to the validity of reductionism in a dance-of-the-probability-waves picture, and the fact that ‘the entangled state cannot be described using any description that tries to model the system as two individual things.’ (p. 93) The picture of a deterministic clockwork mechanism can no longer be sustained, but this does not mean that the difficulties around free will have been thereby resolved, rather that human responsibility is not ruled out by our scientific outlook.

The discussion of the arguments involved in fine tuning and intelligent design are detailed and subtle. They find the first to be self-undermining in that two aspects pull in opposite directions: ‘if the niceness of our particular universe suggests that it was created by God…then it must assume the non-niceness of the laws, so that fine tuning is needed.’ (p. 145) Yet God is also assumed to be capable of choosing the laws as well as initial conditions. They also take the view that fine tuning of physical constants is really a ‘just so story’. Likewise, they find the complexity argument of ID overstated and some of its claims lacking in evidence. This leads on to a chapter on how they see the story of life on Earth, where they suggest that randomness should be seen as openness and that a better metaphor for selfish genes would be eger. For them, our connection to the rest of life on Earth does not diminish our humanity but should heighten. Those regard for the natural order and its possibilities. They address the question of suffering, pain and death as part of the God-given pattern of life on Earth while not claiming to resolve it, but rather being left – as we all in fact are - in a position of not knowing and needing to trust the overall process.

A chapter on the relationship between science and religious commitment draws on historical examples from the 13th and 17th centuries by entering into the thought-space and categories of those eras as reflected in their commonly understood parlance means ‘forming beliefs without evidence’ (c.f. Dawkins) while for them it means ‘willingness to respond to suggestive evidence’. In this respect, philosophy, theology and science all have unresolved questions to be lived with and processed. (p. 82)

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the end of every chapter there are a couple of suggestions for practice.

Rupert elaborates on the spiritual side of sports elsewhere in this issue, providing some interesting evolutionary background and discussing the experience of flow, the thrill of speed and oriental martial arts, where he relates an interesting experience of his own when he confronted a celebrity beating up a woman simply by focusing his energy in his hara centre, in accordance with his Aikido training. The effect was dramatic. The chapter on learning from animals summarises Rupert’s research in this area within the overall context of human-animal relationships. He sees psychic phenomena such as telepathy as part of our biological nature, providing evidence from his own work, also on human telepathy. He also draws out some spiritual lessons from animals in terms of humility, unconditional love and living in the present.

Fasting has been a common practice across many cultures and is making a health-related comeback in our time. Rupert covers physiological effects of fasting, including the impact of ketosis on the brain and its potential impact on rising levels of obesity and diabetes. In some cultures, there is a practice of fasting to death while elsewhere there is evidence that exceptional people have lived for long periods without eating. The chapter on psychedelics brings in the impact of Rupert’s own experiences (also those of Aldous Huxley) and the revival of neurochemical research in the area - here he gives details on the exact processes involved, while also covering cross-cultural spiritual understandings and religious arguments against the use of psychedelics. His overall approach is imbued with the sacred as the title of the chapter suggests in incorporating spiritual openings.

While the first book covered meditation, this one addresses the powers of prayer as a relationship with more than human consciousness. Rupert himself practises both meditation and prayer, comparing the first to breathing in and the second to breathing out. An interesting consideration is that minds are transparent or porous to gods and spirits, enhancing the overall sense of connection. Some prayer is directed to healing, while research shows positive correlations between prayer and health and happiness. References to the relationship between prayer and positive thinking are connected with both positive psychology and New Thought; in this latter respect, there is a great deal more historical material than Rupert has the space to mention. He refers to Wallace Wattles as an influence on Rhonda Byrne, but in my view the work of Thomas Troward, Charles Haanel and even Earl Nightingale is much more profound.

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The sacred theme continues with holy days and festivals, related to pilgrimage and holy places covered in the first book. These can give a rhythm to both the week and seasons of the year in our current era where 24/7 commercial activity predominates. Our ancestors used seasonal festivals to connect with the larger cycles of nature, as Rupert shows in his discussion of Christmas, Easter, May Day, Midsummer, the feast of Angels and St Michael, and finally the festivals of All Saints and All Souls in early November. As I mention in the work of William James, the cultivation of habits is related to the development of good character. Rupert discusses virtues as good habits, drawing on a number of traditions, but here he could also have highlighted the contribution of Aristotle and its current manifestation in the revival of virtue ethics. He discusses the evolutionary roots of human morality as well as selfishness and cooperation, including within insect societies, the relationship between morality and conscience, and vices as bad habits, concluding with an emphasis on the importance of practising kindness.

The final chapter asks why spiritual practices work. While many people take them up for health or happiness benefits, their deeper significance lies in ‘making a connection to a greater consciousness, or presence, or being’ (p. 246) as a result of which we may even experience bliss. Even if such practices make little sense within a mechanistic and unconscious universe, there are now atheist meditators and secular Buddhists, a phenomenon that moves the goalposts in an interesting way.

In terms of metaphysical structure, Rupert compares various versions of the threefold nature of God, relating this to scientific thinking where ‘the laws of nature play the role of the Logos, the principle of form and order, and energy is the Spirit principle.’ (p. 236) Logos also operates in formative fields. He notes the emergence of a philosophy of panpsychism in many former materialist philosophers, adding the panentheistic perspective of his friend Matthew Fox. His overall message is that spiritual practices can lead us to a greater sense of connection with the whole while at the same time expanding our kinship with people, animals, plants and nature, and encouraging the practice of kindness. (p. 270) As such, they can contribute to our spiritual evolution. Taken together, Rupert’s two books on science and spiritual practices provide an invaluable compendium of ‘ways to go beyond’ that can enhance our sense of connection and interconnectedness, which could not be more important in view of the planetary challenges we face.