

The Potential of the Human Brain

Curt Jaimungal, host of [Theories of Everything podcast](#), in conversation with Dr Iain McGilchrist

[Jack Martin Leith](#) sourced this interim transcript from that appearing at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9sBKCd2HD0>

There are full transcripts coming to <https://curtjaimungal.substack.com> shortly, along with Show Notes, PDFs, terminology that the guest mentioned, and such. – Curt Jaimungal

Iain McGilchrist, it's been years since we last spoke. I've been looking forward to this for three years. In some ways, I've been prepping for three years. So, welcome. Thank you very much. It's a delight to be back. Thank you. You have many interests. Anyone who's called a polymath has disparate interests. However, there has to be some core driver that runs along it or that runs through it. So, what would you say is the unifying principle behind your Weltanschauung, your worldview? Unifying principle, I mean, is the one thing behind all of it. I don't think so. It's grown very organically. I've always been interested in ideas, basically. They've always been the things that have the most excitement for me. And I was in therapy for a while, and I discovered that actually, ideas have an almost erotic charge for me. They're not just abstract things. They actually have life. And so, I've always followed those. And there's been a continuous path through my early days at school, my days in Oxford, the first book I wrote against criticism, through to the master and his emissary, and finally, the matter with things. It's been a seamlessly evolving organic process that is concerned with resonance, the resonance between what is me, my consciousness, and the world. It's also the very obvious point that when holes are broken down into their parts, a good deal is lost. Apart from anything else, the relations between those parts. And over life, I've seen relations as more and more important, and I see them as primary. So, I see relations as prior to relata that emerge from a web of relationships rather than the other way around. All these things I've been thinking about most of my life, the idea also that things don't move in nature in straight lines, that ideas and matters of the human spirit, if you like, also don't

move in straight lines, but move with a more circular motion. But I've come to see that as a spiral motion, particularly laterally, which interestingly involves both a directedness and a circularity. So, those are some of the things that have always been important to me. Another is the meaning of the unique, in that really everything is unique. We just approximately gather things together into groups for ease of thinking about them and dealing with them. But that individuality or uniqueness is always being eroded by the way in which we certainly now think. The importance of what is implicit over what is explicitly stated, that really all the important things can only be hinted at in language. Language is not exactly defeated by them, but language needs to rely on poetry rather than simply prose. So, those are some of the themes that have been with me all my life and cohered eventually when I began *The Matter with Things* to study the brain. You have a book which can also be described as a tome. Is it double the length of your previous book? So, there's *The Master and His Emissary*, for people who are unfamiliar. Well, it is. It is actually, yes. And what's funny about that is that it started off as being the short version of *The Master and His Emissary*. Yes. Again, for people who are unfamiliar, there's *The Matter with Things* that's on screen right now. Link is in the description. Just so you know, there's only two books that I recommend consistently on this channel. One is Gödel, Escher, Bach, and then the other is *Master and His Emissary*. Wonderful. I would like to know how your views have evolved from *Master and His Emissary* to *The Matter with Things*. And it would also be great to give an explanation as to the titles. Yes. Well, the title is easy to gloss. It has three levels of meaning. One is the obvious one that there is, as we all agree, I think nowadays, there is something that is *The Matter with Things* in that colloquial English expression, meaning there's something wrong. What is it? And I want to address what I believe that wrongness comes from and what it's like. The second is I think there's something wrong with our preoccupation with matter, at least with the idea of matter as simple. And I always say that materialists are not people who overvalue matter, but people who

undervalue matter, because matter is something very extraordinary. It's not just lumpen matter sitting there inertly. And so that's the second meaning. And the third is the problem with things that I believe we see the world as made up of things, whereas I think that's a start from a very late stage of apprehension where certain aspects of reality stand out to us as the things that attract our attention and seem to us important, whereas I believe that reality is in fact a seamless whole, which is not to say that it's undifferentiated. It's vastly differentiated, but it's not really made up of bits. So those are the elements that go to make up the meaning of the title. Okay, this undifferentiation or this differentiation between what's undifferentiated and what's differentiated, I'd like you to explain more about that and the reason behind this is that you had a great phrase. I believe it was something that the left brain, which we're going to talk about, and people will hear that and think about the PopSci version. They can remove that from their mind because you're going to dissuade them of that belief or disabuse them of that notion. But anyhow, the left mode of thinking is more interested in narrowing down to a certainty, and the right brain is more interested in opening up to a possibility. Now, I like that phrase. However, there are many people in the comment section of your videos, I'm sure on other people's videos, who then feel like they've been enlightened. They've gone to a monastery or they've taken psychedelics or they've done whatever practice over the course of months or years or what have you. And that sounds like a practice of opening oneself up. But then they become certain about their insight of oneness or of reality or whatever it may be. And you could see it with their definitive statements. So it sounds to me like they either are fooling themselves and they think they have a right brain view of the world, but it's right brain rhetoric with a left brain viewpoint. Or it's the case that their right brain opened themselves up to a certainty. So, please explain the difference between oneness and connectedness, given all this backdrop. Sure, sure. It's worth my saying that one of the differences between the hemispheres is that the left hemisphere sees things as either or,

whereas the right hemisphere sees them as both and. And we need both either or and both and, not either either or both and. So we're not forced to make a decision between these two ways of thinking, but we need them both. And the right hemisphere sees these both. So it sees things as unified, but that their whole nature is differentiation within a nonetheless integral whole, the integrity of which is not threatened by the differentiation within it. So I believe this is a very, very central point. So people say, as you have hinted, you know, oh man, all is one, you know, and I say yes, and all is many, now what? And, you know, we need both of these positions, because what I believe is going on in the cosmos is that something that was relatively simple and one is unfolding into ever greater complexity that doesn't destroy its wholeness, but spells out the potential that was within that wholeness all along, brings it into being. So the nature of creativity, and that's true of human creativity, but all of nature is creative, and indeed the cosmos is, I believe, creative in that things are evolving, not just in the living world, but they're evolving in the cosmos too. So all of this process is about the unpacking of what was implicit. So going back to David Bohm's famous concept of the implicate order, it is the making explicate of what was implicate without destroying it. And then that new explicateness is implicit for something else. So the image I like to use is that of a bud unfolding. So the bud unfolds into the full flower. As it does, you can see it separating and individuating into the stamens, the petals, and all the rest. But the bud is not destroyed. It is fulfilled in the making of the flower, and the flower inherits what was in the bud and makes it something new and beautiful beyond what the bud could do. So that's the image, really. So everything needs to be individually differentiated and is heading in direction of that, but not as a denial of its unified nature, but as a fulfillment of its unified nature. Does that make sense? Well, if the fulfillment has to do with love, then I can understand it. The reason being that you once explained to me, either on air or off air, and I'll include our previous conversation, which was solo, just you and I, and then, sorry, just you and me. I think that's the

correct grab rabbit. Just you and me. And then there was one with you and John Vervaken.

Anyhow, in one of them, you said, look, Curt, in order for you to love something, you have to see it as separate from you. Otherwise, you're just loving yourself. So there is something

differentiated about love. It's not just about bringing together and making the same. In fact, one can view, so this led me on an excursion when reading your book, because many people who are mathematicians and physicists, they're attracted to what they think of as the East. It's actually a Western version of the East. And they take their ideas of what the East may be, which is the East is all about everything being the same and non-dual. There's no such thing as a separation.

Everything is one. And it may be the case that we're misinterpreting what the East is saying, because we didn't grow up in the East, akin to, I make an analogy of, if you were to install, sure, a Windows app works well on Windows and an app for Macs works well there, but you can't just take a Mac app and install it on a Windows machine. You're going to get an error. So if in your bones you grew up and there's implicit knowledge, you've mentioned implicit, there's also tacit knowledge that is Eastern or that is Western, then it's as if you're ordering from a pizzeria and you're just, you think yourself, okay, I want pepperoni, I want some of the East, I want some of the West. And it may not be compatible. But anyhow, I see people who are extremely trained with their left brain, readily adopting oneness. And I've had experiences of oneness myself, so I could see myself adopting it. Your book and your thoughts had me consider, hmm, these people who proclaim oneness, I wonder, and the ones that I'm speaking about in particular, so their Eastern, sorry, their Westernized view of the Eastern oneness, I wonder if they think that they're approaching it from the more creative, holistic aspect of the right brain, but it's actually the undifferentiated abstraction of the left brain that they've already strengthened that's allowing them to adopt this and familiarize themselves with it much more quickly. Anyhow, I wanted to know your thoughts on that. I think there's a lot of truth in that. And what gives us away is

something you mentioned when you were just beginning this section of the conversation, which is that they become suddenly certain. And I think that when one is certain about these things, one is certainly wrong. I sometimes say there is only one certainty, and that is that anyone who is completely certain is certainly wrong. Because the nature of reality is not simple and clear in this way. As you know, part three of *The Matter with Things*, which is the whole of the second volume, is about ontology. And I begin with a chapter on the one and the many, well, no, I begin with a chapter on the coincidence of opposites, and then move on to the chapter on the one and the many. And I think this coincidence of opposites and the almost subset of that, which is the coincidence of the one with the many, is very important. One must hold these things, not irritably say, well, it's got to be one or the other. There's a certain kind of thinking that will insist that it's got to be one or the other. But actually, if you can suspend that, you can see something that is subtler. That without abandoning meaning, without becoming simply talking in things that don't make any sense, one can get hold of a sense which is deeper. And in that sense, I think if you think back again to love, and I think even Buddhists think that whatever it is, that the source of everything is equatable with love, then love is both something that recognizes an other, but comes together fully with that other, so that there is no antagonism. So that is fortuitously a rather good way of thinking about the relationship between a thing and another. But it seems to me that without that element of the other, and without that element of something that offers a degree of resistance, nothing can be created, nothing can come into being. I mean, later we may talk about matter and consciousness, but I believe matter has this role that it Matter, Consciousness, and Creation provides a degree of resistance which enables things to be created. Okay, let's go into that right now. What do you mean that matter provides resistance that enables creation? Well, what is this table? Now some people would say it's just, some people I don't agree with would say that it's just an idea. But I know my ideas have no, they provide no resistance for

me. I can think where I like, I can go where I like in my mind. But I can't put my hand through this table. It offers resistance. So we are bounded and limited by the fact that we are material beings living in a material cosmos, but not only material in the way that that word is normally understood nowadays. I think there is, I mean, I don't want to jump ahead too much, but I think that I've put out too many ideas that may sound completely unsubstantiated. But believe me, as you know, you've read, I do work out why I say these things. I think that matter is a phase of consciousness. So it is a phase of consciousness that offers two things, a degree of permanence and a degree of resistance. I've dealt with resistance, that matter provides resistance to our wishes, our desires. It makes only certain things possible. It also makes certain things endure for at least a while, so that my thoughts disappear almost as soon as I've had them. But the table will be here tomorrow and for many years, provided nothing happens to it. So everything, of course, is transient, but matter offers a degree of permanence. But it also offers this all-important resistance. The way of thinking about this is to take the example of friction. What is friction? Friction is what stops motion, but it's also what starts motion. I can't actually move without friction. I couldn't be able to move at all, to start moving unless there was friction. So elements that we think of as being perhaps restrictive, like offering resistance, and even offering solidity and permanence, actually are important and creative and help things come into being rather than get in the way of their coming into being. Otherwise the universe would simply be a big void. And there would be no way of experiencing it, because it just was a single thought. Well, that's interesting. We can get to your thoughts on idealism afterward. But I want to see if I can capture what you've said, and you tell me if it's incorrect. So we have two categories of existence. Maybe a psychological realm or an imaginative realm, and then there's a material realm. In the imaginative realm, we can traverse it quickly, far, as well as impermanently, because it just dissolves, it's like a twinkling. In the material realm, there's much more solidity, there's much more resistance, and

time seems to go at a standstill. So the more you investigate the material world, you get to something even called laws. These are timeless, these have always been. You can have evolution laws of the laws, there are some ways of formulating that. But even that, the evolution law of the law, the meta-law, doesn't evolve. So let me know if this is the essence of what you are articulating. Feel free to correct me, I'm not going to be offended. I want to learn. And then number two. Do you think this is why people who are more analytical tend to be... I'm associating the analytical types with the left brain... tend to be of the sort that time is an illusion, time doesn't exist. And the people who are more spiritual, in my experience, tend to be the ones that emphasize the flow or the realness of time. I do argue that, yes, eventually, in the book. But analysis means the breaking up of things, and that's what it literally means. Because it's the mode whereby we think we understand something by taking it apart. And it's certainly true that a certain kind of explanation can be arrived at by taking something From Analysis to Wholeness apart. But as well as seeing what something is by seeing what goes to make it up, it's important to see what it is by what it goes to make. So below it, there are things that are parts of it. Above it, there are things that it is part of. And each of these direction cells are something about that thing. The trouble with analysis is that it almost always inevitably involves the doing away with relationships. So I can take a machine apart, and I can put all the pieces on the floor. And I now know what the parts are that go to make that machine. But in taking it apart, I've lost their relationships, because the relationships are only there when the whole machine is constituted. And it's the relationships that are crucial, not only in helping us understand what that machine is and does, but also in helping us understand what those things we call the parts are, because they only become what they are because of the context in which they inhere. Now, I mean, for all my life, and certainly since I was in my late teens, I've thought that context is, roughly speaking, everything. It makes all the difference to anything we're thinking about. And by changing the

context, you can change entirely your understanding of what you're looking at, the meaning of what it is, not just words and phrases, which obviously can change vastly, can be reversed by the context, the part of the context being also the person who utters them, the tone of voice in which they're uttered, the facial expressions and body language that go with them and so on. But also what came before and came after, which is why it's so pernicious to reduce discourse to soundbites, because that bite is not anything on its own. So analysis is always going to impoverish what it is looking at. And that doesn't mean we should never analyze. I think it's important to do so. But it should be an intermediary phase that allows us to see how the whole works, now with an enriched understanding of the parts. And you've probably heard me say this before, but for the sake of listeners or viewers who haven't, it's like learning a piece of music. So you're initially attracted to the piece of music as a whole, you want to play it, you try to play it. After a while, you realize that if you're going to play it proficiently, you have to take it apart, you have to practice certain bars over and over again, you have to see the harmonics and the progression of them and so on. So you have a theoretical understanding of it, you have a partwise understanding of it. But if you stop there, you've got nothing. This is only of use if it makes you more able to go back and now play the whole with all that the analysis you've done has added to its meaning. And when you're playing it as a whole, you're no longer thinking about the parts or the analysis or the theory, you're thinking of the thing as a whole. So that is an analogy for our understanding of everything. And it seems to me that there's been for a very long time in the West, a tyranny of the analytic frame of mind at the expense of the more synthetic frame of mind. In other words, the frame of mind in which one sees how things fit together. Okay, two thoughts occurred to me. Feel free to tackle whichever one you like, or both simultaneously and or. Okay. So number one, people who are familiar with this channel know that my background's in physics and math. And I don't see the reductionism in physics as necessarily removing the relations. So for instance, to

construct a plane, you have to construct. I'm going to show you that I'm not an engineer. I study fundamental physics or theoretical physics. The propellers for the plane, I'm sure they have some special name. And you have to understand its relation to the engine and inside the engine. And you have to understand the relation between the oil and a certain fuel that goes inside the plane and altitudes and the tip of the plane and its shape at the back. And then also the economics. So you can't just make the whole plane out of the black box, as some people say. First, they wouldn't fly, but also it may be too expensive for whatever reason. So many constraints come into mind. So I don't see the reductionism of the analytical mind as removing the relations. We can tackle that. But I just want to make clear my second thought. Let me know what you think of that. Well, what I would say about that is that that is an instance of where knowledge has been acquired about the parts, but is seen by the expert in the whole. So the person who is really a skilled engineer understands the whole of the engine and has learned a lot of partwise information on the way to understanding it. That's absolutely fine. But it is that third phase in which things are reintegrated now with a better knowledge of their parts. What worries me about the way certain trends in philosophy go is that they are over-concerned with pinning things down and making them explicit and clear before they really have any idea of what it is they're dealing with. And an analogy for that would be a loose structure, which has many joints in it, and you want to make it tight. Now, the way to do that is not to tighten up one of the joints and then tighten up another one, but to tighten them all up a bit until you get... It's like changing a car wheel, if you've ever done that. When you're tightening the bolts at the end, it's no good tightening up one fully and then trying to do the one that's opposite to it. You have to do all of them a bit and just keep tightening them until you've got the whole thing. Now, that's not perhaps a brilliant analogy, but it gets somewhere near what I'm talking about, that too great a certainty or a desire for... the explicit and the utterly clear at an early stage will lead you astray. It will make the whole harder to

understand, and it will also preempt what something is. What is it to see something clearly? In *The Martianist Emissary*, I quote Ruskin on this. He said, there's a white rectangle on the lawn. What is it? From far away, I think it's a handkerchief. When I get closer, I see it's a book. When I get closer to the book, I see it's made of paper that has ridges. When I put a microscope on the ridges, I can see that they've got all kinds of filaments. When am I seeing it clearly? And the answer is you're only seeing it clearly when you see it as whatever it is you want to describe it as. If you want to see one level of what it is you're looking at, then to see that clearly would need the microscope. But to see a book clearly, you have to put away the microscope. It depends what it is you're getting at. Now, if you tighten things up when you're trying to analyze a hugely complex human experience of some kind, like what do we mean by the good or the true or the beautiful? If you try to tighten things up and make them too explicit early on, you'll lose the possibility that comes from things adjusting in the presence of one another and becoming more fully parts of the whole that is actually the thing you want to understand. Okay, this is great. So the whole W-H-O-L-E, what is it? So for instance, you gave the example of music, and you have different melodies and different instruments and different durations and so on, and if you want to repeat the song, then you have to think of the song as a whole and not just as individual notes on a keyboard, nor just the keyboard because there may be other instruments. But then you could also enlarge in the context to say, well, I also have to think about when can I practice? Where is that going to fit into my schedule? You can also enlarge that and say, well, how is this going to make money socially or economically? And I don't even want to say that those are enlargements. Those are actually differences. Those are different frames. So when we say we need to take in the context, there's so many contexts. There may be more contexts than there are things. So what is this whole that one needs to take into account? It seems like you'd just be paralyzed if you were to try and take into account the context, because the context is synonymous with the universe. Ultimately, it is.

Exactly. The context is nothing less than everything else. But for practical purposes, we realize that an immediate context is more influential on what is going on in front of us than something that is comparatively removed. And I don't mean just geographically or spatially. I mean that there are more remote kinds of influences. So you're quite right. The context is always changing. And because the context and the perspective from which you look at whatever you're examining changes and can change, Perspectives on Truth and because the way in which you pay attention can radically alter what it is you see, you know that that is a fundamental principle of my work in both the matter with things and the master. Right. We're going to get to that. So because of all these things, there is no one way of seeing what something is. Somebody just I've just come back, as you know, from Japan. Sorry, I'm moving the screen around. I'm looking for something that should be here on my desk. It's a wooden block. And viewed from one angle, it is circular. Right. Viewed from another angle, it is square. Viewed from a third angle, it is a perfect equilateral triangle. It is possible to make such a wood block and somewhere in this room it's sitting. Well, even an ice cream cone, an ice cream cone looks like a circle from one perspective. It looks like a triangle from another. And one of the things I love, just sorry to do a little sideways riff here, but I love about the spiral, which I think is the essential form of all things or for many things that are important. Look down the core of it. It appears to be just circular. Viewed from the side, it appears to be a sine wave. But actually, it's both a sine wave that has a direction and it is a circle and it's doing both of these at once. So for all these reasons, there is no one single reality about anything. But I must immediately gloss that because I know you wouldn't think I thought this, but some people might. And this does not mean that anybody's point of view is as good as anybody else's and that I can say it's this and you can say it's that and we just have to agree that we're both. Because it sounds like that. It sounds like that's what you're saying. It sounds like there's a relativism in what you're saying. So please help me understand that. Yeah. Well, of course, once

again, it's this question of it doesn't have to be either or. Just because there is a relative element doesn't mean it can be anything. Almost everything we look at is only relatively what it is. It's only relatively big or relatively small or whatever it is. But that doesn't mean I can change its size at will. What a thing can be seen as is not just anything. So for example, this block of wood cannot be seen as a spiral, however you turn it round. It can only be seen as either a circle, a square or a triangle if you get the pictures lined up. So that is really what I'm saying. At the beginning of *The Matter with Things*, I talk about, for example, it could be music criticism or literary criticism. But let's take the example of literary criticism. There can be different ideas about what the play *King Lear* is about. But one thing it cannot be about is 11th century politics in Azerbaijan. It can't just be anything. There's a rather limited number of things that it can be taken to be meaning, unless you're an idiot. So we don't want to go into idiot territory where, oh, well, it could be this, it could be that. That is postmodernism. It's one of the most destructive things. Incidentally, I think that's happened in academic life is that too many areas of the humanities have given up on the idea of there being truth just because there isn't one single truth doesn't mean to say that aren't things that are truer than other things. Is there not a single truth? Because even in the uttering of the sentence, there's not a single truth. It seems to make reference to some higher truth that suggests that the lower truths are not the only ones. Well, that might be like the thing that's often said that if I say a unicorn doesn't exist, then have I not somehow contradicted myself because by mentioning the unicorn, I say that it does exist. But I mean, really all one needs to do there is be more careful about what one means does it by the words does exist. So I mean, it's perfectly possible to distinguish between the fact that there are no examples of unicorns that have ever been experienced in the external world, but it is an imaginary construct. And that's fine. So what I believe knowledge and the pursuit of truth, which is what universities used to be devoted to, doesn't mean that there is one single right truth and everybody else is wrong. But it does mean an

honourable attempt to get as close to what one can see to be true as one can, without ever being able to fully reach it. So truth isn't an object out there that we just need to take the right steps. And one day, we have the prize of capturing the truth and taking it away. That's thing thinking. It's left hemisphere thinking. And what it is, is a process. So truth is an unconcealing of something. We get better and better at unconcealing it, displaying it, rather as a work of sculpture comes into being. So when Michelangelo made his David, he didn't make an arm and a leg and a walrus. He started with a block of stone. And for several years, all he did was throw stone away. And by throwing stone away, he produced the reality that we call his statue of David. So what I'm getting at here is that, no, there isn't one single truth. And when you start having the idea that there is one single truth, you reach tyranny. You reach a situation where anyone who disagrees with this particular proposition is to be no platform, perhaps imprisoned or burnt at the stake, their books destroyed and so on. And we're getting seriously close to that in the modern world. That worries me, that people have no longer any time for the idea that there may be another truth to this that they haven't seen. And that doesn't mean that what they were saying is necessarily wrong. I like that thing that John Stuart Mill said. And in fact, I discovered that Leibniz said it earlier in a letter in 1714. But to go back to Mill, John Stuart Mill, what he said was that when human beings have disagreed over a philosophical or sociological point, they have usually been right in what they averred, but wrong in what they denied. In other words, it's this thing that if I believe this, then I can't believe any of those other things. But good heavens, a little experience of life tells one that things are not like that. They're not mutually exclusive. Very often it means embracing a number of points of view. So in my work, I argue for a reinterpretation of the idea of objectivity, not getting rid of the idea because I think it's an important and valuable idea and an honest and honourable thing for any seeker after truth to hold to. It's not that there is a viewpoint that is a nobody's viewpoint, the view from nowhere, as it is sometimes understood. And there is

no reason to believe that by taking a human being out of an understanding of something, you will improve the situation rather than make it worse. What one needs is to be able to take in a number of different aspects to what it is one's seeing and give them due voice where it is appropriate. And this way, you build up a much more sophisticated, three-dimensional image of what it is you're looking at, rather than a dogmatic, black and white, simplistic, two-dimensional construct. So objectivity still lives, it just lives in a different way from the way that many people have hitherto understood it. Interesting. So there's a quote that I found that's informed me in my adult life, created me in a sense. It is that only the shallowest of mind believe that in great controversy, one side is mere folly. So that's Arthur Cain, I believe. Yep. It sounds like what you're saying is echoing that. Now something that I think about, I'm a contrarian at heart, so I like to think, I'm so contrarian that I like to look at what do people who consider themselves to be contrarian think, and I'm counter even that. And what people who believe themselves to be speaking, well forgive me as I fall over my words, I've had seven days of lack of sleep. It's extreme. I'm sorry about the lack of sleep, but you don't show it at all. Oh great. I've got jet lag and a 23-hour plane journey behind me, so I really... Alright, so we even out. We even out. I find my words are not coming today in the way that I would have liked them to, but there we are. Beautiful. Okay, balance me. That's wonderful. So something I think about is many people who think of themselves as iconoclasts would say, down with dogma. But I wonder, what is the upside of dogma? So that's a question I'll ask you, but I'll give some preface to it. Look, here's something one can do, and I want to talk to you about prayer later. Let's take a scenario where someone's praying, and they conceptualize Yahweh, or Jehovah, or God, or whatever it may be. They conceptualize it. And they're praying to it intentionally. And then all of a sudden they learn from theories of everything, or your books, that maybe there's a multiverse, or that's what some people think. There are many worlds. Okay, then they think, oh no, was I just praying to the God of this

universe? And is that just... Have I been praying to a pagan deity, and I'm not praying to the ultimate God? Shoot, what the heck have I been doing? Because that's not what I want to do. But then you think, okay, well, sometimes when you pray, there is a way of praying where you just say words that you don't actually understand. It's ritualized. So one of them is, something that I say is, to the glory of the Most High. I don't know what I mean when I say that, but that comes from Bach, and Wittgenstein used to say this as well. To the glory of the Most High. Now imagine if what you were doing when you were praying is you ended it with amen, or to the glory of the Most High, amen, or something akin to that. Even though you didn't implicitly understand it, nor explicitly understand it, you said the dogma, and that hedged you against praying to a lower deity in this case. Because you're saying something you don't understand, which is to the glory of the Most High. That made me realize, maybe I think of the world as, there's implicit and there's explicit. Maybe there's a third element, and it's dogma, or ritual. There also may be a fourth. But anyhow, that's the preface for the question of, what is the upside of dogma? Well, first of all, I'd make a big, big distinction between ritual and dogma. So dogma is conceptual, and rituals are embodied. Even if they're only verbal rituals, they emanate from our embodied being. They're not concepts. Whereas the problem with dogma is that it is conceptual, and when it's held with a fixity that is inappropriate, and when one comes to the nature of God, any fixity is problematic. I think there is no upside to that dogma. It encourages people to feel that they've grasped something, that they'd be better off feeling that they hadn't fully grasped, because that leaves it open for there to be things beyond what we can imagine or conceive. And whatever God is, it is something that it's very unlikely that our normal ways of being and talking about things will encompass. It can call to us, we can have intuitions of it, but they're unlikely to be amenable to dogmatic expression. So I don't think there is an upside to dogma. And I think the problem with the person thinking, oh God, have I been praying to the wrong God, is in a way, it's touching, but

it's crazy, isn't it? Because we don't know who the God is anyway that we pray to. So in order to make that problem a problem, you'd have to have in your mind already, there is a certain God that I should be praying to. And there's another God that I might be praying to. And that's just a verbal fiction. There is no evidence, whatever, of there being another universe, not even one, nevermind many of them. And so if you start thinking like that and inventing all kinds of things that are other than the ones that you know, this will just lead to the sort of distress that you sort of evoke for this person. So no, I don't think dogma is at all what we want. I mean, those who really were in the best position to know, the really wise, such as the Buddha, such as Christ, St. Paul, Montaigne, they ended up with not certainties, but just expressing something in their lives or in what they wrote that spoke to us, not in a dogmatic way about this is what it is, and you shouldn't depart from it. So I think wisdom leads to seeing the importance of not knowing. And this is something, as you know, and many people will know, is very important in Chinese philosophy and in Zen, which is really just a version of Chan, a Japanese version of Chinese Chan tradition. But in those traditions, one's conceptual mind is deliberately disconcerted. The whole purpose of Zen is to put you off guard so that you no longer cover the world over with your ready-made concept, but actually are suddenly exposed to something that may just be able to get through and speak to you. In this, it reminds me of Shelley's wonderful lines about the imagination, that it can take from reality the cloak of familiarity, which has fallen over it and disguised it and prevented us from seeing the wonder of our being. And so imagination enables us to remove that cloak of familiarity. And I think that's a very important part of art. And by art, I mean music and poetry, as well as the visual arts, but also of religion, that much of the purpose of religion is to get one to a place beyond knowing. And you know, Dogen's saying that when I was seeking enlightenment, Certainty, Simplicity, and Organicism vs. Reductionism the mountains were just mountains and the rivers were just rivers. When I reached enlightenment, the mountains were no longer

mountains and the rivers were or when I thought I was on the journey, I've got this wrong. Let me start again. Yes. Okay, go ahead. Before I started the search for enlightenment, I thought mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers. While I was on the search for enlightenment, I thought the mountains were not mountains and rivers were not rivers. But now that I'm enlightened, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers. Wonderful. Wonderful. I love that. That reminds me of the journey or the point of life is to return where you started and know the place for the first time. Absolutely. I would like to know personally in your life that this is something I found as well in mine is that there are many truths that I held as an eight year old or a 10 year old. And then as I became a teenager and the more stalwart inexorable atheist type, I rejected them. And then as I've grown older, I've grown more open to them. I'm not just speaking about religious affairs, but just, or metaphysical affairs, but even theories or ideas. I want to know what's an example in your life that a mountain was a mountain before you then abandoned it and you came back. No, you know what? A mountain is a mountain. You know that mountain is a mountain in a deeper sense. Yes. Well, of course, the point is that, um, that the, the mountain as seen by the enlightened person is a mountain, but it is fully a mountain. Whereas before there was a very much diminished idea of what a mountain was. And this, this is really rather like my view about matter, which is that one, one sees matter as just lumpen matter initially. And one then goes through a phase of thinking, but there's so much more, and that must be over and above matter. But there is a way of coming back to a position which I hold in which matter is just a version of the ontological primitive, which is consciousness. So all is consciousness, which doesn't mean I'm a straightforward idealist in the sense of Donald Hoffman or, or, or perhaps Bernardo Castro, um, and certainly not in the sense of Berkeley. But I think that's an example of, you know, where you, you, you thought you knew something and then you go through a process of, of, um, of thinking about it differently. And finally, you can see a reconciliation here. So it's

like the way in which the right hemisphere enables one to see that, yes, the left hemisphere is not just useless and problematic. It has its virtues. And then it is the emissary that was sent to do the task because it was particularly skillful. And so it's good. It's only bad when it thinks it's the master. And so it's another of these cases where if one could get the left hemisphere to understand that it is not being, um, it's not being dismissed or despised. It's just being told not to think that it is the master because it absolutely isn't. It sees only a very small part of whatever it is. And one of the ways of thinking about reductionism and, uh, organicism, which I'm convinced of is that everything is actually organic, but in an organic structure, if you, um, focus in, uh, you can find in this immensely complex system of things that have feedback loops onto others and interact with other things in a way that's almost impossible to model. You can find little areas where there is a linear chain, where A leads to B leads to C. And even in the most complex diagram of an organic system, you can see these little chains. Now, those are where a mechanism can be brought to bear. You can say, I can interrupt this chain and cause something to be different. And you do it and lo and behold, it is different. And, you know, this is very good. This is the trouble with this is it is a success, but it makes us think that the structure of the whole we're looking at is mechanical, but it's not. It's organic. So I would like to explore dogma some more, because when I hear you say, I'm convinced of organicism, it sounds to me like a truth. Like I'm convinced of this. That sounds like a left brain certainty. So you can dispel that, but also I would like to give an example of the upside of dogma again. So Scott Aaronson is a quantum information computer scientist. He was saying after Trump had his ear shot at that, look, he was making a call for nonviolence, even though Scott considers himself to be on the left. He was saying, even if there's political violence and you found out, and you're a utilitarian, you want to maximize expected utility. And you've, even if you did some calculation and you found out it's worth it in the long run for us to temporarily subject our enemies to torment. Then he said, I would sooner

give up being an expected utility maximizer than give up the principle of nonviolence. And I was, I was extremely touched by that. I sent him an email about that. That specific line has stuck with me. I would give up being an expected utility maximizer for someone who's so rational, like Scott Aaronson to say that there's something underneath that. And that sounds like dogma to me.

Ethics and Morality It sounds like a principle that I hold sacred, that I'm not going to give up. And even Jesus said many statements that are unequivocal, like truly I say to you, you will not see the kingdom of you do so-and-so or truly I say to you almost any of the truly I say to you are straightforward. I am saying this to you. This is how it is. It's not like, maybe I'm going to say this to you. Yes. So let me know what your thoughts are on that, please. Well, I don't think that anything is so certain that I could never be wrong. So it's just shorthand to say, I'm, I'm pretty certain that organicism triumphs over mechanism. And I have very good reasons for saying that, certainly in the living world, but even in the non-living world. So what I mean when I say I'm certain of something is it should be read as simply, I'm as certain as one can be about, about this, that this has become more and more convincing to me over my lifetime. And really it is always a matter of a process. One becomes more convinced of something, but in order to make conversation a little less clunky, one doesn't always qualify everything by saying, well, of course, everything is up for grabs eventually. But so that's what I'd say about that. I mean, about, about having a principle and, you know, I, I, I argue against utilitarianism anyway, and long-termism and things like that. But, but let's take your friend who, who nonetheless is a utility maximizer, a deeply immoral position in my view. And he is taking, it sounds to me like a dogmatic view that this can never be tempered. And of course, this isn't as old as the hills, you know, in wartime, there are people who are conscientious objectors. And, you know, sometimes they were asked, well, you know, if, if an armed soldier was coming towards you and your sister and was going to rape her and kill you, would you not take any action to, would you not shoot him then? Would you

not, if you had a gun, would you not shoot him? And it's always possible to say, absolutely not. I think Quakers are pretty, in my experience, pretty 100% dogmatic about what they will and won't do. But I think that everything is contextual and there are contexts that will excuse something that one should normally never contemplate. And those circumstances or sets of, sets of circumstances or contexts are going to be rare and rather special. Very, very special. I mean, I gave a talk in London just before I set off for Japan called The Sovereignty of Truth. And in talking about truth, which I think is enormously important and very much, as you know, degraded and depraved now, the search for truth is something that people seem to have abandoned, or many people have anyway. So truth is deeply important. And I mentioned a book that impressed me very much when it came out in 1978 by a philosopher, Cicela Bock, called Lying. And she argued that there were no circumstances in which it was okay to lie. And I said, I don't think I agree with her. But nonetheless, the point is a very good one, that we should always think extremely hard about a lie. We shouldn't lie ever casually. But there were always going to be some extreme circumstances in which you lie. If, for example, you're protecting Anne Frank and the house is being searched, you lie, you cover up, this is okay. So there will always be circumstances, but these are the really fringe cases. And so you sent me a thing by Dan Dennett in which he was saying, he talked about fuss budgeting, which is, I know it's an Americanism, it's one I quite like, fuss budgeting about what we call them the fringe cases. You know, so if there is a fringe case, then doesn't your position fall? And he's quite right. No, it doesn't. There are fringe cases that can't be decided. We can never be 100% certain in anything. Is there a use in dogma? No, I think there is value instead in faith. And they should never be confused. And one thing you talked about earlier made me think of the important distinction between propositions and dispositions. And I think that Christianity is often misunderstood as a network of propositions, many of which sound certainly on initially hearing them, frankly, impossible. Interesting. But I don't think it is a matter

of propositions. I think it's a matter of a disposition to believe in which you try out what it is like to have faith in a mythos, to have faith in Christ, if you want to find out the value of Christianity. It's no good trying to swim by sitting on the bank reading a book about swimming, you have to actually get in the water. And that is a kind of commitment, which is not a dogmatic commitment, but is nonetheless a serious act of commitment. So I would make a difference between commitment of disposition and the dogma of propositions. You probably know that the subtlest theologian that ever lived, Thomas Aquinas, eventually one day after mass in 1273 or whenever it was, said, I have seen something today in saying mass that shows that all the work I've done for 30 years is just as chaff or straw. And from that day on, he never wrote another word. So he was non-dogmatic, although he was the most complex systematizer of theology that has ever lived, at least in Christian theology at any rate. LBW Yeah, Wittgenstein did something similar where he says, what I've done with all this philosophical work is to construct a ladder, and I'm going to kick it away because language doesn't capture the essence of what I'm speaking about and what we can't speak about one should pass over. AC Language and the Brain So this is a great point to talk about language. Most people think of language as associated with the left brain and it's just low resolution communication. I sent you an article that I wrote about that. And then there's another view of language that language, this is Chris Langan's view, language is synonymous with the universe. It's not just communication. Language is embedded in consciousness. Consciousness can be thought of as not only language, but the processing of language. It just depends on what one's definition of language is similar to how someone could say machines will never be conscious. But then if you expand machine to be any working of the material, well, what do we know about material? Like you mentioned, we have an impoverished view. So material has some element of consciousness to it. Or maybe anything that's a Turing machine is a machine or a computer. So it just depends on what one's definition of language or machine is. Now let's speak

about language. What is your view of language? Well, you know, in *The Master and His Emissary*, I wrote a chapter called *Language, Truth and Music*, which was a kind of by blow to AJ, Freddie, who wrote a book called *Language, Truth and Logic*, which was very popular when I was at university. But I wanted to suggest that truth can be expressed in other ways than in language. And that in fact, language almost certainly evolved out of music. I mean, anthropologists do differ on this, but I think the consensus is that, and it makes a lot of sense that music was, in other words, the intonation of sounds that are made was initially more important than individual terms or words. So the first thing is that language is differently understood by the two hemispheres. I mean, one of my essential points is that there is nothing that is only done by one hemisphere. Everything is done by both, but just in quite different ways, with a different kind of attention and a different approach. So language exists for both of them. And what's interesting is that actually the meaning of an utterance is better understood by the right hemisphere than the left. Although the left is more precise at using semantics and syntax. And this is a parallel with the left hemisphere's much greater facility at carrying out rote procedure with numbers. So it's much better at doing multiplication, division and all that kind of thing. But it doesn't have a very good idea of what it is doing at the end of this and whether what it's come up with is likely to be right. The right hemisphere has a better idea of what is going on overall. So it's back to the image of the right knowing and sending an emissary to do the dirty work of the nitty gritty bits, but to stick to that and not try and become the master. So language has different aspects to it. And, you know, the right hemisphere has semantics and syntax, but not as sophisticated as the left. But it also has other things that the left doesn't. It has prosody, which is the meaning of the intonation of an utterance, which makes all the difference. I mean, for example, if I say, yes, or I say, yes, or yes, or, you know, I sometimes think of making a tape of like 500 ways of saying yes, but all mean different things. So intonation is really crucial for understanding an utterance. And it has, more

importantly, I think, pragmatics, which is what does this really mean in terms of the experiential world? You know, so I usually give the example of somebody says, it's hot in here today, and they don't mean to supply me with meteorological information, which I already know about. What they mean is, would you open a window? And so the right hemisphere understands where the person is heading with what they're saying, whereas the left hemisphere is stuck with the literal. And that means also that the right hemisphere is much better at understanding metaphor. And metaphors are crucially important in language. Indeed, all language is metaphorical in its nature. I'm a follower of Lakoff and Johnson's belief that language is essentially metaphorical. And this is particularly true of science and philosophy. Their language is almost entirely based on metaphors, because new words have to be made. And we draw on experience and we come up with a word which is concrete in its meaning. So even the word abstract comes from dragging something away from basically its context. And immaterial traces back to matter meaning wood, that is the basic substance out of which everything comes. So these words are, even the most abstract words are in fact, drawn from embodied experience. So language is narrowed down when we try to make things too explicit. I don't know if people will have heard of the book, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* by William Empson. It was a great critic and poet. But it is an extraordinary book, which he wrote when he was in his 20s, when I was writing against criticism. I mean, not when I was, but at that point in his life. Now, that might sound to the very left hemisphere analytical mind as though, well, that's confusing. That's just going to get in the way of the truth. But what if the truth is, in fact, multiple, complex, and need things to be held in the mind together, even if to our everyday life? They seem to be contrary to one another. You know, as Bohr said, the bigger, the deeper the truth, the more it is going to be. It's going to be contrary, contrarian in its nature. So what if someone says, this sounds like a way of always evading being wrong, because if you say something and then it turns out to be incorrect, you can always just retort back, well, it's

incorrect, but it's also correct because there's contradictory elements to reality. And so you just have to view it from that point of view. So, for example, I'm completely clear that there's only one right question to answer to the question, did you have milk in your coffee this morning? I mean, either I did or I didn't. There's no two ways about it. And if I say I didn't, when I did, that is just wrong. And so I'm very happy to be often wrong. But not everything is a matter of fact of that nature. And when you get into the really big questions, the sort of ones we've been talking about to do with consciousness and its nature, to do with language and its nature, to do with God, to do with, you know, many things, morality and so on, there is no single simple answer. If there was, humanity would have discovered it a long time ago, because these things have been discussed since time immemorial. And people go around and around in circles. So what that says to me is that the wise person does not feel in a position to pronounce dogmatically on them. So in answer to your question, is there any value in dogma? Provided one rode back from the idea of true dogma, which is about, you know, propositions in belief. But if one rode back and said, well, I'm dogmatic that I had milk in my coffee this morning, well, I wouldn't disagree with that. But I wouldn't call that dogma at all. Dogma, by its nature, is a term that's used to apply to areas where dogma is not a good thing. Well, okay, so we have these two modes, and you keep mentioning master and his emissary. So let's spell that out for people who are wondering, okay, that's the name of the book. And the left brain is associated with being an emissary, but it thinks it's the master. What does that mean? Should the right brain be a master? I thought those were supposed to be seesawed and balanced. Master sounds like there's a hierarchy. Spell that out. Yeah, let me just say that because of the mode, The Master and His Emissary the entirely non-controversial difference between the mode of attention in either hemisphere, they bring about different experiential worlds. And the left hemisphere pays piecemeal attention, highly targeted, highly focused on a detail. And this is because its aim is to get and grab stuff. And to do that, you need to

be able to be precise in picking it up, having it, whether it's food, whether it's a tool, whatever it is. So it enables us to do the business of grabbing and getting, and it's the hemisphere that controls the right hand with which we do most of our grabbing and getting. And it also is the part of the brain that controls that aspect of language with which we pin things down. The right hemisphere, on the other hand, is at the same time keeping a completely different kind of attention, which is broad, open, sustained and vigilant. And that's because if it didn't, you would become somebody else's lunch while you're getting your own. As you need to be looking out for predators, you need to be looking out for your conspecifics and so forth. Now, what these two kinds of attention, this is all very, very much kind of reduced and ridiculously simple, but these two kinds of attention lead to two kinds of a world. The piecemeal attention of the left hemisphere brings about an understanding of the world as made up of bits that are already known and desired by us, familiar and can be put together by us in certain ways, but are decontextualized, abstracted from their context, general in nature, explicit and effectively inanimate. Whereas the right hemisphere sees that everything is actually connected ultimately to everything else, that it is changing and flowing, that it is never finally graspable and certain, that a lot of its meaning has to be implicit and isn't captured in what we think we've captured in a sentence or even a book of sentences, that its nature is to see the individual and unique, but at the same time to see that as part of a whole. So it's doing that thing I talked about of seeing the differentiated without that threatening its understanding of the whole. And it also sees a world which is embodied and animate. So if you think about those two, one of them is like the left hemisphere's world, is like a map. It's a highly abstract, stylized, diagrammatic version of reality that is not like a picture of reality, but a diagram that helps you or a map that helps you negotiate the world. It's purely for utility and it wouldn't get better if it had more detail in it. A map would be totally useless if it had loads of information. It just has to stick to the things you need to know.

Whereas the right hemisphere is seeing everything else. So it's seeing the full experiential picture of life in all its depth, with all its moral and aesthetic and other modes of being. So clearly if we live in the map, we live in a very June, a very simplified, skeletal, inanimate kind of a version of the world. If we move to living in the world described by the right hemisphere, then the world becomes alive. It's complex, but then life is complex. The world is complex. It's experience is complex. And we know it's complex and everything in science and art and in the spirituality that it is not simple and straightforward. So that's fine. But if we want to know the answer to a technical question, of a mechanistic kind, we address it to the left hemisphere, which is we need to keep the right hemisphere focused on what it understands and not to lose that while the left hemisphere is busy, like one's personal computer, grinding out an answer. Like the computer, it doesn't really understand the answer, but it can do it quickly. And so it's useful. There's nothing wrong with it. It's actually vital. That's why it was appointed, as it were, by the master to be the emissary. And I mean that also in the sense that what the left hemisphere has become has been much to do with our being, the animal that uses tools and the animal that has language, so that it is more differentiated from the right hemisphere than in other animals, although this process begins a long way down. Have you found that there's always intention embedded in attention? That's a very good question. I think there is in humans, yes. Although it can be very suspended. So the left hemisphere's attention is guided by certain intentions to become powerful, to be able to use things and therefore to grab and get things like food and material objects and so forth. So that is very highly intentional. The right hemisphere's attention is, I think, of a higher level or a more diffuse level. It's not just on that thing or that. I mean, its whole point is that it's able to see a much bigger picture, but its intention is to understand the whole. So the left hemisphere's attention is to manipulate the world. The right hemisphere's attention is to understand the world. And in that sense, they are intentional. And the world calls out for attention to each hemisphere

in different ways. So there is always a kind of dialogue or reverberative act between the consciousness and the world that that consciousness is dedicated to understanding or disposed towards. And because of that, in each case, something different comes forward as the world that we know. So each of them will produce, as I've described, a different kind of experience of the world, a different kind of world to be experienced. In animals, I think it must be less so. And it's hard to know, of course, because it's a very difficult thing to know whether an animal is intending something or not intending, and if so, from where in its brain it is doing so. Of course, yeah. What prompted your shift from a literary scholar to Hemispheric Roles in Mental Health becoming a psychiatrist? Ideas, as always. Very simply, I went to Oxford, you have to sit in an entrance exam in the school subject. And I chose English almost at random. And what I wanted to do was philosophy and theology. My reason for doing that is that the common thing that people do is philosophy, politics and economics, so-called PPE at Oxford. And I'm not the least bit interested in politics or economics and didn't want to spend two-thirds of my time on that. I wanted to be involved in philosophy. And the kind of philosophy that I liked was the kind of philosophy which had room in it for the possibility of there being a God. And I didn't want to do just theology because I wanted not to be preparing myself to read simply the religious text, but to think about theology from a philosophical perspective. So, that was my intention. And I was interviewed by people from the English literature world, the person who became my tutor, John Bailey, but also by Tony Quinton, who's a philosopher, and anyway, Gary Bennett, who's a theologian. And they said, oh, you can't do philosophy and theology because it's not an honours degree. In other words, you can only get a pass or fail degree. You couldn't get honours. And they said, you must do something that gets honours. So, they said, come and do English because obviously, you've got a knack for this. So, I did. And then I got this fellowship at All Souls, which gave me seven years to do anything I wanted. And during that time, I went back to philosophy. I went to a lot of

philosophy seminars. And I thought a lot about the philosophy of aesthetics, the philosophy of literature, and why there was something wrong with what went on in the university when we studied works of art, poems. But not limited to poems. But you started with poems. But the same sort of, your critique of the criticisms applies to not just poems. It applies not just to poems. It applies to a whole way of being in the world as I discovered later. But what I saw there, and it would apply to music, it would apply to visual art and so on, is that what we did was take something that was unique and make it general in nature by paraphrasing it. We made the implicit, which was rich, crash into simplicity by making it explicit, rather like explaining a joke, just ruin it. And the third thing was that we took something that was embodied and made it entirely abstract. And I thought, these are really interesting things. At that time, I was reading Oliver Sacks' *Awakenings*. It had only just come out. And I thought, this is bloody amazing, because here's a man who's philosophically minded, and he's using the experience of patients where something has gone wrong with their brain to illuminate how their world has changed and how their behavior has changed, how their personality has changed. And so I immediately thought, you know, I read around in the psychological literature about the things I was interested in, context, abstraction, implicit, explicit, and so on. And I realized that these quite possibly had something to do with the hemispheres. But I just thought I need to know more about how the brain works. So that's what happened. I went off and had to start at the beginning being a lowly first year medical student, the lowest kind of life form known in a hospital, and worked my way up to being the consultant that I eventually was. Now, have you found in your practice that there's a broad stroke that you can apply to your patients, such that you can say, primarily, it's a pathology of the right brain or of the left brain, something akin to this, and feel free to cite specific diagnoses like schizophrenia or depression or cynicism, or what have you? Yes, yes. Well, as you know, I've written a lot about this, in both books, particularly perhaps in *The Matter of Things*.

Schizophrenia is a fascinating condition. And it can't simply be summed up as overdrive in the left hemisphere to compensate for hypo function in the right hemisphere. But that's to take a very complex phenomenon and make it sound simple. But that is one of the very important aspects, probably the single most important aspect, to understand if you try to understand schizophrenia. It's as though somebody's left hemisphere was ramped up to the maximum and was trying to do all the understanding of the world that normally the right hemisphere would be supplying and is not supplying for them. So they take things that should be understood as metaphorical or whatever, literally. They try to solve things by taking them apart, see if they can understand what they are. They have strange beliefs, which are entirely rational. If you have lost any kind of sense of the context of the world as experienced, say, for example, they're sitting in a room and they hear a voice speak to them. And you or I would look around and think, that's very odd. It must be my imagination. It must be my mind that's doing this. But they think, but it's very clear this voice. It must be somebody and I can't see them. So they must be speaking through something that gets into this room. What are they speaking through? Oh, that plug, that socket on the wall over there. That's the only way they could be getting in. So it must be people who've taken over the electronics. Who would that be? My neighbors. It must be my neighbors. So they build up an idea that the neighbors are speaking to them through appliances and so forth in a very sort of technical and entirely rationalistic way, but it's totally unreasonable. There's all the difference in the world between being rationalistic in a mechanical sense and being reasonable. In fact, they're almost opposites. Being reasonable means not doing that, but allowing one's rational mind to operate with all the things that one knows from experience and from intuition. So it's what a wise judge would have. Not that he's lost the ability to follow an argument, but he's able to take in more than just dogma, if you like. Yes. Yeah. That confusing of the internal with the external. That reminds me of some people, there's a phrase nowadays, maybe you're familiar with it. When

they have some insight or creative spur that seemed to come out of nowhere, which before we used to characterize as a Eureka moment, or just something occurred while you slept and your brain reorganized itself, what have you. Rather than them saying, oh, that's, I solved this problem. They say, I've downloaded, it's been a download. Absolutely. And that is very much interesting that people with schizophrenia tend to talk about their brain as a mechanism. They say there's something wrong with my brain. It's just a simple point. But people who have depression tend to say there's something wrong with my mind. And people with schizophrenia have this technical way of thinking. I did some research when I was at the Maudsley on the subject studied by people who had psychotic breakdowns while at university and were referred to the Maudsley Hospital, because it's a tertiary referral center for these sort of things. And what I found was that people who became schizophrenic were overwhelmingly studying either engineering or analytical philosophy, which is interesting, because Dan Dennett said, if I hadn't been a philosopher, I'd have been an engineer. And he was asked by some journalists, do you think we have a soul? He said, of course I do. And it's made up of lots of tiny little robots. So there you have a kind of psychopathology which leads people to easily fit into the reductionist, materialist, Anglo-American analytic way of looking at the world alone. But the people who had psychotic illnesses of an affective nature, so what used to be called manic depression or is now called bipolar disorder, they were almost all studying things like history, literature, music, and so forth. And those are things that one would imagine the right hemisphere would be much better at understanding, and the engineering and the philosophy things of the left hemisphere would be much better at understanding. Personal Experiences with Psychosis So the reason why I recommend your book, there's only two books that I mentioned, it's Godel Escher Bach and Master and His Emissary, is because, well, I will tread on this delicately, let me think about how to say this, I've had many excursions with elixirs, let's say it like that, and pharmacological

peregrinations, let's say that. Okay, I love it. And many are absolutely pleasant, more than that, and many have experiences of the right brain sort that you mentioned before in the positive sense, imbuing the world with meaning and so on. And I'm not just speaking about pharmacological interventions, I'm also just saying meditative practices and so on. Yes. But there were a couple times where I've had terrible experiences, and I won't speak about them in detail, I can talk to you about them off air, but it's beside the point. I had something that was akin to a psychotic break, and I had to go to the hospital, I called myself into the hospital, just because I was worried, what may I do? I don't know, I didn't feel like I was in control. And that shocked me, I couldn't actually, I couldn't, it was so terrifying, I stopped even pursuing consciousness on this channel for almost a year. And that was in part the advice of the therapist that I was seeing, because afterward I told my family doctor, the family doctor said, see a psychiatrist and see a therapist. So I saw a psychiatrist, psychiatrist was not concerned, because this was a one-off event. And that made me so relieved, because I thought I was confessing something that was extremely terrifying, that would lock me up. And then they're like, oh no, so, and what are your thought patterns like now? And they just took notes, they're like, yeah, no, you're fine, just continue to speak to a therapist about this, just work through it, there's nothing you need that's a pill, you're fine. Okay, great, cool. The therapist said, what was occurring with me, at least this is one of her viewpoints, was that, what I'm doing here with this channel, it's called Theories of Everything, and every week, sometimes bi-weekly, twice a week, I interview someone on, oh, here's how reality works. And it's completely different than the last person, and I have, I am right-brained in the sense that I'm extremely open, extremely open, almost too open. And I used to repudiate people who would say, you shouldn't keep your brain so open that your head falls out, or your brain falls out. I would say, yeah, you're just trying to justify your own closed-mindedness. I'm going to be open-minded. And I can't, there's something in me that can't, it's difficult for me

when someone is telling me their theory, for me to think they're a fool. It's extremely difficult for me to think that. I think, okay, maybe you're onto something, I'm going to treat it like you're being honest, and I'm going to see where this leads me. And so what that was doing was, it was as if every week, what ordinarily takes someone a lifetime to get from point A to B, I was traveling the world every week, and just shaking up my head. Not even the world, traveling to the moon, traveling the galaxies. And I needed to start to say, okay, what these people are saying are just their points of view, you don't have to buy them wholesale, even though I felt like that's my job, I still feel like that's my job, like I can't dismiss people. I have to, one, be able to emulate them in my head in order to know that I've done enough preparation, and two, be able to see the world from their point of view. But anyhow, getting back to Master and his emissary, it was approximately at that time, either just before or just after, that I started to read, huh, what I've been doing was firstly narrowly focused, all I was doing was thinking, I need to be in this world more, and that there's a co-creative aspect to even perceiving, and that's in part what you mentioned by attention is a moral act. So when I'm with my wife, those are my days where I'm just in the being mode, where there's no goals. And your book, it may have helped save my life, I mean that. So, well, someone can transcribe all of that and put that as a Google review for your book. I mean it, I mean each word, and thank you. That's lovely to hear. It means a lot to me, thank you. And you might be interested to know that you're by no means the only person who said that. People have said those very words, you saved my life, or my life has just been different and better since I read your book. But I never thought that I was doing something that would have that kind of impact, but apparently it does. So this is good. And I think it's because people recognize at an intuitive level what I'm saying at a more technical, well, not terribly technical, but at a more scientific and philosophical level, they recognize that it's right. And one of the things people often say is, you know, I kind of knew a lot of this stuff, but I didn't know how to begin to express

it or to talk about it. So that wouldn't be you, but I'm glad that it had a good effect in that way. I'm, yeah, I'm amazed and delighted. Tell me about an experience of yours that's been between The Cosmos and the Sacred the publication of Master and His Emissary and the writing of The Matter With Things that has shaped your worldview for The Matter With Things. Gosh. Hmm. I don't think there was really. I mean, I could say, oh, it was this that happened. I mean, what happened was that I had a contract. Getting down to brass tacks. With Penguin Random House to write a more potted version of the Master and His Emissary. And I started doing it and I just didn't find it at all interesting. I mean, I thought, what's in this for me to say something that I've already expressed at length and subtly, rather too crudely and briefly. And if people are going to read that rather than the Master and His Emissary, I'd rather I didn't do it at all. But in trying to say something about it, I realized I'd only scratched the surface of the philosophical implications of this. I mean, after all, if it is right, and I'm pretty certain that I am right about this, that the two hemispheres, there's just so much evidence. There's something like 6,000 references in the bibliography of The Matter With Things. Because I need, if I'm saying something that's not yet completely mainstream, I have to really say why I'm saying these things. So I've really put down the evidence. There's just this evidence from so many different strands that the two hemispheres see the world differently. If that is the case. Then that has something to say about philosophy, and our understanding of everything. In fact, it ramifies into every area of life, which is why people have responded to me from the world of the law, particularly judges and barristers, attorneys, as you would say, from government, from, you know, obviously philosophers and psychologists, psychiatrists, and so on, but people from all walks of life. So my correspondence include a lavatory cleaner in Oxford, and he's a rather unusual lavatory cleaner. I think he has a doctorate, but nonetheless, a long distance lorry driver in Australia. So people write to me from everywhere and from all kinds of niches in life. So I wanted to explain what it was that this had to

say about what we can know as reality. After all, if the left hemisphere has a version of reality that it believes, and the right hemisphere has a version of reality that it believes, how can we work with this? And the answer isn't as somebody rather jokingly said, we need a third hemisphere to adjudicate, but that's not really the case. We can look at the sort of things that the two hemispheres come up with about the world and about life, and look at which ones correspond to experience. And the test is one of pragmatism, that if you believe a lot of false things, you'll be caught out by experience rather often. But if you believe things that tend to be truer, you will find that experience confirms that body of beliefs. And you'll find that the body of beliefs held by the right hemisphere are much, much better ones to work with than that of the left hemisphere. So that meant trying to go back to the first principles and say, okay, let's describe the ways in which we get any handle on reality. And I take those to be what I call the portals, which are attention itself, perception, which is not the same as attention. Judgment, which is the things we think on the basis of what we've attended to and perceived. Emotional and social intelligence, cognitive intelligence, apprehension, which is the way of grasping and using what we and testing it out in the world. And what I discovered was that of all these, and creativity as well is one of the ways in which we understand the world at the very start, because a percept comes to us not as a complete blank, but we already are working on it creatively to see where it fits in the world, if you know what I mean. I mean, all this happens in millions of seconds, but so that's part of it. And what I discovered effectively was that apart from what I call apprehension, which is grasping something to use it, the way in which we evaluate the world and come to know anything about it are all dependent on things that are better done by the right hemisphere than the left. And then I thought, well, after that, you need to go on and look at the pathways. When you've got these, if you like, data points or information or whatever you like to say in the modern jargon, but basically, when you've got this view of the world, how are you going to take it forward to know

what is more true or less true? And I thought, well, there's effectively four things, science, reason, intuition and imagination. And I think nobody would disagree with science and reason. Some people, but not the majority, would disagree about intuition and imagination, but they've been given a bad rap recently. And in the second part of *The Matter of Things*, I try to explain how each of these is needed. We cannot do with just one or two and that each of them has limitations. Each of them can only answer certain kinds of questions and only be so reliable. And we're best to try and bring all these four into play. And particularly imagination, actually, which the history of science and mathematics shows was extremely important in virtually all the important discoveries made in either science or mathematics. But then in the last part of the book, to say, okay, so we've got this information about which hemisphere is more veridical. And we've got this information about ways in which we can look at things and we shouldn't neglect any of them. Let's look at the cosmos and say, what can we know about it? And that's the last part of the book where I look not just at the one and the many and the coincidence of the repository, but the fabric, if you like, of reality. Time, space, matter, consciousness, and partly to my surprise, values, purpose, and the sense of the sacred. I say partly to my surprise because I knew the sense of the sacred was going to be a very important element in what I had to say about what we can understand about reality. But I hadn't realized how very, very important up there with space and time and matter and consciousness were values and purpose. And these are, of course, things that science dogmatically rejects. And I think it's entitled to do so. There are advantages to saying, I'm not going to consider that there could be purpose here. I'm not going to consider values. I want to rule them out and simply look at the facts. I think it's naive, but it's very, very helpful. And it's helped science make many of its great discoveries. But it is naive in the sense of being a guide to the nature of reality. It can only tell us certain things within certain bounds. It has axioms. And what I've discovered is that values and purpose seem to be inherent in the cosmos, not just in the

living world, but in the cosmos. There seems to be directionality. In the evolution of the cosmos towards things that are complex and beautiful. And there seems to be directionality in life, obviously, although it's been denied until very recently. But finally, people have given up the ghost on that one and decided they'd better come clean and say, very obviously, all living things exhibit purpose and life has purpose. But also values that goodness and truth and beauty, particularly the three platonic virtues, are not things that we make up to cheer ourselves up. They're not invented. They're discovered. In other words, they exist. And we either get to recognize them and respond to them and by doing so help them to become more themselves, to grow and to be manifest, or we fail to discover them and our life is robbed of much of its meaning. I don't know where that leaves us. But that was probably a long way of saying, you know, going back to what happened that made me change my mind. It wasn't really anything that made me change my mind, an event. It was just that I realized that the unfolding of my thought, the logical progression of it, the flow of it was towards this book. And I think that in writing that book, I have said pretty much all that I want to say, including the very, very difficult chapter on the sense of the sacred. It's over 100 pages long, so it's a short book in itself. And it costs me more grief in writing than anything else I've written. I write rather painfully. I don't like writing. People often express surprise because they say, well, it doesn't read like that. But the reason it doesn't read like that is because I sweated blood over it. And writing about whatever you like to call it, the sacred, the divine, God, the holy, whatever is meant by these words, and to do justice to them, not travesty them, not to say things that were obviously false, but to try and reveal what it was that I was seeing to other people was exceptionally difficult. But I've been very comforted by people who have said that that particularly part has helped them. So clergy have written to me fairly interestingly to say, you've said what I have always thought as a clergyman, was a priest, but never found the ways of putting. But also people who've lost their faith or never had any faith who

are atheists have written and said, I used to think it must be all rubbish, but after reading what you have to say, Personal Practices you've persuaded me that there's something there very important that I can't dismiss. So there we are. Wonderful. Now the audience, I'm sure is, as well as myself, eager to learn more about the practical implications of your work for you, how you have taken your own work and shaped your own life. Give a specific example of how you used to solve a problem or used to see the world and you now see it differently because of it. But also I want to say that I listen extremely, extremely carefully to each word. And you said something, you said moral comma dot, dot, dot. Well, emotional intelligence, cognitive intelligence, social intelligence. And then you didn't get back to that word moral there. And I was wondering if moral intelligence would be the same to you as wisdom. So feel free to tackle both questions, the practical implications and what the heck is moral intelligence slash wisdom? Well, the practical implications is a question I'm often asked, and it's a hard one. And partly because I'm not very good at doing things that I know to be good for me. Like Samuel Johnson, who I wrote about much earlier in my life in my 20s was always a bit of a hero to me. He said, do as I say, not as I do. And because I'm not good at putting into practice the things that I know are good, I'm intermittently good at it. One thing I'm fairly good at is regularly praying and sometimes meditating. I think these are very important aspects of life. And one can only see why they are when one starts doing them. I also intuitively spend an awful lot of my time in the world of literature, music, poetry, but also unfortunately of abstractions, because increasingly I'm caught up in conversations with people all around the world about philosophical issues. Sorry about that. Sorry about contributing. I love it. I absolutely love it. But when you ask me to evaluate, is this a good thing? Or should I really be saying, what do I know? And just accepting the gift of life and its beauty in a generous spirit. I don't know, but I can't help myself. Ideas have always been the driver of my life. And so I love to talk about them, as I guess you can see. There are things that I think we can quite

practically do. First of all, we can stop doing many of the things that seem to be causing problems. The first thing a psychiatrist does with anybody who comes in for help is not to tell them what to do. I mean, unless you're extremely inexperienced. When I was inexperienced, I used to tell people after talking to them or listening to them for an hour and a half, and they'd often say, good heavens, you know more about me than my parents, my children, my partner, whatever. Yeah, I would know what basically they needed to do. And I tell them, but they wouldn't accept it, partly because if they had been able to see that at that stage, they would have probably thought of it for themselves. So one of the first things to do is to sort of say to people, what is it you're doing that is not working? And try to stop doing that. So much in my belief that the more you know, the more you know, how little you know. And the more you see the vanity of action, you see the importance of acceptance. I mean, action has a place, knowing has a place, but I'm speaking in a sort of paradoxical way, in an oriental way about those things. But I also think that not doing is a very important way of improving. So we can't actually make the things we want to grow in us grow by going grow, damn you. Instead, we have to stop stultifying them and stunting their growth. And much of what we do nowadays in the modern world is stultifying and stunting to them. So one first thing is to look at your day and see how much of the time you're paying attention to something you want to and how much of your time you're distracted. And the modern world is built to distract our attention to fragment it. I mean, I'm not saying anything original here. But of course, that plays into the left hemisphere thing, which is, oh, something that gives me pleasure that I can use and so on. But no, what we want is a much sort of humbler approach, which is to try and be there and see what this thing before us is in all its richness, to allow it to speak to one. And so partly, I think monitoring what it is that you're doing, seeing the things that you're doing that are likely to be destructive or repetitive and unhelpful, and finding something to put in their place that embodies some of what I mean by right hemispheric thinking or right hemispheric being.

And I think there's probably no way to say that quickly here. But the Master and His Hemisphere is not a very long book. And I know people who've read it many, many times. So it helps to explain that. And what more can I say? I mean, I think the thing is that being and doing and thinking for me are one indivisible entity. And I started to think these things a very, very long time ago. And I've merely, if you like, refined them, expressed them more closely, more clearly, as I've got older. But that's a kind of way of thinking that I didn't suddenly adopt. It's a kind of way of thinking that grew with me and in me. And so I can't really say, oh, I started to do this, that or the other.

Sometimes I make myself stop doing things that I know to be unhelpful. But largely, it's something that has become almost intuitive. And that's why it's difficult to say to people, you know, if you just do the following three things or six things or nine things or whatever it is, 12 rules for life, 48 ways of doing what, there's so many book titles. I mean, people would love that. But really, what I'd be doing is speaking to their left hemisphere. The left hemisphere is going, I want to know what a quick fix to this is, without changing my whole way of thinking about the world. And unless you change the whole way in which you think about what a human being is, what the world is and what we're doing here, then nothing will improve. So that's what I have to say about that. And I know it's disappointing, but it would be even more disappointing if I came up with some fatuous life coaching plan that you should do the following things. That's much too narrow. What I'm really saying is that something enormous has to happen, which is that you see something differently. And once you've seen that something differently, everything then looks different and falls into place. This is why I'm sorry to keep saying this, and I'm not saying it out of any spirit of, you know, pride, I hope, but just of feeling happy that I have connected with people, that they write and say, once you see what it is you're saying, everything seems different and better and more fulfilling. So that, I think, Moral Intelligence, Wisdom, and the Nature of Love is what I would say. Moral intelligence, if one can call it that, because it's not just a matter of

thinking, it's a matter of like emotional and social intelligence, understanding. So it is a kind of intelligence. And I think it's enormously important. And the difficulty we've got into is that we think that what is good, what is morally good, is certain particular practices or beliefs, whereas the mistake is to rule out and forget that what matters is the disposition of the mind. So you can have people who think a lot of very worthy sentiments in the abstract, but are actually not particularly nice or particularly warm or particularly kind people. And you can find people who, you know, if you wanted to search around in their minds, you might find them honestly saying things that you thought were pretty bad, but they might turn out to be astonishingly kind and generous people. So it's a very difficult one. It's not just about things you do. And it's certainly not just about outcomes. It's about the cast of mind that is behind the action. And the trouble with utilitarianism, in a nutshell, is that the very cast of mind that is calculating is quintessentially immoral. It is exactly the kind of thinking about what... Immoral. Immoral. Immoral, not immoral. No, immoral. Interesting. Because it is the kind of, you know, if I say to you, torturing children for pleasure is wrong, and you say, but why? Can you explain that to me? Lots of people get a lot of pleasure from watching things on the dark web that involve this. And, you know, the sum of their pleasure is great, but the suffering of the child, you know. Once you start talking like that, I mean, we're dealing with evil, frankly. And psychopaths think like this. Psychopaths who are, you know, people dislike using the term evil, but are basically evil in their behavior and thinking. They think in this very calculating way. And the message of all the wisdom traditions and religions is that you don't act and think out of calculation, but you act and think from what is called the heart, particularly in the East. In fact, in Chinese, the word for thinking actually involves the concept of the heart. And the Japanese don't think in abstract terms. They think in... they have very few abstract nouns. So this business of experience, the heart, our embodied being, our disposition towards others is the basis of morality. And it's a complex issue, but I think that if

you had to put your money on any of the current philosophies of ethics, of morality, I'd say virtue ethics, but I certainly wouldn't say utilitarianism. And I wouldn't say deontology either, which is far too rigid. So there we are, but I don't think that that's all that's involved in wisdom. Gosh, wisdom, what is that? Wisdom is like God. It is something that simply can't be pinned down and reduced to a certain concept. It's a thing that one recognizes when one meets it. In a way, love is like that too, isn't it? I mean, love is not a rare experience, I think. But love is one of those things that I can't explain to someone else who's never been in love or never really truly loved anything or any person or any place. It's not something you can really put into words. It just slips out of the words and vanishes into nothing, banality. But it's so important. And wisdom is of this kind too. I mean, what one can be certain of, that it is not the same as knowledge. There are people who are wise who don't have great knowledge, and there are people who do have great knowledge and are wise. So they're almost independent of one another. But having great knowledge might be a temptation to believe that you were wise just because you had a great knowledge of things. Whereas wisdom is something that comes out, as I say, something that can't be put into words, I'm sorry. And it's often again best defined apophatically by what it is not. It is not knowing exactly what to do or knowing the answer to the big questions or anything like that. It's almost an abstention from any of those, but not in a negative way. One of the problems for Westerners is that they think that, for example, emptiness must be negative and bad. And the word that is often translated as emptiness Eastern Philosophy is sunyata in Sanskrit. And that really doesn't mean emptiness in the way that we think of it, just like a void. It means a potential space in which something could grow. So it's like clearing away things so that something has a chance to emerge. I find this idea extremely important. There are so many ways in which it's true. You mustn't be so much in the face of another person that you don't allow them to come forward to you. You mustn't be so clear about your thinking that you drive away the things that would speak to you if

you stayed quiet. I mean, it's a common observation by Easterners that we in the West do far too much speaking and talking. I'm not doing it now. But it's almost antithetical to that, without that being an emptying in a negative sense, but more really a fulfilling and allowing of something rich, spiritual, to come into being. You must stop me if I'm yakking. No, no, no. There's so many threads here, and it's beautiful. Almost like poetry. Well, that's the only kind of language that can deal with this, yes. I'll tug at one of the threads. I like what you said about the apophatic tradition, and also that you should look at what is it that you're doing that you should stop doing. You've also outlined in your books, multiple times in the books, about how... primates have the most inhibitory neurons, and we, of the primates, have the most of that, and the corpus callosum, I believe, is primarily inhibitory. Yes. I wasn't exactly sure if that meant it's at the level of the corpus callosum, or if the signal that gets transmitted is an inhibitory signal. If you want, I can very quickly try and answer that. A lot of the neurons across the corpus callosum are so-called excitatory neurons, glutamatergic neurons, and quite a lot of them are GABAergic neurons, which are inhibitory neurons. But even the excitatory ones often abut on so-called interneurons, which tend to be inhibitory. And the overall effect of transmission is, yes, excitatory in that it gives information, but largely it is inhibitory in function overall. So I think I use the image of when you press the brake pedal, that is a positive action, but it results in an inhibition. So one has to separate out where the nerves are, as if we're doing a positive action, which they are, but often the outcome of that is inhibitory in nature. So there's a phrase that there's sins of omission, sins of commission. And it's popular now to think of sins of commission, which just for those who don't know what this means, you can sin by not acting. So that's omission, and you can sin by acting commission. People think that the sins of omission are of equal import as the sins of commission. But I don't know if that's true. I would say it's much more important that you minimize the lies that you tell than you maximize the truths that you tell. I would agree. And it's much harder as

well. There's some priggishness with saying, I'm just going to tell the truth, or I'm just going to do my good act. But you're sinning against your sister, or your mother, or what have you. You should minimize those. Yes. I'm with you, Curt. I think there are cases where omitting to do something is to be regretted. But most of the serious sins are sins of commission, I think. And often, as I say, the important thing is the intention in the mind. And the intention in the mind of somebody who is performing an act positively to commit something that is sinful is a more unpleasant, a more immoral state than the state of mind of somebody who is perhaps just a bit confused, apathetic, lazy, or whatever, and doesn't really do the things that they ought to do. That's also regrettable, but it doesn't seem to me to speak of somebody who's as morally comfortable. I also like your point about emptiness being not what we think it means in the West, that the Eastern notion of emptiness is a void that is the potential for something to grow akin to dirt. That's important, because earlier, it could be interpreted that what I'm saying is that the East was incorrect in some way, or left-brain. I'm not saying that. I was saying that what I've found to be the case is that the Western interpretation of the Eastern mode of thinking is something that I've noticed many left-brain people flock to. And I think it's because they have a left-brain understanding, so they'll experience the world as empty, because they've taken that word emptiness as empty. So they'll say, I've gotten to a place where there was nothingness. I experienced nothingness, a point of nothing. And everything was the same, and I was God, and you were God, and there is only this oneness, and so on. It's the difference between your right-brain ruling and you using right-brain rhetoric. It's as if you think you're being this holistic, implicit right-brain person, but you're actually using your left-brain. It's being hijacked, where the left-brain is responsible for racism, because it sees you as the same as any Scottish person, or any white person, or as any what-have-you. I'm going to remove the differentiation that makes you unique. And you can do that to the point of getting some of the insights that you believe belong to the East, but it's your Western

interpretation of the East. And so, that's what I was saying, and I'm making that more explicit, using my left brain to make that more explicit. I mean, what I'd say is, first of all, that that business of thinking you're being right-brained, but actually being very left-brained about it, is one of the reasons that I do this, no doubt, frustrating thing of backing away from saying, now, what you need to do is the following half a dozen things, because then people start doing those things and think, I've got it, but they haven't. And this is very true of true Buddhism. Buddhism can be completely misunderstood, and often is, by Westerners, as a sort of benign whatever-ism, in which you're well-disposed towards everything. And that fits in very well with people who basically want to be atheistic, but to preserve some sense that, you know, perhaps there is a, I don't know what it is they think, really. I mean, I start reaching for words like spirit and so on, but if you bring that into the conversation, Religious Perspectives then why not stop being an atheist? Yeah, they want to proclaim, I am spiritual without being religious, and look at you, you're this backward person who can't help but take both at the same time, when all you need is one, and you don't see the poison of the other. That's how they think, and there's some truth to that, and there's also some not-truth to that. Yes, and you know, I have very good Buddhist friends, and I know that what they are embodying is something very different from what is taken on by a lot of Westerners as a kind of formulaic way of being spiritual. It is very much a disposition, I think. That idea seems to me an important one, that it's about dispositions, not about propositions. But, yes, what was the other thing you were saying? Well, actually, I'll jump off at this point, because you mentioned your Buddhist friends, and I do want to put an asterisk on that. The way that I think of Buddhism, prior to a couple of years ago, was Buddhism, but as I spoke to, and I investigated this more, and I spoke to actual Buddhists, especially those who came from the East, or who are Indian, or Tibetan, or what have you, there's so many different sorts of Buddhism, that even to say that Buddhists don't believe in God, or Buddhists don't believe in religion or

spirituality, the traditional elements of religion, you can't say that, no. That's not straightforward. No, it isn't. Right. And Anand Vaidya, who is an Eastern, who was, he unfortunately died a few months ago, he is an Indian philosopher. He said that in the Vedic tradition, currently, materialism, and historically as well, is more prevalent than idealism, and that there was an actual effort by the Indian government in 1960s or 1950s or so, just prior to the New Age movement, to export the idea that Indian is non, Indian means non-dualism. Like the Indian government, I forget the specific person who was in charge of this, akin to a marketing campaign, was quoting that when people think of Italy, they think pizza, we want, when people think of India, to think non-dualism. And they had a specific sort of non-dualism, even me saying non-dualism without putting an asterisk implies there's one sort, when there's Advaita Vedanta, and there's non-union with God, or union with God, subject, object, being the same. Yes. There are five different flavors. Yes, yes. But anyhow, I just wanted to say that, like, even when you, I know you know this, but for people who are listening, when I say Buddhism or you say Buddhism, we're putting asterisks and just, again, painting with a broad stroke, but there's a multiplicity. We're painting with a broad stroke, and almost anything at its opposite could be found somewhere within the broad church of Buddhism. Yeah, like someone who comments on your channel and says, oh, the Vedic said this 3,000 years ago, as if the Vedic said one thing, or there's only one interpretation of that. Yes, indeed. And of course, the same thing can be said of Christianity, because the things that Christ said were written down so long after Christ that we don't know what he actually said, and a lot of them are contradictory, or apparently contradictory, on the surface. I would say that they can be understood, and one can get back to see what it was that Christ probably intended by the remark that is reported, but that's another thing. But yes, I didn't realize until quite recently, there were many Buddhas as well. There's the one person we call the historical Buddha, but there are other Buddhas that are believed in by different kinds of

Buddhists. So, it is not a straightforward thing. I know religion has a bad connotation for many people, and I fear that I may be in some way guilty of being spiritual without being religious, because I don't actually go to church. But I think that would be probably wrong. I think I'm spiritual but religious. I have a lot of time for a number of different religions, but I was brought up in the Christian religion, and increasingly, I think its mythos is surely richer than that of any other religion. It's just an astonishing story, however you understand it, and has a kind of richness to it, which I can't say I can find in all other religions, but there we are. But everybody will have their own ideas about either religion being, as a group, a bad thing, or about there being one religion that's better than another, and there we are. Wolfgang Smith and Jonathan Pazol make this point. I believe you're aware of them. I am. No, I know him too, yes, yes. Okay, great. He said, and he's also someone who lived in India for two decades in his formative adult years, he said that the Eastern idea of salvation, well, firstly, they don't have the, okay, there's the idea, which he calls perennialism, which is called perennialism, sorry, that all religions are expressing the same truth. He doesn't like that idea. He doesn't see that as being true from his firsthand experience and also from his explicit analysis of texts. He said that the Eastern way of solving the problem of existence is to obliterate yourself from existence, to get yourself to the point of no longer being around whatever that means. And the way that you do that is by going into an undifferentiated void. And then he said, there's the Christian idea though, that came about, which is that you are to have unity with multiplicity. And somehow that's done via Christ. Exactly how? I don't know. I don't understand it. He explained it several times and many other people echo it, like Jonathan Pazol. But I intimate it. I can feel it. I can see it. I just can't put my left Prayer, Meditation, and Death brain on it. Anyhow, as we end, I want to ask you about how you pray. And the reason is that, look, there's one modality, which involves petitionary prayer. So you seek an outcome. So you're saying, look, I want to recover from illness or I want to secure employment or what have

you, please help me. And then an alternative was, or is you supplicate for something like strength. God, give me the strength, as sometimes people say, or you request resilience. Or you can just say, okay, God, I don't know what I should be doing. I'm not even going to ask you to tell me what to do. I just want it to be in your will. Just let your will be done. There's many sorts of prayer. And I was speaking to Rupert Sheldrake, off air, and I was asking him about this. And then he said, Curt, that's an extremely personal question. How do you pray? But he said, it's a good question. In fact, Curt, I would like to make an entire series on that, asking different people, how do you pray? And then I asked him on air, Rupert, how do you pray? So if it isn't too personal or impertinent of a question, I would like to know, how do you pray? There are a number of sorts of differences, I think, that can be made. There is a praying where one utters perhaps formulaic words. So I have collected and have collections of prayers. And there are some that I particularly like. And I often use those prayers and repeat them and sometimes say them several times over, even many times over, depending on what they are. So that is one way in which I would say I pray. But another is by saying, I don't know what I'm doing. I need some help. And I'm listening. And there's a prayer, which I was asked, actually, on a podcast, to say a couple of prayers that I thought were important. And one of them is one that I say very regularly, pretty much every day, which was written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who, of course, was hanged after being tortured in a concentration camp by the Nazis for helping Jews. And he had this prayer, which I think is a slightly abbreviated version of it, but it goes like this. At the beginning of the day, O God, I call to Thee. Help me to pray and to gather my thoughts to Thee, for of myself I am not able. Within me all is dark, but in Thee is light. I am alone, but Thou wilt not abandon me. I am weak, but Thou wilt help me. In me there is grief, in Thee long-suffering. I do not understand Thy ways, but Thou, O God, knowest which is my path. Thine be the praise and thanks for the quiet of the night. Thine be the praise and thanks for the new day. Whatever Thou givest this day, O God, Thy name be

praised. Now that does a lot of things. It sort of asks, but without making any specific demands. It says, I don't really know, but You know, and I'm placing my faith in You. It says, I need to be grateful for the good things that have been given me, and whatever happens, since it is what You will, I should be grateful. So I think that is, and it also acknowledges right at the outset how difficult it is to pray. So that is a favorite prayer of mine. I mean, there are others, but I won't go on with that. But another one is, as I've said, just really being open and listening, because a lot of prayer is about listening. It's not about speaking. And we can, once again, drown out what it is that we might have heard if we'd been quiet. So it comes back again to a sort of apophatic kind of prayer. But also, conventionally, prayer is divided into four species. Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication, so-called acts, A-C-T-S. And when I was young, I obviously thought that supplication was what prayer was mainly about. I now think it's mainly about adoration. But I think everything has its place, adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication, despite the fact that Saint Francis said, when you pray, you must ask for nothing, nothing, which is interesting. And of course, his most famous prayer is the canticle of the sun, which is really just saying, praise, adoration to God, including for, you know, and praise be thou for our sister bodily death. I know a very good old friend, a very dear man, a gentle soul, and he couldn't come to terms with the idea that he was dying, which he very clearly was. He had cancer and he was dying. And he said, I can't understand what Francis meant about this. This is nonsense. But I have a completely different view of death. I think it is a blessing. I mean, it's obviously not something that is always a blessing at all times in life. But it's not the antithesis of life. It's in a way the natural outcome of life. The antithesis of life is the machine. And it is the machine that is having a war on life, and on the spirit, and on the body, and on nature. And this is where we are now. There are strident voices that are promoting machines and machine-like thinking over against life, nature, the body and soul. So I think of death as a perfectly natural

thing. And I'm absolutely ready for it when it should come. In fact, when the Grim Reaper knocks on my door, I'll probably say, where have you been? You young people have no sense of time. I'm well past my sell-by date. I'm joking, but I'm not joking. I really feel, you know, happy with that. So, I don't know if you know this story from Nietzsche, and I forget where he wrote it. But it's the story of King Midas, and King Midas was asking a daemon, okay, what is the best and most desirable thing? And the daemon stood there, shrill and motionless, letting out a laugh finally, and said, oh miserable ephemeral race, children of hazard and hardship, why do you force me to tell you what would be so much better for you not to hear? The best of all things would be for you to not be, to not be born, to be nothing. And the second best would be for you to soon die. But it was a cautionary tale in that instance. Yes, and it's not, they're not sentiments that I would subscribe to at all. I think life is wonderful. I just don't think that it's negated by death. Mary Midgley, who died at the age of, I think, 96 or 97, but when she was about 92, she wrote something about death and made, to me, an absolutely stunning point. That effectively, if there was no death, you would never, ever, ever be able to stop your existence going on and on and on and on and on. And that, to me, is an awful thought. The thought that there could never be any end to whatever it is that I'm experiencing. And so, you know, after that, it's just a question of when. And I think 70 years is a rather good portion size. In part, one of the reasons I went to the hospital at one point was because I had the feeling that this was going to last forever. And if I was to be rational, there is no difference between ending my life now and ending it later. Because if it's all on an infinite continuum, I think that's a dangerous, dangerous road that I was on. I think that somehow, through a natural death, where you greet death as an old friend, they said that in Harry Potter, an old friend. So, not just a friend, it's an old friend you're supposed to want to live, but also be comfortable with death. It's through that that you either transcend death or you don't die. But I don't know how to make sense of that. I mean, you're not talking about what happens

after death, or are you, in what you've just said? Well, I have ambiguity in what I mean, and clarity eludes me in these matters. No. Well, nobody does. I mean, that's the subject of which nobody has experience. So, we can only make intuitive guesses. My thought on that is quite simple, that if there's something, I'll be absolutely fascinated to know what it is. And if there's nothing, I won't be there to be disappointed. So, there's no worry about it. So, there it is. I'm not, by the way, recommending, in case anybody thinks I'm recommending people to die. I'm certainly not. I'm recommending to them to live. But part of the joy of living is part of one's understanding of life is that it will have an end. And one of the things that the Japanese are so brilliant on is the importance of transience, the fact that things don't last, and neither does life. And that if they did, they would be somehow completely devalued. They become something quite, quite different, and a lot of their power and value would be taken away from them. So, in this sense, I believe it's not something to fear or worry about. Well, I won't get personal about it, but that's how I think. I think the best aspects of life that have the highest quality to it have an aspect of death that's accepted. A-C-C, not E-X. Yes. Well, I'll give you an example. A trivial one is Breaking Bad, one of the best TV shows. Vince Gilligan, who wrote it, conceptualized that this is not going to continue on forever. I have the ending in mind, and now it's just a matter of getting from the beginning to the end. And it would happen in three to five seasons, he thought, from the beginning. And because of that, it wasn't long and drawn out, like many shows become because they get successful, and then it's no longer in the creators' hands. It's in the television producers' hands who just want this to continue to live on. You see this with McDonald's. They want it to live on, and it doesn't have a personality to it. Same with Apple after Steve Jobs. They want it to continue. But I think there's something about a company. I think if you want to have a successful company, The Importance of Endings in Life and Art and now I'm just speaking about companies, but you can generalize this. You have to have the idea of its death baked in. So for me, for this podcast,

I'm not trying to... Well, I can contrast it with some other people who are trying to make a large production out of their podcast and have it have multiple different hosts, and then it's going to have a brand name and that will survive for 100 years. I think this will continue for another 10 years or so until I've exhausted every theory that there is to be known. But I think that people sense that I'm only doing this when I'm interested in speaking with someone, and I'm not just trying to crank out something for the production machine that's supposed to outlast me. But at the same time, I feel selfish for saying that, because then it means that I'm tying my death to the death of the show. But I also think that Apple was at its best when it was with Steve Jobs. Well, anyhow, there are quite a few thoughts there. Feel free to comment, contradict, or riff off of.

Look, I think there is a time for everything. I'm going to get really funny here and say that there are a couple of things that I'd like performed at my funeral. And one of them is the very last chorale of the St. John Passion, which is quite short and very, very beautiful and moving, I think. And the other is something that I came across in the last year, I think, maybe a little longer ago, it doesn't matter, which is a live performance on a video clip on YouTube of Judy Collins and Pete Seeger singing a song called Turn Turn Turn, which was Seeger's version of Ecclesiastes. You know, there is a time for sowing and a time for reaping or harvest or whatever. There's a time for living, there's a time for dying, basically. And this idea that there are times for things and they succeed one another, and that they also turn, in other words, that there is a circle or cycle to them, is hugely relevant for me. And it sounds as though it might be a rather simple thing, but listen to it. And not only is the song very good, but the whole point is watching Judy Collins' face while she's singing. It's absolutely a spiritual experience because you can empathize with, you can see the soul of the woman singing. It's absolutely extraordinary. I don't think it'll ever happen at my funeral because we'd have to have a big video screen and have this. I don't particularly like the idea, but it is something that in any case seems to me absolutely magical. And so there we are.

Okay, let's wrap this up with a quote from Carl Jung. He said something akin to this, and I'll write this out on screen. He said, when asked, what makes a good life or a happy life? What contributes to a happy life, I believe? He said, good physical health and mental health as well. So number one. Number two was good, personal, intimate relationships like a family, like marriage, like even friendship. Number three, the faculty of perceiving beauty in art and nature. Number four, a reasonable standard for living satisfactory work. And number five is a philosophical and religious viewpoint that allows you to cope successfully with life's vicissitudes. Something like that. I want to know, The Role of Relationships do you agree with that? Is that incomplete? Do you see some of those mapping on to the left more than the right or vice versa? I wouldn't attempt to reduce it to hemispherics, as it were. I do agree with it. And I note that of those five things, three of them are the things that I always say on the basis of a vast amount of research, not my research, but just of research that exists. The three things that lead to a fulfilling life, and these are a relationship with other people, our relationships with other people, whether they be family or friends or whatever. The second is a relationship with the natural world. And the third is a relationship with what everyone likes to call it, the sacred, the divine. And what I didn't like in the way it was expressed, and it may just have been leaving options open, was when you said number five, it was almost put out as a coping mechanism. Whether it's true or not, it's something useful to have. Whereas I would like to say no, that I think that when we are in communion with other human souls, when we are in communion with nature, and when we are in communion with the divine, we know that this is communion. It is not something made up. It is something more real than anything else that can be named. It is far, far more real than all the things, the superficial material things around us that we count as reality. These are the main sustenances of a human life and a human fulfillment. So I would agree. Now, lastly, I don't mean to keep you, but we've mentioned the word listen quite a few times, and you especially. You talked about when we're

praying, you can pray to open yourself up so that you can hear. And earlier we were talking about some of the delusion or paranoia or schizophrenic thoughts that can occur where someone believes they're hearing something that they're not, or sorry, that something is external when it was just internal. So one answer, I was going to ask you this question, but I'm going to tell you my answer to the question, just as a jumping off point. One answer to the problem of how is it that you're supposed to open yourself up to listening to the divine, but at the same time, be cautious because what you think of as a voice can lead you down a dark path, especially if it's a maniacal one, either in the positive or negative direction. And one answer that came to me as I was saying this, is you listen with your heart and you don't listen with, it's not going to be a voice that says it in English. It's not going to be the text that's written on the wall or scrawled. It's going to be something that manifests as a feeling from your heart. Okay. Now maybe that's foolish. That was my solution. It just occurred to me. I may even just remove that from this podcast because I don't, I don't know why I would tell you my answer prior to ask to hear yours, but I mean, I want to know what yours are because you're Listening to the Divine informed from many aspects. Theologically, you're informed as a psychiatrist. I've never really sat down and asked myself that question, although I'm aware of the problem that when one is listening, is this something that one would say is coming from somewhere divine? Or is it something that one's struggling to put in the place of silence or even worse, that is coming to you from a part of you that you don't want to be listening to or obeying. So it is. That is a real question. But I suppose what I think is that I think one knows when something is, one never knows finally. I don't think there's any certainty in life. I think that's been one of my themes today and one of my themes in general is that we can never be certain of things. And faith is not certain because if it was certainty, it would just be a fact and we'd know it. But instead, it is literally a fidelity. It is a matter of allegiance to something more beautiful, more true and better than we are and that one wants to have to do with and to allow

one's life to be enriched by. So it's that. And I think that one knows when one's dealing with that, not always, but one has a sense probably what you mean by feeling it in your heart. And I think one of the things to do is to sort of ask yourself, you know, is what I'm hearing the sort of thing that I would just be saying anyway to myself? And if so, it's not necessarily wrong, but it might be more convincing if you're being spoken to by some entity that is putting in your mind ideas of things that you tend to duck away from, that you don't want to do, but you know are probably good and right. So that's all I can say. I'm not in any sense a very good practitioner of any religion or spiritual life at all. It's just that I know it's very important. The question that I'm asking is, as a clinical psychologist or a psychiatrist, what are some practical tips that someone could know to differentiate between a voice or what they're listening to than like a genuine spiritual insight? Something like that. I'm terribly disappointed. I don't think I've got any kind of rules for discernment as it were. But there are a number of things I would say. I mean, I think in the normal working state, when you haven't been taking drugs, if you start thinking that you're hearing voices speaking to you and they're saying weird things, you know, then I think that probably you should see a psychiatrist. But the trouble is that, of course, unfortunately, one of the effects of psychosis is to take away your insight so that you don't see that this is likely to be an illness. You think, obviously, this is very real. But on the back of this, I would say, you know, taking mind-altering drugs of the recreational kind, even Ayahuasca, which is probably the most interesting of them, I think is fraught with all kinds of dangers. And I think we're much too glib in our embracing of it. And I think the current drive to use them more in a clinical setting is something that I cheat with a great deal of scepticism, partly because I think that the pharmaceutical industry can see making enormous profits out of legally selling these drugs, which they never had to develop because they were already there for the asking. But they can be very damaging. At least half of the time for most people, they don't have good trips. They remember the good trips, but,

you know, they're also bad trips. And I know people who've had terrible trips on mushrooms and LSD and other things. And I'm not saying there aren't people who have wonderful experiences. But I think what's happening is that a filter is being removed. People sometimes say, isn't this liberation of the right hemisphere from the control of the left? I don't think it is at all. And in fact, I quote some evidence from some experimental work done in the 1960s, which couldn't be done now, because it wouldn't get ethical approval, but which suggests that it is in fact the left hemisphere that is the source of hallucinations, delusions, and all the sort of things that people experience, even if they're pleasant. So it's more likely that it's the un-disinhibiting of the left hemisphere. In fact, there are cases of people who were having a temporal lobectomy in this particular series of patients studied, and they were given LSD before and after surgery. And one patient had their right temporal lobe removed. And before having it removed, they took LSD and had no particular trip. And after the right temporal lobe ectomy, they were given LSD again. And this time, they had a trip that they never had before. And this was based purely on the fact that the left temporal lobe had no balancing in a way by the right temporal lobe. Anyway, I'm not explaining that very well, because I do describe it more clearly in *The Matter With Things*. And I'm trying not to go into long, involved things, because I know we want to wrap up. But no, I think it's worrying. And I just want to say that I am quite prepared to go on record saying that I believe that there are I don't know what they are, but there are spiritual forces. In Buddhism, for example, there are bodhisattvas, who are people who have attained a certain degree of enlightenment, but stay behind in this world to help people. They're spirits, but they stay in order to help human beings. And in Buddhist art, there are also demons. And this is not a stupid way to think. So, I've been reading a book by Rod Dreher, called *Living in Wonder*. And I've been asked to interview him at the Oxford Literary Festival about it. And one of the interesting things about the book is, he's talking about how the world... needs, a view I very strongly believe, needs wonder, the restoration

of awe and wonder into our lives. But he's worried that people will flock to all kinds of things that are, there's evidence that they're flocking in very large numbers to things like black magic, voodoo, things that are, you know, not even professing to do good, but actually professing to do certain kinds of harm. And that, in other words, a return to wonder has to be careful. You don't just be seduced by a spirit that comes to you and says all kinds of blandishments, you need to be careful. So, what I'm really saying is, yes, I agree that it's not straightforward, that one does need to be careful. And one certainly doesn't, one shouldn't be rushing into dealing with things that one doesn't know a great deal about, because they can, by whatever mechanism, change one's mind, one's heart and one's behavior, and can be very destructive. Again, what a wonderful three hours. Thank you for putting up with my Concluding Remarks hebetude. I, again, I haven't had much sleep in the past seven days. Good heavens. It's wonderful, and I've really enjoyed it. I'm sure there are many, many things we could talk about, but we'll probably talk again. Yes. Very good. Thank you so much. Get some sleep. I will get some sleep. I will get some sleep. Let me just say, for those who are watching, who are listening, there's The Master and his emissary on screen. Link is in the description. And there's also The Matter with Things. There's part one, part two. The link is on screen and in the description. I highly, highly recommend The Master and his emissary. My opinion is, start with The Master and his emissary. Work your way up to The Matter with Things. I hope that The Master and his emissary will be a gateway drug to the full experience. Exactly. Okay. Bye-bye. Okay. Take care. Bye-bye. Bye-bye. which means that whenever you share on Twitter, say on Facebook, or even on Reddit, etc., it shows YouTube, hey, people are talking about this content outside of YouTube, which in turn greatly aids the distribution on YouTube. Thirdly, there's a remarkably active Discord and subreddit for Theories of Everything, where people explicate TOEs, they disagree respectfully about theories, and build, as a community, our own TOE. Links to both are in the description. Fourthly, you should know

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