

treated as a scientific hypothesis, advocating instead both a positive cataphatic 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.

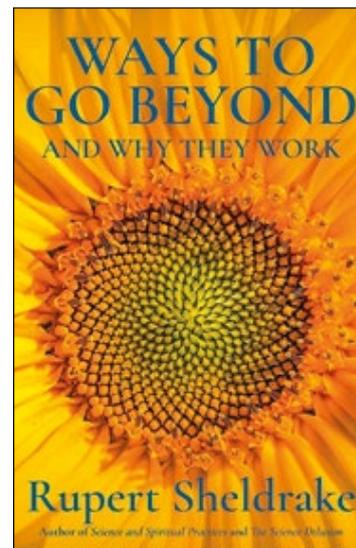
The discussion of the arguments involved in fine tuning and intelligent design are detailed and subtle. They

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 eager. For them, our connection to the rest of life on Earth does not diminish our humanity but should heighten our 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 arguments between a number of leading thinkers. This helps to define the scope of science in discovering 'those truths that are amenable to systematisation and mathematisation', which form only part of our reality. The authors see the practice of science calling for new vocabularies and standpoints that can enrich rather than destroy a religious perspective as a different frame of reference. Their treatment of miracles is extensive in relation to reasonable belief and questions of evidence. Rather than taking sides on New Testament accounts, they prefer instead to treat the stories as 'conveying truths that are important for growth in wisdom.' Their central concern is moral issues and our personal response to these, more specifically the challenges raised by Jesus himself which do not relate to certainty, but rather the importance of developing an overall sense of trust and the practice of love.

Reading and digesting the contents of this book is a demanding but highly rewarding process due to the quality of intelligence and insight into issues central to knowledge and human life. The authors have thought deeply, conversed widely and articulated coherent ways of making

sense of the world that does justice both to the Christian commitment and scientific integrity. Readers are also encouraged to keep seeking for themselves.



EMPIRICAL SPIRITUALITY

David Lorimer

■ WAYS TO GO BEYOND

Rupert Sheldrake (Hon SMN)

Coronet, 2019, 327 pp., £20, h/b
- ISBN 978-1-47365343-6

Rupert Sheldrake's pioneering work in expanding science and consciousness studies will be well known to readers of this journal, and here he follows up his recent book *Science and Spiritual Practices* with a further volume on the same theme. He covers the spiritual side of sports, learning from animals, fasting, psychedelics, prayer, festivals and the cultivation of good habits, before concluding with a chapter discussing why spiritual practices work. As he states in the introduction, he is a strong believer in the scientific method and empirical enquiry, extending his interests into areas where most scientists fear to tread. The book is a further valuable contribution to overcoming the separation between science and the spirituality. Rupert defines the term spiritual as 'a flow of consciousness that connects us to more inclusive, higher forms of consciousness, and even to the source of consciousness itself.' (p. 68) In each chapter, the practice is related to strands of scientific research and the wider cultural background where there has never been such widespread access to the spiritual wisdom of the world across many traditions. Then at

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 *bara* 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.

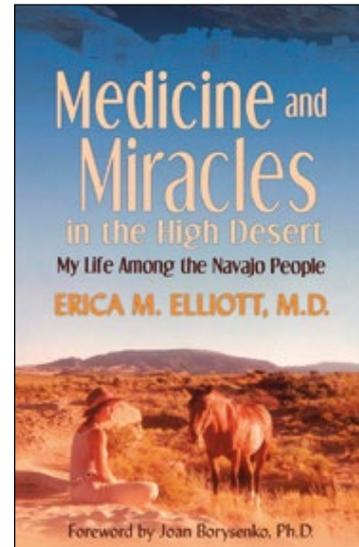
While the first book covered meditation, this one addresses the powers of prayer as a relationship with more than human consciousness. Rupert himself practises both meditation and prayer, comparing the first to breathing in and the second to breathing out. An interesting consideration is that minds are 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.

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. 256) Logos also operates in formative fields. He notes the emergence of a philosophy of panpsychism in many formerly materialist philosophers, adding the pantheistic 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.



MEDICINE-HEALTH

A NAVAJO INITIATION

David Lorimer

■ MEDICINE AND MIRACLES IN THE HIGH DESERT

Erica M. Elliott MD

Balboa Press, 2019, 184
pp., \$14.99, p/b - ISBN
978-1-9822-2098-3

This vividly written account plunges the reader straight into the author's medical crisis on her first night duty at the Cuba medical centre in northern New Mexico. A Navajo medicine man has been repeatedly run over and is dead on arrival. The conditions of work are appalling and every previous medical director has tried to leave, submerged by lack of support, sleep and overwork. Friends and relatives of the dead man are taken aback by her speaking the language as she compassionately explains the circumstances - then immediately has to deal with life-threatening seizures in a pregnant woman. It is already well past midnight, and work continues until it is daylight and beyond.

Then go back 15 years to the autumn of 1971, when Erica arrives to teach a class consisting mainly of Navajo